by Tammany

Summary

At this point, more than 100 posts in, I do think it only fair to rewrite this intro. This is a whopping big heap of meta posts, dealing primarily with *Sherlock*, though heaven knows a lot of other literature and art wanders through. The writing quality and style varies from fairly good pseudo-academic to outright fangirl squee. If it's worth reading at all, it's worth reading because it's fun watching someone who really does care how art works go hunting for the engines that drive the show, and to guess at the hidden and not-so-hidden details that may shape the future of the show.

Original intro below:

Of all these little meta digressions, this is more truly an essay and piece of lit-crit. I had a chunk of last night and this morning to think about the structure and nature of how a story is told, and what your perception of the story does to your choices of through-lines. This is a lit-crit essay focusing on *Sherlock*, and using Dorothy Sayers and Agatha Christie as paradigmatic examples of two different approaches to the development of narrative spines and through-lines. Meta. Essay. Lit-crit. Analysis. Dry. Somewhat academic. Consider yourselves thoroughly warned. My inner honor student shineth forth.
Regarding “distributed” plots, through-lines, and the spine of a narrative.

At some point in an interview or written piece—and, no, so help me, I can’t recall which one—Mark Gatiss comments that Dorothy Sayers wrote lovely literary works, but that unlike Agatha Christie she didn’t have the killer plot lines for mystery. As a massive fan of Sayers and a mere moderate fan of Christie, part of me wanted to bridle in offense. Sayers’ plots were, in my opinion, complex, detailed, intricate embroidery, coming together at the end to provide outcomes that were satisfying emotionally, intellectually, and thematically. Much of what made her plots work, for me, was their distributed nature, in which the bits and pieces oozed in along peculiar paths of entrance, were associated with the story in unexpected ways. What held these distributed plots together was a narrative spine tied not to the mystery itself, but to the character arcs, and in particular the character arcs associated with Lord Peter as he grew, and explored, and cared. This would ultimately resolve in *Busman’s Honeymoon*, which was quite honestly subtitled, *A Love Story with Detective Interruptions*...a subtitle that, to me, has always seemed even better suited to the book’s immediate predecessor, *Gaudy Night*. In both those books the narrative spine of the story—the skeleton on which the actual telling of the mystery hangs—is not a mystery structure, but a character/romance structure which provides a form through which the mystery is wound.

In contrast, Christie’s plots were always mystery plots, and any romance trappings were wound through a direct, clear mystery-based through-line. Christie appeared to have no doubts what her job was: it was to arrange for a crime to be committed, and then play games teasing that crime through about 300 pages of novel, with a clever solution at the end and an entertaining detective in the middle. Christie’s narrative spine—her dramatic through-line—is always the mystery itself.

Both provide good models for how to build a story. Both actually have to provide great stories. Both depend on strong skeletons and strong dramatic through-lines. One, however, must focus on the mystery itself at all times. The other can digress, because the heart of the other only allies with a mystery without itself being a mystery. It can be a love-story with pertinent detective interruptions.

Which is better depends, in part, on how you define your mysteries and what you look for in your plot lines. Which leads to a comment regarding *Sherlock*. Moffat and Gatiss have made it reasonably clear that, ultimately, they don’t regard *Sherlock* as a “mystery show.” It’s a character show about a man who happens to be a detective. It’s a love-story about a friendship, in which one of the friends happens to be a detective and the other is his best friend in the entire world. Calvin and Hobbes play detective…but remain forever a boy and his tiger before all else.

That being the case, the distributed plotlines of shows like “Scandal in Belgravia,” and our two recent Series 3 shows, “The Empty Hearse” and “The Sign of Three” make perfect sense. Interpreted in that light, they’re stories about Sherlock and love, just as Moffat said ages ago about “Scandal.” Their narrative spine is, rightly, the emotional element of how Sherlock and his love-ties grow, and how his eternal friendship deepens and intensifies with time and events. Any detective interruptions must support that central spine, because love is always the dramatic through-line.

Which is great if you share Moffat and Gatiss’ vision of *Sherlock*. If, however, at heart you think the show is a mystery show before all else, with mere love-story interruptions, then you’re going to keep coming to the conclusion that the mysteries are bloody weak and annoyingly peripheral to the
central dramatic through-line. After all, it’s about detectivin’, to use a lovely word invoked by Lord Peter in one of his mysteries. Let’s get the detectivin’ underway, then, for goodness’ sake. Stop with the folding of serviettes and the indulgence of Sherlock’s best man speech and so on and so forth: quit confusing a good plot with all this irrelevant blather.

Now, let’s be honest; the very, very best of the stories occur when Moffat and Gatiss and Thompson find stories in which the emotional and mystery through-lines are literally one and the same, in the end. That was one of the great successes of “Scandal,” that emotionally the Irene/love story was completely integrated with the Bond Air story. They were front and back of the same tapestry. The magic was the realization that what had looked rather messy and sloppy was, instead, just the story teller moving back and forth, from front to back, showing you the essential details to understand both by the end.

Right now I’m not inclined to think either “Hearse” or “Sign of Three” work as brilliantly as “Scandal.” “Scandal” was, to me, roughly equivalent to Sayers’ *Gaudy Night*, in which plot, theme, character arcs—everything worked out as a complete, integrated, fully enabled whole in which nothing, not even little frivolous scenes, failed to feed back into the vast central dialog, and in which every way of viewing the story turns the reader back on the questions of love versus calling and social role versus individual dignity. “Scandal” and *Gaudy Night* are exceptional examples of stories in which there’s really no choice between the character development and the mystery development: they’re so interrelated as to be the same thing.

“Hearse” and “Sign of Three” can’t really make the same claim. As a result those who are looking for a mystery in their mystery are reasonably peeved and set on edge by all this romantic, sentimental lovey-dovey stuff getting in the way of the writers developing a nice strong mystery spin, and a nice strong mystery-based dramatic through-line. I can’t blame ‘em a bit. If you think you’re supposed to be functioning in what’s essentially an Agatha Christie fictional universe, all this Dorothy Sayers-style stuff is merely so much faff and fuss you were not looking for and don’t really want. If, however, you agree with Moffat and Gatiss that it’s essentially a love story, first and before all else, then the secondary position of mystery in the two episodes is a failing, but by no means a serious failing: indeed, it’s proof the authors do know what their own central goals should be. Tell the love story first and foremost, and give us your mystery as best you can within that central goal.

If the third show of the season turns out to provide a strong, strong classic mystery element—even an element that can’t be resolved this series—then those who see things from a Dorothy Sayers POV will likely be satisfied. I’m not sure the pure Christie-ites will ever be, though. This series has simply refused to be a Christie-style run, and its dramatic through-lines and narrative spines have failed to meet the Christie challenge of being about the detectivin’, rather than about the heart of the detective.
Addendum 1, 2, 3

Chapter Summary

Ok, I keep throwing in addendae. Which is so not-cool. But I do, and I thought this might work better, treating them more like chapters.

[Addendum: I want to think a bit about the thematic integrity/unity of "Sign of Three." The core of the story is Sherlock's love for John, and his need to accept that John has other people he loves. Looked at in that light, saving Sholto--of whom Sherlock's quite openly jealous--becomes, like allowing his marriage to Mary, an act of love and courage and even self-sacrifice. He's trying hard to accept that, as Mary puts it, he's not "the first." John's loved before, and will love again, and Sherlock has to be brave enough to let that happen. Which, arguably, also ties to Mycroft's clear struggle, as Big Brother simultaneously allows Little Brother to grow and go out there and mix it up with love and relationships, while at exactly the same time trying to haul him back into the safe little world of "just us two." It might even be possible to weave it into Lestrade's preamble, in which we once more see a Lestrade who can and does accept loving a man who never seems to put Lestrade first: a man who definitely loves other people. I want to think about that one. Dang. I do hope they ultimately treat poor Lestrade better. Actor and role both deserve more than they're currently seen to get....]

[Digressive addendum: It has occurred to me that there's a very faint chance Mary's one of Mycroft's team of merry men. Mycroft has admitted he did keep an eye on John during Sherlock's absence... I can see the possibility of Mycroft planting John with a nurse(maid) to keep him safe, especially as the entire issue does have ties to real international hijinks. Now, that would account for the linguist thing...and might also account for Mycroft being that adamant about not showing for the wedding. Too meta even for Mycroft to cope with. It would account for a LOT of stuff, including Mary's amused fascination at just how very bad Sherlock is at getting human nature, as Mycroft for all his flaws does appear to comprehend and cope better. The complex revelations of the compare-and-contrast if you came at the entire situation by way of knowing Mycroft first would be fascinating, both for what it would show you about Sherlock--but also for what you'd learn about Mycroft reflecting backward.]

[Further digression. Because I'm me, and by now you know I keep coming up with things...: We're finding out tiny bits and pieces of Sherlock and Mycroft's backstory. Mummy and Daddy, late introduction to "normal" children, intense and somewhat exclusive sib-bonding. Sherlock having Mycroft as the judging voice in his head, laying out the standards--whether this is how Mycroft would see himself is anyone's guess. One suspects not: we never think we are who others see us to be. Sherlock might be surprised to enter the court of his brother's mind and see what dwells there. We know more and more that Mycroft's struggling with an arc that parallels Sherlock's with John: how to let go and hold on at the same time. We know that Mycroft appears to have loss/abandonment issues of his own. At this point I'm guessing one loss to death, one to marriage. At his age that's quite easy to manage. There are a gazillion ways to manage that, from killing off a love/crush/mentor in the loathed Field Work to doing the same from AIDs or cancer or a car accident, and having another beloved crush/friend/mentor/lover marry and quickly "lose" Mycroft. Throw in a touch of the melodramatic: have the married associate have been a bi-curious lover who ditched Mycroft, frex--and you can come up with something that would leave nasty emotional scars on anyone. Add in known backstory, Mycroft's difficulty reaching across that social divide]
between him and the "Goldfish," and then assume that if he loves as Sherlock loves John, and as he himself loves Sherlock—well. Holmeses seem to do nothing by halves. It's not at all hard to imagine a Mycroft who's not just been burned twice, but left bitterly injured and with no more clue than you'd expect of either brother what to do about it.

Which leads to another conjecture of mine. I've really been both intrigued and uneasy at Sherlock's reaction to Mycroft's sexuality. There's a touch of uneasiness, a touch of mean-mindedness, a touch of using it as a way to bait big brother hurtfully. The Duel of Deduction brought that out beautifully: Sherlock only gets nasty about Mycroft's lack of experience with women when Sherlock's feeling upset and defensive because Mycroft topped him in deduction again. Watch Cumberbatch's face: Mycroft nails an observation, and Sherlock's face crumples...and the accusations about women come out, a defensive "I'll hurt you back," combined with a "Well, you're not perfect either." Add in the sideways smack in the phone call during the reception, in which there are two possible explanations for why Mycroft's panting when he picks up: Sherlock's comment suggest that a) he at least *thinks* Mycroft is sexually active, and b) is distinctly disturbed by that. Moreso than he appears to be about John and Mary.

I swear, I keep wondering if some of Sherlock's entire emotional mess doesn't have to do with when and how he first learned about Mycroft being gay, with an added level of concern about whether whatever ripped Mycroft's heart to pieces didn't serve as an unnerving cautionary tale to Sherlock. There's something just a touch off about that entire dynamic—-not "off" in terms of being non-authentic. It rings really, really true from what I've seen of the world. But it's true because sibs don't always deal comfortably with their other sib's sexual identity. Not even when it's straight/straight, and absolutely not always when it's straight/gay. I can see it being very difficult for Sherlock to process a gay, sexually active, romantically vulnerable big brother, especially if his inner Mycroft has always been some version of The Judge: perfect, cold, logical detachment.}
A Point About Structure in Hearse

Chapter Summary

Just mulling over more structure issues. I really am a structure freak...

One thing I don't think I've seen anyone else point out, or even recognize: one of the crucial structural elements of "The Empty Hearse" is that John's guilty of much the same kind of hurtful neglect as Sherlock. No, not in the sense of faking his own death and then not contacting his best friend. But it's a major structural point that John's left Mrs. Hudson high and dry and in the lurch, with never a phone call or contact. Her complaint is the same one that will be echoed later, especially in the kabob shop: "All it would have taken was one word. One call."

To me it's important on multiple levels. It reminds us that you don't have to be an emotional moron in the ways Sherlock is to make that kind of error: that it's hard crossing those empty silences and maintaining contact, even when there's no outstanding reason for secrecy. It reminds us that John's not a complete innocent lamb: he's capable of the same mistakes. It ties the entire pattern together, from beginning to end. And it phrases the core question early, before Sherlock and John do together. Just as the scenes with Mycroft set up the parameters in play: that John's moved on, that Sherlock's not prepared him in any way, the sequence with Mrs. Hudson sets up the core human dilemma: that it's often too easy to fall into passive silence, rather than deal with the difficult, the painful, the emotionally dangerous. Again, just as the scene with Mycroft sets up another complex paradox: that you can run risks for someone you love, and make sacrifices, and not be thanked or appreciated, if there's any reason your loved one can imagine you were gloating over his pain. Whether he's wrong or right, he'll blame you more than he'll appreciate what you've done for him.

I do look forward to these episodes making it to Amazon, so I can buy them and re-watch them more for their structure. My experience is that Moffat and Gatiss in particular respect the framing of a story, and build in plenty of informative parallels, reflections, and symmetries. But it's hard to pick them out on the fly. Multiple viewings are helpful.
What Are They Doing With Lestrade, Anyway?

Chapter Summary

More random thoughts, this time about Lestrade and Series 3.

So, what the devil are the doing with Lestrade this season, anyway? I’m forced to say, I find it a bit baffling. They’re making sure he’s there. Between the mini-episode “Many Happy Returns,” his two spots in “Hearse,” and his bits in “Sign of Three,” he’s very definitely present, and even approaches front and center. In some ways he’s been shown more than Molly. The thing is, it’s not immediately clear what the core arc is. Molly’s pretty clear: the issues of her increased independence and self-esteem, the issues of whether she is (or can) move away from her thing for Sherlock, and the very real question of Sherlock’s affection for, about which he appears sweetly bemuddled and bemused. He likes her more than he’s willing to admit, and is admitting more than he himself knows how to handle…just as she’s trying to pull away and give herself some distance and some dignity.

Molly’s arc is pretty clear. Even more, Molly’s arc really has no room for Lestrade in it. In real life it would make sense, because real life isn’t structured story-telling (or if it is, it’s on a scale and from a perspective we can’t easily share inside our lives…). In fiction, though, Lestrade’s one narrative thread too many for her arc. Even if Tom fails to work out, it won’t be because what she really wanted was a Lestrade. It’s far more likely to return us to the point that, yes, Molly does really love Sherlock. He really is “her type,” flaws and all. No room for Lestrade except as an also-ran. At least, there isn’t at this point. It would take real dramatic investment to pull that one off convincingly, even with strong performers like Lou Brealy and Rupert Graves managing it.

Further, he and Molly don’t seem to be testing each other out. If anything they’re reading as comfortable friends: trust each other, confer with each other over shared concerns…but there’s not a flirty, seductive, or even “maybe in another time and universe” feel. Yeah, they’re framed together at the wedding—but they’re not being “together.” There’s very little interaction at all, or even much body talk beyond Graves’ body-lean toward her.

It’s possible. It’s not really ruled out, yet. But…

Right now it doesn’t feel compelling. There’s just no real sign Lestrade’s pining for Molly, or that Molly’s attracted but otherwise committed. Even that bit at the party at the end of “Hearse,” Lestrade could be asking as seriously because he’s interested in Tom as he is in Molly. I mean, it is the kind of question you ask your bestie: “You really interested in him? Because if you’re not…."

What they are doing with Lestrade is playing out layers of his affection and commitment to Sherlock. He appears to be among the few who really did think he was dead. He handles it well, and with dignity, but he also clearly regrets it. He’s…sweet, returning his memorabilia of Sherlock to John, as the legitimate “widower.” Now that we know he wasn’t aware Sherlock was alive, the tenderness of his reaction to the DVD he makes sure John sees becomes all the more interesting: it’s such a loving memory of Sherlock and him together, working to make something for John, with Sherlock at close to his social-emotional worst. And both giving John the DVD and within the DVD itself, it’s so clear that he does love Sherlock dearly. No—he hasn’t fallen to pieces. No, he
hasn’t let the loss destroy his life. But Sherlock’s so very much someone special to him.

His handling of Anderson, his ongoing respect for Sherlock, it all builds to create someone who’s almost certainly more committed to Sherlock than Sherlock was committed to him. And then we get the reunion, and the pure sweet joy of that hug. And then… then that stupid, stupid Jack the Ripper case with Molly tagging along, and Lestrade leaving one wondering if he’d been pithed through the brain like a frog in biology class—so clearly having hoped he had a case that would intrigue Sherlock, so openly curious what the dickens was going on with Sherlock and Molly.

And then the pantomime silliness of the bank robbers, when Lestrade not only gives up being the arresting officer in a case we’ve been vividly shown matters to him, but doing so without even thinking things through properly: John, Molly, Mrs. Hudson—any one of them would call or text Sherlock back saying, “Not coming unless you tell me why.” Because they all know that Sherlock’s priority stack could have you racing to his side simply to move his teacup five inches closer, because he’s too lazy to do it himself. But, no: Lestrade, faced with a call for help, can’t stop himself.

And we see Donovan’s frustrated anger for him as he rushes off to watch over that damned idiot puppy on Baker Street. Jealousy? Or honest anger for the ongoing abuse of a man she respects? Or worry that her boss has it bad for a complete and utter tosser? Any of these would make sense, honestly. All of them make more sense than the idea that Lestrade’s just that dumb. I mean, he wasn’t even invited along for John’s stag-do. It’s a pitiful thing when your role is to get the two buggers out of clink, rather than land in clink right next to them, singing “Good Night, Irene, Good Night” in harmony with Sherlock.

Whatever they’re doing with Molly and Lestrade (and I’m currently a bit suspicious that’s a red herring with both of them), they’re making very sure we know that Lestrade’s a faithful friend to Sherlock to the point of being self-destructive, and that he asks next to nothing in return. At least, this Series’ Lestrade is. We’re seeing very little of the Lestrade who could at least grouse at Sherlock. Of course, we’ve been given very little of Lestrade and Sherlock having to share crime scenes, or navigate social waters together.

So where the hell are they going with this? I don’t think they want to ultimately make Lestrade the dope of the show. They seem to think better of both the character and the actor than to do that. They do seem to have placed him in the same emotional current as Mycroft: someone increasingly left out of the game of happy families Sherlock, Mary, and John were accomplishing, and Molly and Mrs. Hudson at least seemed to function security within. Mycroft and Lestrade, though, are the ones left out. Both love Sherlock, in some way, for many reasons. Both have been of huge service to Sherlock. But Sherlock does not yet appear to see himself as owing them in return, in the way he’s come to understand he owes John, Mary, Molly, and even Mrs. Hudson. He accepts from them without thought, the way young children accept parental generosity as their natural due.

I don’t know what they’re going to do with that. Not for either character. But for both Mycroft and for Lestrade I find myself hoping some rearrangement of the stars that gets them appreciated. By Sherlock and by others. Maybe even by each other. They’re both such giving characters—Mycroft with his nose in the air and his very best suit on, Lestrade with a bloke-ish grin and a bear-hug. But both so generous to Sherlock over the years. I want to see the universe give them some payback.
Errrrgh. It has just dawned on me that Greg has been well placed to be the first up against the wall when CAM hits. Currently holds least crucial role practically--they are doing fewer NSY style stories and probably will continue that way while CAM and Mycroft are central to the tale. Set up as under-appreciated odd man out. Everyone loves him to pieces, no one really needs him right now, he's only Sherlock's third-place Goldfish.... and Sherlock could actually be stirred to guilt if Lestrade went down because Sherlock really just wasn't paying attention, because after all, John and Mary and Molly and Mrs. Hudson are vital.

I do hope I'm wrong. It is very USA type tv logic. But it would work and make sense of what they've done with Greg this season. Adoable, dumb, faithful to a fault, and quite capable of walking into a trap without looking if he fears for Sherlock....
Arggh. Hatred of Character Deaths

Chapter Summary

In which I fret helplessly over upcoming character deaths, with minor asides.

Ok. I admit. I lurk the non-spoiler reviews, because I don't CARE if you spoil me. And I'm now quite terrified.

Mycroft looks well on top of the list to die: with the Barbarossa/Redbeard hints, and the way he's been trying to get Sherlock to please link back up with him since the first story, he's just begging to perish. And I don't want that, because I simply adore Mycroft to pieces. Want him to live, and thrive, damn it. Very much...and, yet, he's the logical focus of both a spy plot line (His Last Bow) and a upper-reaches-of-society blackmail plot-line, and having Sherlock pick up for him is logical: and a world for Sherlock with No Big Brother to love and support him would be one heck of a new world.

But it's not a world I want. At all. Big Brother's adorable, and deserves better. So there.

Next most likely? Mary. And, again, it fits some of what happens in the original canon, with some gender reversals. And I'd like to see John drill Milverton...which would be the canon-parallel outcome.

Can't think of any other likely characters to kill, unfortunately. Well--Anthea, maybe, but she's pretty peripheral. Mrs. Hudson? No chance.

It really feels like it should be Mycroft. In which case, I am praying, praying, praying it's another switch and bait. They're so good at those. Irene, Sherlock. I'd be happy to have Mycroft slip between the cracks and disappear into a land where he can have a happy love affair and drink pina coladas. But...

Oh, dear. If they kill him for keeps I will be weepy beyond words.

Lestrade seems unlikely, which ups the odds that a reported rare-pair match seen onscreen will be Lestrade and Molly. I do hope they do it well, if that's the case. Both characters deserve something rich and lovely.
Death and Mycroft

Chapter Summary

Still blathering on. I do that. Bad habit, but there it is. I worry at things. I am currently worrying about Mycroft.

I have one serious outstanding problem with Mycroft dying, besides, well, the "Mycroft dying" part of the premise. I mean, I like the silly duck, and there's no denying I'll be deeply distressed if they kill him regardless.

But I will be even more distressed if they kill him without fully redeeming both his loneliness and his relationship with Sherlock. Now, the relationship with Sherlock is actually the easier. All it really takes is Sherlock having the spine to recognize and appreciate what Big Brother's done for him. One of the fascinating things about Mycroft is he's almost a perfect example of "he's not bad, he's just drawn that way." Much as his introduction tempted us to think he was Big Bad Moriarty, he's been constantly set up to look far worse than he is...and he keeps turning out to be an incredibly powerful, responsible man who's still trying to not only protect and support his exceedingly quirky brother, but who's working almost as hard to ensure that, within the parameters of a Secret Service setting he allows baby brother to maintain something resembling a private, independent life.

Considering what we know about both brothers, that's impressive. I mean, first, we know Sherlock's been historically addicted to drugs, frighteningly reckless, that his social and emotional skills are...iffy at best. His income appears to be unreliable. His survival instincts close to non-existent. He'd scare the living whoosit out of almost any responsible older sib. I mean it, Sherlock as we first meet him is a big brother's panic attack in a skinny suit and a Belstaff coat. Which might lead even your common garden variety brother to have baby bro institutionalized for his own good. Mycroft? Mycroft could almost certainly have Sherlock locked up. Frankly, he could probably have Sherlock quietly put down, too, if he were dangerous enough and out of control enough. He could have Sherlock living in theoretical freedom while being unable to take a step thanks to secret service goons--the moreso as it looks over the full arc of the show as though Sherlock may have always had a real Secret Service rating, either as an asset or a problem. It's not clear whether Sherlock would be kept under observation as a proto-Mycroft or as a proto-Moriarty, but there would have been good, plausible reasons for Mycroft or any other Secret Service spymaster to keep an eye on Sherlock...and possibly even keep Sherlock well and truly chaperoned to the end of time. That would certainly be *easier* for Mycroft. Safer, too. But Mycroft's chosen to try to give Sherlock room to be what Sherlock wants to be: wild-card consulting detective with motley crew of associates. Mycroft's actively trying to give Sherlock the life he wants, up to and including trying to make sure he gets supplementary cases when Lestrade and private clients are not enough.

In short, no matter how it looks, Mycroft's a pretty good brother making a pretty impressive effort to ensure his baby bro has a decent life of his own choosing. That Mycroft would really prefer it be with him, inside the Secret Service world, is not all that peculiar. This past two episodes have made that ever more clear: Mycroft would like Sherlock to come work with him. But he's not forcing it.

So...one keeps waiting for Sherlock to see that Mycroft's actually been a pretty good chump. Instead he tends to interpret every action of Mycroft's in the worst possible light.
I'd like to see that end—at least for a golden moment of "Yes, you've been a good brother. I love you."

The thing is, that's easy. It can be done well, and quickly: all the construction is there. It just takes Sherlock to repair his own focus, and actually see Mycroft through eyes not colored by childhood envy and defensiveness.

The harder part—and the part that really keeps eating at me, is the loneliness. Mycroft's standing alone has been increasingly clear over all three seasons, and this past one, with everything from the "goldfish" scene to the refusal to come to the wedding all leave no question but that Mycroft's been living in a form of solitary confinement for ages...

Killing him doesn't fix that, even with Sherlock seeing him and loving him. A repentent, tender goodbye doesn't undo that...nor does it really satisfy the hooks set during the "goldfish/who'd care about being different" speech. Mycroft dying without ever being given a goldfish or two of his own just doesn't answer the problem as posed in that first episode, or as it's been building over the past seasons.

It's doable. Tragic, but doable. But it's ugly, in a sort of "Bambi Meets Godzilla" sort of way. Here's Mycroft with Sherlock only just beginning to see he's alone. And here's death, come to stomp Mycroft before we can see Sherlock or Mycroft do anything about the depth of that alone-ness.

I don't know. I honestly don't know. I know there's a character death looming—though I don't know how permanent it's supposed to be. I know there's something big for Mycroft and Sherlock including flashback to childhood. I know it's supposed to get tender and emotional. I know there are plenty of strong hints that dying for Mycroft is on the agenda.

But it feels wrong. Not just because I adore Mycroft and Sherlock—though it's true. The brothers delight me as a team and give all of Sherlock a bit of depth that, IMO, a pure John-and-Sherlock story couldn't quite reach. That family element provides depth and dimension that's lost when Mycroft's gone from the picture. Having something so complex, that goes back years and years, provides aspects of story telling that would die with Mycroft. But even beyond that, it just feels like the wrong answer to the questions posed in the first episode...most of all the answer to what Mycroft needs to escape his own loneliness, without the answer being "Sherlock." Right now they keep showing him trying to answer the question with baby brother....but it's not the right answer for either of them. At some point the *right* answer is not baby brother, even a baby brother who's able to finally love and appreciate Mycroft. The answer is for Mycroft to find his own peer or his own goldfish, but to find *someone* who's not Sherlock. A deathbed reconciliation with Sherlock doesn't really satisfy that at all...it just underlines how damned unfair it is, that a very good big brother ended up ultimately very alone, and very isolated, with far too little life of his own, while doing amazingly well at winning baby brother the life Mycroft never gets.

It rankles.

Of course, I'm a big sister. I'm a bit of a stoic. I've got these built-in biases pro-elder-sib, pro-Spockish-reserved-person.

Dang. I do so hope that all the worry that Mycroft's going to die is WRONG.

The only real hope I take is that the overall reviews seem too *happy* to make that credible. Death for Mycroft seems really too big for the sense of thrilled happy response the viewers who've seen the episode seem to have. Basically to me killing Mycroft seems too likely to cast a shadow over happy endings more than seems to have occurred.
But...Dang. I have to wait. We all have to wait.

And it's driving me nutso.

Ah, well.

Fingers crossed for Mycroft.

And so, to bed.

And, jigger. when you lie in bed you think of things.

It occurs to me that one of the ways they could kill Mycroft, that would be simple and just rework how we've been hearing things for entire seasons, is to have him die of simple heart disease. Thus explaining diet comments (Baby brother worries Big Brother's taking proper care of himself) issues of not liking leg-work, care in exercising, and repeated forms of comment on "heartbreak/broken hearts." It turns the entire period we've seen them into two brothers knowing time might be limited, and struggling with that in various ways. Even things like the entire fight over isolation and difference starts turning into Sherlock having "end of life" concerns for his brother: what's missing, what needs attending to, etc.

Dang. I would so much prefer to have Mycroft just live and thrive and prosper. But I also know they're very close to the end of any possible original canon material for Mycroft, and there are some things to gain from cutting Sherlock loose.

If they kill Mycroft, they better do so in ways that keep him a glowing part of Sherlock's mind and mythos. (grumble, grumble, grumble, I do love me some Mycroft....)
The Wrath of Magnussen... Or OMG, it's Mashup Time in Tammany's Mind Palace.

Chapter Summary

In which a hypothesis forms.

No, I don't know if this is sane. I don't know if it's sensible. But...

Let's start with a set of logical analogies.

John is to Sherlock as Kirk is to Spock. (though I'd honestly say John's more a blend of Kirk and McCoy, but just go with it, ok?) (Addendum: Please, do go with it, especially as Sherlock's really a lot more Kirk than he likes to let on--the wretched little drama queen...)

Sherlock is to Mycroft as John is to Sherlock as Kirk is to Spock.

The Reichenbach Leap was to John and Sherlock as The Wrath of Khan was to Kirk and Spock. (The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few--or the one. Die, die; cry, cry. "Best and most human." All play "Amazing Grace" and fall apart in need of tissues...) Then the hint at the end of a return.

Is it entirely out of reason to hope that "His Last Vow" is to Sherlock and Mycroft as "Riechenbach Leap" was to John and Sherlock and as "Wrath of Khan" was to Kirk and Spock?

I mean, I can deal with die, die; cry, cry better if a) it's a worthy death, b) there's plenty of lovin' going around, and c) at the end of it all I get a view of the photon torpedo on Genesis offering the chance of New Life...like the hint of Sherlock overhearing John at the graveside. it's not over yet. Even big brothers have to die to the old life before they can arise to a new one.

I can do that.

If that's the deal they're offering, I'll take it. Gladly.

(Now hopes frantically that Moffat and Gatiss' fanboy instincts RULE...)

Addendum: Further frenzied mashup idiocy...of a semi-structural nature.

Sherlock's never been a convincing Spock. He's a drama queen. He's Kirk with a flash of Shatner as played by a (sorry) more skilled actor who knows how to manage his campy excess a bit better. He only thinks he's Spock because he's a) alone, and b) socially not so skilled and c) smart as hell and d) unlike Kirk he's uneasy with women.

John, as I said, wavers between Kirk and McCoy--though I tend to see his lovely, dour grumble as more McCoy.

Mycroft, however, is an utterly convincing Spock. Brilliant, isolated, witty, reserved. Yes, he's socially more skied than Sherlock, but the core chemistry works out best of one thinks Sherlock = Kirk; John = McCoy; Mycroft = Spock. There are enough differences to allow all three to mix and match story lines a bit--moments when John can be Kirk and moments when he can be Spock;
Moments when Mycroft's Kirk and Sherlock's McCoy, etc. But on the whole I think the triad works best that way.

Which is interesting, as I think it's remotely possible that Moffat and Gatiss originally may have thought their triad was John = Kirk, Sherlock = Spock, Lestrade = McCoy...only to have Sherlock prove too Kirkish, and Mycroft prove too splendid a Spock.

And which does leave me worrying they're going to have to find a way to run Lestrade in parallel and continue to find ways to use him as McCoy, perhaps with his Kirkish sublines. Or I can see him as McCoy to BOTH brothers...but primarily to Mycroft. I'd like that just fine.

Anyway, one thing we do know, if only from the references in both Hound of the Baskervilles and Reichenbach Fall: Moffat and Gatiss do know and see the various parallels, and have been quite knowingly playing with them a bit.

That being the case, I find it difficult to believe they'd actually shelve Mycroft permanently: he's their "true" Spock, and losing him loses a corner of a vital triad. Even if he's usually not front and center, his dynamic is part of what makes the series work--as the Spock, as the brother with deep history, as a resource that's powerful but not always easy to access. Lestrade could in theory fill in for John: they play similar roles to Sherlock, and always have. He can't substitute for Mycroft: wrong character type entirely. We don't have a Spock replacement, especially as we've just spent two episodes building out the ways Sherlock isn't Spock at all--bit brother is.

Which does lead me to hope. The two episodes we've had were used to transform Sherlock and to transform Mycroft, moving Sherlock closer to the Kirk role (insofar as Holmes can do Kirk) and Mycroft further into the Spock role. That sets Mycroft up for a nice, noble, tragic death "embraced" honorably, as Major Sholto suggests in Sign of Three--but it also sets up for Moffat and Gatiss to see if they can find a way to pull yet another death-and-resurrection.

Which has to be a bit of a fascination for them, because deaths that fail to stick but which transform the character are the non-Whovian equivalent of the Doctor's ongoing regenerations. Death and rebirth as managed by the Riechenbach Fall and the aftermath are a way to mix it up, keep it fresh, push characters into new modes, make them operate in different contexts. If anyone should know what "regenerations" do both for and to a show, it's Moffat and Gatiss, who've grown up with dying/reviving characters in the center of their imaginary lives.

Boy, do I know hope this is an Easter Story, no matter what else it is. Aieeeeeee!
Eeeeeee. Eeeeeeee. OMG. I think I just figured something out. LESTRADE!!!

Chapter Summary

In which I prove just what a screaming nutcase optimist I can be.

Of course it made no sense for Greg to go racing frantically away from the Waters case. Becuase it made no sense for Greg to go racing away from the Waters case.

Try it again.

It made no sense, at all, for Greg to leave the Waters case. It just did not. We KNOW Greg's not that stupid. We know it. And we know the writers don't betray a character or an actor like that. We know that, too.

Greg really is Mycroft's man on the ground. He's not Sherlock's hander. He's his partner in crime, when it comes to MI5/MI6 in London. And, yes, while he knows Sherlock can be a total arse about some things, he's not thinking in terms of Sherlock and best-man. He's thinking in terms of Sherlock and whatever he's doing for Mycroft above and beyond the London Underground original case... and which is going to carry over into elements of His Last Vow.

If Sherlock were just Sherlock, Lestrade's some-time consultant, you'd call first to be sure he wasn't being a total arse. If Sherlock's your partner to a degree, and you get a call that seems like a distress call--yes. You'd call in all the extras, and you'd run like hell.

Which, if it's true, then adds a level of curiosity what's going on from start to finish. I always did think Lestrade was in the know regarding Sherlock's survival. I'm less sure, but "You bastard" followed by a huge, huge hug is really more consistent with how you'd treat someone you'd worked with and missed, who hadn't told you he was going to be back in town working again, than it is with "OMG, you're alive." It never was. And that puts us back on questions of whether Lestrade wasn't, to some extent, "managing" Anderson and his conspiracy rumors and keeping an eye on John as part of work for MI5/6...lying to Anderson, supporting John and trying to keep him from giving up hope entirely.

In which case the stupid case with the Jack the Ripper thing becomes...

Becomes, among other things, how Lestrade and Sherlock always stayed in touch without anyone asking why they hung out together. Because then Lestrade could better act as a gobetween. They've got a built-in basis for working together, even if it means Greg willingly looks like a complete simp sometimes...because, really, Jack the Ripper? And his curiosity over Molly becomes a partner's curiosity as to whether Molly's a new obstacle that's going to regularly be part of their obstacle course. And Greg hanging around in the middle of a car park at night killing time and smoking starts looking like a classic secret agent rendezvous...and accounts for why he didn't react more strongly to the sound of Sherlock's approach...nor to the sight of Sherlock, either, sloping through the car park heading for him.

In which case, the "rare pairing" we may see is Greg finally in contact with Mycroft at some point, playing his role as middle-man. Which, if they *don't* show any of this, actually ups the odds of Mycroft living, becuase then he'll still need Greg as his undetected contact with Little Brother.
And it all adds a lovely layer to the "Graham, Gavin, Jeff," stuff, as it could be Sherlock being Sherlock--but Sherlock forgetting a man's name that constantly seems a bit dim even for Sherlock. But it could also be Sherlock gleefully playing up the apparent indifference, which would get on Greg's nerves a bit, but also be a shared joke between them once it starts...which really does look like at Baskerville.

Though...

Sherlock as good as hands the entire formula to John, and John fails to catch it. It could have been Lestrade and Sherlock trying to figure if John were twisty enough to play the game as a third partner. He's not. He's really not....

And, oh, dear, if that's what's going on, then the season almost does have to be one huge, unified case tied together with nearly invisible strings. I do so LOVE how they plant evidence.

Oh, dear. I do hope I'm right. It would not only win me a pint it would let me rise like Sherlock from the grave of my dignity. And it would SO redeem poor Lestrade, and make so much more sense than his overreaction in Sign of Three.

Oh, oh, I do hope. I really do hope. XD XD XD

(Dabs froth politely from lips, and murmurs..."Yes. I really do get that into my games of Deduction. Sorry. It's a bit of a thing. Just keep calm and carry on. Ne'min' me. I'll just stand over here till the spell passes...)

(And I still hope it means Mycroft's not, you knowk DEAD-dead. Just a bit dead-ish, as it were...)

Addendum: And, OMG, it would also explain a lot of Greg and Molly's interaction. Molly proved herself as a contact-operative in Reichenbach Fall. She may not regularly be part of Mycroft's team, now, but she's a known and reliable contact--one more in Greg's network of eyes and ears in London, and a coworker in a way she wasn't when she was just Molly-in-the-Morgue. Which still leaves room for Molstrade for those who love that pairing, but also leaves room for why those two read more as just friends/allies/associates. And Sherlock has to give Molly away to John because the story of the Fall makes no sense without her, but Greg isn't needed to explain the Fall at all, and can be left out of the total of people in play as the more critical active undercover operative. Molly was just a chance-selected helper. Greg's a freakin' agent....
Ok, So Let's Say Sherlock and Greg really are MI5/6. Really....

Chapter Summary

Further implications.

If Sherlock and Greg are MI5/6, and have been working together for, let's say at a guess, 5 years prior to Study in Pink, then they're almost certainly specializing in the London beat. Which makes a lot of sense of Sherlock's commentary as he puts together the case on the London Underground: this is an old beat he once knew very well, and worked *as an agent for Mycroft* (Or at least MI5-one is working on what Mycroft's full purview is. He's definately MI6-ish international, but he's got elements of MI5 Domestic...and mostly appears to be, yes, The British Government when he's not freelancing as the CIA)(And, sh*t, if Mycroft needs to "die" without dying, he's the PERFECT candidate to disappear into a US witness protection program for awhile... LOL!), but he's been out of touch for two years. The time hunting Moriarty's people was, quite literally, the holiday Mycroft called it--time away from his regular job. Time Mycroft almost has to have arranged for him. Which then plays into Mycroft's eventual comments that he's discussed having both he and Sherlock on the case with the Prime Minister...because Mycroft's MI6 International Affairs, and Sherlock's MI5's hot boy on the London Beat, and they got him back from the hinterlands just for this.

[Addendum: And OMG, wouldn't that make good sense of Sherlock and Mycroft's interaction all the way back to Study in Pink, when Mycroft asks if Sherlock and Mycroft ought not work on the "same side"? If Mycroft's MI6 International and Sherlock's currently doing work on a consulting/erratic basis for MI5 Domestic Affairs working specifically in London... They're working different sides of the same broad field...]

And "this" has long-term implications that go on after the arrest of Lord Moran: they have new information and an entire new network to take apart, much as Sherlock took apart Moriarty's network. Which of course applies...Sherlock now has experience doing solo-work to take apart a network with international elements. Which means he's also reaching a level where he can legitimately be seen as Big Brother's apprentice: he's no longer just London, anymore. In any case, in the immediate aftermath there's almost certainly going to be tracking around following up on information gained by the capture of Lord Moran and information that comes in as collateral reward for all the different things researched prior to that arrest.

So if Sherlock's been taking apart a live terrorist network, and Greg's his first point of contact with his people, then Greg's going to be on hot-button alert for any indication Sherlock's in trouble--because Sherlock could be dealing with deadly danger at any moment, and might have only seconds to send word he needs help and no chance to pick up a response. And Mycroft and MI5/6 are going to expedite the full-backup Greg calls for when he goes to rescue Sherlock--because Sherlock's their hot boy in London and he's at high risk, and so helicoptors are not over-the-top in the way they would otherwise be.

I wonder to what degree prior to John showing up Sherlock was seen as MI5/6's potentially deadly idiot savant: brilliant but a bit insane and entirely weird, and thank God we've got Lestrade who can mostly cope with him? Not to mention fear of the drug thing. During that period one has to assume Lestrade really was quite literally a handler/manager, keeping Sherlock stable and getting
good information from him at a time when he could not be used as a reliable operative, but could still be a critically useful informant.

I still don't know what they're going to do with Mycroft. But it looks much more likely that at some point either within the frame of the story or in flashback we find out that Mycroft recruits Sherlock for a London-based job. It could go all the way back to his return from Serbia, or it could be more recent. But it's there.

Hmmm. I wonder if Mycroft was ever Sherlock's first "Lestrade"? Maybe asked more of Sherlock than Sherlock was able to handle? I can see Mycroft failing to accurately guess when Sherlock would PTSD out of the game and flip to drugs and dismay and distrust of Big Brother and his motives. He wouldn't even mean it badly--he'd just overestimate what Baby Brother could take in. Which would certainly add a layer to love and guilt and distrust and Sherlock's paranoia regarding all things Mycroftian...but would also add another layer to how it comes to be that Mycroft is the voice of reason and authority in Sherlock's head, teaching him how to handle situations, lecturing on basic principles of both deduction and group management. Both brother and MI5/6 mentor and partner.

Which leads back to the conversation about goldfish. If Sherlock was originally Mycroft's partner, then Mycroft's been without a partner a long time...or with only a partial partner during the years Sherlock wasn't at full capacity, prior to John. Lonely. No partner, not even a goldfish.

Or not. I would really love Lestrade to be Mycroft's goldfish, at least eventually...

Anyway. This is all looking pretty do-able within the limits of canon, which is my first critical test of an hypothesis...
"Somebody has to die." Oddly, I'm relieved. SPOILERY

Chapter Summary

In which I evaluate the import of Show Runners/producers tweeting gleeful little hints...and find comfort. This one feels firm enough to rate comment as a spoilery post, rather than just speculation/analysis. It feels likely enough to turn out accurate. Though, frankly, if you've been following I would assume you, like me, don't MIND being caught up in guesses that may turn out correct in the end...

Ok. We may still temporarily lose Mycroft, but Susan Vertue's recent tweet (Sometimes somebody has to die), actually makes me feel better for our primary characters. There's a level of sadistic nasty that on the whole show runners and producers know better than to attempt, and turning the death of a well-loved character into a tweet tease is over the top for most. Which makes me feel much better, especially as there is an alternate explanation for using the line.

For those of you who haven't bothered to read the "Charles Augustus Milverton" story....it ends with a provocative and well-deserved death. One Sherlock Holmes quite cheerfully refuses to solve, on the perfectly sensible grounds (unstated) that some people need to be murdered, and some murderers are performing a public service to the community.

Now, I've been expecting for some time that, whatever else happens, John pots Magnussen. Time for BAMF John to deal with the snake like a gentleman, a soldier, and a man who knows what to do with not-nice men. We're already pretty sure Magnussen threatens Mary, and while this will entail a gender-flip from the original story, not to mention a major reassignment of roles, it's "right." And lovely.

Now, if they're teasing an apparent Mycroft death, a real Magnussen death, and a final Easter Egg with Mycroft still alive....

Then I think we've covered the available hints without losing any main characters, and have provided reasonable grounds for the glee on the part of the viewers. Meanwhile i think we still work with the assumption that Lestrade's secret service with Sherlock as one of his primary assignments: it explains far too much, not only this series but previous series. Still not sure if Lestrade was aware Sherlock was alive. I tend to think so, but I can also see him simply too aware of the various games the secret service are able to play to be shaken to the core if a "dead man" walks back into his life. More like, "Hell, I wish they'd quit doing that...."

I've got outstanding questions about Mary. There are reasons she's threatened by Magnussen, and that will be interesting. And she's too clearly a near-Holmesian savant, but with a feel for people-patterns to a greater degree than Sherlock and Mycroft and an evidence-pattern talent that's strong, but not as strong. She can tell when Sherlock's said the right thing to motivate Sholto. Sherlock can tell when her associates don't care all that much about her based on the way they seal their envelopes. Both, though, appear to be "talents." While it could be quite separate from anything else, I keep expecting it to tie in some way. Either she's an illegitimate Holmes or a cousin multiple times removed, or she's one of Mycroft's people, or something. I just find it too convenient. In the real world I agree with Mycroft: the universe is not that lazy. In fiction, I assume the authors are just the right kind of lazy not to write in coincidences unless they intend to do something with
them: not lazy, proactive!

At this point I expect a fair chunk of the episode to be tied to a Mycroft-related spy plot with roots all the way back to Hearse. I expect Greg's behavior over the Waters case to be clarified, because, really, I find it impossible to accept that Moffat and Gatiss would just make Lestrade suddenly a moron— I truly don't believe they willingly do that to their characters or to their actors. They wouldn't destroy a character's credibility as a capable professional just for one remarkably cheap laugh... much less erode the character in bits and pieces over the arc of a series. Which suggests that Greg was up to work of his own during the wedding, too, thus explaining why his mind was not on Sherlock's hint to go to the loo.

Which leads to another question: to what degree is Greg quite specifically Sherlock's guard, partner, and backup? To what degree would he normally be unlikely to leave the room when Sherlock's apparently losing it, instead staying as spotter watching Sherlock's back when he's off in his Mind Palace?

I do hope we get some hints. I do hope I'm right about Greg's role as secret agent tie to Sherlock. It makes more sense than a lot of other things.

I expect Mary to make it out alive.

I would not be surprised at Mycroft appearing to die. I would, however, be surprised at it sticking. It just feels wrong for the hints Vertue's dropping and the happiness of the reviewers and the comments that this really isn't a "Reichenbach Fall" episode. Mycroft being too dead, or even too convincingly Exiled, would "feel" too much like the despair after Reichenbach. So I'm holding out for the one major character death to be Magnussen. I'm holding out for at least some of the teasing to be there to prep people for the idea that sometimes someone like John needs to kill a not-nice man like Magnussen... yes, we've accepted that premise with the cabby previously, but if this plays out the way it did in the original Doyle C.A.M. story, then Magnussen will die in cold blood, shot by someone (I'm hoping John) who knows Magnussen deserves every bullet.

I am hoping Mary makes it out alive. I think she will. I'm hoping she will. There's room in the original story material for her to die, and John to kill in revenge. But I'd actually prefer it to be proactive and protective, and have Mary around for another season. I like her almost as much as she likes Sherlock, and for many of the same reasons. Granted, I'm not particularly a Johnlocker. (Yes, I understand it. I just happen to be more intrigued by the implications of Moffat and Gatiss exploring a relationship intense enough to be sexual but not sexual--as a team they and Freeman and Cumberbatch seem honestly intrigued by what it means for two men to love each other that deeply *without* it crossing into sexual romance, and I like watching what they're doing with it. So I myself run non-Johnlocky as a result. I want to see where they go with it...)

With two days left I will no doubt come up with more projections and meta comments. And afterward i will absolutely have some things to mutter about structure over the season: this season looks as tightly planned and integrated as anything they've done. But I do think that covers most of my core expectations for the last episode, and is in the ballpark for what I expect to see wrung out of the material.

Regarding season structure: One thing I find fascinating about Moffat/Gatiss/Thompson is that they do a superb job at integrating a full season without betraying the overall freestanding nature of each episode. They do these long, complex, intricate little things that weave back and forth and turn an entire season into an integrated story in its own right, but often they do it by planting evidence, building little mystery chains for the audience to work out. Like the entire issue of Lestrade seeming far too stupid: you can do the passive viewer thing and just accept that writers regularly
betray characters, and thus it's bad writing. Or you can assume the writers don't willingly do that, and consider it as evidence of something else.

I love playing Deductions with the show because MGT make it a worthwhile bet that it's never bad writing--it's good planning and its evidence. Most of the rest of the entertainment world? Not a safe bet. Too many writers and show runners will gladly sacrifice a character's integrity for the sake of a single Benny Hill moment, and most of us have learned to sign and move on, cursing the writers but looking for nothing else. It's not evidence of anything but low skills and lower ethics. With MTG? It's reason to start muttering "Game on, suckers!" and start trying to figure out what is going on, there.
Whose Eyes See?

Chapter Summary

Brief consideration of POV in story telling, especially TV/film.

So, ok, I'm sitting here thinking about all the ways MGT "palm cards" and plant evidence in the episodes, leaving folks like me (ME! ME! cries the Hermione/Sherlocky part of me, waving my hand to get the teacher to call on me...) with the glorious game of "solving" the puzzles they leave us. It's always a tricky challenge to hide evidence in plain sight without overplaying your hand. Really, it's not easy to cheat and play fair at the same time. So much of story telling is cleverly managed magic tricks. A lot depends on the POV character and the decision to limit your knowledge base to a scant few who are very carefully stage managed.

On its surface film begs to be omnipotent narration with no real POV limitations. Go anywhere, show anything, and what the camera tells you is "true," for a very precise yet extensive value of the meaning of truth. In film it's always tempting to play as though anything the camera has shown you is not just truth, but absolute and all-inclusive truth. To use an example from the ongoing Tammany-blather, take Greg Lestrade and the Waters case. He looks like an idiot. He waddles like an idiot. He quacks like an idiot. He must be an idiot: the camera showed him to us being an idiot. If the camera shows it, it must be true. Because in film (and, in all honesty, to a lesser degree in prose fiction) the camera shows only what's vital, and essential in its truth. Even setting aside psychological bias to "believe" narrators and have faith in the observations and opinions of POV characters, there's so little time in story telling that it's not all that peculiar that viewers and readers seldom spend even a second asking themselves if the camera, the POV character, the narrating author/director, are unreliable witnesses. We take what we see as truth.

We don't ask if there's a greater truth hiding in what we see.

POV character are among the most powerful ways a writer and a director can manipulate that to their advantage in story telling. It's a superb trick actually--one of the best. It's also among the least artificial ways of limiting the sight-lines of the reader-viewer.

Here's another way to think about it: the perennial problem of any writer who does mystery-type stuff is to hide information without cheating the reader. Omniscient narration is a nightmare: a God's Eye writer shouldn't technically be allowed to hide *any* information from the reader/viewer, because the omniscient narrator knows all: hiding it is cheating. So the smart writer/director opts for a more limited POV/narration perspective. That of someone who does not know everything. Ideally, someone who knows rather little of what's necessary.

Remember Sherlock setting John up at the end of Reichenbach Fall? Telling him where to stand, forcing his sight-lines to ensure all the crucial information was out of sight? At that moment the writer/director started playing very careful games with sightlines: barring closeups of Sherlock--which one could assume a John with superb distance vision might see--we saw what followed from John's POV for the most part. John, who'd just been placed where he couldn't see anything. John, whose knowledge base was close to nil. We, the audience, watched Sherlock's fall from the viewpoint of the one character least able to tell us what actually happened. The writers palmed a card, they forced a sight-line, they finessed a problem created by the Omniscience of the
writer/director's absolute power and the ability of the camera to show anything...and everything. In short, they made brilliant use of POV games.

That can get really complex. The truth is that film usually does a HUGE amount of jumping around, to accomplish its work. Again, let's look at POV with Greg in the Waters case. It's not Greg's POV: we're very definitely being invited to watch Greg, not see through Greg's eyes on the whole. He's the object of our regard. That's close to narrative omniscient POV--but the writers/directors make one critical choice--they do limited omniscient. We see only the actions of Greg Lestrade in very narrow focus, with no ties to context, and no asides to fill us in. It's carefully structured like peeking through a crack in a fence: we can see what's in the line of sight, but nothing peripheral.

Now, I would argue that in Sherlock, the presumed POV character is usually actually John, as shown in the end of Reichenbach Fall: we get to see what John sees, know what John knows, experience what John experiences. Sherlock's seen, but not understood.

Occasionally we shift to that limited omniscience game played with Greg. It's the common mode they use when we have to peel off and follow Sherlock because John's otherwise occupied. Think in terms of following Sherlock in the long run-up to the climax of Reichenbach Fall: we see Sherlock act, think, brood...but we're never allowed to see what Sherlock knows, or why he does it. It's very limited narrative POV.

It's all so tricksey, and what makes it most tricksey is the viewer/reader has to accept and to some extent understand that their view's being impaired, but that this is in some way fair play. We accept that there are people/characters whose actions and motives will never be clearly shown in full. We accept that when we follow John, we pretty much always know what he knows and understand where he's coming from--but when we follow Sherlock, we'll reliably be shown only the outer seeming, but not the hidden truths.

Eh. I may be wasting my time talking about this. A lot of people get it all automatically, and a lot don't care. But I find it fascinating to work through the technical finesse needed to actually surprise a reader/viewer without them feeling cheated or jerked around. In the end, it's all a magic trick. In the end, the author/director gamed you. But a good magician writer asks you to enter into the illusion willingly, cheats you with joy and kindness, and lets you walk away delighted, never resenting for a moment that he or she never showed you how the elephant materialized in the middle of the stage. Even if, like me, in the end you want to know how it was actually engineered, it's not because you think you were duped. It's because the trick was so perfect as to demand understanding. Manipulation of POV is one of the strongest ways writers and directors pull that off. It's the smoke and mirrors basics of writing, and it's fascinating to think about

At least, if you're me. But we've long since passed the point of establishing that I am weird.
Entirely Too Spoilery

Chapter Summary

And a major risk. I'm going to go out on a limb, not because I've got proof, but because it feels right. If I'm right, *somewhere,* *someone* owes me a pint or two. Because if I'm right, even I'm going to be impressed. Predictive mode on, folks. If you don't want predictions, run. Now. Fast. Here there be a few serious guesses.

I'm going with it, because I swear, it feels right.

Yes. Mycroft's got heart disease. He's been prepping for the entire time we've known him for heart surgery. Diet. Exercise. Extreme care how he exerts himself. Brother on tooth-setting edge over everything in the world and then some because there's a good chance Mycroft will die, either of heart attack before surgery or on the table under the knife--and, no. Sherlock does not want big brother dead. Mycroft at least is quite aware of it during the scene in Scandal. "All people die. All hearts break. Caring is not an advantage, Sherlock."

Don't rip yourself to pieces over me, baby brother. Everyone dies, and caring won't make it go away.

Sherlock's pissy with Mycroft over Mycroft's suggestion that he give some thanks to Mycroft for coming to get him in Serbia not because he really thinks Mycroft enjoyed his pain, but because there was a very real physical risk involved...and because he knows the operation's coming. Mycroft could have killed himself going to fetch Sherlock just when the end, for better or worse, was in sight.

Yes. The "lonely/goldfish" conversation is indeed about loneliness. But it's triggered by "can't deal with broken hearts." It really is "end of life" concerns. If Mycroft dies, is he dying alone and lonely? Is Mycroft the template for Sherlock, if Sherlock continues on as he is?

Another possible layer: some aspect of the heart problem is externally inflicted--someone murdering Mycroft, a senior spymaster for the British. That one's a longshot, but it ups the connection with Major Sholto... as does a very real concern that Mycroft might actually choose to die, rather than allow himself to be operated on. Indeed, I find myself wondering if Sherlock doesn't spend a chunk of the wedding actually trying not to worry Mycroft's going to suicide. Or, of course, die before the operation. Or refuse the operation.

The discussion Mycroft has with the Prime Minister was held because there's a real chance Mycroft could die in mid-operation, and Sherlock really is the best choice of replacement for him if he caves. He's also the best choice of leg-man and active agent when Mycroft simply can't do the same work. The mission Mycroft offers Sherlock is some form of work as his proxy: it could be a clean, overt "here's a case I literally can't do." Or it could be "we need a bait and switch, with you doing things we don't want me seen doing." Or it could be actually acting as Mycroft's deputy, at least during the time Mycroft's being operated on and recovering. If there's a plan to at least pass Mycroft off as dead during this period, to reduce potential attacks on him while he's weak, then Sherlock may be passing as more than just deputy.

Oh, heck. There are a gazillion ways they can play it out. But I'm seriously feeling hot on this one.
I think they've word-played us. I think "heartbreak" and "damaged heart" are being played on by those witty, verbal Holmes Boys, who, among other things, don't feel safe talking about their real emotions, so play games around them, even if the games sound even more obviously emotional. Because they can play with romance so long as it's actually not related to the threat of real death and separation.

Now, is Mycroft really lonely? Yes. I think that one's in the gold. Is Sherlock concerned about that, above and beyond Mycroft's health? Yes. I think that's gold, too. But I think this round will be that terrifying feeling of walking up to the operating room together, knowing you may never get to say anything more to each other. That this very well could be the end of things.

The adventure will weave in and out, and will tie to Sherlock working for Mycroft during all this. Meanwhile the plot with Mary and John will also twist around. Both will tie into the entire Magnussen situation. But the, er... heart of the Mycroft situation will have to do with health and heart disease.

Am I right?

Oh, for pity's sake, how would I know?! This is my spidey-sense talking, now. Screaming, actually. But it feels right. It really does feel right.

Does Mycroft survive? I think so. Indeed, I think either Sherlock or John will act to save the day somehow. No, I don't know how. But I think John will have at least a second or two of being "Mycroft's doctor," as he was Sholto's doctor, and saving the life rather than solving the murder. It feels right. It feels--whole.

But I could be wrong. They could kill him. I just... hope not. I really hope not. I do think that having this be an arc Sherlock and Mycroft have been struggling with for all three seasons is lovely, though, if I'm right, and does change the tone of any death they may deal out. And it also ties to the entire question of Sherlock dealing with Real Life in this season. From his return on he's shoved into the practical aspects of friendships, love, marriages, pregnancy...and the death of loved ones. We start with Sherlock having to face what his death did to his beloved brother-by-choice. In the end he has to face issues of the possible death of his brother-by-blood and upbringing.

Making it really nice that in the first episode Sherlock calls Mycroft "blud," just before leaving the office to find John. British slang for brother, but punning on the blood-brother element. And explaining why we want to see Mummy and Daddy--again, stress that these are two blood brothers, with history and kinship that runs a lifetime. It's not an accidental association, but an inescapable one.

Now.

Who's buying me a pint if I'm substantially right about any of this? Because so help me, if I'm right I'm really going to feel I earned something tall and malty and mellow. (smile)

Addendum: And, Bingo. Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and leader of crusades--the other "Redbeard"--died of drowning with the likelihood of heart attack added in. Sherlock wanted to be a pirate--one Redbeard. Mycroft became an "emperor." Another Redbeard. Odds just went up another notch.

[^^^^ Addendum to the above addendum. Looking at the various "Barbarossa/Redbeard" claimants, I am more and more fascinated. Frederick I seems very much someone one could tie to Mycroft and his empire building and crusades against terror from the east. But I also really like the ties to Barbarossa Heyreddin Pasha and his brother. It's like no matter which historic direction you
come in, you get good Mycroft/Sherlock ties. Works. I think it should be both, frankly: take all the good Redbeard ties you can get, and run with them....]

I do hope he lives. Modern Medicine can do some very impressive things. Heart transplant, heart repair, etc. We shall hope for Mycroft that this can indeed be dealt with.

Addendum: Heart disease a common problem for folks with AIDS/HIV--which remains an issue within gay communities. Which might allow one to finally figure out why Sherlock, who really does appear to think "it's all good," never seemed to feel quite the same way about Mycroft's orientation. This one's a VERY long-shot. There are too many other ways one can come by heart disease, and Mycroft The Original was always fat. Or it could even be congenital, dating back to childhood, with emotional implications for both boys. But it would resolve an aspect of the boys' relationship that's always left me feeling unsettled.

Addendum: And it all ties back in with the show writers/runners/producers wanting us to take very seriously the idea that there's real peril in this episode. Peril for Sherlock doing Mycroft's business, peril for Mary between pregnancy and threat from Magnussen, threats for John, and a real threat for Mycroft--every major player facing life shattering threats that could kill them or rip their lives to pieces. Sounds like an episode trying to take everyone hostage to the real issues of death and loss. Again, uniting the themes and issues of this season's shows. "Hello, Sherlock. Vacation's over. Welcome to Real Life--the kind without fairy dust and magic solutions to problems."

Addendum: Possible Sholto tie-in by way of heart-damage while on duty. Shot or otherwise attacked in his role as spymaster/agent. Sholto's injuries are visible. Mycroft's aren't, but are no less real. Ties again to the question of "he wasn't John's first." Mycroft is Sherlock's "first." John's first admired, injured role model has come for the party. Sherlock promptly calls his first to try to get him there, too. Both "veterans" in a very real sense, underlining why John, a wounded veteran himself appeals to Sherlock--another reflection of what a "brother" is to Sherlock. And pushing Mycroft out of his Mind Palace isn't because he doesn't want Mycroft there, per se, but because it is getting darker and darker and closer and closer to issues of death, and he wants John, who offers life and "saving the patient."

Oh, I so don't know if this is right. I so don't know if this is what they're doing. But if it's not--well. At the very least you can see one could make one heck of a story out of it!!!!!!!!!!

More: Images from trailer: Doctor in surgical mask--catastrophic event during surgery? Quivering finger of hand? Perhaps they've been waiting to see if Mycroft ever comes out of anesthesia or a forced coma? If so, save that as the Easter Egg? The last sign before the end, with Sherlock trying not to chew his nails, and you're given the first sign that Mycroft's coming up--he's still in there?

Someone please sedate me. I obviously need it.

Addendum: Reviews Sign of three. Mutters, "Oh, I just don't know. Dang it. There are limits to my Deductive skills. And almost no limits to my ability to spin twenty stories all logically based on a single canon...."

Stay me with flagons; comfort me with apples, for I am sick of Deductions....
Alternate balance

Chapter Summary

I continue to spin my wheels like a truck in deep mud...

So, alternate option, still sticking with Mycroft seriously ill. Only this version Sherlock doesn't know until Mycroft says, "Redbeard." Shared memory, codeword like "Lazarus," in any case, that's the key. Sherlock's not amused--Sherlock's really upset. Did Mycroft ever pretend a bit too hard to be dead while playing pirates? Or what? In any case, in this variant, I'd hypothesize Sherlock didn't know Mycroft was in life-or-death until Mycroft hands him the key word, and Sherlock's juggling that right through to the argument at the door with Sholto. Sherlock would not willingly die on John's wedding day. Sholto would not. How dare Mycroft hand off that level of bad news on John's wedding day and darken it for Sherlock?

Which, if that's what happened, is a legitimate question, but one also answered by the fact that Mycroft has no goldfish of his own.

Eh.

Less than twenty-four hours and people will know.

I should stop spinning my wheels.
Chapter Summary

More last minute stuff...

Sherlock wanted Mycroft to meet Sholto. Matchmaking. Classic gambit--get them to cute-meet at reception. Two of a type: injured, honorable, patriotic, reserved, reclusive, threatened. Sherlock's both jealous, yes--but also sees someone Worthy of His Big Brother.

Longshot--they really are setting up Mystrade, and while Sherlock's trying to matchmake, the real goldfish is drinking too much and hanging out with bestie Molly, alone and worried about Mycroft, the other half of his "team of Holmes brothers."

In the original story, Sherlock gets engaged to a housemaid to get access to Milverton. I think he'll attempt a similar trick in this, only to be told why that's horrible and cruel to the girl by Molly...who may be asked a brutal question or two about her engagement to Tom in return.

I really would love it if they were setting up a slow-reveal and maybe even slow-develope Mystrade. So many ficcish pairings are just not usable for this show. Neither Johnlock nor Sherlolly are likely for reasons of core ACD canon, thematic elements as all the major Powers see them, with Moffat, Gatiss, Freeman, and Cumberbatch all seeing a straight John and an Unboyfriendable Sherlock. Dramatic pragmatism alone suggests matching up Shetlock would be disruptive--that they're managing to pull off John/Mary with this much success is a near miracle. But Mystrade is something they could do gently, silently, kindly, by nearly a gesture and a smile, over seasons, and never damage the core dynamics of the show...which would be so pretty. Both a gay and an Older People story done with grace, dignity, and without the usual hoopla.

I am probably hoping for too much, there. But...it works, where so many other lovely pairings are doomed to fic because they have practical problems in the show setting. It would be so nice to see that fan pairing work out...

Addendum: And now we've apparently also got a "betrayal from within" plot to unravel going into next season. I'm-a gon' say, right up front:

Anderson, in the Library, with the mistaken assumption

Donovan, in the conservatory, with the opposition agent

Mary, in the dining room, as something she did under duress

Or one of the others by accident, I would expect. All can make errors. But really, Anderson because he's an idiot, Donovan because she's been against Sherlock for a long time and because I'd actually like to see her "promoted" to serious and capable enemy, and Mary, because we know she does come under pressure at some point.
Sigh. Of course they have to set hooks for next time. But me, I'm looking for some resolved hooks, myself, right now.

And, yes. I'm going to go with Donovan as my first pick. Because looking at the Waters case, I'm too strongly convinced it's a set-up against Greg. It feels far too much like the and Sally are gaming Lestrade, setting him up to think the Waters family isn't clued in, when they are.

Now, that leaves two obvious questions: is this aimed at DI Lestrade? Or Secret Agent Man Lestrade? Or both? And how far back does it go? Sally's got issues going back to the very first episode with Sherlock... and by extension with Lestrade. (The Waters case is the first time she's ever called him "boss"? Ok... that's actually kind of intriguing in its own right...) Did Sally at some point simply become a bent cop, working with crooks who can pay her? Or is she an operative in her own right, for another faction or nation? Or is she a lingering part of Moriarty's network, left uncaught? And... did we ever identify who the assassin was in Lestrade's office, at the end of RF? Can we have been misled?

Ok. Enough. Must go to work on real work. Sigh...

Late-breaking questions:

Do we get to hear Sherlock reprise John, and say, "Don't be dead"?

Do we get to see Sherlock learn from John, and "save the life"?

How do we link the Mycroft/spy plotline to the Magnussen blackmail plotline?
LMAO. Oh, dear...

Chapter Summary

If the Mirror's review is accurate...

I got next to nothing right.

Tricksey writers. Tricksey, tricksey writers! (snerk) Will wait to see ep...but it looks like they scored big-time! Their win!

Whoa, dang, this one sounds like a pip. Really, it sounds like an all-around win-win-win!

I am looking forward to learning what happened in full....so many questions!
First longer thoughts on reading spoiler reviews...

Chapter Summary

Beginning to evaluate where we landed.

Ok. I'm very glad Mary's an agent. Even if she's not (known to be) one of Mycroft's. (Though one must wonder if there's a connection, because, as usual, we still know he's the CIA when he's freelancing...)(As in, I still don't believe in coincidences.)

If they don't redeem Lestrade next series, I will be properly pissed. The actor, the character, and the audience deserve better than dope Lestrade. The one biggest area for hope, IMO, is that if he's undercover, he's good at it.

We avoided all the many forms of "Mycroft's dying," that all of us dreamed up. I'm glad. For all I had a lovely time planning out the heart disease, and an equally lovely time trying to evade all the other forms of death possible, I prefer me some firmly alive Mycroft.

I'm thrilled to hear that, yes, there's a difference between Sherlock's internal Mycroft and the real one--and that the real one can find it in him to try to let Sherlock know how much he truly loves baby brother. Looking forward to all the nuances, including the ways poor Mycroft's just not all that good at this, poor duck. Fascinated that there may be hints of Sherrinford out there.

Actually quite glad they're going further with Sherlock's drug issues. High time. Very glad Molly can wale on the man. Good for her. Just as happy she's split up with Tom.

Did I say they'd better redeem Lestrade? I'm saying it again. They'd better redeem Lestrade.

Really looking forward to sitting down with all three eps and working out the season-long arcs and patterns.

Personally hope beyond hope that Jim Moriarty isn't really back. But I'm not a Moriarty fan.

That's all till I manage to get a copy of the episode running. Having some issues over that. It will work out, in time.
Seen It

Chapter Summary

Nice. Not as outsized as it felt like we were led to expect, but...nice.

Ok. Good episode. Not as big, sweeping, or transformational as somehow it felt like we were teased to think it would be. People actually end up far less shifted than I expected from all the hoo-ha going in, somehow. Of course our own various theories are at least in part the problem: all of us coming up with great theories. But

Things I like: Yes. Sherlock absolutely has drug issues, they're real and active, he rationalizes like an addict, and at some point if they stay true to canon John's going to have to work with Sherlock on that.

Mummy and Daddy are not "ordinary." Mummy's another genius, and Daddy's the goldfish who can manage her. Which is promising in certain ways for both our Holmes boys. Among other things they're both going to be imprinted with an idea of successful long-term relationships between the genii and the goldfish as normal and stable and desirable. Hope for both Sherlock and Mycroft, then. I like this better than both of them being goldfish. A lot better.

I like Daddy Goldfish almost as much as I like Mummy Genius. Maybe more. He's a darling...and he actually knows quite well how to deal with his hot, flaky, sexy genius wife. And he knows that bowties are cool. He could easily be the 11th/12th/13th Doctor in retirement. (Pick the numbering scheme of your choice, but only one that resolves into Matt Smith...) Again, I find this really promising for the long terms arcs for the two boys.

I'm fascinated by the hint that there's another Holmes brother after all. It's one more nod, this time to Ye Olde Classic Holmesian Fanon: the non-canonical but well-loved and much theorized Sherrinford, eldest of the Holmes brothers.

Sherlock hears Mycroft in his head the way any little boy hears a teasing older brother: too big, too nasty, too mean. But Mycroft is also the one port in a storm, the ultimate resource, the one person who can tell you what to do when it all gets shot to hell. And--I'm interested that Sherlock's reproach to Mycroft over Magnussen is that big brother's supposed to deal with bullies who pick on the different--why isn't he dealing with this bully? One strongly suspects Mycroft actually did quite a bit of little-brother protection in his time.

It's impossible not to melt knowing that in Mycroft's eyes, the defeated Sherlock really is his little baby brother, innocent face, tears, and all. One keeps wondering how Sherlock can so completely miss that Mycroft utterly adores him.

One is rather proud of Mycroft having what it takes to admit that losing Sherlock would break his heart. I'm proud of him.

If the plan with Moriarty using Sherlock as bait went wrong, the plan to use Mycroft as Magnussen bait went wrong, too--and Sherlock does not appear to have included Mycroft in the planning on this one, unlike the reverse, in which Sherlock does appear to have been at least somewhat in the loop.
What we see of Moriarty returned is not impressive. So "bad internet Photoshopped animation." The impressive part is the taking over of the UK broadcast system. Still...I can't help but suspect that this is Mycroft very sensibly finding a way to ensure Baby Brother's actually not spent on stupid missions in Eastern Europe.

I find myself wondering if "The East Wind" may not become Sherlock's version of The Doctor's "Oncoming Storm."

I'm actually more reassured by Lestrade's last sequences in this than I feared. He wasn't a clown, and he was absolutely working in tandem with Mycroft. He, rather than John, contacts and works with Mycroft, and he appears to end up in Mycroft's more secret offices. He's professional, on point, and stead as a rock even when on alert. I'm even pleased with the end sequence in what appears to be a favored pub--I think the same one seen in "Many Happy Returns." Again, alert, aware, on point. Strips some of the goofy stuff off, and leaves plenty of room to hang on to the theory that he's working with the MI5/6 mess in some capacity. I still like the theory that he's a full operative with Sherlock as a central element of his duty roster. It allows a lot of room for explaining things--like how Mycroft always knows what's going on with Sherlock's case load.

It's intriguing to think of Mycroft as originally the middle kid. I'm...not sure what I think about it. The favorite old school theories of Sherrinford make him the eldest, and there are "lost in the middle" elements of Mycroft that make sense with him as the middle-kid. But... I don't know. There are other ways Mycroft reads as eternally the oldest: the caretaker member of the family.

But, then, a lot would depend on what role the eldest had taken. If Sherrinford exists, and was definitely no nurturer, that would leave Mycroft with a clear role.

I really personally like Mary as an agent/assassin. I'm intrigued what they're going to do with three people utterly unsuited to prosaic suburban-style parenting, though: John, Mary, and Sherlock are going to have to reinvent family if we're actually going to have kidlock. But there are enough enemies for Mary that I can see the possibility of her having to run, baby and all, once more fleeing the people who want her dead. That may ultimately finish that arc. We'll see.

I liked John/Sherlock/Mary as a triad. Even if they never do OT3, they actually work very well as OT3 in terms of dynamic. The currents at work in the faceoff in 221B over Mary's revelations was perfect, with all three crazy in love with the other two, and working so very hard at it all. Just as Irene's right to nail John and Sherlock as a couple, she could easily amble in and nail J/S/M as a stable and highly integrated poly triad.

I want to think some about Sherlock and Janine. Yes, he's a cold SOB. But...he also comes across as rather enjoying having a case that lets him experiment with this mode. He may not have ended up in bed with her, but he kept both of them...interested...as near as I can tell. And their final exchange was as much flirtation as it was reproach.

Sherlock and Molly. Mmmm. They keep working well with those two. Someday, someday, it could work. As something. Bless Molly for smacking him. And, in a weird way, isn't it fascinating that his response to her reproach is to attack her thing with Tom?

Poor duck has no idea what he feels, sometimes, I swear. And, oh, Cumberbatch and Brealey play the two better and better, as they become more and more integrated with each other as peers, not as lordly master with groveling love-slave peon.

More later. Must boogie for now.

Tammany
I have to admit, I adore the two Holmes boys having their cigarettes out in the yard and trying to hide them from Mummy. And so help me, am I mistaken or are the first words out of Sherlock's mouth an attempt to blame Mycroft?

And poor Mycroft. I suppose if you're *going* to carry that name around, it's just as well to have the whole thing and avoid "Mike." I do want to know if it's actually his middle name, as is Sherlock's in this version of reality. (And I'm charmed that Sherlock's first name is the same as Wiggins'. One wonders if Sherlock has barely escaped from being a "Billy" himself....

And... Oh. Hmmm. *IF* Moriarty's not really back, and it's someone filling in for him.

And we've just been told there may be a Sherrinford. Who at least appears to have "gone bad." Or at least proven outside Mycroft's umbrella of fraternal protectiveness...

I wonder.

Oh, I do wonder. I always did wonder if Moriarty didn't have a handler above him. He was always too crazy to seem like a plausible international criminal on his own. He's got too many "run away, this one's crazy" post-its stuck to his forehead. Even loony-toons criminals should be shuffling quietly to the back of the room and thinking up excuses to go visit their dear old mums rather than work with Moriarty.

One thing I will say: the entire sequence of being shot...

Ok. I don't have Sherlock's Mind Palace. Nor have I been shot. I have had an exciting experience with trying to bleed out from internal injury and coming much closer to succeeding than I'd prefer. They did do a very good job of catching what it's like to be working through the layers of what you ahve to do to even hope to keep living, and the layers of controlling even odd aspects of body control like how you manage your own shock and pain. Been there. Didn't have Molly or Anderson or Mycroft to coach me. But have done the strategic breakdowns on the way down the slope toward dead. They really, really caught the mood, at least for me.
Ok. Going by a) Mycroft's final comments to the star chamber at the end of "Vow," and b) by Sherlock's actual activity for two years breaking up Moriarty's old network and c) the implications of the assignment he's being sent on by MI6...

Does it seem logical to assume that, to at least some extent, Sherlock, like Mary, has been a government assassin? Perhaps even prior to the project to clear out Moriarty's people?

I find the idea intriguing, if only because the alliance between Mary and Sherlock then becomes one between two peers, and John's attraction/affection to both becomes all the more clear-cut in terms of it being an outstanding character peculiarity. He's drawn to capable killers. And people who can clean out an international criminal network don't just, well, materialize.

And while I'm at it:

According to Magnussen, Mycroft's been looking for an opening to destroy Magnussen for years. Yet Mycroft doesn't let Sherlock know that, and allows Sherlock to think the worse of him instead. He's willing to let Sherlock think he's Magnussen's willing patsy, and that he's so much a pragmatist that he'll just treat Magnussen as an ordinary cost of doing business, when in fact he's apparently actively looking for a way to get rid of Magnussen, and is not only not Magnussen's patsy, but has avoided being caught in Magnussen's traps until the Sherlock/John/Mary complex comes into view.

Yes? I did follow that right, yes?

And, really, so very happy to see Greg so clearly working for/with Mycroft, up to and including reporting to his office. We now have not only implication via Hound, or circumstantial evidence, as one puts together the logic of how things play out in the show, but a clear, direct, unmistakable instance of the two working together with Sherlock as the subject of concern.

I do like it. I do.

Addendum: the odds of Lestrade being the contact that allowed Mycroft to recruit Anderson and his wife seem pretty sure. At the very least, it feels a bit Occam's Razory: why look for alternate routes for Mycroft to know of Anderson and know he's in any way worth recruiting when Lestrade's there, big as life and twice as natural, filling the optical sensors from horizon to horizon? Which is one of the fascinating side effects of now having confirmation of Lestrade and Mycroft working in tandem even to a limited degree: before you've got confirmation of that level of connection, trying to suggest that team-up may account for some elements of the show's underlying logic remains tenuous conjecture. Once it's clear and firm, it becomes a reasonably high-ranking first choice to account for those elements.

Example: how does Mycroft know when Sherlock's likely to need extra cases, if John's not reporting on their status? Before we knew Lestrade was working with Mycroft, there was no reason
to favor Lestrade as an informant over Mycroft bugging the flat or Mrs. Hudson being a hired stooge. After Hounds, Lestrade seemed promising, but one wasn't quite sure the connection was firm enough to suggest that level of information flow. This recent ep, though, shows us a) Lestrade can and does call Mycroft directly with breaking news, offer his best current information regarding Sherlock, Mycroft actually works with him to refine that information, and Lestrade, far from reporting at a distance entirely by phone, actually goes in to what we've seen is one of Mycroft's more secret-service offices, rather than the cover office John visits at one point. Face-to-face onsite, and a secure onsite. That level of interface suggests that, yes, giving Mycroft a ring to let him know that there's no work for Sherlock from the Met, and that John's kvetching about no new cases coming in, seems like a high-probability answer to how Mycroft's getting his info.

What do we learn from this?

Lestrade's got fairly direct access to Mycroft.

Lestrade's got a security clearance that gives him access to secure locations. Unless one theorizes that this only occurs as a result of the emergency situation, and that seems a long-shot. If Lestrade's not cleared to be there on a more common basis, what's happening in the scenes we see would not be sufficiently critical to get him in there when there is an emergency.

Mycroft respects and works with Lestrade's information: Lestrade may be a goldfish, but it does look like he's the goldfish Mycroft trusts to look after baby brother.

Lestrade's in a position that has him reporting to Mycroft pretty much instantly when something goes wrong with Sherlock. So, yes. Sherlock's well-being is a professional commitment, from the looks of it. Which does indeed tend to soften/redeem the idiot Waters case...though, frankly, we could use more.

One does wonder if things like taking videos of Sherlock aren't as much secret service as scampish teasing. Part of maintaining observation for Big Brother.

To me a strong suggestion he helped recruit Anderson and wife...which puts a new complexion on "Many Happy Returns" and the start of "Hearse."

The relationship between Mycroft and Lestrade also has me wondering even more whether Lestrade did or did not know about Sherlock's survival.

I'm really beginning to wonder what Lestrade's exact standing is. Is he just a Met detective who got recruited because he was well-placed to handle Sherlock? That doesn't seem entirely in keeping with having a direct line to Mycroft and clearance to the secret offices, nor does it seem to fit with Sherlock calling Lestrade his handler: a handler usually has authority over you and is senior. A Met detective tapped because he's in the right place at the right time would have his own handler, rather than the other way around, I'd think. So, again: MI5, and embedded in the Met? MI6 and likewise? Veteran from the military with military intelligence experience, working in the Met and then sort of grandfathered in when he worked well with Sherlock?

I do find it interesting: Both Mycroft and Lestrade care that Sherlock become a good person--stated directly by Lestrade in SiP, and implied as strongly by Mycroft at the end of the same episode. Lestrade wants to see a great man become a good one. Mycroft hopes John Watson will be the making of Sherlock, in a good way. Both men work together to oversee Sherlock, care for him, and support him. Both men provide guidance and limits, and both can and do deal out discipline when necessary. Now that we know that they really are working as a coordinated team where Sherlock is involved, if nowhere else, it becomes hard to ignore that they're functioning as de facto parents together.
It's...intriguing. And becoming harder and harder to imagine the intrigue is accidental and all in the head of the viewer. There's a game in play, here.

First season you could logic out a connection, but it was circumstantial.

Second season you could logic it out, and you had fairly suggestive witness statements.

Third season we now have logic, and direct demonstration of Sherlock-related partnering going on.

What will fourth season give us? More? Or is this a game the PTB will always delight in leaving unstated and unstudied, to be guessed at?
Goldfish

Chapter Summary

For wittering Mystradians like me.

Ok. We now have Mycroft and Lestrade in a confirmed if limited partnership with Sherlock as at least one of their critical subjects of concern. We have Lestrade quite determined that he does not just do what Mycroft tells him, and that he's not actually Sherlock's handler. He could be lying to either himself or Sherlock on both counts--but let's say he's accurate and within his rights to feel a bit peeved.

That would suggest whatever relationship he and Mycroft have, it's not pure superior/subordinate, and it's not such that the point of it all is just for Lestrade to run Sherlock as Mycroft's proxy. It's got some other framing context and some other power structure. Again, we could have Lestrade be on limited loan from another hierarchy--say he's normally MI5 with his own boss, but Mycroft "borrows" him for Sherlock work. But that then begs the question of how Lestrade fails to be Sherlock's handler, and leaves us with him still doing what Mycroft tells him within the context of Sherlock --which is, after all, what's under discussion in "Hound."

I rather like the idea that they're partners within certain limits, and those limits include but are not entirely restricted to Sherlock. But they're working together within those limits. The boundaries pretty much have to leave out "British Government" work--I can't see Lestrade even being interested. But they would seem to have to include elements of Sherlock on the London beat. But we will see.

I'm just so pleased to finally have this much clarified, resolved, and confirmed. They're a working team, trust each other, Lestrade contacts Mycroft--then actually comes in to the office with him, rather than continuing to report on the fly. Logically we seem to end up with a) Lestrade reporting to Mycroft's office, b) Mary heading out to question witnesses (which may account for how we get Molly in there), and John doing similarly, interviewing Mrs. Hudson.

Now, for us Mystradians...

Back to "Hearse" and the goldfish discussion.

Sherlock's prying. Mycroft goes into denial, and his route is to comment on the entire goldfish problem--a neat feint, suggesting he'd only associate with non-goldfish. Sherlock counters, suggesting that goldfish might actually be perfectly acceptable and perhaps Mycroft's got one. Mycroft flusters, and retreats to the fireplace, not denying outright, but instead insisting they change topics. I always found that sequence a bit... Holmesian in its evasive elements. Mycroft retreats from the question of whether he might have a goldfish rather than outright denying it. Now that we know that Mummy Holmes has a lovely, abiding marriage with her own goldfish, and that the two boys know perfectly well that goldfish keeping can be a happy project for all concerned, we have even more reason to be fascinated by Mycroft's rattled retreat...

Then we get all the not-lonely stuff. If Mycroft's not lonely, does he actually have a goldfish he won't admit to? If so, why deny it to Sherlock?
Lestrade would be an obvious and fascinating choice of goldfish just from the logistics: of course one would try to deny it and protect Sherlock from knowing. Lestrade's Sherlock's DI, his Met contact, and adding in questions of whether he's Mycroft's goldfish would complicate what's already complicated.

Eh. Really, this one can wait. But at least it now looks canonically tenable beyond just being a conjecture out of silence.
A few more little details I loved...

Chapter Summary

Just rambling while contemplating a fic. Finished a job of Real Work, and have time to ponder for a bit...

I like that Mycroft's "obsessive compulsive," because he always straightens the knocker at Baker Street. Unaware of it. And, as Sherlock and John cheerfully illustrate for us, Sherlock always, always sets it crooked again--without being aware of doing it.

Just lovely.

I love that in Sherlock's Mind Palace, the return to life is a return to Baker Street. Home.

I love the smile on Mycroft's face as he calls Little Brother home. Britain may or may not be facing a serious and deadly challenge--but Mycroft's getting his baby brother back, and he's so openly happy about it.

Again, I love the two brothers smoking in the garden. All of it. Every lovely, luscious bit. I love that Mycroft "still smokes like a beginner." Dang, Sherlock, you're the kind of jerk who eggs people into more and more catastrophic habits, aren't you? But we knew that, you wicked, nasty enabler, you. I again love them hiding their cigarettes from Mummy--who's GOT to see the smoke, dear woman! I love Sherlock starting to blame Mycroft. I bet he earned every single Mycroftian Spooky Story About the East Wind that Mycroft ever told...and a lot more on top. "Mycroft did it. Mycroft started it. Mycroft wasn't paying attention." Oh, you just KNOW Sherlock was the bane of a big brother's existence, especially with that seven-year gap between them. That's a gap big enough to have good elements--and some nightmare aspects. Mycroft's seventeen? Sherlock's TEN. Middle School age. The perfect age to treat big brother as a despised monster who is, nonetheless, also a mandated convenience who's supposed to be at the beck and call of baby brother.

I love that Mycroft's not just Mike--the first time Mummy uses it, it's actually Mikey. Poor Mycroft. If he's going to have a freak-flag for a name, he's going to march proudly to the end of the street with his freak-flag high and fluttering in the wind, dammit.

So. Mummy's Mummy. But Mr. Holmes is Father. Mummy and Father...and if Father hums, just poke him. (smile)

I do think that it feels like life is all about Sherlock for Mummy to a degree. Or maybe I'm just a big sister. But even taking the shooting into account, I got the feeling that family's not *about* Mycroft for her--it's about Sherlock and Mycroft's supposed to be a staunch and willing supporting player. If I'm not imagining it, then the writers and actors are doing a superb job at portraying a rather subtle and sad family dynamic: spoiled Sherlock, the apple of Mummy's eye, and Good Boy Mycroft, the respectable, responsible one, kind of left out in the cold and expected to perk up and show willing in Mummy's imaginary family drama. It adds such a clear layer of why both boys are what they are, and why they're at each other's throats so often. Mycroft waiting for someone to someday actually care if he's happy or not. Sherlock enjoying being the center of attention, and resenting Mycroft's dour attacks on that status...and Sherlock knowing he can game Mummy in a split second. Oh, he's a "youngest." (Laughs and grimaces remembering youngest sibling at age
eleven....who actually drove her older siblings so nuts with behavior more suited to a five-year-old
we ended up taking said sib into the kitchen and having a serious, serious talk about just how much
willing cruelty could be inflicted on a child who pretended to talk with a lisp at that age as a way of
manipulating parental buttons....)(Did I say I feel for Mycroft? I didn't? Well, I do. Sherlock would
have been the very devil of a baby brother: big blue eyes, floppy curls, tears at the drop of a hat,
and absolute conscienceless willingness to play whatever games got him what he wanted...and so
hurt and furious that anyone dared question it or resist. The miracle is that Mycroft loved him
enough to let him live to adulthood...)

Will look forward to eventually getting Amazon copies with (gasp) subtitles, so I can catch stuff
that disappears in British accents and background noise.

I do love Father Holmes. He's such a sweetie. I'd sic River Song on him, but I'm not sure Mummy
Holmes wasn't River Song in her day.

I think I'll take a pass at season structure notes in about a week. Maybe less. Depends on how long
it takes my brains to clear from the first round combined with a project I had to finish.

Just as an aside--

Sherlock has got to be one of the most emotionally expensive people in the universe to love. Love
him and you get opportunities to see him do things like consider playing Russian Roulette with
suicide pills in the company of mad cabbies, repeatedly expose himself to lunatic sadistic d*cks
like Moriarty, fake death and not let you in on it, play dodge 'em with viscous creeps like
Magnussen, and, oh, yeah--commit murder in front of armed SWAT-teams and risk making his
best friend and the brother who adores him watch him get shot down in a hail of automatic fire--
with the Best Friend actually IN the freakin' line of fire.

And that's just the tl;dr version.

Poor Mycroft has just had the crappiest Christmas possible. Oh, dear. Given his first-season
comments about Christmas with the Holmes family, this is likely to be just one more Christmas
Sherlock found a dramatic way to destroy with his baloney. NO WONDER BIG BROTHER
HATES CHRISTMAS!!!!! Who wouldn't hate being the Prodigal Son's Big Brother with Sherlock
as the Prodigal?
Very Early Prediction for the Next Time Out

Chapter Summary

In which a brainstorm passes through Tammany's Mind Palace, causing all sorts of fertile ideation.

Ok, this is for what is commonly called "shits and giggles." But an idea came crashing in this morning, and it feels so right for Sherlock I have to post it as an early guess/prediction.

Yes, they will indeed bring back Sherrinford, the smartest, eldest Holmes. Sherrinford will be a woman. Because "Sherrinford" is a girl's name. Thus putting Sherlock's last bit with John to double use, and making Mycroft's rather odd phrasing about "the other one" a way of neatly avoiding saying, "You know I didn't get all sentimental when things went to hell with my sister."

There will obviously be family history. There will also be some reason she's been a no-show. I have no idea if she'll be a good-guy or a bad-guy. Um, as it were. Good-gal? No. Sounds like someone writes her own phone number in men's bathroom stalls...

Oh, now that would be fun. Oldest daughter, brilliant (Like Mummy), mad, bad, dangerous to know. Bit of a run-around in her day. She and Sherlock tag teamed against Mycroft sometimes. Mycroft is the "oldest boy," though, thus still giving him a form of oldest child status in our culture: it's still different being the oldest boy. And with luck the sibs again have something complicated, weird, and totally loving, no matter what Mycroft's comment seems to suggest.

Because Sherrinford's entirely fanon in the first place, based on preliminary notes ACD made planning out Sherlock, there's really no canon obligation to make the character anything at all--it's true open season. So Moffat and Gatiss could give us a female Holmes--smarter than the boys, even.

Oh, and done right, Moffat could even run one of his wild-girl River Song-y characters. In her fifties. (Starts mentally casting Catherine Tate or Alex Kingston, keeping the fun in the family and making his teasing of Matt Smith lately particularly eeeeeeevil. But either woman would SO make a killer female Holmes. Oh, dear....maybe even a literal killer: yet another operative in Mycroft's world of spies and agents. But there are so many brilliant female actresses and comedienne just hitting that age bracket. I mean, come on, when you've even got Emma Thompson kvetching because she'd like to play Sherlock but Sherlock's a boooooooy....)

How does this tie in with Moriarty? No idea. I'm not even sure Moriarty's not a red herring pointing back to someone else. Maybe his own Mummy's mad her little boy's dead. Or not. I really have no ideas about Moriarty, and kind of like John am less interested in how than why. But I do love this idea that they're going to use Fanon Sherrinford to give us a female Holmes Sister.
Parallel Structure, Season I and II, or Invitation to Empathy

Chapter Summary

A bit of pondering regarding structure and technique, and John versus Mycroft.

Season two and season three end with two remarkably similar challenges to resolve. In both, Moriarty's presumably dead, and has deleted his own mental files, thus making sure Sherlock can't use his information to undo the threat to his three friends. Magnussen, similarly, has the sole copy of critical mental files--and in this case deleting all those files is a very desirable outcome for Sherlock, as rather than needing those files, he needs those files gone. In both cases, the deleting of the files can and will lead to Sherlock making a huge sacrifice, placing himself in threat of death--or apparent threat of death at the very least, and certainly in both cases will clearly find himself exiled from his preferred life at Baker Street.

We know that in the first he will fake his own death with help from Molly, Mycroft, and about 25 street people using a plan that's at least partly Mycroft's...or that Little Brother will present as being at least partly Mycroft's. We now have seen that Little Brother will at least blame Mycroft to Mummy over cigarettes: why not blame Mycroft to John over thoughtless deaths? In any case, we know Sherlock will make the jump, make the sacrifice, go into exile...and leave John a gibbering wreck, having just watched his best friend commit suicide.

We know it and feel it because the writers and directors and actors all worked together not only to show us more or less what Sherlock did (well, barring *how* he did it, which is almost never the most important part of things like this anyway, once you get past the basic foundational question of "can it be done by a good magician?"), they also go out of their way to invite us to see and empathize with what John feels. Sherlock's motives are understandable, and we go along with them--but we are also allowed and encouraged to empathize with how hard it is on John.

Now, a lot of that goes with POV manipulation: being invited into the character's head. In writing that happens on the page with either obvious shifts in how things like pronouns play out or less obvious things like how the writer focuses the reader's mental eye on details of a character's response, reaction, interior thought, etc. In film it usually works with establishing shots, who gets closeups, and who gets the majority attention of screen-time, with added points for who gets the warm-fuzzy scenes. In RF we were invited right into John's head, and followed the entire death sequence with him, bleeding with him every step of the way. Sherlock was soooo hard on John.

Now, of course, I'm fresh off writing "The Aftermath," working with Mycroft's reaction to events, and it's a very good position to be in to talk about how season two and season three are similar in terms of the pain Sherlock puts a character through. Once more we've got someone
who adores Sherlock, who's out of the loop and who's about to be betrayed on profound levels with no real control and no framework to understand what's really going on--because Mycroft for once doesn't seem to have the info about who Mary was, or why Sherlock's pursuing Magnussen. He doesn't know why Sherlock's driven to this any more than John knew the season before why Sherlock and Mycroft were desperate enough to game Moriarty through all the way to exile to try to sort things out. Mycroft's the one in the dark, and Mycroft is about to be put through something that may even be more traumatic than John having to watch Sherlock jump after that phonecall.

There's a phrase out there--"suicide by cop." It's when someone as good as kills themselves using the police as their weapon of choice. It's notoriously hard on the cops who are abused that way. To be turned into the suicide weapon against your will is traumatizing.

Well, Sherlock only fails to commit suicide by Mycroft thanks to Mycroft's quick responses and the incredible training and discipline of Mycroft's forces. And as shown, it's very close to being crazy luck...and Mycroft knows it. They make sure to invite us to know that much about Mycroft's interior reaction, just as they do give us Mycroft's final, broken perception of Sherlock as Little Kid Sherlock, beloved Baby Brother, in tears on the terrace facing the helicopter lights and the special forces team. Granted it's probably less traumatic to almost-kill your brother that to kill him. But--not by much. Not as played out. In a real-world setting that would be the point at which Mycroft's superiors would indeed be talking about taking a little down-time and talking to the shrink for a bit. Very PTSD inducing experience.

But the show, on the whole, does not invite us to see that end sequence with Mycroft, as we saw the end sequence of RF with John. We're only invited to empathise with Mycroft on a passing basis, flashes here and there, just enough links we can logic out that this will be hard on him, but not enough to really walk the road of grief in his shoes. With John, we took every agonized step on the path with him. We knew how it hurt. We knew what he feared. We understood.

We're not allowed that with Mycroft. The biggest thing we're really given is a) we know that Mycroft had the courage to tell Sherlock how much Sherlock meant. That's huge, and if it were handled with the same kind of focus on Mycroft that John got in season two, we'd all be walking around gut-shot and bleeding. Instead, we can deduce the importance, but aren't invited to share that importance by the structure of the presentation.

We also know that where last season Mycroft did not simply betray Sherlock to Moriarty (but that we were invited to believe he did), this season in a real sense Sherlock does betray Mycroft to Magnussen, making the same kind of mistake we were lured into thinking Mycroft made last time out: betraying his brother for what he thought were good and sufficient reasons, with hope of recovery, only to have it all go to blazes. But think about it: Sherlock knows he's dealing with the devil. He knows he's offering to betray Mycroft. He does, in fact, betray Mycroft, keeping him out of the loop, drugging him, stealing state secrets, and trying to handle it all on his own to protect John and Mary, in the process ultimately just putting himself in Magnussen's hands.

Oh, dear.

Sorry. Just saw this. Structure-me now steps forward and says, quietly--

In other words, Sherlock makes exactly and precisely the same set of mistakes Mary makes. For love of John and Mary, to keep his own version of "wedding vow," he wishes to eliminate the threat to them himself, and privately. So he takes matters into his own hands, placing
everything that matters at risk, instead of turning to the one person who could quite possibly help and laying it all out in front of him. Mycroft could as easily say, "Why didn't you come to me for help?" to Sherlock as Sherlock can say it to Mary.

For all the false-footing between the brothers, too often it comes down to Sherlock being unwilling to go to Big Brother and just tell the truth and ask for help.

Because Sherlock in his own mind is always a little boy afraid to disappoint Big Brother, and all caught up in love and resentment and insecurity and self-defense and his own miserable muddle of things even he feels are failures. One finds it virtually impossible to believe that Sherlock is feeling like much of a success in front of Mycroft during their face-off at Baker Street, for example. Brought in filthy from the streets, high, with a woman in his room he's not ready for Mycroft to know about, with Anderson and wife pawing through his things, and Mycroft for good reason being ready to go on the warpath? Of course Sherlock feels like an angry, miserable, defensive wreck and maybe an utter failure after all...

So. Anyway. This is turning into too many sequential digressions.

What I started with was that the two endings of the two series terminal episodes are structurally nearly identical, with Sherlock putting two of his nearest and dearest through similarly horrible things to accomplish similar endings. Files deleted, friends safe, Sherlock going into exile and "death." And two people forced to witness a scene out of their nightmares as Sherlock plays melodramatic hero. The big difference is who we're invited to empathise with. This time out the empathy carrier was really Sherlock: we know why he did it. We ache for him. We know he's once more making a huge sacrifice, and we know that this time around he knows how huge it really is. Even John's peripheral this time...and Mycroft? Well. He's lucky: this time he's important enough to be fully dealt in. We are allowed to know this will indeed break his heart. But we're not invited to bleed every step of the way with him as he himself tumbles through the layers of fear, betrayal, and loss.

Who a reader or viewer empathizes with in a story is the character they're invited to empathise with. The older I get, and the more I write, and the more I watch the world, the more I find myself thinking about that. It takes either a very good or a very bad writer to make a reader doubt the "worth" of the invited empathy character. Once that invitation is sent, we tend to go to the party and stay willingly. That leads to a lot of stories in which people get tons of sympathy who are really, when you think about it, not all that worthy of sympathy. Real jerks. And it leads to a lot of very good characters getting next to no sympathy at all. It happens in the real world, too: we know who we're invited to care about in news stories. We know which members of our families have the permanent get-out-of-jail-free card because they're the lucky ones who own the empathy-role in the family. We know the game is rigged.

But sometimes, in art and in life, it's worth questioning that invitation, and looking to see who else logically deserves sympathy and compassion. If nothing else, in asking, you learn such interesting things--like that the core problems in Reichenbach and in Vow are close to identical--or like that Sherlock and Mary Watson make the same core errors in trying to handle things themselves instead of being honest and asking for help.

Addendum: One thing really, really worth thinking about. Sherlock's lines prior to shooting Magnussen are to Mycroft. One doesn't know if Mycroft, genius and linguist, is a talented lip-reader, but the lines are still to Mycroft, and they address Mycroft's claim that Sherlock sees himself as a dragon-slayer: a hero. Sherlock wants to be a hero for Mycroft, too--wants it so badly. Magnussen hits the right buttons when he implies that this is all about how proud Sherlock thinks Mycroft's going to be of Baby Brother...who slays the dragon even Big
Brother won't take on. (Only if Magnussen is right, Mycroft's been taking the dragon on, just picking his battles and looking for the sure win...)

Sherlock has failed, and failing, he rejects the dream he's the hero, and plays the "better to rule in hell" card--but still gives Mycroft the dead dragon, a forlorn Christmas present that isn't really what either of them would have chosen. Not like that.

You look at the whole arc of the season, and you really see Sherlock needing--yearning--for Mycroft's approval. And, tragically, Mycroft yearning for Sherlock's. And they both keep wrong-footing it, failing to pass each other the right message.

That "goldfish" dialogue in "Hearse." Yes, one hopes that at some level it's Sherlock wanting freedom and for Mycroft to have his own life and loves, to escape his own loneliness. But it's critical to also see that it's Sherlock on a fishing trip to discover if he's been replaced in Mycroft's heart, just as he has somewhat been replaced in John's. "Is there anyone else, Big Brother? Do you still need me? Who will I be, if I'm not still your only peer?"
Thinking about the central thematic issue of "His Last Vow."

In two of the key scenes of "His Last Vow," Mary Watson stands, surrounded by a swarm of Sherlock's text-ideas all shouting "Liar." Mary Watson is a liar. Sherlock has technically known she's a liar since the first episode, as have we. The show runners have invited us to ignore that knowledge, and Sherlock himself has chosen not to explore that knowledge, in part because everyone wants to be able to like Mary, if possible. For John's sake, if for no other reason.

But Mary is a liar. She's not even who she claims to be. There's no aspect of Mary Morstan Watson that's not touched by the truth that she's not who she claimed, and that she's been lying about it for a long time. The question that raises can go any number of ways, but two obvious ones are "who is she really," and "why did she lie." The two are not necessarily the same question, though.

John, in the episode, eventually decides who she was is not the question: who she chooses to be now and in future is what matters. Just as he does not care how Sherlock faked his death, but why, he cares about what Mary most wishes to be, not about who she once was. Within the episode we're told not to worry too much about the specifics of Mary's past: They're burned up with the USB drive, they're blasted to meaty pulp by Sherlock's bullet. Within the context of this one episode at least, we're told that what Mary lied about is not important--what's important is why she lied, and what that motivation caused her to do.

Now, as I've pointed out, Moffat and company appear to like them some parallel structures, reflecting characters, shared thematic material, and so on. That's certainly true in Vow. We start with John lying to himself about his boredom, longing for danger and using excuses to get it. We run straight into Sherlock, lying to himself and everyone about his drug use--whether he's using, why he's using, whether it's a real problem, whether it's actually affecting him in any critical ways.

Don't miss that. Sherlock's using, and he's lying to himself and everyone else about what that implies--about him, his emotional status, and his intellectual capacities. One thing I really like about how MGT have been handling the drug issues with Sherlock is that, on the whole, they themselves are not lying. They're also not "preaching." They're showing, not telling.

They've shown us, not told us, that Sherlock used from the start, using the Danger Nights sequence to make it clear that Mycroft, John, and Mrs. Hudson are all not only aware, but that all have reason to see it as an active and ongoing issue.

They've shown us that it does disrupt Sherlock's life...and that, conversely, it is often triggered by disruptions in Sherlock's life. They've shown us already that he is, like many an addict, not good at dealing with his own use--that he'd rather avoid, evade, rationalize, blame the very people taking care of him...

They've shown us all this in gorgeous, near-silent, non-preachy patterns played out against other stories. So now we come to this one, and we walk right into the real thing. Sherlock's using, and he's quite simply in denial mode. It means nothing. It's just for a case. He's not in any trouble. They just don't understand. They're interfering. He's Sherlock on a case and this is just part of the game.
and it therefore doesn't matter.

Rather like the times when I try to convince myself that the second cookie doesn't matter calorically, because I already took the caloric hit when I ate the first one. What's one more?

Sherlock's playing with fire. He is, as Molly lays out clearly, destroying the beautiful gifts of his mind, betraying himself and his friends, and betraying the trust and love he's been given. And he's lying to them all about it--including lying to himself. We start this episode with Sherlock Holmes as a desperate, driven liar who can't confess to anyone, not even to himself, that he's out of control and not firing on all cylinders. It's important, because he's going to go up against another inveterate liar: one who can say, very simply, that evidence doesn't matter. That what he says is as good as true, when he wishes it to be. That's the heart of his threat, just as it was the heart of Moriarty's threat to Sherlock's reputation: that he could blend fact with fiction, and make the fiction "true" so far as the entire world was concerned. Magnussen plays the same nightmare game, but with so much more truth to play with, and so much less concern for supporting his lies.

Sherlock. Liar Sherlock, will then pit himself against this, using lies all the way down. Lies about drugs, lies about his own health, lies about his ability to function as he is, lies about whether he's actually in control of anything at all. Lies to Janine--and, oh, I love the scenes with Janine. Most of all I love that she nails him for the key failure: he lied when he didn't have to. He lied when truth would have served him better. He lied when truth would have hurt everyone less. He lied because lying made him feel in control, where truth would have forced him to give Janine power. And by lying, he actually lost all his control in the end...and may have lost a potential true friend.

One thing I do love, though, is that Janine herself reminds me of all Sherlock's true friends: in the end, I think she still loves him dearly. And if he's ever got the spine to say sorry properly, those two were good together, as friends at least. She's a strong one, with laughter and wit and class.

Anyway.

Sherlock lies to himself about his ability to function in health. He drags himself to a restaurant (?) and confronts Magnussen, thinking he's clever enough to play the man in spite of being fresh out of hospital and attached to a morphine drip cranked to maximum--which, IMO, comes close to being the most outrageous lie he tells himself--that he can successfully confront Magnussen in that condition. And it tells us a lot about the fact that Sherlock's judgement when he's using is just plain sucko. Which then tells us to consider this entire episode a long arc of Sherlockian fails happening because Sherlock can't deduce his own incompetence while using.

Is Sherlock using right to the end? Can't prove it, but it seems likely. He starts out using, he latches onto Billy Wiggins more or less permanently, and Billy's "day job" is drug production and distribution. He gets injured and has morphine added to crack addiction. He reinjures himself, prolonging his recovery period. He's only just out of hospital recently come Christmas, as Mummy points out. He may even still have access to prescription meds, as well as Billy Wiggins's homebrew. I think it's reasonably safe to suspect that the entire episode, at least up to the end, is Sherlock on drugs, and Sherlock lying to himself and everyone else about his ability to handle that.

Now, I will admit to bias. I got to see this game played more than once--fortunately always at a remove or two from ground zero, but I've seen it close enough to have heard the lines said in life, not just fiction, and to have seen the lies addicts tell themselves. I have always found MGT's handling of Sherlock's addictions subtle, and terrifyingly true. They understand the patterns and how they play out in waves from the addict to all his friends and associates. They understand the consequences of the lies the addict tells himself and others, and the cost of truth in that situation. But they never have left me in any doubt that they understood that there are lies at the heart of it
all, and enormous pain.

That said, we've got two narrative arcs on the verge of connecting in the episode: Mary-the-Liar, Mary-the-Killer, Mary-the-Operative, Mary-the-Genius, Mary-who-loves-John. Now, just transpose the name "Sherlock" for "Mary."

They are reflections of each other. John can love Mary in part because she IS the female Sherlock. Sherlock can accept Mary, because on some level he accepts that she's him...without the drugs and with the hetero-marriage-babies option. When John comments they should have married each other, because he sees the similarity between them, he's right to notice that similarity, but wrong to think it means they should marry each other. It means they're two versions of the same personality type, and both are "married" to him...and he loves them both because they are each other, in so many ways.

Both Sherlock and Mary are lying. Both are deadly, dangerous operatives. Both are killers. (What do you think Sherlock was doing for two years while breaking up Moriarty's network? Why do you think MI6 wants to put Sherlock in the field again? How much do you want to bet that Sherlock's long been barely a gasp away from Mary's old job, and perhaps only stopped when he became too addicted to be reliable any more?) Both Mary and Sherlock love John--and both want, desperately, to maintain a strong and happy relationship with John, and not only don't care if that means sharing him with the other, but both seem to see promoting each other with John as part of protecting their own heart. Mary appears to want John to love Sherlock--because in loving Sherlock, he's proving he can love her. Sherlock wants John to love Mary, for similar reasons.

So Sherlock needs to protect Mary, in so many ways. Because he loves John. Because Mary's also Sherlock, in some way.

The one thing Sherlock does right--the one thing he gets right--is his handling of the fight at the core of the episode, when he forces truth out of all of them. It's the one big scene when he refuses to let the lies stand. He won't let John lie to himself. He won't let Mary lie. He won't lie. They're going to sit there in that dark room and suffer and hurt and struggle, and tell the truth.

(Chuckle) So odd. Sherlock the addict hasn't had his own proper intervention, yet, but he's led a very good one for John and Mary--and because he does, and because he got it right, and because he wouldn't let the lies linger, they came through in one piece more or less.

But the story isn't over till it's over, and we have to go back to Sherlock, lying to his parents about what he intends, lying to Mycroft--by omission if not commission. Then Sherlock lying to himself and John, taking them both into a battle they can't win, because Sherlock has been unable to face his own lack of power and control. He goes out prepared to play hero, when it's a lie--and ends up claiming to be a "devil," a high-functioning sociopath, when that's a lie, too. Both lies to avoid dealing with being a simple human, out of control of his life, his habits, losing his grip on his own intellect...

Hmmm.

They're really setting us up for John and Mycroft and company to have to do that intervention with Sherlock, aren't they? Sometime they have to help Sherlock get a grip on that central lie burning in the heart of his life. Who needs Moriarty to burn the heart of you, when you've got crack and morphine to manage to job instead?
The Real Villain

Chapter Summary

And it's not Magnussen

Today appears to be my day for cascades. Always fun, when the time comes up at the same time as the ideas.

Ok, I think a lot of us were a bit let-down that Magnussen turned out to be a one-shot villain. I don't know how many were with me, and found him a good villain, but not actually the compelling Bond Villain we were invited to expect. And I don't know how many people were a bit disconcerted when he wasn't actually the one who forced Sherlock to lose control or go to his knees, or even the one who placed them all in peril and jeopardy.

When it all gets sorted out, Magnussen is just what Mycroft says. He's no "Napoleon of Blackmail." He's a nasty, crass, boorish pill of a newspaper millionaire who plays stupid little games with his victims more than anything. He doesn't even appear to have Moriarty's vast ambitions. He's quite happy as what he is: a pissy, rumor-mongering little monster using media dishonesty to game people around him. He collects victims, more than anything. But he's a businessman. He isn't in it to rock boats. He has no intention of shooting so high that someone like Mycroft actually does have to take him out. He's willing to stay a small-scale boor and beast and sit in his comfortable niche--too little to be worth an assassin's bullet, too big to try to take down any way that might not work.

He's not the dragon Sherlock wants him to be. Not really. Never was. Never will be. Just an ugly man with too much money and a big, empty house.

But there is a recurring enemy that's there from the start...or at least, from after the intro.

Sherlock's habit. It's his habit that puts them all in peril. It's his habit that actually puts them all at risk. It's his habit that leaves him out of control. It's his habit that ultimately brings him to his knees, having vanquished "the dragon," but still subject to his own addiction and having been unable to find a better solution. Canon itself assures us that eventually John Watson will help Sherlock Holmes give up drugs. Canon assures us that John Watson will always know that such a victory is fragile and uncertain. There's really good reason to think they're going to want to play the drugs card again in future seasons.

So Magnussen is expendable. He's the not-so-compelling Bond Villain they can throw away. He can die--because the real villain finally walked in the front door, when he's been slipping in and out the back door of episodes since the very beginning, and the "drugs bust." MGT have finally brought in a villain we can all really, really hate.
Query/Hypothesis/Speculation

Chapter Summary

An idea to consider over the coming season(s)

1. MGT are drawing from all prior and present Holmes variants for inspiration, treating them all as seminal canon. So far the biggest known out-canon source has been Billy Wilder's "The Secret Life of Sherlock Holmes." But we know they are familiar with the Star Trek work of Nicholas Meyer (Homage to "Wrath of Khan" in RF). It seems nearly impossible that they're not also familiar with Meyer's *The Seven Percent Solution*, in which an increasingly drugged-out, delusional Holmes is chasing a non-criminal Moriarty around Europe, all ending up in Vienna, where Freud gives Holmes treatment to overcome his addiction.

2. Sherlock seems increasingly less reliable in his observations/proclamations in this last episode. His evaluation of Magnussen seems just a bit extreme for what we really see. He accuses Mrs. Hudson of actually running her husband's drug cartel and then goes on to accuse her of exotic dancing. The second, according to Magnussen's internal files, is accurate. The first, which is actually far more gaudy and likely to be a matter of record...

Isn't there. Mrs. Hudson's revision that all she did for the cartel was do some of the typing seems likely.

3. In *The Sign of Three*, Sherlock twice loses control of his deduction, over-deducing, as though he can't stop himself. And much as there's emotional reason for Sherlock navigating the situation erratically and emotionally, we don't see him drinking much, yet he verges on seeming drunk. Enough so to justify Tom's suggestion that he's pissed. He may not be in any way chemically stimulated, but...that entire "into battle" attitude is a bit worrying, as it's exactly the kind of event for which people take a preparatory drink, or hit up, or otherwise bolster their confidence.

Sherlock's been away, without his support structure. He's come back to a support structure quite changed. He's at least eventually slipped back into drug use. He's got a semi-permanent contact/dealer in Billy Wiggins, now. We also know he's a graduate level chemist (Thank you, Molly, that's data, and much appreciate!). He's living with another addict (Mrs. Hudson, semi-recovered alchoholic, pressure point is marijuana...) and his best friend is a danger addict. Sherlock uses detective work as a drug surrogate--but as the season ends he's landed in a realm where both drugs and case work are in play, and he doesn't appear to be dealing well with any of them.

And now we have a "Moriarty" where there should be no Moriarty.

Now, unless MGT intend to pull a Dorothy and have him wake up from being shot and tell us that all of "Vow" was a drug and operation induced dream combined with a bit of near-death experience, I don't expect the Moriarty on the screen to be Sherlock's mental delusion. At least, not as such. I can, however, see Sherlock sliding into more and more conviction that Moriarty is alive after all, when in fact he's not, to set us up for a variant on *Seven Percent*.

Now, some of that is bias. I'm wary of characters who return from death. You've got to know what
you're doing to use them, it can't just be arbitrary, it's got to follow some rules. Sherlock's return is good, because even as the Fall occurred, it was clearly a set-up. It was fair. Moriarty, though, isn't a set-up. Even counting Moffat and Gatiss as Princes of Lies, who will tell their audiences anything in promotion, bringing Moriarty back calls for cheating the audience. Now, me, I don't consider MGT outright lairs. They're canny manipulators of truth. But I believe them when they say Moriarty shot himself through the head, that you don't come back from that, that Holmes and Moriarty didn't fake suicide at each other.

I think Moriarty is dead, existing now only in the minds of people who loved him or hated him. He raves in the padded room at the pit of Sherlock's Mind Palace. Someone has kept him alive in memory to turn into a GIF and broadcast throughout England. But I don't think he's alive.

And I think that, combined with the unresolved drug issues, presents a heck of an opening for a 7% Gambit.
Minor New Datapoints from Vow

Chapter Summary

Just a few things that come out of what Magnussen knows about Sherlock

Sherlock's finances are unknown. That's a very good trick, and suggests that he and Big Brother have made some interesting arrangements, either to provide income, or hide it. Either way, having your finances truly off record is a good stunt.

Sherlock appears to indulge in straight porn within normal limits, going by Magnussen's data--one would expect a specific note if it were anything but a) existent use and b) vanilla het. Now, that can be Sherlock and/or Mycroft smart enough to develop a cover porn-use pattern for Sherlock, but... it does seem a long shot. So presumably het with vanilla tastes in fantasy life.

Mycroft's down as MI6. From what we've seen that's probably too small--his influence extends further--and Magnussen knows that. But it does look like we can now pin Mycroft's *core* official identity as MI6: international espionage. James Bond and George Smiley territory. Not that we hadn't guessed, but it's nice to have it stabilized a bit.

Whatever is on with Redbeard, it's big enough to have made it to Magnussen's files. Which suggests there's more to it than just knowing Redbeard was the family dog, and was put down, and that the memory of him can calm Sherlock enough to help him control shock. So--I am expecting more on "Redbeard" in seasons to come. Code name for a mission that went bad? Codename for another operative? Something that made it to Magnussen's files as a pressure point, though, which seems unlikely for what we've seen.

Opium is listed as a pressure point. Crack isn't. Interesting. Has Magnussen missed something?
Do we know who Greg called when he left the Waters case?

Chapter Summary

Really minor question, but puzzling me.

Ok, here's the thing.

Greg's normal day job is just DI with the Met. In the episode he's working a known case, preparing for a bust they've been planning months and months. He leaves the case to answer Sherlock's apparent distress text. I've already done my prolonged schtick regarding how dumb that is to do normally: all Sherlock's friends know you want to pin him down on why he wants you before you go running across town just to hand him his teacup, so one has to either assume Greg's dumb or that he's got strong reason to assume that Sherlock may be in trouble and unable to respond.

That said, for whatever reason, Greg opts to go save Sherlock. Leaves the site, calling for backup. "Backup, I need maximum backup. Baker Street. Now."

No actual addy. No explanation. And who's he calling? If he's calling within the Met, there should be questions, because he's got an assigned job he's already doing. And "maximum backup" to the extent of a helicopter... That arrives at the right house? From the Met? With no prior warning and a call from an officer who's supposed to be doing something else quite critical? No.... That just doesn't ring true...

And in "Vow" we find out that in emergencies Lestrade can and does call Mycroft and deal with him directly.

I think the call Greg puts in for backup goes to Mycroft and his MI6 team, who will have no question what's needed if the alert is for Baker Street and the call's from Greg. Which more strongly implies that, yes, Sherlock is part of Greg's "moonlighting" job with Mycroft.

It remains a really interesting question which is the most fundamental portion of Greg's personal identity. Is he a Met cop moonlighting for MI5/6? Or an MI5/6 operative working inside the Met? Either way his day to day life is going to look a lot like a Met DI--that's the job he does most of the time. But his priority stack and his concerns are going to be different depending on which identity is the core identity.

Given his response over the Waters case, I'm honestly inclined to stick with his core identity being MI5/6 assigned to cover Sherlock's round, rosy bumm in emergencies. He chose to act as an MI5/6 agent, there, rather than as a Met DI. But...

It will be nice to learn more. It's also nice to have reason to suspect that we've got a reasonably convincing case of Greg contacting Mycroft directly prior to Vow.

Make sense to you guys?
Sherlock and Janine

Chapter Summary

Implications and innuendos. Depending on your triggers, this may be R rating: sexual discussion, if a more clinical/analytical than graphic/erotic.

Janine sleeps in Sherlock's room. Has overheard fights between Sherlock and Mycroft--and knows Mycroft by his family name, "Mike."
Is comfortable with going into the bathroom while Sherlock is bathing. Appears to have done it previously--and to be familiar with Sherlock's bathing habits. Is welcomed by a presumably wet, naked Sherlock, with a certain amount of giggling and splashing without blushing or second thoughts on either side.
Pads around the flat in Sherlock's shirt and not much else. Is at ease that way--presumably has done it before.

All of these things--far more than sitting on his lap or kissing him, actually--suggest that the relationship as Sherlock allowed it to play out was pretty extensive. Really, the only question would appear to be whether penetrative sex occurred...a question her "just once would have been nice," and his "I was saving it for when we got married" would seem to answer, but which might just as easily imply "penetrative sex without condom/birth control." Which in this day and age would actually be by far the more normal meaning of that pair of statements. Unprotected sex--the ultimate intimacy, where 150 years ago penetrative sex would have been.

Even if penetrative sex didn't happen, it seems almost certain that everything up to that point was happening.... and seems almost certain that it was happening mutually, as Janine's responses suggest someone who honestly thinks she's satisfying and arousing her lover. In spite of the "I know what kind of a man you are," comment, the overall implication of the sequences between them suggests that among the traits she's familiar with are "hetero, active, capable within that role, and capable of being satisfied within that role." Taking Janine's words and behaviors at their standard face value, Sherlock at least successfully passed as a reasonably normal and active participant.

While there are "ace" grey-romantic explanations for the relationship as presented, they seem long-shots. Possible so long as the details are not actually given, but requiring a certain amount of dodging to avoid the more standard explanations for what is shown. Even in an ace context, Sherlock appears to have satisfied Janine, who's not presented as ace at all--not at the wedding, and not in Vow, in relationship with Sherlock. That, again, suggests he's successful in satisfying her, and making her feel that all's right with the world in bed. So I think we assume that even if he's ace, he's got "erotic ace" down cold.

She's integrated into his life enough to know about his drugs. Her comment regarding the morphine, and how it must suit him to have it directly strapped to him, suggests that she was involved enough and intimate enough to know he was using during their time together.

Here's the thing. In the original ACD story, Sherlock gets engaged to one of Milverton's maids. In that era, it would most likely have involved a courtship, but not extensive intimacy. Sleepovers
would be unlikely. Making out might even have been difficult. Given the restrictions placed on the average maid of the period, even finding time to "walk out" might have been a challenge. A good chance the courtship would have consisted of exchanged letters, flirtations in public (in the servant areas of the Milverton household, often in the company of other servants...), and not a lot more.

Classic-Formula Sherlock would have been able to avoid almost all actual intimacy.

In our day and age, New-Formula Sherlock's unlikely to win a girl without a LOT more than that... and he's got to be convincing during the period he's taking part in "a lot more." A male suitor to a girl like Janine is not only going to be making out and more, he's going to be talking for hours, listening to music, going to dinner, watching TV/movies... for better or worse he's going to be pretty close to actually living with the Goldfish. And Janine's not anyone's idiot. She's not presented as inexperienced, naive, or likely to be fooled easily. Sherlock may be able to cover some simply by conceding he's inexperienced, but once he's past that, he'd have to be convincing morning and evening, dinner and breakfast, bathtime and on the john and shaving.

Either we assume he's a truly consumate sexual liar--which knowing Sherlock seems very hard to accept--or he actually let himself live the part. Yes, with some radical compartmentalization--always part of him knowing it was all for a cause and a reason, an ulterior motive. But still, to pull it off, he almost has to have gone all Method Actory, and let himself live out a courtship. Which leads to the interesting question of whether, in the non-ulterior side of his mind, in the part that was living his first real girlfriend, he wasn't actually more than a bit in love, more than a bit thinking of making the marriage real, and absolutely enjoying his opportunity to try the entire sexual/romantic thing thanks to having an "excuse."

Now we tie that to his reactions to Molly this season. On the one hand, first episode, there's the speech and kiss in the hallway, the invitation to dinner, etc. That still reads to me as Sherlock coming back ready to...think about it. Actively tempted, if not brave enough to leap into it. And he shows up only to find her otherwise occupied, and being Sherlock in so many ways, reverts to "I don't do that." Only then Janine shows up, and he's got a chance to do exactly what Molly's doing: try for something he thinks he can have. Explore the options. Try the sex thing... the sex thing Molly's quite careful to let him know is happening.

[Addendum: and d'oh. Ok, NOT, IMO, one of the best editing/placement choices ever, but that may explain why we have that one painful, sad scene with Molly, sandwiched in the middle of the search for Sherlock, in which she appears to be discussing the breakup with Tom, all of which ties in one long, single thread from Janine calling Sherlock on his lies, to him trying to sort out Mary's lies while going on the lam. His own breakup and the accusation of liar tips him over to Mary-the-liar--free association or avoidance tactic or just line of thought with Mary at the top of the priority stack is anyone's choice. It is easy to think it's just all about Mary. But that tiny, bright bit with Molly...and we still don't even know who she was talking to. Mary? John? Or is this a fast, bright flashback and her telling Sherlock at some point? Dang. I LIKE that fragment, but I don't like how poorly it ties to anything. It's like this beautiful little diamond that's come free from its setting... But as placed it does seem to tie to Sherlock's feelings on breaking up AND on the soon-to-be-presented threat to John and Mary's relationship...]

And then for a final point...

Crucial climax scene. Magnussen flicking John's face. Flicking John's eye. Threatening Mary. Through it all, Sherlock is still as a stone--yes, broken, but asking John to just take it. Almost no movement. No shift in focus.

Then Magnussen says he's done this to Janine, and that she had the strength and control to actually keep her eye open once. And then he comments on the funny sounds she makes.
And Sherlock moves. Sherlock's stricken.

And then the helicopter comes.

And then Sherlock makes his decision.

Yes. I think it's about John and Mary.

Yes, I think it's about Mycroft, and the agony of failing in front of Mycroft.

Yes, I think it's about killing the dragon.

But I also think it's about Janine, whom Sherlock allowed himself to play at "happy love" with, who he used, abused, failed to honor...and who he's just found out was not only one of Magnussen's victims, but whom Magnussen gloats over. Sherlock can bear for John to suffer this. Janine, though, is the final straw.

One of the things Moffat and company keep liking to point out is that this isn't a "superhero" sort of story. Yes, Sherlock's expectional. But he's got all the underlying elements anyone has--he makes choices to control those elements, but he's not really coming up blank. In this episode we're told a lot of things, but among them we're told that Sherlock's got normal porn use patterns -- which almost requires some regular use over a long arc, as completely erratic or sudden use would not be normal for the average modern male. We find he can completely convince an experienced and non-virginal woman that they're in a real boyfriend/girlfriend "fully functional" relationship, even if it comes up short of penetrative sex. We find out that screwing up that relationship matters to Sherlock--as subtle as his reactions are, he cares that he and Janine are over. And we find out that he cared enough that hearing about Magnussen's abuse of her is able to tip him over the edge, when even abuse of John doesn't. It may be a small extra straw topping off huge bales of more important cargo--but it's a straw that matters.
Addictions and substance use and abuse.

Chapter Summary

Huh... pattern I just noticed.

Sherlock appears to rack up crack, opiates, and nicotine--and adrenaline, and does occasionally drink recreationally.

John drinks, and is a severe, real danger/adrenaline addict. Does drink...drinks during Scandal, Hounds, Happy Returns, Hearse, Sign of Three.

Mrs. Hudson, according to Magnussen, is a semi-recovered alchoholic and a marijuana user.

Mycroft is hinted as having food issues, and smokes. And appears to lie to himself and others about it, if we take both the Speedy's scene (Pirates) and the garden scene in Vows seriously. Oh, and drinks. When little brother screws up a major operation, drinks quite a lot of brandy.

Molly: no idea, but Sherlock's of the opinion she does drink enough to have a solid database to draw on.

Lestrade: nicotine, alcohol--enough alcohol that it's pretty notable. Drinks in Scandal, Hounds, Happy Returns, Sign of Three (Unless he's drinking a gingerale or similar at the reception), and is at least in a pub for the finale of Vow. Seems to favor pints and large glasses of things.

Mary does drink. Beyond that we don't know, I think...

I've always found the use of nicotine fascinating in the show. From the first it's something the characters try to quit, fail to quit, indulge in, lie about, abuse. It's a substance the writers have always used as symbolic of Sherlock's greater drug habit--something they can use both frivolously and seriously. Patches, cigarettes, low-tar, smoke like a beginner, you name it, they're playing with it. (And while I'm here, let's add "lying about smoking" to the list of lie-related tropes in Vow...)

As I've said--I really like how MGT have been dealing with Sherlock's addiction issues. One of the things I like is the degree to which they've always shown all the characters involved in an addictive culture, taking part in their own varied addictive activities. Sherlock's drugs and abuse don't exist in a vacuum, nor are they compartmentalized as being utterly different from the many other forms of addiction in play. John's addiction to his own body chemistry and psychological kink is still an addiction doing both good and bad things to his life. Lestrade, Sherlock, and Mycroft all struggling with their packs of cigarettes are all addicts dancing with the devil. Everyone drinks--and that's not *just* the difference between American "culture" assumptions of teatotal and British assumptions of drinking. (No, I'm not saying Americans don't drink like fish. I'm saying our culture is less likely to treat the pub crawl and the weekend overindulgence as ordinary. It may *be* ordinary, but American culture's more likely than British culture to cluck about it. It's one of the fascinating difference between watching American tv and British: both cultures drink on screen. Neither drinks quite the same way or has quite the same connotation. Same to a degree with cigarettes...)
Truth, Lies, and Relationships

Chapter Summary

Reviewing the complex ways honesty and lies play out in the relationships in "Vow."
MAJOR structural analysis and crit. If you're not feeling like crawling over the script muttering and prodding, don't read. I'm at my worst.

Honesty and Relationships in Vow.

The importance of honesty and relationships is core in this episode, with a range of relationships and a range of honesty. We start, interestingly, with what I think is a good and honest relationship—that of Lady Strongwood and her husband. It’s possible that this relationship is less honest than it appears, but my gut instinct is that it is indeed as honest as Lady Smallwood suggests, and that Lord Smallwood did indeed get drawn accidentally into a relationship with an underage girl who looked older than she was, did write her spicy letters, did immediately withdraw on learning her actual age, and did indeed inform Lady Smallwood prior to the marriage. An honest mistake honestly dealt with and honestly reported to a future bride.

I think it’s important for a range of reasons, some of which I will discuss later, but among them is because it’s the core fact that causes Magnussen to make the ultimate blackmail threat: to threaten to do damage by implying Lord Smallwood’s relationship with the girl was both knowing and more scandalous than it was in spite of a belief Smallwood was essentially innocent. He’s blackmailing Lord and Lady Smallwood not over what’s true, but over a lie he can get away with. This revives the threat Moriarty made in “Reichenbach,” and it frames much of the rest of the show—including the theme of honesty and dishonesty in relationships.

Regarding the whole “I’m in news” theme of selling lies—it not only ties back into Moriarty, it also ties into one of the quotes no one I’ve run into ever seems to cite from the original canon:

What you do in this world is a matter of no consequence. The question is what you can make people believe you have done. – Study in Scarlet

This principle has been a foundational one throughout much of Sherlock. It’s been used over and over, by multiple characters, including cabbies and The British Government as they game their way through the stories. It’s been utterly critical though, for some of the central stories: Scandal, with Irene’s games, with Mycroft’s Bond Air gambit; Reichenbach in which the plot depends on iteration after iteration of “who’s zoomin’ who” working its way back to Mycroft and Sherlock zoomin’ Moriarty, who’s zoomin’ the public, and then back to Sherlock and Mycroft who are about to zoom the world, including Moriarty, his henchmen—and John.

In Sherlock the writers never forget how mutable people’s understanding of truth can be…and they struggle with how that can be dealt with when honesty is impossible, impractical, or unobtainable. Is it better to lie to John and win, or tell the truth and risk everything? If the lie is crucial, how is John to get past it? How can you trust in a world where “truth” is often only what some stranger
says it is? Who can you trust?

Lady Smallwood could trust her husband, because he gave her the truth as much as he knew it, as honestly as he could. Magnussen turns that honesty into a liability or a matter of complete irrelevance—even the best of men places a strong woman in jeopardy to Magnussen for a mistake he made honestly and dealt with honorably. Lies vanquish everything, in Sherlock, if you let them.

Lady Smallwood has no intention of letting them, and she turns to Sherlock to deal with it. Note that she does not turn to Mycroft: she already knows Mycroft’s not playing with Magnussen, and she almost certainly knows why. IMO this is crucial later in the episode, as things resolve…though a lot is still unclear.

Now, on to other relationships.

We start with Mary and John, and with two dishonest people fighting to maintain one relationship they both treasure. Mary, of course, is a former assassin and CIA agent—according to Magnussen a very bad girl indeed—who’s trying to build a new life without telling her husband just how very bad she once was. John’s lie is less gaudy, but equally endangering to the marriage: he’s bored, already fretful at his new domestic life without thrills, and already beginning to a) seek excitement and b) prepare to run away, his clothes ever ready to be packed. He loves Mary, but he doesn’t love their new life, and he clearly doesn’t know what to do about it. Both lies are going to put them at risk—Mary’s quite obviously, as she attempts to manage to make truth what she says, rather than what it is, by killing Magnussen after retrieving her own non-existent files; John’s less obviously as he retreats into self-righteous victimhood upon discovering her deception, attempting to believe he not only had nothing to do with binding her wildness to himself, but even worse, trying to pretend that wildness isn’t just what he’s been aching and itching for from the start of the story on.

John, Mary, and Sherlock are, themselves, in a peculiarly honest/dishonest relationship, in which none of the three is ever quite able to express their mutual three-way dependency. I am not sure what the writers want us to do with that. On the one hand they’re playing to convention: John and Mary are a married couple, and Sherlock is an auxiliary element that operates within “limits.” They are presumed to be unable to “all dance together.” That said, the writers also seem to be quite knowingly writing a poly triad in which one partner isn’t sexually involved, but is fully emotionally involved with both corners of his trine. Sherlock’s got a very real love relationship with Mary, and vice versa, even if it does have elements of mutual narcissism: the old game of the budgie in love with its mirror. Given the already peculiar codependency of the three bonds, that’s small change, though—a mere bagatelle. They’re already the Odd Triple. They just lie to themselves about it a lot.

Then there’s Sherlock’s relationship with drugs—dishonest to the core.

Then there’s Sherlock’s relationship with Janine, a fascinating thing to contemplate. Frankly, while I know there are many fans entirely weirded out by it, IMO that relationship as portrayed by writers, actors, and directorial decisions is a strong and appealing one. She’s strong, quirky, and quite able to deal with how odd Sherlock can be. They play nicely as a pair—and much as I love Molly, one thing neither she nor Sherlock has ever managed to do yet is simply play and laugh together, as Sherlock does with John. Janine, from the start, sparks shared laughter: she’s witty, tolerant, sardonic, sly, and appreciative without being fawning or overawed. Sherlock with her is thrilled at his own ability to please her—of all the things that pairing offers, it’s that Sherlock the show-off enjoys succeeding for Janine. She makes it easy for him to play the lover, because she’s willing to love him, and he thrives on that. He always has. That shared vibe is much of what made the two work during “The Sign of Three.” He could give and be appreciated, and she brought out a sweetness in him that wasn’t all a ploy.
But Sherlock’s operating with mixed motives: rather like his comment regarding Mary and the shooting that saves his life. “All right, I grant you, a bit of a mixed message.” Sherlock chooses to grant Mary her better motive, in the end. The court is still out on whether he and Janine can really get past his using her to get to Magnussen, and pursuing that relationship in part to pursue his—and Lady Smallwood’s—enemy.

I’ve looked at the hospital scene with Janine, and remain unsure to what degree Sherlock, to the end, is kind of trying to dodge the term “lie” with Janine…as though he truly wants to maintain that relationship and the validity of that relationship. The entire “taking advantage of our connection” spiel to me suggests that he’d really much rather she accept that he really did love her—and just found it convenient as a sort of fringe benefit. He wants to keep what they have, adding a sweetness to he and Mary, who both appear to like her, twitting each other over each of them first connecting with her to gain access to Magnussen.

And now I’m getting lost in the layers of dishonesty at play in the relationship even as shown to date. Sherlock lies to her about why he meets her, then apparently lies to himself about how much he actually values it, then attempt to lie to her some more to try to preserve what he values but can’t admit he values. My head hurts.

But in any case, what we get at the end of that sequence is a Sherlock who does know he’s lost something valuable because he lied within that relationship. Which then moves him to Mary—who wants him to lie to John, joining her in evasion. And Sherlock has just been forced to drink down how destructive that can be to love…because it’s been demonstrated dramatically on his own heart.

A side point, while I’m here with Sherlock and Janine: there’s a real sense of “John’s got a girlfriend. Molly’s got a boyfriend. I’ll show them! I can have a relationship, too, you know!” in this entire muddle. Sherlock comes home only to find two of his three most critical SOs are in relationships, and not with him. (Thus the secondary reason for the entire “goldfish” exchange, as Sherlock simultaneously explores his worries for his brother while reassuring himself that at least that tie is constant: someone still needs him….) It also comes into play during Sign of Three, as John and Mary wed, and Molly makes a dramatic point of Having A Boyfriend, complete with over-the-top PDA while still eying Sherlock reproachfully as he circles around with Janine. It’s a dynamic worthy of a sitcom or rom-com, and it has been the central element of many, only being eclipsed in Sign because so much of more life-and-death importance is going on. It’s still real: Sherlock’s got a million reasons to pursue Janine, not all of them honest, and some of them including demonstrating to both John/Mary and Molly that he can do what they do: pursue alternate relationships.

(And this is not the time to ponder further on his attempt to bring Mycroft aboard—a move that would almost certainly have blocked his pursuit of Janine for all sorts of complicated reasons…though one does wonder if he also hoped to show Big Brother, too, that he could have himself a love-life….)

Anyway, there we are. Sherlock has his face-off with Janine, only to hurtle pell-mell into the entire issue of Mary—and into the realization that the only way to come through this is to have it out and end the lies. Which leads to his escape from hospital, which leads to the search, which leads to Sherlock, John, and Mary in the Empty Houses, which leads to honesty at the heart of the story, as the three struggle through their intervention, and strip away layers and layers of lies and illusions, all three blisteringly vulnerable and all three just short of tearing apart, unable to endure each other’s need and hurt and anger. And, yes, all three: Sherlock’s on display in this, too—drug-addicted, injured, needy, and about to fall on his ass thanks to his own reckless stupidity…and desperate to keep the one stable relationship he’s got left, using the one truth he’s just learned: that you can’t keep love if you lie to your lover.
A lesson he can’t bring himself to apply to the rest of his life…and to Mycroft.

Now, here we go to Christmas, and home-fires-burning, and Mummy and Father, and happy marriages that beat the odds no matter how odd those odds are, and brothers who love each other even if they’re bad at it…

And a planted detail that, again, no one seems to be noticing much. The suicide of Lord Smallwood. It is now important to point out that mere days before Mycroft will be in a critical star chamber meeting with Lady Smallwood, her husband will have killed himself. Right before Christmas. It’s not clear if Mycroft knows ever in this arc—at least until the very last—that Magnussen was threatening Lord and Lady Smallwood. We know she approaches Sherlock, not Mycroft (Yet another possible case of “Why didn't you come to me for help?”). We know that at no time in any of Sherlock and Mycroft’s discussions of Sherlock’s fixation on Magnussen do either of them mention the couple—which given Lord Smallwood’s death seems unlikely if Mycroft had known. My suspicion is that Mycroft’s policy to leave Magnussen be while he looked for the one sure kill was known to Lady Smallwood, and that she chose to never approach him in the first place. Probably as much because it would leave her vulnerable to him as she was to Magnussen: Mycroft’s not someone it would be easy to hand that kind of problem to.

But the detail underlies all of the discussion between Sherlock and Mycroft. Sherlock wants to slay the dragon, and wants to know why big brother doesn’t. Big Brother, apparently not knowing about Lord Smallwood’s death, can say from a safe distance of ignorance that Magnussen doesn’t do enough damage to justify destroying him. Now, there’s another layer to that: it becomes clear over the story that Mycroft’s hiding his own interest in taking down Magnussen, and that he doesn’t want Sherlock to be involved. There are so many good reasons he would not want him involved: Sherlock’s drug issues alive and rampant; if Sherlock makes a mistake he could actually put Mycroft at risk, making it harder for Mycroft to then take Magnussen out; to all appearances Mycroft appears to be very Sun Tzu/Art of War in his approach to some things, and only fights when he’s worked out how to win. All good reasons for hiding his own plans and motives from headstrong, hero-fixated Sherlock. Regardless, even as Mycroft makes the attempt to be honest about how very much he cherishes Sherlock, he’s apparently lying about how much he wants to get rid of Magnussen.

I don’t know if he’s learned yet about Magnussen blackmailing Lady Smallwood. He has to know of Lord Smallwood’s suicide. That’s just too prominent and too close a death for him to be unaware of. The core question to me is whether Mycroft’s yet in the know about the blackmail, and what his own plans were. They were not to have Sherlock involved, though, and he’s specifically lying to keep Sherlock well and truly away from that mess. So one more lying relationship, from the looks of it.

But that’s OK, because Sherlock’s about to drug him and everyone else but John, and go off on a private party of his own, where all these lies and truths are going to explode, blending all the various lies and self-deception and posturing and game playing in one toxic and tragic conclusion. Sherlock will at least temporarily give up on being St. George, and once again cling to being “a high-performing sociopath,” as he completes his original commission from Lady Smallwood with a bullet through Magnussen’s brain.

Thus returning us, as I said, to the moment at the end in which her involvement matters, and her own honest relationship with her now-dead husband matters.

Sherlock’s future is on the line. Prison is apparently accepted by all the star chamber as not an option. One gets the feeling that, among other things, the public is not being told that Sherlock Holmes was the murderer, too. This is being handled as a matter of national security, not of mere
civilian criminality. Sherlock and Magnussen are both too critical and tied together too many secrets and strengths to risk a public trial. Much of that is implied. Some is laid out quite specifically. But if prison is not an answer, and Sherlock is not only a murderer—but also a national asset specifically because he can be a remorseless and precise dagger—then what do you do with him when he’s just gone rogue and killed on his own recognizance? When he’s again hooked on drugs? When his discretion can no longer be trusted?

I’d argue first that the obvious question being discussed is whether to execute him. If you can’t put him in prison and can’t let him run free, what do you do with a rogue 007-caliber genius with too many secrets and too many direct ties to important people? You make sure they die and stay dead. A merciful death, ideally. A quick bullet to the brain, just like Magnussen’s. it’s over fast. It’s done. Sherlock will indeed be “put down.”

Only Mycroft is fighting for Baby Brother. A bullet is sure and certain. Even a desperate mission to Eastern Europe is not, and it buys Sherlock more life, and Mycroft and Sherlock time to try to come up with some other answer. But Lady Smallwood’s the one who must approve the choice… suggesting she’s even higher MI6 than Mycroft, or that she’s even higher in the “official” government, as shown in her grilling of Magnussen earlier. She’s the formal face of government that balances Mycroft’s hidden power.

Her response is that the Eastern Europe mission is “not merciful.” To me that confirms that they’re discussing putting Sherlock down mercifully, rather than any of a number of more catastrophic ways of dealing with him. Mycroft counters with the odd point that Sherlock is a murderer.

Why does he say that to the woman who can then turn him down and take the easier and more “merciful” route?

Because Sherlock, in killing Magnussen and becoming a murderer, completed the commission she herself started at the very beginning of the mission, and did so in a way that revenged her husband for her after his suicide in the middle of the episode. For better or worse, Sherlock served throughout as her Knight Paladin, and killed her dragon for her. Too late to save her husband, but not too late to provide her with some satisfaction. The star chamber has to be fairly soon after Sherlock kills Magnussen, mere days or weeks after Lord Smallwood’s death. Lady Smallwood, sitting in judgement, is being reminded by Mycroft that, no matter what else, Sherlock served her well, and is a murderer in direct consequence.

And, thus, instead of a merciful execution, Mycroft gets what he’s bargaining for from an honorable woman, the widow of an honorable man, giving us once more one honest, true relationship framing a story about dishonesty in relationships and how to deal with that dishonesty. Honor at the beginning, honor at the end, honor in the center with the intervention between John and Mary and Sherlock and with the reflected honesty of Mummy and Father Holmes.

I’m sorry, I know plenty of people want Moffat and company to be writing *different* Sherlock stories. More detective-oriented. More this, more that. But somehow in there I sometimes feel people really, really do not see how gorgeous the real stories are—how beautifully, meaningfully constructed. How layered and intense.

They do good work.

I’m not yet ready to try to take on the series as a whole. I’m just beginning to feel like I’ve got a proper grip on Vow, and to work out how it relates to Hearse and Sign of Three when I really think I’m not up to speed on the first two is probably out of my league, though I can see some arcs—like Sherlock and Molly—playing through the entire sequence. But I AM already convinced that the gorgeous integrated work will show in the season as a whole, as well as it does in this single
episode.

Those buggers may not write what audiences expect, want, or even manage to realize. But, oh, my. They do write pretty work. So nice to take apart, admire, and put back together: Faberge Easter Eggs, so precise, ornate, and lovely.
The Sign of Three Bullets

Chapter Summary

Quickly impromptu on Killing Sherlock.

"They're putting me down, too. Not much fun, is it?"

Thus Sherlock says to his long-gone dog, Redbeard, in his Mind Palace, as he falls as a result of Mary's shot.

One of the long, episode-unifying elements of *His Last Vow* is "killing Sherlock." Putting him down. By my count there are three clear and distinct moments in which Sherlock faces the threat of being put down. The first, of course, is when Mary shoots him. She's trying for a "merciful" shot that will let him live, but actually her shot puts him in enormous pain, and nearly kills him. But she wanted life for him and she got life for him: she risked a potentially lethal shot to avoid an actual killing shot. She's a superb shotsman, and she can take the risk and win. Remember those points: placing someone in one level of jeopardy to avoid putting them in an even more terminal state of jeopardy. (And, yes, there's going to be a muddle between "mercy" meaning granting life, and "mercy" meaning "mercy killing/merciful putting down. Unfortunately English is making me jump between the two meanings here a bit... Will strive for clarity.)

The second time is on the terrace of Magnussen's house, when only Mycroft's reaction time and the discipline he and his people demonstrate saves Sherlock from being put down as a violent killer. One really does suspect Sherlock is attempting suicide by big brother in that sequence. Mycroft narrowly avoids Sherlock's death--and is left with the conundrum of what to do with him.

As I said in the previous essay, we come to the star chamber meeting, when Mycroft manages to convince Lady Smallwood to assign Sherlock to a suicide mission rather than a more "merciful" decision--which I suspect was going to be death. (A mercy killing--putting a dangerous dog down) Given Mycroft's standing and his roles, there's a good chance Sherlock's death would have been in some way on his authority. He's in the process of making the same decision Mary made earlier: to kill Sherlock quickly and painlessly and put him down (One form of mercy)--or to take chancey shot that's not merciful at all, but save his life (another form of mercy--this one with quite a bit of potential attendant pain).

Mycroft's primary weapon, though, is not a gun, but words and wisdom and leverage. Just as Mary can drill a coin in flight with a single shot, Mycroft can manage a room full of hostile or neutral power players with precision. In this, case, again, he chooses the life shot that hurts and has a high risk of death, rather than just putting his brother down. And, again, I've discussed the logic of how that "shot" works, using Lady Smallwood's own honor to force the issue.

So, there are three near-death moments for Sherlock--and two of them, the first and last, mirror each other almost exactly, both Mary and Mycroft depending on their skill to save Sherlock through a high-risk gamble, rather than kill him for the sake of convenience and simplicity while calling it "mercy."

Within that, there's one more thing about Lady Smallwood's decision: it's an absolutely elegant reprise of the original ACD story, shifting Mycroft and Lady Smallwood into the role Sherlock
plays in "Charles Augustus Milverton."

Ok, here's the set-up for the original story. That story isn't as tightly interwoven as this one, so I'm going to jump to the rather freestanding end. Milverton has whipped Holmes. Holmes and Watson go to his house planning on stealing the vital blackmail information for their client. There they witness a mysterious woman and Milverton talking. Milverton has driven her husband to suicide. In revenge and out of knowledge that the law can't and won't deal with Milverton as he deserves, the mysterious woman shoots Milverton. Later Holmes and Watson realize who she was--a woman of great standing with a husband of prominence and honor. In all this Lestrade shows up excited, as he thinks he's got a case for Sherlock. Sherlock refuses the case, willingly reprieving the murderess rather than handing her over to the law, which will, rightfully, kill her.

In *His Last Vow* Sherlock becomes the killer, for his own reasons. But he also becomes the killer for Lady Smallwood's reasons: he becomes her gun. He's her bullet and her own murder weapon. Ultimately she kills Magnussen, her enemy, just as the original Lady Smallwood does. But she and Mycroft also become "Sherlock" from the original: the ones who must judge the killer. Like Sherlock, they determine between them that honor demands giving Sherlock a pass--or at least a fighting chance.

It's a beautiful modulation of the original material, simultaneously giving the killing spot to Sherlock while at the same time reserving it for Lady Smallwood. Sherlock is both free agent AND carefully selected weapon.

Mycroft's move is just elegant...and he wins the challenge, and shoots his brother just enough to save his life.

No doubt Sherlock would comment that the message is, on the whole, a bit mixed. It's no wonder Sherlock sometimes thinks Mycroft wants to kill him, given his methods of saving Baby Brother. (grin)
Mycroft, Sherlock: Relationship and Intimacy

Chapter Summary

Playing with The Holmes Boys and their relationship and with their mutual understandings of each other's intimacy issues.


I’ll be honest: while I don’t think the PTB are writing the two as being involved in incest, they are writing the two as being quite worthy of the word “incestuous.” On the one hand they’ve done a reasonable job of presenting reason to suspect the two never did walk the physical path. On the other hand, they’ve also done a superb job of suggesting why the two are drowning in layers of codependency.

The reasons? Well, let’s start with the most obvious of all: their mutual brilliance and their mutual detecting abilities. Two men who make ordinary people feel as though they’re walking around naked with a PA system announcing their innermost thoughts. Of course they read each other. Heck, the odds are good Sherlock at least trained on Mycroft. It’s a bit hard to suspect Mycroft, seven years the elder, did his serious “read people like a book” training on Sherlock—so much less to read in an infant than an adult, after all, and so much of it completely unhidden in early childhood. But one would bet that Little Brother Sherlock trained and tested himself on Big Brother Mycroft. So many reasons—challenge, rivalry, the usual Little Brother desire to know everything about an older sib and, on occasion, to turn that knowledge against him. Yes. I think we can assume that Sherlock was reading Mycroft as soon as he could, and as completely as he could.

Which must have made puberty hell for each of them, in radically different ways. Mycroft, the elder, would have started in only to discover himself watched. Sherlock would have started in knowing in advance that he could be watched.

Boundaries? What boundaries? Mycroft does appear to recognize boundaries, and at least attempt to respect them—much of his prying so far appears either professionally driven, or driven by legitimate fears for Sherlock (junkie brother with insanely self-destructive tendencies…). Sherlock to date has shown very little comprehension of the core idea of boundaries. Both together, though, would have been in a state of mutual transparency for much of their lives. What does the entire concept of boundaries mean, when your primary companion can read what you ate for breakfast, whether you brushed your teeth, and quite likely whether you’ve been making out in the past 24 hours? Not to mention if you’ve done your homework, smoked a joint, or hidden out in the neighbor’s barn?

Which leads to the second outstanding reason for their crazy entanglement: what appears to have been a prolonged period in childhood of having no other children in their lives. Mycroft and Sherlock/Sherlock and Mycroft. And their adults.

Adults pretty much always live in the Pantheon, far above the kids.

For their formative years, when they were working out the basic elements of who they were, and how they functioned, their primary context and framework was defined by their brotherhood. Big
Brother and Little Brother—and, yes, maybe a third sibling…we don’t know much about that, yet…. As shown so far, though, if there was a third sib, he or she still didn’t trump Mycroft and Sherlock. The conversation about their upbringing seemed too strongly aimed at a binary pair: the smart one and the idiot, with nothing to compare to.

Sometimes I don’t know which brother to feel sorrier for. Mycroft’s apparently literally the smarter, and he had seven years head-start on Sherlock. Between the two, it’s not hard to see why they both thought Sherlock was an idiot. There the poor bubbies are, trying to make sense of their world, and there’s Mycroft…and there’s Little Brother, and OMG, is he slow. That puts the burden of inferiority on Sherlock, which sucks. But it puts an ever-heavier burden of protective obligation on Mycroft. Not quite on a par with having a kid brother with a condition that will keep him from ever having a “normal life,” to use the polite euphemisms, but awfully close sometimes. Given that Mycroft appears to have a major mothering/protective/nurturing element in his personality, that sense of a needy sibling would be a burden that would weigh on him…and that would peeve the independent Sherlock no end.

The third reason for that entanglement is related to being brought up as each other’s only companions, but not quite the same. They’re each other’s only peers, insofar as either has peers. Well—barring the occasional Moriarty, Adler, or Magnussen, so far. And don’t those two boys have horrible luck in finding fellow geniuses? You’d think they’d at least find a few smarties working the good side of the street, for heaven’s sake. But in any case, there’s the goldfish problem—it’s lonely having only one person who can track your reasoning and share your understanding.

Fourth reason?

“That’s the frailty of genius, John. It needs an audience.” The smarter the audience, the better. Applause from the educated and discerning is much more rewarding than applause from the goldfish. Even if you don’t have a friend, you’ve got an enemy who’s really thrilled with the challenge you present. For both boys the one reliable pair of eyes to see and know are a brother’s eyes.

Fifth reason?

Sherlock’s addiction(s). That one’s been made obvious. Sherlock’s got addictions. Mycroft’s got a kid brother who’s addicted…and Mycroft’s apparently never just walked away from that. Here’s the thing: even if the two were not codependent before, it’s incredibly hard to go through the various arcs of addiction and recovery in tandem without becoming entangled in codependency in at least some ways. The struggle with addiction turns all our best instincts into tiger traps that can destroy us. Mycroft appears to be working to find some balance between standing firm and being there; hovering; and bugging out. Sherlock, conversely, is trying to find some balance between needy helplessness and independence. He wants to be free of needing Big Brother, but he’s not free of that need—and it gets up his left nostril, all the more because Mycroft has a hell of a time with tact when Sherlock’s involved.

So. A mess of good reasons for the two to be intertwined. Then add in that it’s looking increasingly like they’ve got backstory…things that happened to them. Things that changed everything. Just as the addiction issues matter, so does whatever made Sherlock a person under surveillance in the first place, or got him the training to be treated as an MI6 officer assigned to hot spots, while Mycroft ended up running the whole game. What brought them both into the Great Game… the old fashioned international espionage game, that is? What happened once they were involved? How did Sherlock end up drying out and cadging detective work from the Met, instead of playing 007? Who died and left Mycroft with a broken heart and serious fear of loss?
There are not only stories there, but one suspects that at least the major ones are actively in play, for all Moffat’s supposed to be leery of backstory.

Sex, Intimacy, and What the Two Holmes Boys Believe

Mycroft thinks Sherlock doesn’t do the sex thing. Sherlock thinks Mycroft doesn’t do the friendship-intimacy thing—and he free associates to that belief by way of Mycroft being unable to deal with a broken heart. To me that reads as Mycroft got burned badly, Sherlock knows quite a lot about it, if not all about it, and Sherlock is convinced it’s something Big Brother has never dealt with or healed from...that he ought to do something about. Mycroft? I’m less sure he thinks Little Brother needs to get over the sex thing—but he does feel profound remorse when the sex thing gets all tangled up with Irene Adler and leaves Little Brother vulnerable.

Again, Mycroft thinks Sherlock doesn’t do the sex thing. Sherlock thinks Mycroft does, and he’s not entirely comfortable with it. He appears a bit uneasy that Mycroft’s gay; he appears uneasy that he’s active. And, given both Mycroft and Sherlock’s comments and discussions, it appears Sherlock believes Mycroft is active, but that the sex he has is not “relationship” sex. If I’m reading the subtext right, Sherlock’s perception of Mycroft’s sex life and motivations is that Big Brother has not been messing around with a beloved Goldfish, he’s having it off in secure, emotionally sterile pragmatism, with no chance of love, and thus no chance of heartbreak. The ultimate in safe sex—two organs under protective wraps, not just one. Sherlock may be (or have been, depending on a lot of what-ifs) the Virgin Moriarty described, but Mycroft’s chosen to be the Iceman. It’s not that he doesn’t engage, it’s that he refuses to risk caring.

For both boys, such emotional intimacy as they’ve had most of their lives has come from each other—and they’ve both split physical intimacy off of emotional intimacy, in different ways. Mycroft appears to end up with physical intimacy of a pragmatic sort, and family/fraternal intimacy with Sherlock—and perhaps to a degree with Mummy and Father and any unknown sibs—but no friends or beloveds. Sherlock has at least some elements of both friends and beloveds, but really no reliable physical intimacy. Again, he does have family intimacy with Mycroft and, to some degree, Mummy and Father—and perhaps to unknown sibs.

Both struggle with the goldfish problem. Sherlock loves his friends—but the allure of an Irene or a Moriarty is there. Mycroft seems less given to the option of goldfish or to the fantasy that somewhere out there he will find another genius to mirror-dance with, but as a result he’s more committed to his ties with Sherlock. (Thus adding intensity to Mrs. Hudson twitting him about there only being family in the end; of all the characters, Mycroft is the one who has only family to keep him attached to human connection at all…and his dedication to that one link is extreme.)

Either way, Sherlock and Mycroft form a pairing as strong and as dramatically informative as that between John and Sherlock. Different. More complex, when it comes down to it. Less an engine to drive a story than a limiting or complicating condition that modifies the story as it progresses. But the Mycroft that Moffat, Gatiss, and Thompson have created is as much part of their Sherlock as Watson is.

Now, that leads to another comment. Media is message. The form and dynamic of a print-based Victorian series of almost entirely free-standing stories with a star-and-sidekick cast is quite different from the form and dynamic of a modern 90-minute series of three-story arcs written by a stable ensemble team and acted by a stable ensemble cast. Sherlock not only can alter the forms and relationships of the original ACD material—it must. As a result we’ve got a more dynamic, integrated group of characters than ACD gave us as the starter set. But it remains worth noting that Sherlock and Mycroft become something quite different and quite complex when you take the basic premises presented by ACD and extend them to at least some of the logical conclusions.
offered in the real world.
Chapter Summary

Really not much more than notes and jottings. Things I am thinking about the newly revealed elements of the Holmes family.

Mummy's the genius of record, focus on math. No idea how good, but worthy of publication, which is never a bad start. Father seems to think she was top-flight.

Mummy gives up a career in which she excells to become a mom. It's really clear that's not Father's preference; he'd have argued with her if he were the arguing sort. So it's her desire, for one reason or another. Tempting to think she at least passed on the desire for serving as a parent to Mycroft. Also, though, curious that she appears to have bolluxed up a lot of the boys' upbringing. Really, very little we've heard so far suggests she was an exceptionally talented mother. No idea how much of that was starting with brilliant but difficult spawn in the first place, and how much was over-thinking her own project, and how much was being in some way messed up herself.

Father appears to be not only "the sane one," as Mary puts it, but the quiet one. Not a fighter. Might even look "weak" from the outside. Might look "weak" from the inside, come to think of it. Appears to be kindly, but also appears to be a bit off in a corner in terms of family dynamic.

Mummy may not play favorites: it's a bit hard to decide when her attention on Sherlock does have the valid grounds of him being back from near-death injuries and dual hospitalization. Given Mycroft's comments in 221B, one kind of thinks she has to know about Sherlock's drug use, but you wouldn't know it from her behavior. But, again, it's hard to decide how much of that is a loving mother dealing with multiple emotional shocks over Baby Boy.

On the other hand, Sherlock in multiple ways appears to be the natural favorite: the flakier one, the more emotionally loud one, the demanding one, and the one who is most openly needy. "To those who need the most is given the most."

Mummy comments on turning into a total monster if she finds out who shot Sherlock. I'm...curious to what degree she really is a bit of a dragon in a temper.

Father, just because he is the quieter, saner one, is hard to make any long-term guesses about. He does not appear to have provided a lot of check-and-balance. He certainly didn't attempt to talk Mummy out of her kids, and judging by his own comment sort of got seduced into it. Happily seduced, mind you. But he wasn't thinking with the more intelligent of his two heads.

On the other hand he appears to be the steady one: family anchor, if not loud about it.

Right now I can see both elements of Mummy and Father in Mycroft--Mycroft's the anchor/caretaker, but he's also the one who appears to have an actual drive to parent, and he's "the smart one." Sherlock's harder: he really reads as Mummy's. Smart, if not as smart as Mycroft.

I don't know. We need to see more, I think.

My biggest twitch--the part that makes me feel uneasy-- is that Mycroft appears to be almost set...
aside in Mummy's interactions with him. It's not just that she fails to take much pleasure or pride in what he's grown to become--and, I swear, I hear a hundred proud mothers kvelling about their Son the British Government while Mummy remains silent and treats Mycroft, his laptop, and his presence as a bit annoying--she also quite openly dismisses his fairly outspoken attempt to say he's not enjoying himself.

Now, he's also whining. I've got a child. I know from whining. Mycroft is absolutely whinging. But he's also absolutely not having fun...and no one much cares.

I just keep being a bit bugged by the interaction where Mummy says they're all happy, and Mycroft points out that he's not, and she just runs right over it. It sets my teeth on edge a bit.

Then there's the interaction between Mrs. Hudson and Sherlock on wedding day. Mrs. Hudson is right: Mummy has a lot to answer for. And Mummy, bright as she is, appears to have lost the respect of both her sons.

Mummy's also the dominant one in their first appearance, and the chatterbox. (chuckle) Far more boring than Sherlock, but with a similar case of motor-mouth and a similar tendency to treat her goldfish as though he's not all there. He's a terribly good sport about it.

I'm just trying to work out what's there. Not sure I have a real picture, yet. Not sure I'll get one. But I do like having them there. I think they're a *better* answer than the one that seemed inevitable until Moffat, Gatiss, and company threw them into the picture. They're more likely, more interesting, and much more complicated than the Upper Crust Dysfunctional Creatures that we were all sort of imagining in fanfic-land.

Addendum:

Sherlock's birth name is William Sherlock Scott Holmes. Mycroft, even furious at him in Buckingham Palace, gives him his apparent preferred name of Sherlock Holmes. It's not quite clear to me if "Sherl" is Janine's pick or is something she caught at the same time she caught that "Mike" is Mycroft's family name. One gets the feeling of her overhearing Sherlock and Mycroft having a serious ripsnorter about something and Sherlock backsliding to "Mike." Or coming back in with Janine furious enough to backslide then while storming around in a temper afterward. "Shezza" is a bit hard to place at all. Just Sherlock having a jolly time picking a street name? Seems like it. Or going with a street name he's given rather than fight it.

We don't know if Mycroft's a middle-name the way Sherlock is. We do know that both his family name and his professional adult chosen name are focused on that choice...and that he chooses Mycroft, and Mummy's not made the shift nor willingly acknowledging it. Hmmm. Sherlock's name she respects, even though it's definitely a middle name. He's more likely to have been a "Billy" growing up until he picked Sherlock, though that's a BIG guess. It's possible Mummy always did call him Sherlock. It just seems...questionable. Especially given her normalization of Mycroft to Mike/Mikey. Mikey and Billy seem much more like the probable pairing in Mummy's mind with young sons. Then at some point both boys choose to claim their "I'm different" names, and Sherlock is able to make it stick with Mummy, while Mycroft is still fighting not only to move from Mike to Mycroft, but even from Mikey to Mike.

One does wonder if Sherlock, in rage or sentiment, ever does himself fall back on Mike/Mikey. It does explain Janine knowing. It seems...unexpected. But we're also dealing with a lot of variables in play, including drugs.

Just keep wondering.
I find myself really wondering where Father fits in all this. I really do.

Addendum Redux: Similarly I find myself wondering about Mycroft's status as "outed gay" at home. The show seems to strongly suggest he's gay, and at least not going out of his way to hide it in his adult life--even if he's also not trumpeting it from the rooftops. At home, though, is another question.

Has the man whose mother doesn't choose to acknowledge his professional prestige, his responsible behavior and care of his brother, his unhappiness or even his name been informed of his orientation? Or has Mycroft felt that's one bridge too far with a woman who won't even call him by his chosen name or recognize when he tells her he's not happy? Or has he outed himself, and some of Mummy's behavior is her own negative response to that? Or is it entirely unrelated?

Just...

The dynamic between Mummy and Mycroft is downright weird. So many ways he's the son to be radiantly proud of. The loyal, dependable, reliable overachiever. Yet he seems secondary, if that.

How does a woman who leaves her profession to have children come to be quite so out of sync with her older son? (Leaving room for there to be one even older with Sherrinford, but still... You get a son who grows up to be the British Government and caretaker of Little Sherlock, and you would think there'd be some admiration in there somewhere....
First Rough Evaluation of Series Three

Chapter Summary

Just what it says on the label—my very first attempt to evaluate some of the through-lines and continuing development arcs of the season. Very much a preliminary once-over.

Series Three Structural Comments

Ok. I’m beginning to feel like I see a bit of the pattern of Series Three. It’s a slow process, not least because IMO this is one where you have to work through a lot of what’s going on in the last episode with Sherlock, Mycroft, Mary, Janine, and Magnussen to understand what was done with them at earlier stages in the season’s episodes. That last episode is what pulls the season into shape. (wry grin) Another distributed plot—or at least a distributed set of arcs.

Moffat, ages ago, said *Scandal in Belgravia* was about Sherlock and love. If I had to say what season three was about, I’d say it’s about Sherlock and family, and most of all about Sherlock between two brothers--a brother by choice and a brother by blood—and about how he can love them both, and need them both, and still not really understand them very well. How he can make catastrophic mistakes out of his misunderstandings.

So, let’s start with the beginning, in which we’re offered two interlaced sequences dealing with…

Or, no. At the beginning we’re offered Anderson’s Fantasy Fall, and Lestrade and Anderson providing us with a framing device that’s going to matter to the first episode. I’m still working on whether that framing of *Hearse* is also structurally critical to all of Series Three. What can I say? I’m still sorting it all out. This isn’t even really “first draft.” It’s “first conjecture.”

So let’s just say for the moment that a man who may or may not be in the know about Sherlock’s survival (court’s still out on Lestrade) is listening to a man who’s a) guilty, b) delusional, but c) also partly right about Sherlock’s survival discussing how Sherlock might or might not have survived, what it all means, while themselves being framed in a background sequence suggesting that Mycroft and his people have now opted to disappear the old Sherlock scandal and clear Sherlock’s name, now that it’s safe and necessary to do so. Ta-da! It’s proven in court that Moriarty created Richard Brooke, and that Sherlock was a straight shooter all along, and the door is opened for him to come back redeemed—and we, the audience, are actually none the wiser about anything but that Sherlock’s redeemed, because Anderson’s theory is a fantasy, and Lestrade’s reactions are increasingly suspect. The more we learn about Lestrade, the more we know he exists at least partly inside Mycroft’s world of secrets and espionage and illusions, and the less we know where to classify him and his responses. So the one truly useful thing we come away from is that Sherlock’s now officially cleared.

And now we get to the “real” intro of the show as we start to follow the consequences of Sherlock being cleared. We weave back and forth between John and Mycroft—John starting without Sherlock, Mycroft starting with him. John getting on with his life, finding a new love, returning to old haunts. Mycroft showing up to retrieve/rescue Sherlock from Serbia, and quite honestly coming
across as entirely too “The Game Is On” chipper. He’s bringing Sherlock home to play with him, in his court…and frankly, he seems to be looking forward to it.

This entire pattern of scenes seems to me to lay out some of the long-arc issues of Series 3, right up to Sherlock’s rooftop view of London (which looks like an intentional quote of James Bond on the roof of Babylon-on-Thames at the end of Skyfall, after M’s death). On the one hand there’s tension between Sherlock and Mycroft—the accusation that Mycroft didn’t really rescue Sherlock, that he enjoyed seeing Sherlock hurt; Mycroft’s clear frustration that Sherlock really does not get that two years makes a difference to all concerned, his frustration that Sherlock’s more interested in John than in the threat posed to London by the terrorists. Mycroft expected Sherlock to come back to play with him, in his world. Instead Sherlock wants to go back and play with John in the world of 221B. Yet, at the same time, Mycroft has kept an eye on John. He does have the file on what John’s up to now. He does know where John’s eating that night. He almost certainly knows John’s preparing to propose to Mary. Where Sherlock’s let that contact lapse entirely, Mycroft’s tracked it, kept watch over John: for two years, from the looks of it, Mycroft’s never really let John out of his sight.

It does make one wonder who he was watching for, and why. Clearly not for Sherlock in the ordinary sense: Sherlock’s his usual clueless self, and treats John’s reality as though Sherlock was able to hit pause when he jumped. Sherlock apparently hasn’t even asked Mycroft about his old friend second hand, during the time away. He does have the file on what John’s up to now. He does know where John’s eating that night. He almost certainly knows John’s preparing to propose to Mary. Where Sherlock’s let that contact lapse entirely, Mycroft’s tracked it, kept watch over John: for two years, from the looks of it, Mycroft’s never really let John out of his sight.

So…why’s Mycroft watching so carefully?

I wish I knew. I wish I knew if he watched over a man he felt bad for harming as a direct consequence of the con he and Sherlock put together, or if he is watching over Sherlock’s friend for him, even though Sherlock himself can’t be bothered, or if he’s keeping watch over a rival for Sherlock’s time and attention, or if he’s keeping watch over a man with whom he’s planted Mary Morstan (on the conjecture that Mary has been able to pass in England and assemble a new identity specifically because she’s got Mycroft’s help and support…). In any case, Mycroft’s kept watch where Sherlock’s not even managed a passing glance.

Meanwhile we’re doing the sequence with John where we get the parallel built with Mrs. Hudson—the announcement of Mary, the tag on “gay,” the fact that John’s no more stayed in touch with Mrs. H. than Sherlock’s stayed in touch with John.

In the process two worlds are set up, and two characters are placed in a sort of rivalry: John’s world, in which Sherlock was once a rock star; Mycroft’s world, in which he will always be Mycroft’s little brother, no matter how cool or competent he is. John, who’s his “brother” of choice, Mycroft, who’s his brother by blood and life experience. Both men he has depended on, both of whom he owes his life. Both of whom he appears to misunderstand, evaluate poorly, and judge primarily in terms of his own needs and expectations.

Right now, on “first conjecture,” I think the season’s a dialog about his need for both “brothers,” and his failure to fully understand both “brothers.” In a season that starts and ends with Mycroft saving Sherlock, and that has Sherlock rejecting his Mind Palace Mycroft outright dead in the center of the run in favor of John, that thread of brotherhood—two different brother-relationships—seems to thread its way through everything.

Which means that as I pick this season apart, I’m very likely to try to track whether there’s a reasoned thesis being presented and a dramatic argument being made. My gut reaction is that there is—gut reaction says that Sherlock needs both brothers, not just one, and that no matter how he
tries to claim John as the simpler brother—the one who can play the “Sherlock” role to Sherlock’s own attempt to be Mycroft—Sherlock’s got to find some way to work through a relationship with both of them.

Sherlock may claim John as his key figure in his Mind Palace in *Sign of Three*, but when he’s dying in *Vow* it’s not Dr. John Watson, combat veteran, combat surgeon, saver of lives, who talks him through how to survive: it’s Molly Hooper, Anderson, and Mycroft: his chosen guardian angels.

John and Mycroft—both older. One always ahead of Sherlock. One always several steps behind. One at present seeming to hunger for Sherlock to “return” to a prior closeness. The other who’s “got on with his life,” and who now has both wife and coming child. Both servants of England, and “soldiers” for a broad definition of the word. One who Sherlock claims as moral compass and guide to being human, but the other who’s apparently the guiding star of rationality and logic and survival.

Worked through the story, too, we have Mummy and Father: actually presented in *Hearse*, referred to in *Sign of Three*, and showcased in active central cameo positions in *Vow*. They provide backstory for Sherlock, absolutely—but more, they provide a frame and context for Mycroft and Sherlock as brothers, building on that sense of two men with decades of history to draw on and to complicate their relationship. In comparison John’s Tabula Rasa: clean slate. No more than a couple years shared history with Sherlock, and much of that time spent in relative awe of him.

Which brings us to another connecting arc of the season—John’s arc, and in particular John’s relationship with Sherlock moving from the platonic infatuation presented in Series One and Two, and on to something darker, wiser, and more aware of Sherlock’s failings. We start with the obvious: that Sherlock can hurt the hell out of John Watson and not only not have a clue, but be almost unable to understand it. Sherlock can love, but he doesn’t understand the complex obligations and expectations that go with that feeling. John starts the entire season having to really take in just how profoundly his best friend is flawed. Yes, he decides to love him anyway, but it’s with a more adult understanding of what he’s signing on for. Similarly *Sign of Three* moves John further into that understanding, as Sherlock tries so hard to prove his love, and live up to what John wants from him—and still manages to be eternally, beautifully, tragically handicapped in terms of quite getting the “humanity” thing. By *Vow* John will have already walked a hard road, loving Sherlock but also accepting more completely what an asymmetric relationship it will always be: Sherlock “smarter,” John wiser; Sherlock more driven, John a stabilizing factor. So we dump John into an arc where Sherlock ultimately invites him to play on cliff edges, and John is given the ultimate lesson in how fallible Sherlock can be, even as he gets to see how glorious and valiant and faithful he can be.

It’s harder to see the arc Mycroft and Sherlock are walking. Some of it parallels Sherlock’s struggle to deal with John’s marriage: as John threatens Sherlock’s security by loving and marrying Mary, Sherlock threatens Mycroft’s stability by moving more and more firmly into John’s world, and away from Mycroft’s. We get to see more and more Mycroft’s loneliness, both negative and positive elements of his love for his brother, and of his and Sherlock’s dependence on each other. In some ways what seems more obvious, again on first scan of the season as a whole, is that Sherlock misreads Mycroft at least as badly as he misread John: he sees Mycroft “enjoying” seeing Sherlock get hurt, when Mycroft at least argues he had to play a role to save Sherlock. He sees Mycroft trusting him with what Mycroft clearly finds a serious and important task—but refuses to act as though he himself takes it very seriously, treating Mycroft’s concern for his dead officer and for the safety of London as rather prissy nagging and fussbudget behavior.

Hmmm. There’s another aspect that comes into play in *Vow*. John’s given a chance to step into the
role of being Mycroft’s “brother” as much as he’s Sherlock’s. IMO he muffs it, over and over again: he may ally with Mycroft on occasion. Call him in when Sherlock’s using, share the hunt when Sherlock’s missing. He’s certainly getting a clearer and clearer picture of why Big Brother’s got reason for his frustration. But in the end, when it’s a matter of taking sides in any way, his side is Sherlock’s side, and he and Mycroft pace uneasily around each other, Mycroft not-quite threatening, John definitely laughing a bit and refusing to take Big Brother very seriously at all. That, in some ways, comes to a head when John accepts Sherlock’s invitation to steal Mycroft’s laptop and go off on a very badly planned, doomed mission.

“John keeps me right.” Only in so many ways John doesn’t keep Sherlock right. In the end he’s with Sherlock—drugged, out of control, self-destructive, on a mission from God—more than he’s with the voice of reason.

And, again, we come back to the central sequence of *Vow*, with John having to swallow that he’s as much an addict as Sherlock is, and that it’s coloring every aspect of his life and his relationships.

All the way back in *Study in Pink* Mycroft postulates that John Watson could be the making of Sherlock—or that he could make Sherlock worse. Season three plays out both those themes. John anchors Sherlock to loving, caring, complicated humanity, to saving lives, to the morality of intimacy. But he also feeds on Sherlock’s craziness, hungers for the danger, fails to provide reliable checks and balances. He may make Sherlock pee in a jar, but he’s not the one who’s going to wale on him when he tests positive, nor is he the one who’s going to insist that nothing—absolutely nothing—is worth getting back on drugs, not even a case destroying Charles Augustus Magnussen. Given the choice he’ll run with Sherlock even when Sherlock’s not fit to run.

One critic declared Series Three a love-letter to John Watson. I’m…not sure I’d call it that. It’s an examination of Sherlock’s “families,” and most of all of his brother-relationships with Mycroft and with John. Both brothers come up short in some ways. Both shine in others. In the end, though, Mycroft earns his credits as the foundation and capstone of the season, saving Sherlock at the start and the finish. John may keep Sherlock right, in some ways. Mycroft keeps him alive, when things get far too real.

As I said, this is sort of a first run-through. A season can be a lot to work through, when it’s this complex, and frankly I will not be at all surprised if I contradict myself, find entirely new themes and arcs, and even decide this first evaluation was piss-poor. But such as it is, it’s my first reading on this season as a unified whole.

Questions while I continue to ponder:

Alternate option regarding Mycroft’s name: he really could be a Michael Alan Mycroft Holmes or something similar, thus giving us Michael and William Holmes in youth. Regardless, given the acid touch of “Billy” Wiggins, and Sherlock’s edge on that, I’m betting Sherlock’s baby name was Billy, as Mycroft’s is Mikey. We still come down to the fact that at home with Mummy, Sherlock’s been able to make the transition to his preferred adult name, while Mycroft’s still waging war with both Mike and the even less dignified Mikey.

Also still brooding over Mycroft’s relationship with his mother. On the one hand it’s clear they’ve got some problems. On the other, it’s just as clear that they are more a team than Mummy and Sherlock, who can brood, be difficult, not play the game. Mummy and Mycroft bicker—and Mycroft’s fighting to get seen and respected—but at the same time they’re playing on the same
Eh. This whole thing with the family is fascinating, but there’s just too little info. It’s so hard not to want to figure it out, but really it’s just me doodling around considering the many ways it could go, and muttering feverishly.
**Frivolous, minor points I'm considering.**

Chapter Summary

What the label says: NOT a "real essay."

Having Mycroft as a regular 3-D character actually improves John, IMO. He provides counterpoint and complication of Sherlock, which allows John to then become more complex. Actually, all the different relationships for Sherlock allow John to be more complicated—he's not so trapped by the eternal shared role of narration, audience POV character, and perfect side-kick.

I wonder if they'll go deeper into James Bond/George Smiley territory over the next two seasons, or find a way to pull back at least a bit. I like the espionage elements, and I know it's something Gatiss and Moffat both liked from the old Basil Rathbone stuff and from *The Secret Life of Sherlock Holmes.* But I also think that basic case work is much to be desired. It remains the heart of Sherlock's own mystique.

Things we expect to happen next time out:

More of Mary's backstory.

At this point Sherlock and John really have to reforge a working relationship: they've come through the friendship elements. For better or worse they're Best Friends again. But their working patterns are entirely chaotic right now.

There's something directional going on with Mycroft and Lestrade...and I'm not simply talking about Mystradian fantasies. You can sit there and watch that thing slowly, slowly rise out of the shadows, a step at a time, each season adding a bit more resolution and detail. I want to know where they're going someday. I really do, even if they continue to force me to play Sherlockian deductive things the way they've done with Mycroft and his world all along.

Speaking of shadows, I have to go examine the sets for Mycroft's office some more. It's an absolute symphony of carefully designed chiaroscuro, painting with light and shadow. So perfect for Mycroft: living in shadows, but shadows pierced by brilliant light and glowing symbols. Queen, globe. Beautifully designed set work and lighting. Just gorgeous.

If we do not see more of Mummy and Father Holmes I will be gobsmacked.

Oh, before I forget--another long-arc of Series Three is Sherlock contemplating his own potential for sexual/romantic relationships. From first meeting Mary with John to blowing up his relationship with Janine then saving his weird OT3 with John and Mary, with fascinating little side tours with Molly, the entire question of human romance is in play for Sherlock. So---maybe I need to broaden my phrasing of the key thesis? Not "family" but "building families" so that it includes the question of romance? And, again, where does that put the "goldfish" conversation. Is it about friends, lovers, or both? Do both Holmes Boys recognize that romance is part of the subtext?

Sherlock may have mixed feelings about families, romance, sex, etc. But boy, he wants a baby named after him. He really wants his mark on John and Mary's baby.
Forefront and Background: Layering in Sherlock

Chapter Summary

A consideration of the layering of realities in Sherlock. Mycroft and Sherlock's worlds, shared and unshared.

It’s possible to write drama that’s mostly foreground: indeed, most traditional sitcoms are splendid examples of that mode. The story begins and ends with elements presented openly, taking place in the immediate awareness of the POV characters or at only one slight remove—usually a remove the viewer is fully in on.

So in a hypothetical episode of The Brady Bunch, Greg, in the foreground, will invite his kid sister Jan to a dance because he can’t get a real date, and he may then encounter a complicating factor. Yet while he didn’t know Jan was about to be invited by the boy she really likes, the viewer will be let in on that complication early and clearly through a conversation with Marsha. Everything crucial is played in the foreground and is overt and unobscured. Even a B-plot, in which Bobby and Cindy want to help Jan and don’t know the boy’s already planning on inviting her, will be all displayed on the surface. No guessing, no partially hidden elements, no deduction required.

Your average mystery, say, Bones, depends on a partially obscured layer of background, usually pertaining only to the case of the week. The viewer knows pretty much everything necessary and pertinent about the central characters, at least everything necessary to be getting on with, but must discover the missing pieces of the case of the week, assembling information on a sort of dramatic scavenger hunt to find all the elements to solve the current puzzle. While over the course of a series the viewer may come to know all sorts of backstory tidbits, they seldom impact actions, behaviors, or lines of logic unless in doing so they serve the focal issues of the episode. Thus while we learn early of Temperance Brennan’s history as a foster child, it doesn’t set off odd resonances in episodes that don’t relate to that issue. On the whole, while her history does impact her character and make sense in relation to what we’re shown, it’s not really a hidden background influence.

Then there’s soap-structure. On first glance soap-structure looks like it would be the natural habitat for foreground/background games. Except it’s not: in soap there is no real background, only multiple POV plus “what the writers haven’t told you yet.” Which is a different beast altogether. Yes, good soap writers can and will start dropping hints on upcoming material early, but it’s not something steady-state looming as a constant in the lives of the characters, known to at least some of them as common truth, but unstated. It’s not background—it’s writers trying to stay one long arc ahead of viewers in an environment where almost nothing is hidden. Billy-Joe may not know that Brenda’s cheating on him with Sadie down at the Blue Oyster Bar, but Brenda, Sadie, half of Little Soapton, and all of the viewers know. There is no real background, only infinite variations on foreground.

Some things do depend on background. Good thrillers—those demand a fully functioning reality that’s invisible or partly obscure to the reader and the POV characters: something complete and complex and detailed that moves with its own logic under the appearances of the surface reality. What you think you see is only the top layer—the underlying layers are at work, though, creating
false images. The obvious explanations prove false. The apparently trivial and irrelevant proves potent and meaningful.

That’s *Sherlock* territory.

One of the frustrations of reading many professional reviewers discussing *Sherlock* is the degree to which they appear unaware of the layering of the show, and the importance of background as well as foreground in the series.

Ok, if you’re reviewing *The Brady Bunch* you’re a bit of a fool if you dedicate much attention or concern to backstory. Vast detailed meta considerations of what Alice does in her little bedroom off the Brady’s kitchen are probably a waste of time. Not only is there almost certainly no coherent pattern written in—even if there were, it impacts nothing in the show. A reviewer is right to focus on Greg and his dilemma taking his kid sister to the dance, and to the B-plot of baby brother and sister trying to sort it out for their older sibs. That’s all that’s really meaningfully there. The rest is set dressing at best.

But ignoring the importance of background at work in *Sherlock* is like trying to write off the importance of corporate greed and ecological concerns in *The Pelican Brief*. *Sherlock* is consistently, demandingly all about backstory: that’s what sets it apart from a show like *Bones* or a soap. It’s what Hitchcock might have created if he’d been writing long-arc series, instead of single-shot movies.

The most obvious and accessible entry point for that argument is Moriarty and his influence on the first three episodes. Moriarty makes his first “appearance” in the first show. He appears first as a red herring allusion on Mycroft’s first entrance, in which in-the-know viewers are expected to jump to the conclusion that this Tall, Ginger, and Mysterious Archenemy must be Moriarty. He appears a second time as a teaser when the information of his name is forced from the dying cabby, dropping the first major hint that Wee Jimmy is out there, waiting for us.

Then, over the next two episodes, Moriarty rises from the depths, his logic shaping events long before we ever see him.

First season’s a bit clumsy with that—inescapably so, IMO. It’s hard to set up layers of background while initiating the “surface norms” of the foreground. As a result Moriarty in the first season is pretty obvious, even when he’s being hinted at. By second season, though, the logical lines of Moriarty’s existence run under everything. *Scandal in Belgravia*? It’s really about Moriarty. *Hounds of Baskerville*? Actually a major stepping stone setting up Reichenbach, with the entire last half of the episode driven by the fact that Sherlock’s negotiated a deal with Mycroft, almost certainly over Moriarty…and ending with the clue/red herring of Moriarty’s release. Reichenbach? All driven by background considerations regarding Moriarty that are not fully revealed to the viewer, but which can be at least somewhat deduced.

An even better example of background, though, is something that at least tonight I would label “Mycroft’s World,” or, just possibly, “Mycroft and Sherlock’s World.” That, too, has been in play since the very first episode, underlying everything, defining and determining the foreground in ways that only become clear with time.

There’s the easy one—the introduction of the theme: the red herring appearance of Mycroft mentioned above. He appears mysteriously and without explanation. John and the viewers develop theories and assumptions. We see that the existence of Mr. Mystery has some kind of effect on Sherlock’s world: and then we get the reveal. Not Evil Moriarty, Not Deadly Criminal Mafioso ranged against Sherlock. Not, in this instance, even The British Government (though he’s also that…), but worried big brother dealing with Sherlock, changing the entire picture of Sherlock
we’d been given to that instant, and complicating him enormously. It’s one thing to be super-cool consulting detective. It’s another to be super-cool consulting detective with big brother watching out for you and worrying about you.

But Mycroft’s World is larger by far, and over the nine shows shown to date, it becomes more and more clearly one of the defining aspects of Sherlock’s own world. It’s a huge, dark, shadowed and secretive place from which Sherlock has apparently come, and to which he occasionally returns. A place that brings forces to bear that may change lives without warning or explanation: John’s learned that the hard way, over and over. Thanks to Mycroft’s World, things happen that may be foreshadowed episodes in advance, only to trip into full clarity much, much later.

In the first episode Mycroft welcomes John back to the war, and suggests he choose sides. He asks Sherlock if they should not be on the same side. No one seems to ask in that first episode what the sides are, or what war Mycroft sees himself as engaged in. Yet over the course of nine episodes Mycroft’s World and Mycroft’s War, including Moriarty—who is part of Mycroft’s World—shape all the plots.

Series Three has added what you can think of as an expansion pack to the Mycroft’s World developed in Series Two: the elements that turn it into “Mycroft and Sherlock’s World,” rather than just Mycroft’s World. In Series One there appeared to be a distinct line: Mycroft’s World, which Sherlock appeared to shun and avoid, and Sherlock’s World, which was Baker Street, cases, the Met…even Moriarty was easy to see as pertaining to Sherlock’s World, not Mycroft’s. Series Two showed us that Mycroft’s World underlay and affected Sherlock’s World far more than we’d thought, and that Sherlock had more invested in Mycroft’s World than we knew—the lines weren’t all that bright after all. Even the Met was suggested to be in play in Mycroft’s World, with the hint of Lestrade as Sherlock’s “handler,” with the assassins even within the Met itself, with the strange, never-yet-stated question of why and how Donovan and Anderson were able to warp perception of Sherlock so quickly. (I’m still waiting to find out if Donovan’s a Player on the Other Side…)

But now we’ve got the World beneath Mycroft’s World: the World based on Sherlock and Mycroft as boys and young men, a world that ties Sherlock and Mycroft’s world together every time they interact. Each scene between them includes all those layers of play.

Mycroft is always the General in a War with a loose cannon Sherlock rattling around the battlefield. He’s always also the spymaster trying to integrate his brother into the Great Game. He’s also always the big brother who remembers playing pirates, and the family dog, and who’s fighting for his mother’s approval no less than Sherlock’s fighting for Mycroft’s approval.

Now, here’s the kicker: even accepting that some of that is almost certainly retrofit—the writers and actors working new material in with old material—the writers and actors are good enough to make that new material not only fit what was already there, but make it illuminate it. And some of it’s not new: some of it is clearly there from the start, uncommented on, at work from the very beginning.

It’s like the old saw about the iceberg: three-fourths of it below the waterline, where you can’t see it. Or, even more compellingly, it’s like the dangerous and complicated waters around a shoreline, filled with hidden hazards. In a show with a real background that’s in play, the shoals and reefs, the great granite rocks, the nasty currents, the drowned wrecks all affect sailing, even if they’re never seen or noted. And in a show like Sherlock, you can see in retrospect how different characters, each with different charts of the waters, navigated their courses. John navigates in near ignorance. In many ways he still does: there’s little sense so far that he’s really internalized the depth and meaning of Mycroft, Sherlock, and Mary’s complicated realities. Sherlock navigates like a wary sailor who, nonetheless, would like to just heave the stupid chart overboard and head out
for the high sea. One suspects one tiny part of his affection for John ties to the fact that John’s just plain not part of that complicated world map. It’s much simpler to be John. And Mycroft? He doesn’t have just one chart: he’s got an entire map case, with annotations and log books, and unfortunately he hates being up on deck…and, unlike Sherlock, he’s unconvinced that throwing out the map and heading for the high seas is an acceptable answer.

And you can see all that—but it’s not announced. You don’t get juice music and dramatic editing pauses when bits of Mycroft’s World have an effect on John’s. John never realizes something is hinky and forces Sherlock to sit down and give us a useful few pages of expository layout, letting us know the players and ensuring we’ll know what’s going on as it comes up. We’re never allowed, as the audience, to be ten steps ahead of events in Mycroft’s World. We’re always days, weeks, years behind the curve, trying to catch up.

In other words, in a way that’s entirely appropriate to a mystery show, we are forced to deduce Mycroft’s World—and now Mycroft and Sherlock’s World. We have to gather evidence, put the pieces together, develop and test hypotheses.

Moffat, Gatiss, and Thompson are smart enough to make sure that the “casual viewer” can enjoy the show without ever really sensing the existence of Mycroft’s World of Shadows, or Mycroft and Sherlock’s fraternal world of shared memory and need. It’s possible to experience a great ride just cruising the surface, never really noticing that the story jigs and jogs in odd ways tied to the hazards hidden under the shining waves, or the currents surging in the narrows. But, oh, lordy—for those of us who like work that is both elegant and complex, Sherlock offers a rare treat…

And it’s this that the reviewers so often miss. You can comment that a single episode is strong or weak as a free-standing piece, and that’s valid. But with Sherlock, free-standing is not really the differentiating element. It’s the depths that make the show stand out. It’s the unstated background that allows the writers to surprise viewers, and that complicates the picture over and over. That intricate, lurking Hitchcock layer matters, and too often is missed.
Mycroft and Mary: Connected or Not? Conjecture and Speculation

Chapter Summary

What it says on the label. Prompted by SunriseSerenity's comment on the last chapter. Not conclusive, just contemplative.

SunriseSerenity’s comment on the last little meta chapter has me brooding some more about Mycroft and Mary.

So let’s see if I can unpack this a bit. Mycroft’s been keeping an eye on John. That’s plain canon: he’s been keeping such good track of John that he knows he’s moving on with his life, by direct implication he knows John’s involved with Mary and getting ready to propose, he even knows that it’s likely to be that night, and where it’s going to happen.

He appears to prefer Sherlock miss the event, though he’s not apparently desperate for that. But he does what he can within modest limits to discourage Sherlock going, and he’s definitely put off his feed that Sherlock wants to go in the first place.

Logical conclusion: he wants John’s romantic life committed prior to Sherlock recontacting his old friend—if he must recontact John at all.

Why would Mycroft want John in a committed relationship before Sherlock can touch base again?

Well, we could go all Holmescesty. But Mycroft really does not read as that type or intensity of jealous or territorial. There’s some other kind of territoriality going on. We also know Mycroft wants Sherlock working “on his side”—and that he has wanted that for as long as we’ve known him. We know that the London Terrorist Attack’s perfect for accomplishing that: combining both Sherlock and Mycroft’s areas of expertise, apparently appealing to even the Prime Minister as being a good project for the combined Holmes Boys team.

And John’s actually been a set-back in any hopes Mycroft had of reintegrating Sherlock in Mycroft’s World. He’s tended to rather blindly side with Sherlock against Mycroft—the two in many ways playing best buddies schoolboys resisting and mocking the too-serious Big Brother. John will work with Mycroft when it’s clearly to Sherlock’s advantage, but in the end he’s inclined to support Sherlock’s resistance to Mycroft, rather than any inclination he might have to work more closely with him. Further, John’s shown time and again he’s really not cut out for espionage: he can’t lie worth a damn, he doesn’t track the layers and layers of possible explanations for things, he’s too easily manipulated—by Mycroft, by Moriarty, by Sherlock. He’s a liability if Mycroft’s ever to get Sherlock involved in the Great Game of espionage on a regular basis again.

He’s also a weak point in Sherlock’s defenses, as Reichenbach Fall has already demonstrated. He’s proving unable to defend himself and too tempting an access point for Sherlock’s enemies. Just as Sherlock repeatedly proves a weak point in Mycroft’s defenses, John proves a weak point in Sherlock’s.

And now Sherlock’s been away for two years. Now Mycroft has final first-person witness that
during that two years Sherlock didn’t so much as drop John a line or wonder if he was moving on. For two years there’s been a true, natural separation that Sherlock’s accepted apparently completely.

Why in the name of heaven would Mycroft want Sherlock to reunite with John, really? He doesn’t have to hate John or be angry with Sherlock to think it would really all be for the best if the separation remained in effect. I know from experience that most of us look at friends and family and think, “His/her life would be so much better and if it weren’t for whosit. Whosit isn’t a bad person, but s/he’s a bad influence, in the end.”

Mycroft had hoped that John would prove to be the making of Sherlock, but from Mycroft’s POV there has to be a lot of question whether John’s not actually the ruin of him, as he also feared. John’s blog has fed Sherlock’s theatricality, his vanity, his love of drama and stardom. John’s blind loyalty has encouraged Sherlock’s audacity and rudeness, and has also encouraged his rebellions against Mycroft. John’s lack of complex understanding has made him an easy dupe, while his bond with Sherlock has made that a deadly danger to Sherlock. If I were Mycroft, no matter how many ways I liked John and admired him, I’d consider him a very problematic friend for Sherlock, bringing out many of Sherlock’s worst traits. Yes, John will collaborate with Mycroft to try to block Sherlock’s drug abuse, but beyond that he’ll encourage all sorts of reckless, rebellious activities, he’ll encourage Sherlock to wallow in his sudden celebrity, he’ll fail to note when Sherlock gets tangled up in schemes far larger than are immediately apparent—and John’s overall attitude toward Mycroft is a sort of sulky, skeptical scorn. Rock bottom, John really doesn’t ever seem to believe Mycroft and Mycroft’s world are as much a form of service as John’s time in the army. John’s a soldier. In his eyes, he seems to think Mycroft’s merely a spook—and, worse, that Mycroft’s really just a snotty, prissy big brother in spook’s clothing. John’s awareness of Mycroft never does seem to catch up with what he actually knows about Mycroft: he still treats him more as a kid treats his best friends annoyingly fussy, humorously dorky elder brother than he treats him as a man fighting a war to protect his nation OR his brother.

In other words, John appears to be tone deaf and largely blind to all of Mycroft’s World.

That said, there’s no sign so far that Mycroft dislikes John—and judging by the “apology” at the Diogenes Club during Reichenbach, he’s aware that what he and Sherlock have planned and are doing will hurt John terribly, and he regrets it.

So, from Mycroft’s POV I would expect an ideal outcome to be John safe, secure, happily involved in a het relationship, and Sherlock, having found this to be the case, turning back to Mycroft and to Mycroft’s World. John’s heartbreak largely healed, his aims and goals being met, his relationship with Sherlock slowly fading of natural causes and personality traits on both sides. Sherlock to suffer no real heartbreak at all, perhaps: after all, Sherlock’s gone two years apparently not even thinking about John. From Mycroft’s position it would be natural to hope that with John engaged, Sherlock would suffer a sulk, and then get on with life himself.

Kind, comparatively painless, and best for everyone, including Mycroft.

Again, as we learn more and more and integrate more and more, Sherlock’s an asset as well as a wild-card. He’s done things that have gotten him threatened with knighthood. He’s someone Mycroft will later be able to argue that the nation will always need. He’s someone whose record leads to the Prime Minister himself wanting Sherlock to be on the job with Mycroft—not nepotism, but a desire to see the very best team possible working the case. Mycroft, who lives and breathes that World of espionage and assets, has got to have a perfectly honest distrust of anything that compromises Sherlock’s ability to function in those roles.
Now, all that being at least one reasonable way for Mycroft to see John, where does Mary fit in other than as potential spouse and replacement goldfish for Sherlock? Is she a plant of Mycroft’s?

If so, she’s a very, very cleverly chosen plant. As she and Sherlock have both pointed out, she’s just what John Watson’s going to be attracted to: danger on wheels. Secrets hidden just out of John’s ability to detect them. Deadly skills. Espionage in her bones and in her blood. Brains. Laughter. She’s a brilliant replacement goldfish, offering much of what Sherlock offers, but in a sheepskin that makes her acceptable to John as lover, wife, mother-of-children. After all, he’s not gay, at least in his own eyes; he’s also the “normal one,” in his own eyes. Mary’s a “have his cake and eat it, too” answer to John’s emotional and life-style issues, giving him a healthy jolt of Sherlock wildness and the option of living that normal little life John thinks natural. Career, wife, kiddies. Central casting would have been hard put to find a better choice of goldfish.

Coincidence?

Mycroft would say that the universe is seldom so lazy, and that the balance of probabilities would suggest that Mary’s a plant, just on her perfection alone.

Whose plant?

Not, apparently, Magnussen’s. Nor does Mary have a good reason to link herself to John during the time of Sherlock’s exile: if anything he’s a bit of a hazard, as his lingering fame and association with the brother of Britain’s great spymaster would make him visible to too many people Mary would prefer to avoid, including Magnussen. Hanging out with John’s a bit like hanging out under a solitary streetlamp on a very dark night: you stand out in the darkness.

But what if you owe Mycroft Holmes a major debt, and are working with him to accomplish the removal of that evil bastard Magnussen? And he says to you, several years into your own exile, “I’ve got a favor I’d like you to do for me. It’s got risks, but it would give you a stable cover, a small income, and I think you’d enjoy it. I have an… associate… who needs to be guarded without knowing he’s being guarded. He must be kept safe at all times, and at all costs. Can you do it?”

And if it turns into a romance, Mycroft won’t weep even one crocodile tear. And if it doesn’t, he’s still got Mary watching over John, whom he owes a debt, and whom he’ll owe a greater unacknowledged debt if he succeeds in separating John from Sherlock.

Is Mary’s vendetta something Mycroft’s actively collaborating on? My guess would be no. But I’d also be surprised if Mycroft were not fully aware of it, and treating it as “not my business, but if you take out the vicious little ferret I can only applaud and offer the appreciation of Her Majesty’s Secret Services. Huzzah, yay-you, you-go-girl—would you like me to send word to your own spymasters to let them know you’ve resolved that little issue? Glad to pass the news on, if you like.”

Is Mycroft aware in tandem with the CIA what Mary’s up to? Is this a two-nation solution?

Don’t know. Could be. Magnussen was proving to be an international problem, certainly. And having him dealt with by an exiled rogue agent would be politically optimal, if Mary did get caught.

Can Mary return to the CIA now that Magnussen is dealt with? Is her career no longer a dead letter? Or could she be absorbed into Mycroft’s team, in a sort of international exchange program? Could Mary become the espionage “replacement goldfish” for Sherlock with Mycroft in the long run, rather than the emotional replacement goldfish for Sherlock with John that she’s currently serving as?
Further questions: the thematic ties between Irene and Magnussen are too obvious to ignore, and if I were Moffat, Gatiss, and Thompson I’d be tempted to eventually take advantage of them, if only to retro-weave plot and world-building threads all the way back to *Scandal* at least. Maybe further. It would be interesting if there was, all along, information in Irene’s hands that was also information in Magnussen’s hands. There wouldn’t even have to be an obvious or overt relationship between Irene and Magnussen. Both were predators in the same hunting ground; both collected the interesting and suggestive. For both to have encountered the same secrets and threaten the same victims would not be that unusual.

Play that game, and play Mycroft’s “the universe isn’t that lazy” card, and you can have Mycroft involved in literally years of resistance to blackmailers, and protection of some victim or victims unnamed, including possibly himself—even if it’s just himself at one remove, proving vulnerable to an attack on a goldfish previously unnoticed by Irene or Magnussen. Mycroft protecting a hidden pressure point.

That really would tempt me terribly as a series writer. The biggest trick would be forcing oneself to keep it low-key, and largely implied, to never tell all the story, and to show, rather than tell what is revealed.

Anyway. I do think Mycroft having a hand in planting Mary on John, and doing so with full intent, seems reasonable—and reasonable in ways that don’t even make Mycroft evil or villainous. Just determined to protect John while offering him some other doors that Mycroft really hopes he will voluntarily walk through. It’s not particularly evil or even manipulative to simply give John choices, and pray he chooses the ones you’d prefer, after all. The only moral lapse in that is that Mary’s not telling who she is.

And that is one big moral lapse, on her part and on Mycroft’s. But she and Mycroft live in a world where the assumption of someone’s identity is a fool’s mistake….and the giving away of your own a suicidal leap. It’s going to look different from their line of sight.
Does anyone know if John or Harry is Eldest? (Yes, that's all this is about...)

Chapter Summary

Just like it says, one question to rule them all... in the lands of Mycroft, where the Shadows (Whap--oh, now i'm just getting silly...)

Ok, this is a serious question: do we have any evidence at all one way or another regarding whether John's elder or younger in birth order, compared to Harry? Because the more I look, the more I see both John and Sherlock as younger brothers, united in their conviction that the elder sib's at fault. There's just...

It's weird little stuff like that shared certainty that Mycroft was just horrible for the "East Wind" story...which seems more big-brother tease from out here. There's no sense of dual vision--recognizing that young Sherlock had a right to be scared and angry, but that even so, telling your kid sib spooky stories is a long and cherished element of brother/sistering, and rather mild as such things go.

It just...

They set it up in the very first episode: John and Sherlock both have problematic sibs with all sorts of odd little resonances. "Gay" has always seemed like one resonance. Harry's drinking a different resonance--this time offering John one thing he sympathizes with Mycroft over, and sides with him over: the question of addiction. But the more I think about it, the more it feels to me like both John and Sherlock feel like "the babies."

Another question: did we see any sign of John having family at the wedding? Sherlock comments on Mary's lack of family, but did we get any sense that John had any more than she did?
More on Harry/John

Chapter Summary

Bless Wiki for making some things easy...

Ok. Thank you ALL for such useful responses. Let's see what we have.

I can't find a mention of Harry being older on the blog. She's set at 36 years old at the time the show starts, though--to the extent you can trust dates on John's blog, which is not so much. (wry grin) John's as unreliable about continuity as his Original Model. But we've got an age, in any case. She'd currently be 40-ish.

However, Wiki gives me an easily extractable bit on Original Watson's relations:

At the beginning of A Study in Scarlet, Watson states he had "neither kith nor kin in England". In the Sign of the Four, it is established his father and older brother are deceased and both shared the initial 'H'. In this story, Holmes examines an old watch in Watson's possession that was formerly his father's before being inherited by his brother. Holmes estimates the watch to have a value of 50 guineas, so H. Watson senior was a very prosperous man if he could have afforded such an item. Holmes deduced from the watch that Watson's brother was "a man of untidy habits—very untidy and careless. He was left with good prospects but threw away his chances, lived for sometime in poverty with occasional short intervals of prosperity and finally, taking to drink he died.

Harry's not dead, yet, but if you track through her comments in the blog, she appears to be having increasingly hard times with her drinking. It's kind of sad. They're playing out a really understandable dance on the blog. Harry increasingly unhappy, and trying to reach out to John; John walking a thin line between staying in touch and retreating/rejecting. Harry apparently breaking into rounds of "inappropriate" comment, at least in John's opinion. (He deletes a fair number of her comments.)

If they stick to shadowing the original a bit, Harry may die in "our" timeline. Which would be interesting, especially if they really are consciously using her as comment on Sherlock and Mycroft's relationship. And, no, I'm not saying it means Mycroft's doomed, but it would mean that there'd be an opening for John, Sherlock or both to consider that once your difficult relation is dead, they're dead, and anything you might have hoped to salvage is gone.

I think for now I'll go with Harry being older, as the original Mary was, and with John having no other immediate relations--yes, a few cousins and such, but no one close, to match the "no kith nor kin in England."

And again, thank you all so much for pitching in on this. I try to keep fluent but sometimes it helps to have people chime in on things. HUGE HUGS. Thanks, all!
MI5 and MI6

Ok, MI5 and MI6 are two distinct, if often overlapping bodies. MI5 is domestic secret service/espionage, MI6 is international. We know Mycroft's international with what appears to be a particular interest in anti-terrorism, but by no means restricted. Mycroft's everywhere, and he does appear to exceed the limits of MI6, but more and more it's looking like Magnussen's core identification of him as MI6 is an appropriate foundation.

Sherlock's another matter. If, as is looking more and more likely, Sherlock's area of excellence is most especially London, then even counting questions of international terror, he'd be MI5, occasionally liaising with MI6 when there was dual interest. That, to me, continues to feel good with Greg Lestrade, who doesn't feel like he would ever, ever be "international" in normal senses—he's domestic on a national basis, but more precisely he, too, appears to be fundamentally the London beat, occasionally on loan to Mycroft. That would keep his actual lines of command normally non-Mycroftian, which would give some punch to his grumble that he doesn't just do what Mycroft says: Mycroft and his orders are in addition to his normal work, and entirely off topic in some ways. It would also tie in well with a number of aspects of the show and its assumptions that are explicitly London-focused.

It's always been commented that London itself is almost an active character in its own right, in Sherlock, and this past season has gone even further. Sherlock's got people he keeps under observation. He's got a feel for the city he's got to renew after a prolonged absence. When he goes missing, John's comment, "Find Sherlock in London?" is almost paradigmatic: London is Sherlock's supreme territory. The person he chides for letting things slide is the London copper and possible MI5 operative, not the MI6 spymaster.

But that would suggest that Sherlock, as is possible with Lestrade, would ordinarily be outside his brother's direct line of command.

Now it's already clear Mycroft can exceed that limit without anyone even blinking. Mycroft is much, much more than just MI6. But it does add yet another possible set of implications to the entire "on my side" issue, and the power struggles between the two brothers. If Sherlock's shifted to MI5 and specialized in London, it gives him a little fief of his own outside Mycroft's immediate interest and control. It may be a big-fish/little-pond arrangement. But, hey--Sherlock! Sherlock wants to be a big fish somehow, somewhere. He can't buck Mycroft and take him on in Mycroft's own scale and scope. But by specializing Sherlock can become The Very Best at something Mycroft can't and won't master: one city, in every way, on every level. One can't imagine Mycroft happily down in the filth grubbing in skips, or leaping from rooftops, or dancing at a club. Sherlock in specializing would be his brother's superior in one unassailable area. No one can do London like Sherlock.

I'm not sure Mycroft really wants Sherlock to go international. The entire two year exile thing appears to have been very much off Mycroft's books in a lot of ways: he appears to have treated it as Sherlock's free time, a little sabbatical that Sherlock took on his own recognizance. It seems
more likely that he'd like Sherlock to liaise more extensively with MI6, become part of an ongoing network of projects. Maybe focus even more tightly on anti-terrorism? That would absolutely involve constant integration of both the domestic and the international.

I don't know. It was enough to get some confirmation that Mycroft was MI6. I'd placed him there in my mind for awhile, as his likely center of balance. But getting confirmation that Magnussen agreed with that placement was nice. With Sherlock we've got nothing but logical inferences from abiguous data... What we really know is that both he and Greg work inside Mycroft's World, as well as in the ordinary world where they're just a consulting detective and a Met DI. Somehow they fit formally and officially into Mycroft's World. We just really don't know where, yet, and I can't help speculating and testing ideas.
If Mycroft planted Mary on John, and if Mycroft, no matter what else, knew all along who and what Mary is, then of course he has to go ballistic when Sherlock decides to go chasing after Magnussen. Why? Because he loves Sherlock, and because he at least has opened his protective umbrella over Mary and John.

He's facing a multi-level catastrophe: on the one hand, Baby Brother's going up against a terribly, terribly dangerous foe--really out of his league. Magnussen's too big a fish for Sherlock to hope to land. On top of that, thanks to the case Sherlock's back on drugs--horrible outright for its own sake, but adding layer after layer of danger if he goes after Magnussen while he's not at his peak.

But then add in that from Mycroft's line of sight, it becomes instantly inevitable that Magnussen's going to jerk Mary's strings, and thus John's strings, and thus Sherlock's strings, and thus, yes, Mycroft's strings. It's not just that he fears Sherlock getting involved will place Sherlock and Mycroft at risk: he knows it, and knows the line of attack, and knows it will risk bringing Sherlock and John's world crashing down on them. Sherlock's doing the one worst thing he could possibly be doing to preserve the marriage he's invested himself in: his second family, his odd poly whatever it is. Of all the projects Sherlock could take on, he's taken on the one that is absolutely guaranteed to shake his world to its foundations.

And he's gone back on drugs to do it, which simply can't ever be a minor issue. But it almost becomes the secondary frosting on the cake.

And Mycroft can't explain why, without doing exactly the same kind of damage he hopes to avoid.

Again, there's never any indication that Mycroft doesn't care for John or Sherlock or that he wants to hurt either of them... not beyond a sort of ongoing Big Brother grumble and kvetch and snark. But hurting Sherlock badly, like losing him, would almost certainly break Mycroft's heart. And while I doubt he feels the same way about John, John does appear to have become someone Mycroft chooses to watch over and protect.

No idea where Mary falls on the "Mycroft's protected" list, really, though to me IF he put her to watch over John (still conjecture, not fact) and IF he actually thought it might be a good matchmaking option (again, conjecture) then it seems safe to think he may rather like her. But, really, we don't know. But we know he's deeply, deeply invested in Sherlock, and appears to be modestly committed to John.

So, lessee. Just as Magnussen "owns" Mycroft if he owns Mary--Jeez. In a bizarre sense, Magnussen already had that ownership, if he'd only known it. He didn't need to chain up through Sherlock, he could have already just tapped Mycroft and said, "I own Mary Watson." The entire rest would have pinned Mycroft to the wall--no escape that would not generate a domino chain of destruction for the people Mycroft cares for.

Good thing Magnussen didn't realize he didn't need Sherlock directly to own Mycroft; that Mary
alone was all he needed.

At the very least it makes the entire reaction to finding out Sherlock's messing with Magnussen entirely understandable: Mycroft facing a serious and unresolvable problem that can only be dealt with by Sherlock backing off this case...and being Sherlock, he won't willingly do that. But of course Mycroft instantly has to put Magnussen under his protection and let Sherlock know he'll be up against Mycroft if he proceeds. Mycroft would then have to fight Sherlock specifically to protect Sherlock.

I do think the intensity of Mycroft's reaction, and his complete prohibition on Sherlock taking Magnussen on, suggests that he was at least aware of Mary's background and her issues with Magnussen. Otherwise it would be too tempting to actually let Sherlock proceed. But if he knows Magnussen's already holding a card that will prove devastating to Sherlock and John, it's a different deal altogether. That's when you go for protection and damage control.

I wonder....

Ok. John learns who Sherlock's after.

Mary, who's already pregnant, learns Sherlock's after Magnussen. She's got to know that if/when Magnussen figures Sherlock's after him, he'll come after Mary and John. So her action in attempting to kill Magnussen isn't simply "I don't want John to know who I am." It's "If I can't kill Magnussen now, he's going to destroy John and Sherlock--and by extension, Mycroft." Assuming she and Mycroft have a link. But at the very least, she'll know Magnussen's necessary line of defense is to attack through her.

Which changes her motivation factors once again, if true. She wasn't in a rush to take out Magnussen until she learned through John that Magnussen was almost certainly soon going to want to damage her--and John. So she's not just protecting herself and her secrets, she's protecting John and Sherlock and possibly Mycroft.

She's still lying. And it still matters. But it also changes the sense of how she's weighing things. She moves in response to Sherlock stirring up the hornet's nest, and her knowledge of what that action can let loose.
Another really short observation/question. Lestrade, video.

Chapter Summary

Again, what the label says. One topic, short, focus on Lestrade and picture/video taking.

By my count we now have three distinct documented cases of Lestrade videoing Sherlock or intending to. First time, after Irene drugs him. Second time, recording the "apology" message for John's birthday in "Many Happy Returns." Third time, intending to film him in his hospital bed after Mary shoots him, in "Vow."

With this show, three times is a pattern.

We already know he's working with Mycroft. We already know in some measure he's keeping an eye on Sherlock. Is this all an element of surveillance? Or is this just "Lestrade likes filming Sherlock when he's at his worst?" Or what?

I'm NOT a photo/film/video person. I'm painfully photo-undocumented, because I type long before it occurs to me to snap a picture. To the degree I'm video/film fluent, it's in terms of narrative arts, with an eye to fiction. Movies, tv series, and so on. Not even particularly fluent in documentary mode.

Does anyone else see a pattern I wouldn't? Can anyone else think of Lestrade or anyone else photographing characters? I have wondered, for example, who took the photo of John with the moustache in the file Anthea hands Sherlock in "Hearse." It's a bit nice to be a CCTV clip. Mary? Lestrade? Someone else keeping an eye on John?

It's just, yeah. Three times on this show is a pattern, and it's a pattern for a character we now know is more layered than he seemed going in. So I can't help but wonder.
Chapter Summary

Trying another round of analysis on Season Three as a whole. Sherlock, John, Mary, Mycroft. Major Sholto. A short run with Lestrade and Molly. See what you think...

Season Three: Sherlock and John, Sherlock and John and Mary, Sherlock and Mycroft

Ok, I’m going to say right up front, this season’s a bugger for me, primarily because I can’t quite determine how much it looks so Mycrofty to me because I really, really like Mycroft and Sherlock. In spite of that, the season does look Mycrofty to me—indeed, in many ways it feels like a complicated dialogue about Sherlock and the intricate balances and interactions between his primary relationships: John, Mycroft, and increasingly Mary.

To some extent this is a structure thing. It’s a season that starts and ends with Sherlock hunted by special services operatives, with a helicopter hovering overhead—possibly both times at Mycroft’s direct instigation. It’s a season where over and over again John and Mycroft are balanced against each other—in structure (consider the opening passages of “The Empty Hearse,” after the first explanation for Reichenbach, in which the story passes back and forth between Mycroft’s World and John’s World, over and over.) It’s a season where Sherlock even explicitly chooses between John and Mycroft—though a Mycroft of the mind versus a John present in all ways.

If John and Mycroft are pitted against each other in some ways, strong parallels are drawn between all three men in others.

In a lovely, complex bit of cinema and script tapestry, an intricate set of parallels are built around John, Sherlock, Mycroft, and Major Sholto, John’s former commander, who plays a pivotal role throughout “The Sign of Three.” We start with a parallel drawn between Sherlock and Sholto, both preparing for John’s wedding, or, as Sherlock puts it, “into battle.” A metaphoric bridge is built between the two men, both loved by John. That, alone, would be a sufficient dramatic link—most writers would be pleased to get that into place. But then a second, more complicated link comes into play when Major Sholto actually arrives for the reception: a parallel between Sholto and Mycroft—though a Mycroft of the mind versus a John present in all ways.

It’s a lovely bit of work. We already think of Sholto as having parallels to Sherlock, after all. Then the discussion occurs between Mary and Sherlock. Sholto is indicated as “the most reclusive man John knows.” Sherlock goes all tetchy, and Mary points out that neither he nor she is John’s “first.” Presumably the first person John loved. And it would end there—if Sherlock didn’t promptly go stalking off to call the single most reclusive man in the entire Sherlockian canon, a man who makes Sherlock look like a chattering socialite: Brother Mycroft. Upon making that call we find him dressed in exercise togs that got a good lot of the internet, including me, in a tizzy, as they are strong visual echoes of Sholto’s uniform. Mycroft is alone—and Sherlock actually applies pressure to try to get his brother to join him at John’s reception, which would create a balanced block of men in intricate parallel with each other.

Think of it as a sort of square:
Over the arcs of the seasons we’ve found out that each man has served his nation: Sholto and Mycroft as commanding officers of their juniors, John and Sherlock; John and Sherlock in lower ranking roles. All four show signs of being injured, John and Sholto quite overtly, Mycroft and Sherlock in ways that are harder to pin down, but which seem increasingly certain, from “heartbreak” to reasons to wonder if Sherlock has some form of PTSD playing into his many problems. Basically it becomes increasingly likely that all four men are injured veterans of distinctly different kinds of war. You can draw little lines between then, along the outer edges of the square and through the diagonals, seeing parallels between the men and the ways they relate to each other.

Within that setup, we find two younger men trying to make connection with their two reclusive elders—their two injured elders? John succeeds this time out—his wedding is enough to draw Sholto out of his retreat. Sherlock, this time, fails—Mycrof’s bond with John isn’t strong, and one continues to suspect there are issues with John and Mary. That said, there’s a fair chance there’s another element at play.

This is a show that does not waste things. One of the elements they make a massive point of showing off in that interchange between Sherlock and Mycroft is Mycroft’s gold ring—the unexplained ring. It’s not a little throw-away view, either. The shots are set up to make sure we see that ring clearly as Mycroft talks morosely with his little brother, trying to make his own kind of emotional link. He’s quite clear that John and Mary won’t want him there at the wedding—and Sherlock’s response is meaningful: you always need a spectre at the feast.

That’s a devious little comment. Very loosely interpreted it could just be a comment on Mycroft being a dreadful Eeyore, which he can certainly be. But the spectre at the feast is most often a “momento mori”, a reminder of death and loss in the midst of celebration. One can think of few thinks more likely to make Mycroft the “memento mori” at a wedding feast, than for him to be a widower in mourning—and few things more likely to make Mycroft reluctant to attend, and morose and lonely at the thought.

But just as John would wish Sholto to come join him for support and friendship, and to come back into the “world of the living”, Sherlock would, apparently, like his morose, lonely brother to join him—whether for moral support, out of compassion for Mycroft, or out of a sense of recognition of the similarities between Mycroft and Sholto, two loyal men of service, two damaged men of integrity, two lonely men of reclusive tendencies. One isn’t sure why it matters to Sherlock—which of many benefits most motivates him. One does know that on this day, a day of both celebration and battle for Sherlock, he wants his brother there.

All of which still leaves the complexity of their discussion a bit ambiguous. Even knowing now that Redbeard was, at a minimum, the family dog, doesn’t explain the oblique, edgy interchange between the two brothers, hinting at far more on both sides than is actually said.

We do know that now Major Sholto’s been placed in script structure and cinematic image to serve as a metaphoric reflection of not just one major player, but three—and possibly, just possibly, a less clear fourth in Mary. But Sholto’s definitely a place holder for Sherlock, John, and Mycroft, carrying elements of each, and suggesting that perhaps each has more in common than is always obvious. Most of all, Sholto’s injured, reclusive status suggests that Sherlock and Mycroft, too, may have injuries and privacy that matter in relation to their service and their loneliness. We’re left with, if nothing else, four men bound by honor, service, loss, reserve (which John does have in
gobs), and almost certainly injuries, hidden and otherwise.

Why does it matter? For the same reason it matters to have Mycroft in the story at all: because Mycroft’s almost certainly one of the most critical figures in Sherlock’s hidden past and hidden present. Understanding who Mycroft is, and how Sherlock and Mycroft relate in spite of their problems goes a long way to making *Sherlock* make sense, instead of just being a bewildering series of unexplained and entirely quixotic interactions. If both Sherlock and Mycroft reflect Sholto—his honor, his awkwardness, his fatalism, his loneliness—and if for much of their lives they had only each other, then their continuing ties make sense, as does much of their continuing anger with each other: it’s hard to carry off that kind of relationship when you’re both walking wounded and you’re neither of you much good at the emotional stuff, and you’re carrying a load of normal big brother/little brother stuff as well. Sherlock’s love-hate with Mycroft makes so much sense, though, if Mycroft’s not only always the snotty, competitive big brother who told spooky stories and whose mastery of snark matches Sherlock’s own, but if he’s also the Voice of Reason, the protector who sourly walks you through “How not to die,” and, beyond that, he’s Major Sholto: noble, injured, isolated role model.

You can look at John’s reaction to Major Sholto, and see a possible parallel to Sherlock and Mycroft. The admiration, the looking-up-to, the awkward compassion trying not to turn to pity, the true happiness that Sholto is there for him on “his day.” Major Sholto would not let down John Watson on his wedding day, any more than Mycroft Holmes would fail to be there for Sherlock on the day he jumped to his death.

See? A square. You can draw these lovely little lines between the four men, and see reflections of them in each other. It’s nice work, right there in the middle of the season, when at first glance it appears to all be about John, Mary, Sherlock, and weddings. There’s Major Sholto and all he suggests about a different kind of relationship entirely…

…and even hints that Mary, herself, may be a “Sholto,” not something else entirely. It’s easy to miss that casual, “neither of us is his first,” comparing both Sherlock and Mary to Sholto—yet, coming from Mary, it’s intensely precise and accurate. She knows, if John and Sherlock don’t yet, that she’s also a Sholto: a soldier in a covert war, a killer-on-command on the run, a recluse of sorts, with her hidden name and her secret past. One more of John’s dangerous loves.

In any case, the season starts us off with Sherlock firmly in Mycroft’s world. By the end of “Hearse,” he’s been allowed back into John’s world, but it’s still an uneasy truce. In “Three,” Sherlock tries to bridge the worlds, bringing Mycroft into John’s World just as Sholto is in John’s World. Mycroft declines, and Sherlock then metaphorically commits to John and John’s World—John “keeps him right,”—only to come head on with the fact that, love or no love, commitment or no commitment, pseudo-wedding-vow or no vow, he and John and Mary don’t quite know how to all three dance together in John’s World.

So. Let’s look at this a bit. Again, we begin and end with Sherlock hunted by special ops forces with a helicopter chopping overhead, possibly both times leading to Mycroft, both times with elements of Mycroft “saving” Sherlock. Then there’s the setup of the two sides in play: John’s World, Mycroft’s World. Without Mary to complicate things, it might even be that simple right through the end of the season, but Mary (and her prospective child) do complicate things. At the same time we’re setting up all the ways the season is going to be about wounded warriors: John, Mary, Sherlock, Mycroft, with Sholto there as the glowing multi-level metaphor in the dead center of the season. The season deepens the ways we’re aware of Mycroft and Sherlock as “soldiers” in a very different kind of war and service: if Sholto and John are daylight soldiers, Mycroft and Sherlock stalk the shadows and fight battles that do not give them the uniform and ranks of ribbons Sholto wears.
Which—ah. Ok. Which explains part of why they had to make so very clear in the first episode that one of Mycroft’s people died to bring him the information: they have to make sure we know this isn’t a deathless game of airy tactics. And, for what it’s worth, they do a reasonably good job of illustrating that, reserved and controlled as he is, Mycroft recognizes the death and values it. Sherlock may mock it. Mycroft not only doesn’t, but appears to be honestly unhappy at Sherlock’s lack of respect or concern. Like Sholto, then, Mycroft honors his fallen dead. He and Anthea know the cost paid, and care about it.

Sherlock’s got a bee in his bonnet—and that bee feels like it ties back to how he sees his own sacrifices versus how he thinks Mycroft values him. Like their face-off over whether Mycroft “enjoyed” Sherlock’s pain during the beating. And as though somewhere Sherlock got smacked down for getting injured when Mycroft thought he was just “showing off.”

But we’ve seen Sherlock—he does show off. He definitely, absolutely shows off for both John and for Mycroft. Which lets us jump directly from the beginning of the season to the end, and Magnussen’s deadly recognition that Sherlock’s raid on his home is motivated by a desire to impress Big Brother. “Mycroft will be proud.”

Which then leads back to the bridge between “Sign of Three” and “Vow.” In SoT Sherlock commits to John and Mary—only to realize that it’s already doomed, at least in the form he expected, thanks to the incoming offspring. They can’t dance as three: they don’t know how. So he slopes off alone.

What’s left? Mycroft’s outstanding relationship with Sherlock. Mycroft’s the reliable fall-back. Only Sherlock’s been turning his back on Mycroft and isn’t going to be easy saying, “I was wrong, you were right.”

And then Lady Smallwood presents him with a chance to show off to Big Brother. A case Big Brother appears to be unwilling to take himself.

Meanwhile, Sherlock’s judgement is fragmenting…which leads from Lady Smallwood to drugs. And Janine. And so help me, that gorgeous scene with Molly slapping him, and him ripping her over her broken engagement: poor boy still doesn’t understand that they’re in a relationship with each other, even if it’s not an “active” one—but lordy, do they both play it as a relationship. They’re fully as bad as John and Sherlock, and even less articulate about it. And then there’s Janine, his experiment in “I could be romantically involved, too,” which he screws up because he can’t bear to be vulnerable to her. In any case, Mycroft’s his one safe haven, his one secure anchor—and he can’t bring himself to go back to Mycroft as a loser. He’s got to win…

Only he doesn’t. He blows it seven ways to Sunday. Buggers it up beyond recovery. Opens Mycroft up to inescapable vulnerability in the process: all laid out pretty as you please by a gloating Magnussen. He who owns Mary owns John, and thus Sherlock, and thus Mycroft. And Sherlock knows it’s true, because Mycroft just broke all their rules to tell him so, even if Sherlock couldn’t figure out what to do with the gift and the love.

Somewhere in there, with the framing of Mycroft, I have to sort the weave of Mary/John/Sherlock. And, yes, I kind of do mean the “slash” in that presentation. Sherlock may always be the non-sexually-involved partner, but they really did write a three person bond, and it’s not only counterpoint to the Mycroft arc, it’s all part and parcel of the same tapestry.

Ok. As a very, very rough thesis: If “Scandal” was thematically “Sherlock and love,” then Season three is very specifically Sherlock trying to figure out how to “dance” love, and with whom, only to
make a serious mess of it this time out. He blows it so many ways.

Maybe next season he’ll be allowed to do a bit better? Or just lick his wounds and start to heal before he tries again in Season 5?

Sub-arc: Lestrade and Molly.

With some regret to Molstrade fans, I have to say, I think I just worked out why Lestrade and Molly don’t read as attracted to me, even in this more “intimate” season. It’s an odd one, though: people may want to think about it.

One of the things that came out all the way back in “Scandal” was that Molly and Lestrade are apparently confidants—to the extent that Molly knows some of what’s going on in Lestrade’s marriage. Enough so that she knows where he’s supposed to be over Christmas, and he feels free to add on that the where is dictated by the why with the wife: Molly already knows they’re having trouble and needs no further reference.

It’s not surprising Sherlock knows about it—he’s Sherlock, and he’s nosy. It’s also not surprising John knows: he’s Sherlock’s buddy and he appears to at least be on comfortable “mates” terms with Lestrade. Between the two knowledge appears inevitable.

It’s not inevitable—or even that likely—between Lestrade and Molly unless they’re also friends and to some degree confidants. Bottom line is that even as laid-back a man as Lestrade often appears to be is unlikely to sing sob stories about his marriage falling apart to a woman right in the sexual sweet-spot in age, looks, and social status unless he’s either actively fishing for sympathy from a potential replacement partner, or is on really solid “platonic friends” standing. But there’s no indication, in spite of his awareness of her dress, or his protectiveness of her—getting her a drink, trying to keep Sherlock from being a snot to her—that he’s trying to attract her attention sexually. He “reads” neutral in terms of his goals, and she reads as neutral in regards to hers. They’re not hitting on each other, they’re swapping personal information like moderately close friends.

There are many reasons that limit may be in place. They may both be insanely good at covering attraction. But generally, people aren’t that good. Which leads to the next issue: They feel comfortable discussing Sherlock together in Season Three, and Lestrade feels comfortable asking Molly about how serious she is with Tom. He and she are comfortable sitting together at the wedding—indeed, closer than Tom and Molly are sitting. But in spite of that proximity, there’s no feeling of shifting sexual dynamics between Molly, Tom, or Lestrade. No testosterone displays between either of the two men (well, possibly on Tom’s part, wanting to take a guess at the solution to “The Bloody Guardsman.” But there’s no sense at all that either Molly or Lestrade see it as a competition in any way.

Here’s the thing, Lestrade knows Molly was/is crazy for Sherlock. And she almost has to know he knows. Their conversations almost treat it as assumed knowledge that does not affect their friendship, any more than information about Lestrade’s failing marriage affects their friendship. It’s not an emotionally charged issue between them. Lestrade’s not pining or competing. Molly’s not defensive or sorry about trotting her thing for Sherlock out in front of someone she considers a possible suitor.

The writers, to me, do not appear to be writing UST, and the actors do not appear to be portraying UST. And they’re not showing UST in exactly the kinds of situation where UST shows up: when men and women who are attracted to each other nonetheless can’t immediately do anything about
it due to conflicting suitors/spouses/commitments. The times when men and women who are attracted to each other are nonetheless caught in between possible actions.

There’s no sign either Lestrade or Molly feels trapped in between. Even Lestrade’s open recognition of and admiration for Molly’s dress—it’s not asexual, but it is non-frustrated. He’s not longing with a “hands off” element. He’s admiring, and maybe even a bit stunned—she’s over the top. But he’s not showing any sign of wanting to do anything about it.

To me they’re reading in the non-sexually close range of “brother/sister,” or “gay/bi/strongly-not-attracted best friend” territory. That’s territory that allows for all the reactions we see—his protectiveness, her interest in his vacation plans, their shared concern over Sherlock, their mutual protectiveness and comfort together at the wedding, all combined with the fact that yes, he sees she’s sexy and dressed to the nines, but doesn’t seem to be motivated by it beyond, well….


Which leads me to a question that’s been brooding. Lestrade appears off-key during the wedding. It doesn’t read as anguish over Sherlock or John or Mary. But he’s alone, he’s drinking just a tad much, and while he lights up for bits—and shares that delight with Molly through glances and similar—he’s still coming across as in a sort of wistful limbo.

So, here’s what I find myself thinking. Just as Lestrade tried to protect Molly from Sherlock’s viciousness during Scandal, trying to cut him off, I find myself wondering if Molly, Lestrade’s at least partial confidant, isn’t aware of her friend being blue, and sitting just that bit closer and interacting just that bit more for the same sort of reason: you care about your friend. You know he’s off. You love him, even if you’re not in love with him.

Lestrade and Molly, to me, do not read as being in love with each other, or currently caught up in UST. They read as being friends who do love each other, though, and take a little extra care of each other. Now, that doesn’t rule out late-developing UST. It does change the situation, though, in terms of where and how Molstrade would work out. It would be slow blossoming and late, rather than either of them pining and sobbing behind the bedroom door on late nights.

I do keep coming back to the fact that they appear to be friends in much the same way that Molly and Mrs. Hudson prove to be friends: gossips together, sharing their concern for their friendship circle, and trusting each other very much in that mode. They know private things about each other, they take care of each other, they feel free crossing in and out of each other’s private space—both in terms of conversation and in terms of interaction. They just don’t seem to be pining. At all.

Moffat, Gatiss, and Thompson really do seem to care about all the ways people love each other, including sexual, but not at all fixated on sexual. I find myself really suspecting that Lestrade and Molly are the “man and woman who love each other without being a couple.” If you look at one of the major themes of Sherlock as the exploration of the fact that love and sex are related but non-identical, then it looks like Lestrade and Molly may occupy a particular niche in the dialogue: close without being desirous.

Now, that does leave me muttering and frothing, as Lestrade is definitely involved in some unstated narrative arc of his own and I still can’t work out for sure what it is. But it does help me by reducing my own sense that the arc may be “the falling in love with Molly” arc, that seemed barely possible for him, but just plain extraneous for her. Her story’s far too focused on Sherlock for the foreseeable future. Lestrade had no easy role but pining, and that didn’t seem to fit.
Notes and Jottings

Chapter Summary

Again, just stuff I'm thinking about RE: Sherlock.

Mummy Holmes, in the midst of the grumble-spat with Mycroft, turns and says that someone shot her boy, and if she finds out who she's going to be monstrous. I keep turning back to that, as it keeps coming across as a) Sherlock's "her boy," Mycroft's not. b) Mummy's a blame-layer, and for some reason Mycroft's the target when she's thinking about Sherlock getting hurt: has Sherlock, in her opinion, been hurt before when it's "Mycroft's fault"? c) If Mycroft knew about Mary, would Mary shooting Sherlock become Mycroft's fault in Mummy's reality? What about Sherlock and Mycroft himself? "Whose fault" is it if Mary shoots Sherlock, assuming Mycroft did know about Mary's problems and vendetta, and was happy enough to have her kill Magnussen, sparing him the trouble?

If it's "Mycroft's Fault," what does being monstrous mean?

Why does it feel so much like Sherlock is Mummy's darling--and Mycroft really, really is not? And what if it's actually reversed, and Mycroft's very much Mummy's darling--but also the carrier of all the expectations? Too many to meet, so he's always disappointing her, where Sherlock, the baby's not expected to do so much?

Sexuality and the series: more and more I feel like there really is an ongoing dialogue about love, sex, how they differ, and how many different ways they can be arranged. It's part of why I tend to keep coming back to respect for John's declaration he's straight: it makes the overall structure of the show make sense. He's a straight man who who's emotionally attracted to dangerous people of either sex, but sexually attracted to women. Mary's a person in whom both attractions overlap. Sherlock he can love--but doesn't want to sleep with. Sarah he could sleep with, but she wasn't dangerous enough to be emotionally hooked on. It remains, for me, one of the crucial elements of "Scandal" -- that scene between Irene and John, in which she's quite clear that she's a lesbian, he's quite clear that he's straight, and she then points out that they're both emotionally besotted with Sherlock in spite of that, without altering their orientation. Sherlock fills a vital emotional niche for each of them--someone they can't help but adore.

I love fanfic. I love all the things people do with slash and romance and so on. But I do think we tend to conflate love and sex: it makes for some great, super-turbocharged story lines. But it also sometimes seems to lead to assuming that intense emotional love is, defacto, a sign of a potentially fluid orientation, at least for the purposes of slash. Every passionate relationship becomes more and more likely to be represented as a sexual relationship, as though sex were the perfect short-hand for love. But it's not. Sex can actually be a pretty crappy symbol for love itself, and can be unsuitable to many insanely intense love relationships. It's like we lose a bit of precision and definition in favor of the intensity of a double-double expresso of sexual romance.

That's not a bad thing, necessarily, but it can make it hard to even spot why it might be important for Moffat, Gatiss, and Thompson--and for most of the cast who've spoken--to state that their version of the story is straight-John, and whatever-he-is-leaning-somewhat-straight Sherlock. God knows, there's really very little sign that they grudge fan writers their slash variants--but if I'm right
about what they're doing, then to tell the story they're trying to tell, they need to maintain the difference between passionate love, and passionate sex, insisting that what John and Sherlock have is love-not-sex. Only by insisting on the differences can they maintain the kind of precision at the very core that then carries out through the rest of the show...and that makes things like the ongoing mistaking of John and Sherlock as lovers more than just a crass repeating joke. To have even Mrs. Hudson have a hard time accepting the division between love and sex works. To have John struggling between loving Sherlock like mad, but not being attracted to him, works: as both John and Sherlock, in their own ways, explore what it is to be so emotionally intertwined without the easy answer of being sexually attached makes a life-long story, in this culture. Having someone like Mary as part of the narrative complicates and expands the story, illustrating that John *loves* her and Sherlock for the same reasons, but is attracted to her rather than Sherlock because love and sex are not the same thing: they're often allied, but they're just not identical, ever.

We're a sexually romantic culture. We like to conflate love and sex. We tend to imply that sex without love is wrong, and sometimes we even reverse that and seem to be saying that love without sex is a bit questionable, too. But only by recognizing that they're different can you really understand all the really weird ways they can interact.

Lestrade's arc: It's really bothering me, because I'm fairly sure that there is an unstated narrative implied, but I'm jiggered if I can work it out. I can say that, step by step, it does seem to be leading us into Mycroft's World, and even into Mycroft's office. I can say that it seems more and more to do odd things to our understanding of "good old Greg Lestrade." It even brings things like his real name into question, leaving it almost as odd that Sherlock can't recall "Greg" as it is that John doesn't know the real name of his wife. People aren't who we think they are, and knowing that doesn't tell us anything but that we're ignorant.

Speaking of which, nice little detail: Dance music at the end of "The Sign of Three." "Oh, What a Night." Gorgeous little foreshadow of Mary's plot line, and foreshadowing of Mary's eventual death/loss. Check the lyrics. Just...nice. Such elegant little details.

Addendum: No indication Mycroft visits Sherlock in hospital. Mary, meanwhile, is missing for a chunk of time between the shooting and rendezvousing with John in the hospital, after Sherlock's been operated on. Must admit I wonder if she reports to Mycroft. Must admit, I wonder if Mycroft doesn't show up because Sherlock's shooting is a catastrophe, one that would have broken his heart, and one he feels guilty for--not to mention fearing Sherlock will deduce with one look at his face. It... is an intriguing question. Where was Mary? Where was Mycroft? Where was Lestrade, who shows up late in the game ready to take pictures?
What Do We Know About Lestrade? What Can We Reasonably Hypothesize?

Chapter Summary

Just trying to firm this all up a bit...

1. Lestrade absolutely does work for the Met.
2. He survived the chaos following RF intact, with his team--as did Donovan. Anderson appears to have only been ditched because he went obsessive, and even then Lestrade was willing to try to save him.
2.b We can reasonably hypothesize that Lestrade's the one who recommended Anderson to Mycroft: it's a clear and direct link, we know Lestrade was at least seeming interested in helping poor Anderson out, no matter how crazy he was, and we know that Lestrade's got a link to Mycroft. So it makes sense.
3. Lestrade absolutely does work for/with Mycroft in regards to Sherlock.
4. We know he was having marriage problems.
4.b. We hypothesize he's now divorced, based on the loss of the wedding ring. I'd rate that one high probability, myself: the PTB made sure we saw the ring, saw the tan mark, and continue to see the lack of ring.
5. He works closely with Donovan, but they appear to have no sexual link. It seems at least possible that this is not Donovan's preference--she's definitely not a respecter of marriage vows and she's definitely het and she's definitely got issues with Sherlock that appear to include jealousy--and she's got some kind of emotional investment in Lestrade AND in his loyalty to Sherlock. It's just not clear quite what/how that works.
6. He's got a fairly close relationship with Molly. Again, there appears to be no sexual element.
7. He is shown drinking often enough to set an American-conditioned viewer on mild alert. Not panic mode--IMO they're right on the edge of what would be a dramatic cue, though, in the US. Counter point, he's not yet been decisively shown as drunk ever. Certainly not pissed in the sense that Sherlock and John are in SoT. Counterpoint: he definitely recognizes them as "lightweights" for not making it to closing. Not sure where that puts him, though, as I'd tease them about the same thing, and I can't make it past two beers without beginning to get tiddly.
8. We know he's capable of being peculiarly defensive/protective of Sherlock. He's willing to make serious breaks with his obligations as a Met officer to fulfill that commitment to Sherlock's well-being: resisting Donovan and Anderson's accusations during RF, warning Sherlock that there's trouble brewing in RF, warning Sherlock and John that there's an arrest immanent in RF, leaving a bust to protect Sherlock in SoT.
9. We know he carries a gun when he should not be legally allowed to do so as a Met officer. (Hounds)
10. We know Mycroft can convince him to either leave his vacation or leave his work to attend to Sherlock's needs. (Hounds)
11. We know he can be called from work to come rescue a drugged Sherlock from Irene's place. (Scandal)
12. We know he takes pictures of Sherlock during Scandal, and appears ready to take more pictures during Vow.
13. We know he's got Mycroft's number and he's got access to Mycroft's office.
14. We know for some reason Sherlock can't or won't remember Greg's first name. It does leave me wondering if he's used more than one first name during Sherlock's experience of Lestrade. (Did
they work an undercover case, for example, where Greg's cover name was something else?)

15. He at least was going to do Christmas with his wife in Dorset, suggesting one or both have roots in the West Counties—which would allow Rupert Graves to be using some variant of his native accent (Somerset). Not being British, I'm just plain unable to spot regional accents very well, but as near as I can tell Graves is running something that could be West Counties merging with Estuary, with an educated overgloss of mild RP to blur it a bit. But that may just be me knowing Graves' home dialect was Somerset/West Counties, and trying to work from there.

16. Lestrade does not appear jealous of John's relationship with Sherlock, or vice versa. Which does suggest his committment to Sherlock's not pining love or competitive lust. If anything Sherlock and John appear to amuse Lestrade in a fond way. (grin) They keep him laughing and entertained.

17. He doesn't like the implication that he's just Mycroft's sock puppet.
18. He doesn't like Sherlock forgetting his name.
19. He already knows Sherlock's address and drops on by the very morning Sherlock moves in to Baker Street. I've always found that...odd. Even considering the professional connections, do you tell your work your new address the very morning you move in unexpectedly, when they've got your phone number on autodial already? I've never quite known what to make of Lestrade just breezing into 221b during Study in Pink, when John's just barely even agreeing to move in.
20. Lestrade knows about Sherlock's drug use.
21. He's willing to use the drug bust to lever Sherlock's good behavior.
22. He can make it stick. Of all that string, I find that the most suggestive, somehow. Sherlock has absolutely no doubt Lestrade will carry it to its logical conclusion if he has to: in that situation Sherlock treats Lestrade as the unstoppable, implacable force even Sherlock can't resist.
23. In spite of the fact that Lestrade can force Sherlock's will, and does so, and taht he works with Mycroft, and Sherlock knows it, Sherlock considers Lestrade a valued friend--one of three he'll make sacrifices for.
24. Lestrade can push Sherlock into doing things Sherlock would not think of or even choose to do, in terms of social niceties. Lestrade is able to coerce Sherlock into making the apology tape for John's birthday.
25. By extension, Lestrade cares about and takes care of Sherlock, much as John does.
26. Painfully obvious: Lestrade's insanely patient and sweet tempered about the (many) loons he deals with. Mycroft, Sherlock, Donovan, Anderson, even John in some ways are all a bit not-good, when you think about it. Lestrade still shines through, capable of flashes of anger and annoyance, capable of being pissed as hell--but never seeming to carry a grudge or really even take his own anger all that seriously. You cuss--and then you move on with a grin.
27. It's not clear at all if Lestrade knew Sherlock was alive rather than dead. It is clear that his return is welcomed with real pleasure.
28. Come to think of it, Lestrade may be the only person in the show who's capable of a spontaneous bear-hug without second thoughts. Unlike Mycroft, Sherlock, or John, Lestrade doesn't appear to have a physical personal zone a yard or more deep.

Addendum:

29. During the search for Sherlock, Lestrade specifies that he knows three of Sherlock's bolt holes. Mycroft responds that he knows five. To me this suggests they're speaking for two separate organizations with two separate databases, again pushing my "Lestrade's either MI5 or he's some form of Met undercover ops person" buttons.

30. Was quitting smoking in SiP. Didn't seem to smoke again until Hearse (check that, people, I may have missed an event). In any case, by Hearse he's back on cigarettes and further showing the movements and patterns of someone used to using often: he's got the "search for the pack," the almost automatic extraction and flip, the effortless combination of cupped hand and lighter down
cold. Where Mycroft "smokes like a beginner,“ (And Sherlock's mostly right, there), Lestrade
smokes like a long-term user.

Anyone think of any other points to add to the list? By all means, toss 'em into the heap if you can
think of more clear elements to add to Lestrade's profile.
Chapter Summary

Mycroft, Lestrade, Vow.

Thanks to Ariane DeVere's site, there is a good transcript of "Vow" up. From it I get this nice little extract:

John and Greg are on their way out of the hospital.
LESTRADE: He’s got three known bolt holes ...
(They walk away from the hospital, Greg holding his phone to his ear.)
LESTRADE: Parliament Hill, Camden Lock and Dagmar Court.

MYCROFT: Five known bolt holes.
(He is sitting at his desk in his office at The Diogenes Club, looking down at a satellite map on his computer. The page is headed “UGLY DUCKLING”. A note in the top right corner of the map reads, “TARGET LOCATED. TRACKING ...” and a point on the map is highlighted. As the tracker appears to be somewhere around Warsaw in Poland, Mycroft is apparently multi-tasking. Greg is standing at the other side of the table.)
MYCROFT: There’s the blind greenhouse in Kew Gardens and the leaning tomb in Hampstead Cemetery.
(He looks up at Greg and dismissively waves him away. [Mystrade fans pout with annoyance.])

I do pout a bit. But not that much. What I mainly do, honestly, is brood that it's very, very quick for Greg to leap from being at the hospital with John and at Mycroft's office with Mycroft.

Then it occurred to me: what about the possibility that "Greg in the office" is actually "Greg in Mycroft's equivalent of the Mind Palace"? That he's got a resident spot in Mycroft's mind. In that role, the dismissal gesture becomes the exact parallel of Sherlock moving something aside when he no longer needs it there. But at the same time, it suggests--going on the film footage--that Greg's truly resident, there as a presence from the moment he contacts Mycroft until they move on, cutting the connection. I find I like the idea that whether Greg's actually been in Mycroft's office or not, in mental mode Mycroft imagines him there--that he's as much a player in Mycroft's mind as Mycroft, Molly, and Anderson are in Sherlock's mind.

It makes sense of the weird timing, it makes sense of the dismissal gesture--so like Sherlock's--and it makes a lovely, textured emotional sense of Lestrade there watching Mycroft, almost seeming to loom in his darkened office.

And while we're at it--

"Ugly Duckling?" Sherlock? And the moving, targetted image: that won't be Sherlock, they haven't found him yet. Is it Lestrade's phone signal being tracked? Who's the "Ugly Duckling?"
Sherlock who both Mycroft and Lestrade want to see become a "good man"? Lestrade who's not quite what he seems? Someone else entirely?

And, just possibly--though unlikely, to my mind--does Mycroft actually know where Sherlock is? Is he the moving dot targetted on screen?

Does it work?

Addendum:

Bing. Just noted, reviewing "Vow," that in both the Redbeard section and the imagined confrontation with "Liar" Mary, Sherlock's Mind Palace looks a lot like it may be an extension of Mycroft's own physical wainscotted estate. No proof, but it looks of a type. As we still don't know how it is that Mycroft's living in oak wainscotting and ivied halls, while Mummy and Father are in a far more modest house, it's possible still that the childhood home was Mycroft's place. Or that Mycroft's so strong an influence on Sherlock that Mycroft's place influences Sherlock's Mind Palace.
More Lestradian and Mycroftian mumbling.

Chapter Summary

As Advertised.

Season one: Middle episode. Everyone notices that Lestrade's missing from this one. I haven't noticed many people noticing that both Lestrade and Mycroft are missing. Both without explanation. Both after John's come into Sherlock's life. Which will be followed in "The Great Game" by Mycroft pretty flat out testing John in a "are you a possible leg-work man" role, and John pretty much failing. I've always wondered why they chose to call the episode "The Great Game." Yes, yes, I know Sherlock and Moriarty duke it out, gaming each other like mad. But "The Great Game" has an existing roughly contemporary meaning (see Kipling's Kim) indicating international espionage. Puns work best when both potential meanings fit the use, so that they jangle off each other. So--possible arc for Lestrade and Mycroft for the season. John shows up. As the two men overseeing Sherlock's function in his role as both citizen-detective and agent-in-London, they choose to step back (with possible sub-plot for a romantic arc, but there's nothing to clarify here). It does make sense for them to step out of the way and see how the two get along without Lestrade or Mycroft interfering. They're OK...but they work badly with Dimmock. Of course it could just be a few days worth of the two sitting and doing evaluations on the new situation. I still think it's both interesting and meaningful that they're both missing from only one episode, and it's the one immediately after Sherlock gets a partner.

Season two: Scandal gives us Mycroft pondering love and loss with Sherlock as the focal point provoking contemplation (caring is not an advantage, etc.) Lestrade, meanwhile, is breaking up with his wife in a quiet, rather intriguingly low-key way. We discover for the first time officially that Mycroft and Lestrade work together, but don't have it confirmed. Lestrade is shown using a gun he should not have as a Met DI, under circumstances where a Met DI ought not use a gun. I really have to track Reichenbach again, closely: we've got Mycroft lying through his teeth to John, and at the same time apologizing for it and trying to set John up to provide Sherlock with semi-intelligent backup. WE've got Lestrade attempting a frantic and doomed defense of Sherlock within the Met, unable to block the perfect storm that is Moriarty, Donovan, and Anderson all pushing in the same direction. Each is doing what one would expect of men who know what's going on but have a role to play that they can't risk breaking. Both give small hints they may actually exceed their roles. It's...challenging. So tricky when you know characters are in positions requiring they lie--when are they just being themselves, and when are they playing roles they can't break out of?

Season three: Massive heaps of ambigious and confusing Lestrade stuff. Equal tons of ambiguous and confusing Mycroftian stuff. Mycroft's lonely but doesn't keep goldfish. Lestrade's moping at weddings. Both are playing roles within roles...only we don't know when they're themselves and when they're "in character" in the parts they have to play. Lestrade is either stupid--or he's got conflicting demands *and* is willing to play comic relief to Sherlock when it suits the role. Sherlock amuses me by refering to Lestrade as "Scotland Yard," and comments that he's a detective "in a broad sense." Which is his official role combined with a true statement that his core identity isn't really detective, it's undercover operative. We're given that lovely little confirmation of Mycroft and Lestrade working together--and, yes. I'm back to being convinced Lestrade's in Mycroft's office, and am now asking why the director and cinematographer opted for "infinite reflections of Lestrade" as part of that tiny little window into their roles. Mycroft doesn't show up
at the hospital. Lestrade does.

They're driving me nuts, as I am quite capable of putting all that together into some lovely fics, that would be logical and canon compliant--but which are currently really just extrapolation from circumstantial evidence. The hard data hasn't yet come in.

Must review nine--NINE dratted episodes to try to sort out what sneaky-bad data's been embedded because I didn't know before to look for it. Sigh....
Pet Frustrations

Chapter Summary

Thinking about readers' tendencies, especially in long-arc works.

One of the most surprising things I ever faced as a fanfic writer, was creating an original character who was, by intention, written to be a loving, but tough foil for the leading character of a fic. I adored her. She was tough, smart, crotchety, tart, clever, sly, and had a heart big as space and all pure gold. She just happened to be on the other side than the lead in a couple of critical areas. Not even bitterly so. Just—in conflict. Fairly mannerly, funny conflict, at that.

Got back letters almost before she’d been introduced from people despising her, before they even knew her. She wasn't there sycophantically adoring the lead, and she was annoying the b'jabbers out of the lead, and oh, there were people who were ready to destroy her instantly, less than a chapter into her arcs. It was my first real headlong experience of the degree to which readers and viewers a) side with their POV character or lead beyond all reason (Yes, the lead was WRONG in this instance), and b) go on appearances and fast evaluations, rather than questioning what they're seeing. And oh, do they expect their "good" characters to simply spout their preferred positions, even when it makes no sense.

There are all sorts of ways these expectations play out. In historical romance at present, there are now entire herds of heroes and heroines demonstrating entirely ahistorical attitudes toward love, sex, gender roles, economic roles, toward race, toward dress, toward birth control... Readers want dress and mannerisms wrapped around the political and social types of the present, and have cat fits if they don't get 'em. "Good" characters are supposed to be PC, nice at all times, and those in secondary roles are supposed to support the "core" players...except for brief spats to provide short-term conflict. Characters who love each other are supposed to move heaven and earth to fulfill the needs and wishes of those they love, even when it's out of character for either of them. If they don't do this, they're regarded as being either "bad" characters, or worse, badly written characters.

Here's the trouble: first, it's a horribly dishonest way of writing characters. Sorry, it is. Even heroes are wrong, sometimes, and even their friends should be free to think so and resist like crazy, including being grumpy, rude, and outright insulting about it. Sometimes an apparent antagonist is actually a good advisor who isn't a yes-man. Even more, even good characters may not be PC characters. They may not think what you wish they'd think, or feel what you wish they'd feel.

This is particularly true in well written, complex works, that show characters developing and growing over a long arc.

One area I tend to think about this in respect to Sherlock, is in terms of both John and Sherlock's reactions to homosexuality. On the one hand, both are PC: "It's all good." They're well-trained, aware men of their era. City men. Metrosexual in their own way. By default, it has to be "all good." Then, though, there are the further layers. John's more than just peeved at the ongoing assumption that he and Sherlock are gay--he comes across as angry and uncomfortable. It's all good until someone thinks he's gay. Then it's...less good. A bit not-good. Or Sherlock--it's all good, until he's angry with his brother. Then he plays "God Save the Queen as Mycroft goes off to face an unpleasant interview with a superior 'Friend.' Who may be Her Majesty, but the more one thinks
about it, the more it feels like Sherlock sending a mocking "good luck, thweetheart" to his brother, who's going to have to deal with some real career difficulties. Or it's "Yes, we've come to see the queen" in Buckingham Palace, with Sherlock and John very much acting like sniggering, mean-eyed middle-school boys as they face off with Mycroft. Or it's Sherlock's snippy comments about not knowing or talking with women when he's been beaten at deduction by Big Brother.

One can take that as the authors being homophobic..."They're writing John and Sherlock badly." Or one can take it as the writers writing complex characters, who are well-intentioned, but far from perfect in their relationship to homosexuality. Trying to be PC, but far from entirely there yet.

The trouble is, if you take the first position, and demand writers write "good" characters who do and say what you yourself think is PC-perfect, you leave them no room to grow, and you end up writing propaganda lit: it's dogmatically "true" for your given understanding of truth, but "false" for how flawed and human "good" characters really often are. And it leaves no room for growth arcs. No room to try to explore imperfections and why they might exist. No room for watching mutually falible characters come to understand each other a bit better over time. Or forgive each other their imperfections.

There's a tendency for people to play "grab the diagnosis" too quickly. Just because a flaw is demonstrated by a character, doesn't mean the writer is promoting that character flaw—even if it's demonstrated by a "good" lead. Only really simplistic allegories and propaganda work insist on the "good" characters being saccharine Little Lord Fauntleroy goody-goodies, and "tag" the bad guys specifically because they are the only ones holding the "wrong" beliefs or feelings. Even a set-piece chunk of propaganda like "Uncle Tom's Cabin" is more complicated than that, for heaven's sake!

Similarly apparent antagonism between the leads and other characters does not always indicate the other characters are, or should be seen as, "bad." That's especially true in the sense of piling on layers of negative traits not actually seen and explained in canon.

Mycroft is, again, a great example of this. Some early fanfic shows fan writers instantly snatching him up as the "bad guy" and heaping on piles of extended negative traits based on minimal cues dropped in the episodes. We move from someone who does use the CCTV system to observe Sherlock's associates to someone who plants bugs in Sherlock's apartment; from someone openly concerned with Sherlock's well-being but leaving him a free life in almost all ways, to someone who tries to control his every move; from someone who snipes regularly with Little Brother to someone who's presumed to hate him. Comments like "caring is not an advantage" become engrained in the character in direct conflict with actual recognition of the actions that surround them: a brother who's actually always shown as caring very much for Sherlock comes to be written as uncaring because of the sniping, the personal reserve and control, and Sherlock's explosive annoyance. (Sherlock, the lead, is angry with Mycroft, therefore by "love the lead, hate his enemies" logic, Mycroft must be wrong, not Sherlock...)

I suspect it's impossible to completely get past the native inclination to throw our hearts over the fence for our leads—to love them, to associate ourselves with them, to want them to reflect *our* virtues and reject *our* notion of vices. To rail against their opponents without questioning whether the opponents are wrong or right. We give our leads empty sympathy we'd like given to ourselves. We ask them to demonstrate our most dearly held virtues and eschew our most despised vices.

But it's important to remember that too much of that when actually played out in stories makes for **REALLY BAD STORIES**. I'm sorry for shouting like that, it does. It makes for cardboard characters, all the good guys cut out from one Perfect PC cookie cutter, all the bad guys being used
to conflate differences of opinion with a sort of grotesque moral leprosy. It's camp, it's clumsy, and most of all it leaves us with stories in which only plaster saints are allowed to be good in the first place.

It's far more interesting to know John, who does believe in the PC "it's all good," still has to struggle with a desire not to be seen as gay--and to watch him try to understand what that means when he adores Sherlock to pieces. Watching John work with his own inner gender assumptions is interesting, and worthy of compassion and admiration. Watching Sherlock, who in some ways doesn't even care about sexuality, start throwing slurs at Mycroft when he's threatened is itself fascinating, suggesting he's scrambling for anything his subconscious thinks will hurt Big Brother, and leaving open the question of why he wants to hurt Big Brother, and why Mycroft's sexuality is an open sore he can pick at. It's honest: it's the kind of real flawed detail even heroes must work through. And it makes for great, complex stories, and great, complex characters.

The character I wrote for fanfic became a favorite later. People ended up loving her as they began to understand her prickly, loving, cantankerous self. Not all readers. There were people who, to the bitter end, could abide no character who failed to bow down before the Wisdom and Righteousness of the Leading Character. I still struggle with that a bit. I keep wanting to go back and tell them that they're missing the point.

I try to tell myself that it would only be the reverse of their own error, though: readers, like leads and their antagonists, have flaws and blind spots, and you can't go rubbing them out or making too vast an assumption based on those superficial elements. The good people, like good writing, have layers, meanings, flawed surfaces, troubled depths, shortcomings, and you have to wait and see, not just jump to conclusions--about the characters, their creators, or their creators' ultimate intentions in allowing those flaws to exist and be seen.
Orientation, sexuality, and ambiguity in Sherlock. First attempt/rough draft.

Chapter Summary

Working on a set of ideas. Very rough draft. Messy. But interesting as all get out, at least to me. Having fun writing it.

Thanks to a wide range of discussions, material research runs (for example, re-watching "The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes" and reading articles about the movie and about Billy Wilder), and thinking hard about how sexuality is portrayed on *Sherlock*--and how those associated talk about it--I'm beginning to form some complex ideas about what's going on, and why certain things are important.

I'm going to start with a core point: John's portrayed as strongly self-identified straight, and more than slightly uncomfortable to angry at being repeatedly perceived as in a gay relationship with Sherlock. It's a point made over and over in the show, it's a point held to by Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman, it's a point indicated by Gatiss and Moffat. John's self-identified straight, he experiences himself as straight, and he experiences his relationship with Sherlock as being non-sexual...at least on his side. Over time he's become increasingly aware that Sherlock's "whatever." But there's no sign John has ever, to date, stopped self-identifying his own personal life experience as that of a straight man.

Before people start piling on and pointing out all the reasons for the audience to find that a bit odd, I think it's important to point something out: every single one of us would be justifiably offended if anyone came along and told us to our faces that we just didn't know what we really were. Whether we're gay, straight, bi, transexual, ace, we know that how we experience our lives, and how we self-identify, *IS* who we are, no matter how poorly others see us fitting into that paradigm. It's not about whether we play our orientations convincingly so much as it's about how we experience our lives.

That said, yes: many people experience fluid changes in their perception of their sexuality throughout their lives. This can range from period of life in which people are bi-curious, settling ultimately for one polar orientation or another, to slowly developing awareness of denial of orientation (the man or woman who realizes after years that they've been in the closet to everyone, including themselves), to sudden discovery of sexual options never experienced or even imagined prior to meeting the right triggering person. One can look at John and think, "Well, he just hasn't noticed elements of his personality that don't fit his paradigm." But that still brings us back to the core issue: John, a man in his forties, with extensive exposure to different cultures, with at least some level of PC commitment to "it's all good," experiences himself as being sexually, physically attracted to women, not men. At some level it's pretty much mandatory to accept that he's not a complete moron with no level of self-awareness at all. At some level it's mandatory to respect the self-identification of a person as being pretty much what they're experiencing. Yeah, leave wiggle-room for them to discover more about themselves, but John's showing every sign of experiencing a life wired to recognize women as sexy and wired to try to then do something active and sexy about that. He's not what one can call a raving success...but frankly, the number of men who qualify as raving successes with women is small. Most men are lucky to be "ok with women." Or "more or less all right if your standards are not to screamingly high."
The same can be said of most straight women regarding men. There's a *reason* we all adore Molly Hooper, for goodness' sake. Being charismatic, sexy, eternally switched on, sultry, steamed up, and alluring to the opposite sex is a nice idea. But John's apparent lack of luck pulling women and keeping them pulled doesn't automatically do a single thing to undo the argument that he's straight. He's a nice guy, real nice mensch but a bit of a schlub, too, and in most fiction he'd be John Everyguy. Likes women, doesn't have all that much luck at landing 'em. Add in that he's got a crazy-insane roommate who's jealous of his time and attention, even if not inclined to jump his bones, and whose social boundaries are not set in such a way as to keep him from willfully sabotaging John's relationships, and you've got classic straight-guy nightmare sit-com scenario.

John's straight.

He self-identifies straight. He experiences life as straight. He doesn't appear to question that straightness. He's not in the market for any guy who's saying, to quote Paul Simon's "Gumboots," "You don't feel you could love me. But I feel you could." From what we've seen he'd find that intrusive, presumptuous, pushy, and even a bit creepy and stalkery. As would any of us.

Ten years from now they could be writing scripts with John laughing in amazement that he once thought of himself that way. But in the here and now of the fiction, John's straight for all practical and ethical meanings of the word, with a faint space left over for wanting to see his Kinsey scores and insisting on holding the option in reserve that he may discover differently. But other than that, within canon he's being written and played as a self-identifying straight, and that's pretty much crucial.

Why?

Because if John isn't straight, while adoring Sherlock, then the story becomes a story *about* being gay, or becoming gay, but the gayness becomes the center of the story... and at this point I'm quite convinced that Moffat and Gatiss want to write about love, including gay love, without making Teh Gay be what it's about. It's about love, and sex, and self awareness, and how that can be rigid or fluid, and what sorts of strange permutations can occur, and all still be just...ordinary. Not the point. Not the center of the screen.

If John is straight, and Sherlock is "whatever he is," then the fact that they adore each other is ferociously amorphic. No clear shape. No "gayness" to take center stage. No clear role open for a "type" of relationship. Sherlock's something strange and not-quite-anything, John's straight--and these two men still love each other so much that it's almost overwhelmingly tempting to invoke gayness to have a category to throw them into. A label to establish what they "really" are.

But Moffat and Gatiss and Cumberbatch and Freeman are refusing to give anyone a clear label. They are REFUSING to write a gay story, or a straight story, or a bi story, or any identifiable story but "love."

Frankly, going nine episodes writing love more and more intensely, while refusing to allow the characters to ever waver into a neat pigeon-hole, has to be demanding reserves of discipline the size of the Grand Canyon. People think in pigeon holes, whether they are inclusive pigeon-holes (like me!) or exclusive pigeon-holes (NOT like me!). Writing and acting a relationship that defies pigeon-holes is not cheap and easy work.

Why do it?

Well, let's start with a Mark Gatiss quote: Here.

He's dreaming of a point at which having the lead be gay is a non-focal element in the story. It's
just one more detail, not the point of the picture. A point at which it's normal for character X to come home, get a cuppa, and shoot the breeze with a spouse who's same sex--and it's not an attention grabber.

That's not exactly what is being done in Sherlock, and, yet, it kind of is. Because the core love/domestic relationship between John and Sherlock could be anyone's couple relationship. Irene nails it: regardless of sex, emotionally John and Sherlock are a couple. They're a couple in which being "gay" is not being allowed to be the point. It's not part of the text. Love and partnership are the text. Bedroom hijinks and orientation are not being allowed to grab center stage from the more critical issues of love, friendship, loyalty, living together, struggling with relationship. By making John straight and Sherlock mostly celibate with leanings in all sorts of directions and distinct panic over most of them, they've just plain ruled out having ANY label attached to the relationship. They shed identification like good non-stick sheds fried eggs. The way to avoid being too "on the nose" with gender issues is to screw up the identifying markers so very badly that a relationship doesn't ever quite fit anywhere.

Moffat and Gatiss may not have a achieved Gatiss' dream of a gay relationship that's almost invisible in its ordinariness, but they've achieved a prototype in which such chameleon lack of focal interest can be imagined and explored. They can write the stories that would be powerful straight couple stories or gay couple stories or, at the moment, even weird poly trine stories, because they've just plain ripped the bloody b'jabbers out of all the most obvious social landmarks.

And the core of that involves splitting John's motivations in two, and making both of them insanely clear and strong--and pointed in opposing directions. John's sexually oriented straight while being emotionally oriented in a consuming love relationship with Sherlock, and with Sherlock's female doppelganger, Mary. He has to be both, strongly and clearly. It's part of what makes Mary useful: she acts as one more element preventing John and Sherlock from sliding into a clear category of attraction.

(Nota self: contemplate whether this means that they need, and will continue to need, wild cards like Janine and Molly and Mary and Sarah, etc, to keep throwing both Sherlock and John out of safe "slash or gay love story" territory. Gut instinct is yes: to maintain ambiguity they will need to keep enacting ambiguity... (mutteres to self "Oh, dear, are they even consciously playing Holmescest tropes just to keep the pigeon-holes empty? Or are they using Mycroft as a gravity well to shake the "love but not sex" element, keeping one more aspect from ever fully stabilizing?))

By keeping the relationship from ever becoming "about" a romance/sexual relationship with a recognized form and orientation, they leave infinite room to explore, grow, play out different scenarios, without imposing any of the expectations a clear orientation comes burdened with. The John-and-Sherlock thing becomes a sort of anonymous mask anyone can fit, playing out relationships anyone can recognize without necessarily claiming for any one love-type.

Further, it allows them to play out other arcs that mirror, reverse, shadow, comment on the core issue of "love a person," rather than "love a gender."

Here's something I caught reading someone else's blog: John and Molly both start the season in relationship with Sherlock substitutes. John loves Mary because her personality is Sherlock: because Sherlock's person is who John loves, the relationship ultimately works. Molly's tied herself to Tom because he physically resembles Sherlock--but unlike Mary, he doesn't share Sherlock's personality elements. He's not a core reflection of anything but Sherlock's appearance, and he disappears quickly and without a trace. You don't love a body, you love a person.

But within that, there really is another element. John self-identifies as straight, and that's not
meaningless. He's comfortable marrying Mary, because he's physically inclined to sex as well as love with Mary. Right now he does not see himself as being called to Sherlock in the same way. Sexuality has little to say about who you love. It can have a lot to say about how you end up expressing that love.

Mycroft and Sherlock adore each other, for all their struggles, But "Holmescest" plots aside, there's no sign so far they're either of them canonically called to jump each other's bones. Yet we're being told that Mycroft at least is sexually active (and strongly implied gay), and that Sherlock's at least sexually vulnerable and at least marginally implied straight (Irene, Molly, Janine, and his porn preferences all suggesting such while not demanding it be strong or exclusive. One could place him almost anywhere on the Kinsey scale but at the poles.) Who you love can be almost anyone. How you love gets complicated--by kinship, by social constraints, by age (consider John's dismay at hearing Mrs. Hudson's wild, sexy escapades with the late Mr. Hudson!), by expectations.

Sherlock, the most ambiguous, sits in the center. John, whose "love" is sexually straight but emotionally "danger", complicates Sherlock. Molly reflects John in another mode. Mary reflects Sherlock. Sherlock and Mycroft dance out another dance that's not sex, but kinship. And Lestrade?

Lestrade's their wild card. The more I look the more I'm convinced. I am beginning to think that if Sherlock's ambiguity without the likelihood of sexual action, Lestrade's the same ambiguity with the assumption that he can and will become sexually involved at various times--without the viewer being easily able to decide where he'd land.


Lestrade silently asks why anyone would think they knew what he'd choose. Part of it comes from the genius casting of Rupert Graves: professionally and personally great for just plain screwing the hell out of anyone's automatic gender expectations. Graves takes your standard "gender ambiguous" David Bowie/Michael Jackson tropes--the asexual, genderless enigma--and dumps them in the nearest skip. He's absolutely male, plays a "bloke" like a dream, is convincing when you suggest he's in a straight marriage--and just as convincing if you suggest he could skew bi, or gay, or ace. He's one of very few actors out there who really does manage to laugh in the face of pigeon holes without laughing in the face of sexuality or sensuality. He's a "good man." He's just not an easily assigned one.

Me, I can't swear it, but so help me, if I had a place to put down a money bet I'd put one down on Graves being chosen because he's perfect as a univeral delight--an aspect of the actor brought up regularly by cast and creators alike. Everyone thinks Rupert Graves is dishy--male, female, old, young. Gatiss suggests that pretty much any sane persojn would like to kiss Rupert Graves. Graves as a private individual lives a straight marriage while not turning his back on former non-straight relationships, and while supporting GLBT groups and issues. Professionally trying to find what he's NOT played in terms of orientation is easier than figuring what he has played.

Wild card. Possibly the tarot fool in search of his own orientation. Or in search of The Core relationship that will be his "John and Sherlock" couple match.

John's straight. Sherlock's anything--but mostly he's willfully and determinedly nothing. Mycroft's gay. Molly's female straight. Irene's lesbian. Mrs. Hudson's last generation's wild girl. Lestrade? The wild card. The character who can surprise you. Whose arc can silently play opposite Sherlock and John's. Who can move in the white spaces. Who can make you ASK. And then ask again.

Sigh. Or not.
I will say, this is a male-oriented narrative. I'm not sure I'd join the people feeling it's non-feminist. I do think it's reliably, firmly centered in male understanding of relationship and gender and the search for love and identity, with women always landing as the "Other."

That's not, in my opinion, a crime. It's kind of inevitable when you get three central male characters--four if you count Lestrade--in a Victorian-based derivative fiction of one of the least female-centered genre series in existence, right up there with Lord of the Ring. I'm actually a bit impressed that Moffat and Gatiss and Thompson have done as well as they've managed at breaking that up a bit, and at least VARYING their images of the Other... and giving her a few opinions, goals, and desires of her own. But they still keep landing in territory where the women's roles are complements of the central male roles.

Again, IMO that's no crime. It's kind of hard to escape once you've got John and Sherlock and Mycroft and Lestrade in play. Fiction forces people's hands far more than is always understood. To reverse the dynamic, you'd have to reverse the central roles and put the men in the role of "other" in relation to female-defined central characters. Those Other Men would promptly fall into archetypal patterns that are old, hackneyed, and inescapable: Father, Brother, Lover, Bastard/Demon Lover, Son, Mentor, King, Fool. The pigeon-holes we cast men into, when women are telling the tale. But it's still important to recognise that, yes, this is a story about men--including men in relation to women, but still, it's guy-centered, and it's got a guy-ish perspective, and women can be commentary within that, but they can't undo it without taking the lead themselves.

(Ponders) Though...

You know. I'd really like it if they could find a way to run a female character or two who really did screw up the assumptions in the same way Sherlock and John mess up all the pigeon-holes. At least a female Lestrade, who muddled all the labels and laughed at them.

Of all the "feminism" fights, that's the one I'd like to see this show take on. A woman whose woman-ness refused to be "other," just "me." Molly might grow into it. Mary? Not so much, I think. But it would be a nice thing to see them take on--as graceful as their escape of the orientation wars, and just as powerful.
Tiny, but OMG...

Chapter Summary

Ok, I'm *trying* to do the full review of the season/series, but got stuck in Vows again, and caught a detail...

The fight occurs with Mycroft in Baker Street. Sherlock attacks Mycroft. John pleads to separate them, and stays talking to Mycroft as Sherlock stalks into the living room. We see Sherlock in silhouette against the front windows. He straightens his jacket, then raises his arms--hands will be near his nose or mouth. As John approaches, he takes a deep inhale, audibly, then turns back.

Here's the thing...I'm not at all sure he's not "supposed" to be snorting. One quick hit, after the fight with Mycroft. That he gets away with, with John none the wiser.

I won't swear it. Well, hell, if that's what it is, they're going out of their way to illustrate a clever, bold user who can pull it off, leaving outsiders always a bit unsure. But--

Add in the weird valances of the interaction with Mycroft. Sherlock pins Mycroft, and appears to really cause pain. But when it ends, it's Mycroft who shoves Sherlock back. Taht could be anger and spite, but if you're beaten, you don't push back. You push back if you had reserves and are angry and frustrated enough to feel the need to demonstrate that you weren't really out of control, you were *Letting* it happen.

Why let it happen? Because Mycroft's not going to beat up his stoned brother in front of John Watson. Not when the real fights are already lost, and Sherlock's a) using and b) committed to the thing with Magnussen, and c) determined to step outside the secure circle of what Baker Street had stood for.

But the other aspect is that Sherlock does absolutely appear to get the jump on Mycroft. Mycroft wasn't expecting the attack, or the pain, or the rejection, and they're all evident in his response.

Meanwhile John, who'd been furious with Sherlock right up until they reach Baker Street, and who was the one who called Mycroft, reverts to being Sherlock's ally and Mycroft's mocker the minute Mycroft goes ballistic over Magnussen. He and Sherlock switch to amused distaste for Mycroft's attempts to keep Magnussen from being associated in any way with Sherlock. From that moment on John's not even talking about using. He's hot for the case, he's fascinated by Janine, but it's as though Mycroft's appeal to pushy authority instantly absolves John of any need to stick to concern over drug use...

Which is REALLY weird, the more one thinks about it. A doctor, of all people, and someone as angry as John was, and he just drops it. No longer his worry. Sherlock's got a case, and it's no longer important...

Even as, if I'm right, Sherlock is snorting right in front of John, and getting away with it.

(grim) Which is quite consistent with the users I've known, and I don't know how much my own experience is coloring that.
Addendum: Oh, and while we're at it?

Appledore. Forbidden knowledge. The golden apple (apple d'or) of forbidden knowledge. Fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. Fruit of discord and the start of the Trojan war, too. I want to play with that one some more.
But Who Are You, Really?

Chapter Summary

Seekrit Identities, and Sherlock. Layered truths, and depths of reality.

All right. By way of some other contemplations, I’ve got another thread I’m considering with the show: layers of identity. Who characters are, who they say they are, and who they really are.

Let’s start out easily. Mycroft—he’s simple, in terms of this show. He’s Sherlock’s brother. He says he’s a minor government official. He’s really very high ranking MI6 and, from all appearances, a mess more. He’s gay—implied, but never stated outright, leaving the interesting question of whether we’re guessing right, or if it’s another layer of game on someone’s part. If he is gay, the entire trope of “you’re passing” is old hat: homosexual as secret agent undercover in his or her own life, closeted even when out, playing a role to get along. If he’s not gay, but instead the jabs from Sherlock are some other issue not yet revealed, then we’ve just got more layers still.

Mycroft comes in and seems to be Moriarty, turns out to be big brother, then turns out to be Big Brother, then turns out to be Big Brother working with Little Brother, who’s really his little brother.

Which leads to Sherlock. “A consulting detective.” “But the police don’t work with amateurs, Sherlock.” Sherlock “demonstrates” he’s not an amateur—and thereby avoids what later proves true: Sherlock, at this point, shows serious signs of having at one time or another been a professional. The ties with Mycroft and the events of and after Reichenbach falls suggest strongly that Sherlock’s been at one time or another a professional espionage agent and analyst. He may be “out to pasture,” no longer working as a regular. Or, conversely, he may have been working as MI5/6 from the start until the present, as an analyst regarding London, with at least a minor focus on terrorist action within the city, leaving his detectivin’ activities as a combination hobby and cover. He’s Mycroft’s baby brother, he’s an analytical genius, he says he’s a “consulting detective,” he’s really a spy—or former spy. He says he’s a “high-functioning sociopath.” He’s really a socially damaged something-or-other-else, with some ongoing emotional issues. He’s got a past we don’t know, that’s increasingly looking like it has a serious mess in it somewhere between the Death of Redbeard and the current time.

Lestrade? Yeah. Nice bloke from the Met. What you see is what you get. Except, as we’ve discovered, what you see is not all you get. Good Old Lestrade is also working with Mycroft…and his work shows no sign of being a Met function as a DI. Whatever his alternate role, it includes a database similar to but different than Mycroft’s, regarding Sherlock’s behaviors and hidey-holes—not something you’d expect Good Old Lestrade to be tracking as a Met DI. That’s more something you’d expect any of a number of other roles—Met or MI5/6—to know, but not Good Old Greg, who just investigates crimes. Usually violent crimes.

Mrs. Hudson? Nice landlady who used to help run a drug cartel.

Mary? Nurse, linguist, and CIA wet-work specialist on the lam, hiding undercover. (I still find it difficult to believe she’s in the country without Mycroft’s knowledge and collusion.)
Molly? Morgue worker who manages to work in collusion with MI6 and keep a major secret from the world for two years.

Right now the only person not obviously hiding a secret identity in some sense is John. Or is he?

Ooops, no. John’s a danger addict who refuses to actually face up to the realities of his own addiction: the people that addiction attracts him to, the ways that addiction leads him to decisions most of us would have to consider rather bad judgement calls. (Please. “Let’s go hand over state secrets to a known blackmailer to get access to his secret vault—yes, we’ll probably lose, but what a fun way to spend Christmas!” I don’t think so, John…) And God forbid we ignore the ongoing question mark: is John straight, or gay and merely in such denial as to confound even a mind-reader? John “Clark Kent” Watson: by day a mild-mannered doctor in an urban practice. By night and on weekends, though, he scrambles into his wooly sweater, shoves his SIG in his waistband, and leaps into the fray.

This is the obvious stuff. It’s the easy stuff. It’s not sitting and pondering over the veils and layers of Molly loving Sherlock but trying Tom while Sherlock tries Janine who’s really either his beard or his attempt to prove to Molly and John that he can have a girlfriend too, or who’s just his access to Magnussen. It’s not the insanity of trying to work out if John and Sherlock are in love or in… Oh, bother. There’s really no word I can think of. Charismatic infatuation with each other: psychologically matched to a degree that is equal to obsessive romantic love, without the actual sex and romance part. Fixated on each other like two little kids with their very first Best Friend relationship.

This is a show in which no one is quite what they appear to be, what they present themselves as being, what they even think themselves to be. Now, there’s the obvious: that’s true in real life, too. We’re all great candidates for claiming Billy Joel’s “The Stranger” as a theme song. Indeed, that’s part of what’s so clever about the entire premise. At some level if any character in the entire show starts shouting, “I’m not who you think I am!” all the others are going to look at him or her in great disgust and say, “Oh do give over, you clot: none of us is! Welcome to the bloody club. Now shove over, it’s time for the tea and the sing-song.”

I think one of the most complex elements to deal with, is that of all the characters, John’s the one who’s perpetually out of the loop, oblivious to the layers of reality. That’s in keeping with canon: ACD Watson’s established as being straightforward, superficially not only conformist but likely to get a bit snotty about it, a terrible liar, and reliably bad at working out hidden truths. That’s not Moffat and Gatiss being snotty, that’s ACD’s Watson: if anything Moffat and Gatiss and Thompson are working flat out frantically to give us a sufficiently complex and intelligent Watson as to make it difficult to see at first glance just how blinkered John is. They’ve ameliorated it by having John live in a paranoid’s nightmare: everyone really is lying to him, and they have been since he first met Sherlock Holmes. There really are secrets, there really are hidden truths. It’s not all his fault he misses it: people are working hard at keeping the curtains drawn.

But that doesn’t, in the end, get John off the hook. One of the elegant things about “His Last Vow” is that confrontation/intervention between John, Sherlock, and Mary. “Why is everything my fault?” Because, John, you build your world this way. Because John Watson is attracted to not just danger, but deceivers—and deceives himself about the attraction. Surrounded by his crazy people, John can feel normal in comparison: he can wear Charlie Brown sweaters and cluck at how weird Sherlock can be, and feel like he fits in.

Take him away from all that and he has to face the fact that he’s the stranger, too…and it starts seeping out, changing him.
So, even John Watson is in disguise. Even John has secret identities.

What does that mean for the show? It means, among other things, that “good and bad” aren’t based on whether you are who you seem to be. No one is. None of them. They’re all complex systems of hidden identity, secret lives, mysterious backstories, unstated motives, camouflaged longings. They’re all liars, on some level. They all have issues. They all have addictions. They all answer to hidden masters—internal and external. In a world in which most fiction is driven by superficial identity, *Sherlock* is driven by submerged, hidden identity. Characters like Lestrade develop along long, hidden arcs in which one may only see flashes of movement in the tall grass, forcing one to deduce like Sherlock does to even hope to track the actual course of development.

For another, it means that surprises are possible.

Let’s look at that again: surprises are possible.

In the standard pop narrative structure, based on superficial identity, early reveals of truth, and “hero is always transparent AND right,” assumptions, surprises aren’t really possible. Not for a sophisticated viewer, or not without basically falling back on cheats, deus ex machina imposed elements, etc. A sophisticated viewer—in this culture, almost anyone over the age of ten—can play MST3K analysis/snark with their eyes shut, recognizing the incoming plot hooks from yards back. I used to annoy associates by watching the first ten minutes of a show, walking away to cook dinner, and coming back merely to see if I was right about the major elements of the plot. I usually was.

If you play all your cards face-up, with no hidden stack and no layering, it really demands stupidity, innocence, or ignorance to be surprised by most of the plots offered. Surprise demands incomplete patterns, disguised materials, depths hinted at but not dissected under the glare of flourescent lights. In Sherlock surprises can happen.

In Sherlock answers aren’t always easy, and truths are rarely complete. It’s not just the Reichenbach Fall you have to guess at and take on faith, and never know for sure. It’s all of it. You go fishing. You guess. You’re never sure. There’s always something to be missed, or something you can’t quite make fit. And thanks to that, there’s always the chance of guessing wrong, missing a clue, being surprised.

I don’t walk out on *Sherlock* episodes. I watch them again and again, all the way through, because there’s always a clue you missed, a hint that tantalizes, and a conclusion left unresolved to puzzle you at midnight when you should be asleep, but aren’t.
Chapter Summary

My meta breakdown on Mary, with an eye to the probability of the anti-Mary sentiments making the rounds. Yes, I do run more or less pro-Mary, for what it's worth. Not passionately so, but definitely more pro than con.

I’ll confess going in, this is in part a response to what seems, to me, to be a growing vituperative lash-back to Mary Morstan Watson amongst certain sections of the fandom in the weeks following the close-out of Series Three. At first I didn’t pay it much mind—headcanon is headcanon, and shippers are shippers, and God knows Moffat-Gatiss-Thompson are tricksy wights. It’s within their MO to spin a character on its axis to surprise the audience, though in my own opinion it’s outside their MO to spin the character in the way some fans appear to have.

That said, the loathing’s beginning to creep into my ability to enjoy the lit, leaping from metas—including metas where it doesn’t really technically belong—to fics, in which the often unnecessary speculative projection verges on scurrilous, to summaries, where you can’t quite miss it in trying to pick your way through the fics. Even then—if the predictions were taking account of the full picture we’re given of Mary so far, it would be easier to take. Often, though, it’s ranging into the blackest of predictions about her perfidy, while ignoring every element offered by canon itself to counterbalance those suspicions.

So, without claiming to know what the dickens MGT are planning next, I would like to review some of the material we’ve got on Our Little Assassin, and point out some of the reasons I myself have her penciled in with a far less condemnatory headcanon.

First, let’s go to Original Canon. MGT tend to honor the core elements of ACD canon, even when they play with it. Thus while Sherlock, as we see him, is younger, more obviously socially handicapped, etc, he’s still recognizable as an avatar of Arthur Conan Doyle’s Great Detective. Lestrade, while offered an entire additional layer of development, remains in awe of Sherlock’s genius—and also remains one of the best investigators the Met (Scotland Yard) has to offer. Mycroft, though far more fully present and fleshed out, remains the mysterious, reclusive master of the British Government, dealing with matters of state and drawing Sherlock into the sphere of espionage (as is indicated in the original Bruce-Partington Plans). A character with a central role in Sherlock is unlikely to deviate substantially from his or her type and style in ACD canon: MGT are opting to respect those core characteristic traits, and honor the intended function of the character.

Thus, looking at the original Mary Morstan, she is presented as almost insanely likeable: the classic Victorian counterpart to the everyman Watson, with every cultural flag suggesting a heroine of worth. She’s small, educated, tasteful, plain but not homely, sweet-natured, a governess, fallen on hard times, the daughter of a missing veteran of war. She’s brave, determined, capable. Watson loves her, and even Holmes thinks well of her. She’s Jane Eyre and Jo March and The Little Princess all rolled up in one and handed to Watson on a platter. Mary Morstan as imagined by
Arthur Conan Doyle is Watson’s perfect wife by the standards of the era and the culture. She’s the rightful Queen for Watson’s domestic kingdom.

She’s a good wife for a number of stories, and her eventual death, while it is largely silent, is also mourned, and within the framework of the original canon Watson appears to be willing to marry again—so one assumes his marriage to Mary Morstan was not of such traumatic import as to sour him on marriage. In short, one could hardly have a character presented with more positive traits without also handing the poor thing a sign that says, “This is a Heroine—All Ye Who See Her, Bow Down and Worship!”

For MGT to make Mary Morstan a vicious, psychopathic monster who’s faking her pregnancy to trap John, whose past is a vast bloodbath, who actually wanted to kill Sherlock in Vow, who will sacrifice John and Sherlock to her enemies and betray their trust in future, who doesn’t really love John…

Ok, look: In theory it’s possible. In theory she’s a monster, embodying all or some of the negative attributes that are currently being associated with her. But for it to happen, MGT have to change their MO to a radical degree, turning a character Doyle blessed with the classic hallmarks of a Victorian middle-class heroine into a villain of the first degree, and perhaps the most devious and cruel villain of the television show to date—certainly far more repulsive than Irene, Moriarty, or even Magnussen. That’s…

That’s one heck of a leap. It’s way, way outside MGT’s MO. On the whole they just don’t do that kind of profound and negative sea-change, especially with core characters. It’s far more likely that Mary is the BBC Sherlock counterpoint to the ACD canon Mary: a perfect match for John, someone even Sherlock will like, accept, and admire, and a heroine, not a villainess.

What about evaluating her purely in terms of Sherlock, and ignoring MGT’s habitual treatment of ACD canon characters? Maybe if we evaluate her in that context?

Ok. What do we know about Mary? What have we been shown, or had strongly suggested by Sherlock’s deductions, including the word clouds in Hearse and Sherlock’s revelations about her in Vow?

First, a link to the deductions of the word clouds: Radio Times Article, Sherlock's Deductions About Mary

We have a lot there. She’s a size 12—and given her stature, God bless her, she’s not a waif. She’s a cat lover. She’s an only child (as is ACD canon compliant). Bakes her own bread. Has an appendix scar, and a secret tattoo. And of course everyone now knows she’s a liar.

So, my first comment: yes. She’s a liar. As Sherlock later reveals, she’s an espionage agent who’s done work for her country’s secret service, which puts her right in the pack with Mycroft, Sherlock, Anthea, Lestrade, Molly. Anderson’s now working for Mycroft. John, bless his pointy little head, has worked for—and lied for—Mycroft. Further, Mary’s either a) undercover, or b) on the lam. In either case, she’s a liar by the necessity of her new role and cover identity.

Let’s be honest: all the other characters in Sherlock are just as likely to be liars—about who they are, what they do, where they come from—under those circumstances as Mary is. She’s a liar, but within the context offered so far, she’s a liar-with-sufficient-cause, especially as so far she shows every sign of being willing to live forever within the role she’s chosen: John Watson’s wife. Like a person in a witness protection program, like a classic character starting over with a new name in the Old West, her past is her past…and her future is John Watson’s privilege. Her behavior as demonstrated to date falls within the norms of the characters, is dishonest only within the
parameters already demonstrated by Sherlock himself.

That doesn’t mean she couldn’t be a much worse liar. Her own dismay over her past might indicate she’s a monster—or, just as plausibly, she may just judge herself more harshly than John would. It’s in keeping with most human beings to have that sort of fear and dread of being judged by those who love us…and we don’t yet know what her actual past entailed.

We do, however, have some implied hints.

In *Vow*, Mary turns to Sherlock and asks what he’s deduced about her. His response is interesting.

**SHERLOCK:** By your skill set, you are – or were – an intelligence agent. Your accent is currently English but I suspect you are not. You’re on the run from something; you’ve used your skills to disappear; ... (John shakes his head as if he can’t believe what he’s hearing.) ... Magnussen knows your secret, which is why you were going to kill him; and I assume you befriended Janine ... (he grimaces, shifting uncomfortably on his chair) ... in order to get close to him.

(Text drawn from Ariane DeVere’s transcript: [http://arianedevere.livejournal.com/68242.html](http://arianedevere.livejournal.com/68242.html))

Ok. Mary’s an espionage agent. She’s done something that has her on the lam and in hiding. Is it something evil? Possibly—Magnussen thinks she’s a bad, bad girl, after all. But, well—Magnussen, after all. He’s not in the business of facts, he’s in news. He’s a salacious, drooling little pillock. He considers Mary and John a match: Mr. and Mrs. Psychopath. Are we really going to trust Magnussen’s opinion?

Well, there’s Mary’s own fear of John seeing who she was. He won’t love her any more.

Yes. But having sat with Sherlock and heard what he’s deduced, she’s also willing to hand John that USB drive and let him look: whatever is there is not catastrophically worse at heart than what’s Sherlock’s just said: she’s a spy and an assassin on the lam from enemies, but if her record contained anything much worse, or much different—even if it’s a complete fabrication—she would not hand it to John. Ultimately what was in that USB drive has to match Sherlock’s calm and non-condemnatory evaluation within reasonable parameters.

Do we have further reason to suspect Mary’s pretty much just what Sherlock indicates, and that what he indicates is a fair evaluation of Mary’s core nature? A spy, but not a monster?

Yes. To begin with, let’s look at this from another angle.

Mary worked for John as his receptionist and nurse. She dated John. She became engaged to John.

John was being watched by Mycroft and his people. He was under sufficient observation that Mycroft knew where he’d be on the evening Sherlock went looking for him, and the script suggests Mycroft also knew who he’d be with, and what he’d be planning to do. Hell, one suspects Mycroft knows the carat weight of the diamond and the style of the setting.

Mary is a good—a very, very skilled—espionage agent and assassin. Mycroft’s people—indeed, all serious espionage houses—keep track of known agents and assassins, and in many cases maintain extensive files on players in other houses. Even if Mary Morstan has managed to evade her own team, what are the odds she would not have been noted and IDed by Mycroft, given how much Mycroft knows about John? Given that whoever she is, she wasn’t secret enough to evade Magnussen’s knowledge network?
What are the odds Mycroft would have left a true psychopathic rogue in place with John, regardless of how mixed his feelings may be about John Watson? Let John marry her?

Now, let’s look at that word cloud again—the one with the infamous “liar” deduction. What else do we learn about Mary?

She’s a disillusioned lib dem: disillusioned liberal democrat. In England that could mean she was a disappointed supporter of the Liberal Democrat party, or it could be a broader statement that she’s a left-wing supporter of either the American Democratic party (like many of us, a disillusioned liberal Democrat) or a left-wing/liberal supporter of all democracy. I’d go with the first two, myself. In either case, she’s politically in the same ballpark as Moffat and Gatiss, so near as I’ve been able to determine: one of their own. A lefty-pinko-bleeding-heart. AKA: One of the Good Guys, within what appears to be MGT worldview. One could technically spin her disillusionment into really radical leftist violence, but one’s first reaction would be just “Who’s not a bit disillusioned with the movement by now?” Politics is so venal, after all.

Mary’s a romantic, according to Sherlock’s deductions. That ups the odds her love for John is real. It also ups the odds of her being an idealist, which goes with her disillusionment with the lib dems.

Mary’s in some sense associated with the word “guardian.” Like “liar,” it’s repeated over and over in the word cloud, deducted before liar, and given more actual text prominence. One could think perhaps she’s just a reader of the Manchester Guardian, a lib dem paper if ever there was one. But it seems unlikely to be given such priority in Sherlock’s deduction if that’s all he’s deducing. It seems more likely that, like “liar,” it’s something key to her nature. She’s a guardian: a protector, a knight, a bodyguard, a hero.

Would that correlate with her known behaviors? Not if you’re presupposing that she’s what Magnussen calls her, and what the actions she takes might imply—a bad girl, a psychopath, a reflexive liar, a serial recreational murderer rather than a trained espionage agent working under orders. On the other hand, if she’s what Sherlock himself suggests—a woman who is talented and skilled at her work, on the run from enemies, but ultimately not only trustworthy, but worthy of John, and worthy of John’s forgiveness—then yes. There’s plenty offered to suggest that Mary’s really a good person, and worthy of John’s love.

If, as Sherlock theorizes, Mary not only didn’t want to kill him, but shot him as a better alternative to killing him, working to ensure he’d survive, then, no, she’s not a villain.

If her vendetta against Magnussen was justified—if his blackmail of her was as vile as his blackmail of everyone else in the episode—then, no, she’s not a villain. Come on: Lord Smallwood was innocent. Lady Smallwood was innocent. John was innocent. Janine was, within any parameter we know, innocent. Magnussen was a vicious little parasite who enjoyed twisting truth in ways the innocent and the honorable could not defend themselves against. Why should Mary be the one monster deserving of Magnussen’s blackmail, rather than one more honorable person whose actions were being presented as atrocities?

To make Mary the villainess many are presenting her as being, we have to first and foremost discount all Sherlock’s own convictions about her except the conviction she was a liar. We have to assume that everything else he believed about her is null and void. She can’t be worthy of John Watson. She can’t be someone Sherlock genuinely likes. She can’t be someone he’d willingly see married to John (whatever his associated heartache and regret). She can’t be someone he’d willingly vow himself into a pseudo-marriage with. She can’t be someone he’d tell John to trust, even as Sherlock himself fell from the aftereffects of the injury she dealt him—with a real chance of not surviving this second round of having his heart started back up. She can’t be someone he’d
trust with John’s life at the end of Vow, trusting her to keep John in the right amount of trouble, someone he’d fondly refer to as “my girl.”

To make Mary a villainess you have to zero out original canon, you have to zero out her presented role as someone John and Sherlock both love, and whom Mycroft has left in place with John. You have to zero out all Sherlock’s deductions about her EXCEPT that she’s capable espionage agent and killer and a liar.

Basically you have to cherry-pick your evidence, eliminating the evidence the scripts present as ultimately crucial (that she’s someone Sherlock himself thinks John should and can love and forgive—a fit heroine for a hero), in favor of the smaller body of evidence that can be spin-doctored to suggest she’s not what the scripts or her original source character would suggest.

I won’t say that it’s impossible for this to turn out to be a legitimate spin on the character. Writers can do amazing things. I will say that I consider it an amazing long-shot, and one that would demand a lot of cheating on the part of MGT, in terms of literary fair play and fair play within the “rules” of Sherlock as they’ve demonstrated them so far. Sherlock can be emotionally clueless, but he’s not yet vile enough to encourage his best friend to marry and remain married to a monster. Sherlock can be wrong about many things—but he has yet to be so wrong as to mistake a monster for a good guy for months and months, in the face of close association. Sherlock’s missed many details—there’s always something, after all—but he’s never been the sort to pick up on “liar,” “guardian,” “size 12,” and “cat lover,” while missing “vicious psychopathic sadistic killer.”

MGT on the whole play fair. It just seems stratospherically unlikely that Mary’s going to be at odds with her source character (heroine/fit mate for John Watson/admired of Sherlock), at odds with Sherlock’s positive deductions about her, and at odds with his ongoing ultimate trust for her. They’re just not likely to write that the man who dragged himself from death out of terror that John was married to a killer, would then not only leave him married to that killer but encourage him to trust her, unless he had been convinced ultimately that she was not just safe, but right for John.

I know that none of that is likely to make people LIKE Mary more. Some simply won’t like her. Some will have ethical assumptions that make Sherlock and Mycroft and Lestrade’s espionage acceptable, but for some reason won’t be able to accept Mary’s. Some will simply feel for John in his disillusionment. Some will be unable to stop resenting Mary simply for disrupting a pattern of uninterrupted Johnlock. There are all sorts of reasons for not really liking Mary.

I do think, however, that those reasons logically can’t easily include Mary being anything less than a heroine, and John’s fit spouse. I just don’t. It doesn’t fit original canon, it doesn’t fit current canon without a lot of cherry-picking and spin-doctoring, and it doesn’t fit how MGT handle their fictions. Yes, fans can spin it that way. Yes, there are even ways that MGT could theoretically twist their plot lines. But I honestly, really think that it would be both unlikely and would make for a grotesque story—one most viewers would end up feeling was a bit dirty, in the sense of being a serious transgression of the trust between viewers and a show.

Addendum: One last point. Mary's nationality has not yet been pinned down, but it's already been suggested she's not "English." One of the most logical reasons why she might be afraid that John, a loyal and patriotic Brit, might not love her after reading her records, is simply that she worked for someone he counted as an enemy at some point during his years of service. Given the world as it is, that could include a lot of options. She's a bit young for service to the USSR, but to modern Russia? Not so difficult. And that's just the start. But Russia has been traditionally involved in Afghanistan, and not traditionally on "our" side. It would by no means be impossible for her to have been working with the mujahadeen as an agent. Or any of a number of other activities that, seen from "her" side, were honorable, but seen from "our" side would be the actions of an enemy.
Mycroft and Sherlock both appear capable of differentiating between an honorable enemy and a dishonorable one. They know the game and how it's played, and respect the players on the other side. One is less sure John would feel that way. John runs more emotionally partisan about most things than Mycroft and Sherlock.
Addendum-y stuff on "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary"

Chapter Summary

Just a bit more thrown in.

First, actually, Mary's nationality is pretty likely if not dead certain, if Magnussen's info on her is correct. She's a US citizen or former US citizen.

Second, Magnussen's comments on her wet-work, on going a bit freelance, his comment "No wonder you like her," and Mary's argument with John about what she did...

MARY: The stuff Magnussen has on me, I would go to prison for the rest of my life.
JOHN: So you were just gonna kill him.
MARY: People like Magnussen should be killed. That’s why there are people like me.
JOHN (lifting his left hand and gently punching the arm of the chair): Perfect(!) So that’s what you were? An assassin?
(He looks towards Sherlock.)
JOHN: How could I not see that?
(He turns back towards Mary.)
MARY: You did see that.
(John’s humourless and slightly murderous smile is back on his face.)
MARY (pausing for a moment): ... and you married me.
(She pauses again, then tilts her head towards Sherlock.)
MARY: Because he’s right.
(Sherlock looks down a little, unusually not looking pleased about being correct.)
MARY (softly, to John): It’s what you like.

(Again, from Ariane DeVere's site)

It's easy to take all Magnussen's gloating, and see Mary as a blood-drenched monster. It's critical, though, to recall this in the context of who John is, and what he likes--and how he himself has behaved.

John's a doctor who turned soldier, who has killed (had bad days), who's got a temper that leads him to violence, a taste for violence, and whose first major action in Sherlock World was to kill a man who was "not very nice."

John's a man with a taste and talent for killing that he has channeled into vigilante work. He's a freelancer. Sherlock takes case work rather than take drugs. Watson does case work rather than letting himself be drawn into going to crack dens and beating up junkies. Both, to some degree, justify themselves by pointing to the fact that they're getting their jollies by playing their games against not-nice people: people who need to be captured, tried, convicted, or even killed. People who might not be caught without their help, or who might not be accessible in any way without extra-legal action on Sherlock, John, Lestrade, and Mycroft's part.

Which leads to Mary's comment: "People like Magnussen should be killed. That's why there are people like me."
Whether she is correct or not, whether you'd agree with her judgements or those of her superiors or not, Mary's not just an assassin: she's the East Wind. She's sent out to find the unworthy and remove them from the world. In her own eyes, she was someone sent out to deal with people who would not be dealt with by law or custom, who still had to be dealt with.

She's John aiming his SIG at a "not very nice man." And right now, there's very little evidence suggesting that when she goes freelance, she goes freelance outside that core premise. She may go rogue, by the standards of her superiors - but she appears at this time to still feel that going freelance did NOT remove her from the role of East Wind, killing the unworthy.

While Magnussen may not recognize the validity of that kind of reasoning, he's definitely the sort to see the mirror pattern. Thus he can review Mary's work, her past, and say to John and to Sherlock both: "No wonder you like her."

Thus Mary and Sherlock can look at John and say, clearly, "It's what you like."

Mary reflects Sherlock in many ways. In this way, though, she most clearly reflects John--an aspect of John he doesn't like admitting to himself. He wants to be a nice doctor in an oatmeal sweater with a normal life. What he is, though, is a principled killer and a vigilante.

But it keeps being important to realize that, at least at this stage, Mary's apparent core motivation is playing East Wind, and dealing with Not-Nice Men who would escape judgment otherwise. She's one of the Furies.
Mary's former name isn't indicated by A.G.R.A.

It's indicated by A.G. RA

I'm suspicious that's going to turn out to be a first name, last name (or last name, first name) and "Risk Assessment." (RA) That would make the thumb drive something she boosted from someone else dealing with an evaluation of her standing. No knowing if she had enemies within the CIA prior to Magnussen's comment that she went a bit freelance: we have no idea at what point she went off the reservation, or why. It does suggest that her flight may have been initiated upon finding out that either supposed friends/allies were treating her as a risk to be dealt with, or that enemies were.

Who planned the aspects of the leap that involved making John watch Sherlock's suicide, stand in as suicide note, and live in mourning as witness to the death?

Sherlock suggests that Mycroft's responsible for that aspect of the (possible) Lazarus plan. I've got to say, his delivery is among his less convincing, even at the time: to me it always did read a bit like passing blame. That's especially true as, of the two brothers, Mycroft's the only one who showed any awareness of or concern for the emotional aspects of the Fall--hinting at remorse in TRF in his confrontation with John, and clearly being aware of John's likely emotional reaction on Sherlock's return. While it's possible that Mycroft was still the person responsible for that aspect of the plan, it's not particularly in keeping with his MO to date. So far he's enormously less fond of the Grand Melodrama than his brother, and far more likely to attempt to soothe troubled waters. Further, Sherlock shows no tendency at all to do anything but brag about his plan until he begins to realize that John's not taking it very well--not seeing it as brilliant, clever, amazing Sherlock, but as Sherlock-is-a-jerk. We know Sherlock does not like to be seen as a jerk by John.

Would Sherlock pass the blame?

Yes. If nothing else, we know that at least in minor things Sherlock will pass the blame onto Mycroft. We have at least one outstanding incidence of him doing so: the Christmas smoking event. Given Mycroft's reaction to the cigarette, and Sherlock's comments, it's almost certain that the cigarette Mycroft is smoking isn't his own, but one he's bummed off of Sherlock, who smokes high tar like a pro. So Sherlock almost certainly brought the cigarettes. It's less sure whether Mycroft asked or Sherlock offered, but it's very likely Sherlock was the first to take his own pack out and light up. The two boys are smoking together in what appears to be mutual accountability.

When Mummy Holmes almost catches them (probably does catch them, when it comes down to it) both boys lie--but Sherlock passes blame. Mycroft's willing to settle for "no." Sherlock's got to go for "Mycroft did it."
Looking at the value in following information about secondary supporting characters to their logical conclusions. If we know X about Lestrade, and Y about Mycroft, and Z about the world they're functioning in, what does that tell us about what's happening to all our characters in the show?

I write Mycroft because I delight in the character, but part of what I like about the character has an entirely practical allure. In many works, the structure of the narrative makes the most sense when seen in relation to a particular character. For example, Aragorn remains one of the most useful characters to sort out in Lord of the Rings, because his nature and backstory tie together so much of what’s going on. Heir to Isildur, Carrier of the Sword that was Broken, Dunedain of the North, Elrond’s foster-son…if you sort through Aragorn, you’ve sorted through much of the logistical complexity of Middle Earth. He’s useful, that way. He’s the living embodiment of many of the “whys” of the story. He’s a key piece to the puzzle—a key that not only unlocks mysteries, but a key also in the sense of being a piece that links everything else together.

Mycroft, to my mind, is a similar key character. If you can sort things through in relationship to Mycroft, you know a vast amount of what’s going on in the show. So—I’m going to take at least one shot at that, starting with Lestrade.

Lestrade, who may prove to be a key eventually, is currently mainly a mystery. His actions are almost never “explained,” in spite of the fact that the more one reviews them the odder Lestrade looks. Here are some for-instance examples of Lestrade being odd.

1. Lestrade knows Sherlock’s moved to Baker Street before Sherlock himself has confirmed John’s willingness to room. Granted, Sherlock just moves himself in in spite of not knowing John’s decision, too—but that makes sense for Sherlock. It’s ODD in Lestrade that he can rush into his consultant’s brand new apartment without so much as a call first to learn the new address.

2. It’s odd that Lestrade’s able to allow a civilian to serve as a regular part of his investigations. Even with Sherlock as a “graduate chemist,” and a possible (IMO at this point almost necessarily true) backstory as a secret service agent, it’s peculiar—and no one, including Sherlock, is letting his credentials show much.*

3. It’s odd that Lestrade has the range of choice he’s got in what he will or won’t do next. In large part police work is first-come-first-served. Lestrade gets room to cherry pick, not only for Sherlock but for his whole team. Sally can say to him that, even if something’s not his division, he’s going to want to take it.

4. Survives the professional debacle of Reichenbach Fall intact, with all his old team EXCEPT the one who turned OCD about Sherlock living.

5. Maintains a collection of Sherlock-related paraphernalia which he returns to John, not to Mycroft, suggesting he knows Mycroft doesn’t need it as a memento of Sherlock—and suggesting he may be willingly trying to drop a hint to John that Sherlock may come back.

6. Carries a handgun when he should not be allowed such, particularly when out of the line of duty.
Responds to Sherlock’s distress call even when he has to abandon his own work doing it.

Manages to get rather stunningly stupid every so often. “Dwarf with a blow-dart in the ventilation system?” A very BAD forged Jack-the-Ripper death scene “look so promising”? Really, now, let’s not be silly.

Is accused of being Sherlock’s handler. His denial actually seems to imply he’s substantially more.

Sherlock’s at this point as good as making a big deal out of his first name: always starts with “G,” but never gets the rest right. In canon Lestrade was G. Lestrade with no associated name. In Bondian and real-life secret service, the top-ranking MI6 agent was “M.” In Bond, the Quartermaster/gadgeteer is also “Q,” making G. Lestrade a superb potential choice for having a place in the Bondian initial system, with “Greg” being his cover name—or at least, not the name Sherlock’s thought of him by for a long, long time. It would be just like Sherlock to tease the man by referring to him by the wrong name—but one that always, always, always references his initial.

Has Mycroft’s direct line, from the looks of it: he can call in.

Attends Mycroft in Mycroft’s secret office, which even John does not yet seem to know exists. Worth noting specifically because Mycroft’s MO so far seems to be to contact people outside his offices, or only in the “minor position in government” office…or, occasionally, in the Diogenes Stranger’s Room. Let’s be honest—how many of us could find and be allowed into a major spymaster’s Sekrit Bat Cave without GPS, a seasoned native guide, and a ton and a half of ID?

Is sent out to serve as Mycroft’s proxy when Mycroft can’t leave what he’s doing.

Now, how does that look when you then tally what’s known about Mycroft and his position? Mycroft is perhaps the most powerful man in Britain. Period/full stop. Oh, even within the Sherlock mythos one could probably argue that there are other men and women with equal or similar claim. From our POV that doesn’t matter a lot, as within the mythos Mycroft’s stratospherically exalted. Not the sort of man whose office you can go see in the midst of an emerging catastrophe. He’s also never, ever seemed to be one to delegate when Sherlock’s in critical difficulty. He goes himself and sits his well-toned, well-tailored heiny on the grubby stairs of Baker Street. He interviews potential roommates in person. He feeds John Watson lies in person. He does not delegate Sherlock…

Yet, we’re already aware that he’s not among the people who’ve been shown to visit Sherlock in hospital, suggesting that the situation Mycroft is dealing with is so critical that it can’t be left even to visit a potentially dying brother—or go search for a potentially dying, drugged, escaped brother on the lam. Mrs. Hudson pays lip service to “family is all you have.” Mycroft lives it to an extreme degree where his brother is concerned. He does not mess around with Baby Brother’s well-being.

We know Mycroft works national security in multiple ways on multiple levels. We know he tries to maximize security while minimizing danger and casualties. We know Sherlock sometimes gets caught up in fantasies of Mycroft as cold-hearted strategist and commanding officer, but that Mycroft himself, directly witnessed rather than interpreted through Sherlock’s fantasies, invests deeply in trying to protect innocents while defeating enemies. These are all things the show has demonstrated, not told.]

Mycroft has absolute clearance in a top secret military R&D facility.

So, what does that tell us about Lestrade?

It tells us that Lestrade’s got direct ongoing access to MI6 and higher facilities—just the fact that
he can find and get to Mycroft’s offices, apparently on his own, in the night tells us Lestrade’s almost certainly a high clearance officer. To be where he is, unaccompanied by a guard, while Mycroft works alone at night on something so critical that he can’t leave it even to search for his injured, possibly dying runaway brother says that Lestrade is trusted alone at night with the nation’s top tactician/strategist/spymaster in the middle of a seriously critical event in progress. Basically Lestrade’s in the middle of Mycroft’s war room while something is going down. Mycroft didn’t just give him phone instructions, and he didn’t just text him: Mycroft almost certainly called Lestrade in, and Lestrade came in. That’s—

That’s Anthea-level clearance. That’s James Bond coming in from the cold to talk to M. That’s not just some policeman Mycroft has learned to like and trust—that’s professional clearance combined with both professional and personal trust to an extreme degree. Lestrade almost HAS to be relating to Mycroft on something approaching the level of M & Bond at the very least.

Do we learn anything more from their connection? Not just about Lestrade, but about what’s going on in season 3?

There’s a great blog/meta on “Ugly Duckling,” the mission Mycroft’s fretting over in the “Lestrade/Holmes” office scene. You can find it <a href="http://finalproblem.tumblr.com/post/77456913382/initial-notes-on-ugly-duckling-part-1-part-2">here</a>. The author does a nice job of arguing that the work Mycroft is doing is foreshadowing the later “Mission to Eastern Europe.” S/He has theories about what kind of mission/event it is that is also worth consideration. I’ll let you read up on all that on your own, and say simply that I consider it very likely that this is an ongoing event with roots that go back at least as far as “The Great Game” and “Scandal in Belgravia.” And, as argued, I also suspect that Irene’s been put to use as an agent for Great Britain, and may even be “the Ugly Duckling” who’s really a swan—and that at exactly the time things are turning to sh*t for Sherlock in the Mary-Guns-Magnussen department, Mycroft’s frantically focusing on trying to keep a very different set of concerns running smoothly.

If I’m right, then Sherlock’s stray thought in TSoT wondering where she is would tie to her work for Mycroft. It would turn Mycroft’s scene with John after SiB—the beloved “Pirates” sequence—into Mycroft presenting *JOHN* with MI6s official cover story regarding what’s happened to Irene: misinformation aimed not at Sherlock, but at John, who must be made to believe that now-double-agent Irene is believed to be dead by MI6. It explains why Mycroft isn’t at Sherlock’s apparent death-bed during the aftermath of the shooting in Magnussen’s office: Mycroft literally can’t leave right then, possibly not even for a potty break—one can almost see Mycroft taking the laptop into the head with him, rather than risk missing a critical shift in the balance of power. It may further tie to Mary’s role in the Magnussen thing. It strengthens arguments that the season “did you miss me” was planned all along.

If you read the blog/tumblr post, it also suggests some of how that screen-nabbing could happen, and why Mycroft can afford to be so happy and chipper about calling Little Brother Back: it implies that not only does he get Sherlock back, but that some element of his deeper plan has just come to fruition.

The more we go on with this, the more I’m convinced that the “frame” for all of Sherlock is the James Bond stuff: What happens in the show grows out of what Mycroft’s attempting to deal with inside that secret service world of espionage and schemes.

That being the case, it becomes all the more interesting that they’ve slowly established that Greg’s been part of that world for a long time—quite possibly always was a member of that world. They’re not going to have to go fishing to present grounds for Greg to keep being involved. Anderson and
his wife are involved, now, too. Molly presumably became at least a sometime contributor to the Great Work at the time Sherlock jumped. Irene starts looking like a good bet to come back this season or next.

All of that’s very hard to deduce looking at things from the ordinary John-centric perspective. Turn it around, though, and ask how things fit together in relation to who Mycroft is and what he does, and you start seeing patterns that look like clutter and noise otherwise. Lestrade looks more and more intelligent and competent and his connection with Mycroft looks more and more dedicated—professionally and personally. Mycroft looks more and more effectively devious and skilled at his job, Sherlock looks more and more like a spy as well as a great detective—and poor John looks more and more like a proper “Watson,” always a day late and a dollar short.

Basically if you take all the information we’ve been given about Mycroft totally seriously, and we take all the information about Greg seriously, and we take Sherlock’s connection with MI5/6 and terrorism seriously, we’re off into a world whose logic isn’t “cozy English Mystery Novel,” but “thrilling spy story wearing a deerstalker hat and a Belstaff coat as a disguise.”

*An aside: if Sherlock’s actually been an agent, it’s almost certain he’s got a cover persona/backstory that’s been put together out of real things that can be checked combined with a LOT of cover material that’s faked: a benign instance of what Moriarty tries to turn to malign purposes. Which leads me to what seems like a very obvious comment: John’s so thoroughly affronted that Mycroft gave away Sherlock’s secrets to Moriarty. Even considering the possibility of Sherlock NOT being in the loop on the first phase of that, it seems highly likely that the “truth” Mycroft handed over was already a fiction in *EXACTLY* the same way Moriarty’s later Kitty Reilly story was to be. Moriarty was given a forgery from which he made a forgery…*)
Ah, the joys of reviewing things...

Chapter Summary

A revelation, and other bits and bobs.

So I am finally getting around to walking through the entire series from front to back, reviewing what's been given to date. I hit on one gorgeous one, right in the concluding phases of s1e1.

Our cabby says he's got a sponsor, and that "they're so much more than a man." Sherlock himself guesses an organization, which may be the right call right off the bat. In any case, Moriarty is plural. Has always been plural as long as we've known him/it. From the very first mention, Moriarty has been a hydra--more than one head. You can kill one, but there is at least one other waiting.

James Moriarty that died may--or may not--be Moriarty Prime. Or he might have been a cat's paw being used as a front man by Moriarty Prime. Or there may not be a Prime, there may be only a Moriarty Ensemble.

The thing is, having it always, from the first, be a plural entity means that Moffat and Gatiss can assure us that Moriarty died, and always be telling the truth. That avatar/drone of Moriarty died on the roof of St. Bart's. But the Moriarty is dead--long live the Moriarty.

It will be interesting if they go with twins/clones, etc. Going with brothers/twins/clones would let them keep using Andrew Scott...and give Andrew Scott the fun of playing various differing Moriarties. But it would be as interesting to have the plurality be multiples of different people tied by their brilliance, their criminality, and their organizational network.

What I love is doing the review, though, and being handed such a clear, overt indication that, yes, Moffat/Gatiss/Thompson were preparing for our current scenario all the way back in the very first episode. They really are not kidding that they knew about this all along. Hell, they not only knew, they told us outright. Moriarty is legion.

While I'm at it: the scene at Angelo's looks odder and odder, regarding sexuality. Playing that one close to their chest from the very start. Sherlock's avoidance of John's question about the police not working with amateurs is as clever as I though it was: when you really look at it, Sherlock simply refuses to say he's a pro with the background to claim consultant status. He's dodging, but not because he's not a pro--but because he doesn't intend to explain the kind of pro he is.

Lestrade's knowledge of where Sherlock lives is as odd as ever.

Lestrade's comment about being "desperate" reads very oddly, and always has. It reads BETTER if there's more going on than Sherlock being able to help Lestrade crack cases. Mycroft and Lestrade both read as having deep frustrations with Sherlock in this initial episode: love and affection aside, they need Sherlock to cooperate over something, and Sherlock's refusing. On this case, on this particular puzzle, Lestrade can get Sherlock to work with him somewhat. But it becomes more and more fascinating that Sherlock's now poised like a rogue steer between two irked border collies, who it later appears are working together to Deal With Sherlock.
It makes me wonder more and more what exactly Sherlock used to do for secret service, what went wrong that he's in conflict with both Big Brother and G. Lestrade, and how they are working toward resolving it.

I am really looking forward to viewing Great Game and Reichenbach again with that sort of question specifically in mind.

OH! And lest I forget--as I said, I'm a bit suspicious that Irene's the "ugly duckling," and has turned double agent for Mycroft's team. If so... the original Irene was dealing with the Crown Prince of Bohemia. Which is right next door to Poland. Which is where Ugly Duckling was last spotted. If Irene either is the UD, or is having dealings with the UD for Mycroft and his team, we would now have Irene back in her original canonical territory.

AND, again, I can't see Mycroft wasting a good potential operative if he can swing her to work for him. She's brilliant, after all. Better to have her on your own side than to have her a loose cannon again.

And I knew there was another point I picked up on in rewatching this that matters. One of Mycroft's hallmark stunts is usurping cameras, phones, etc, for his own communication and surveillance purposes. Similarly Sherlock from the very first episode is established as being able to hijack mobile phone signals--it's a vital point never dealt with: Sherlock should not be able to spam all the cell phones he does in that press conference, and as Lestrade indicates, he can't make Sherlock stop if they don't even know how Sherlock's doing it. So, both brother's are known for coopting public communications technology and repurposing it to suit their own goals and aims. Which leads to the issue of Mycroft grinning like such a happy little Christmas Boy when he calls Sherlock back in at the end of Vows.

Think about it. "Moriarty" is usurping the public broadcast system, taking over all the screens in England--just the same way Sherlock "took over" the mobile phones of the press and the way Mycroft's been known to take over the CCTV and the London Public Phone system. "Moriarty" has hijacked one of Mycroft's tricks! Why should Mycroft be so very happy, even if he is bringing Baby Bro back?

Unless this is the indication that either "Moriarty" has taken bait Mycroft fed him, or an ally of Mycroft's is in place and is giving away information within the parameters of a plan Mycroft already has under way?

Which, again, suggests that the current status of the Moriarty plot was indeed contemplated from teh start--or conversely that MGT have at least done a really effective and inspired job of canibalizing their own canon. Either way, they're making this work all the way back to day one.
Second Look at Blind Banker

Chapter Summary

In which I conclude it's not a great mystery ep, but is good ground-laying for espionage. And I catch a few fun foreshadowings.

Blind Banker really does not improve all that much on second viewing. Dimmock performs the vital role of showing why we like having Lestrade around. Sherlock gets a lot of cred for acting more like a Double-0 agent than like a gumshoe. I will say on reviewing, Sherlock looks far less jealous of Sarah than I recalled. Mainly just annoyed because she's massively cluttering up his investigation and his 24/7 focus. Even the self-invitation to the circus date comes across as having no real interest in wrecking John's date, but instead it comes across as Sherlock tactlessly, obsessively trying to simply repurpose the date as an investigative opportunity.

They are really doing a very good job of keeping Sherlock ambiguous. If there is heterosexual and homosexual and bisexual, then I think Sherlock is investigationsexual. His actual jollies really are coming from solving things, just as Donovan says.

Granted his act of choice appears to be performed with a male partner. (snark) But it's not a bare-skin issue.

So, let's see:

We learn that Sherlock’s used to having Lestrade on tap: he calls, he gets Lestrade. He’s also used to Lestrade expediting The Work. Watching the difference between working with Lestrade and Dimmock at the very least tells us that Sherlock and Lestrade have it down to a system. It suggests, though does not prove, that Lestrade’s got some form of job-armor that allows him to push boundaries other cops might not. And it really is intriguing that Sherlock’s surprised to not get Lestrade when he calls.

While the crossbow bolt thing is silly, the Chinese Tongs and smuggling isn’t, and that one ties a) to Moriarty and b) to Mycroft’s international affairs links.

The fight with the middle-eastern thug in the beginning again suggests Sherlock’s got 007 Bondian credit—I had to laugh watching it again and seeing Cumberbatch adding the classic Bond kitsch of straightening his suit and primping in the mirror after the fight. And it’s something he does NOT want to let John in on, which ups my own sense that John was not intended to know Sherlock’s secret service ties. One suspects that Sherlock called big brother Mycroft to come take out the garbage before John got there...

Sherlock may not automatically recognize merchant’s numeric systems, but he does know enough Chinese to translate Zhi Zhou as “spider” and to know a Tong mark. Again points to 007 creds rather than ordinary detective creds.

Ooooh. Quote: “What does it tell you when an assassin can’t shoot straight? It tells you they’re not really trying.” That’s General Shan to John (who she thinks is Sherlock). But once stated, it’s part of the core assumptions of the show—it becomes foreshadowing, not just throw away. So onward to season three, and Mary, the assassin who doesn’t shoot straight.
Ok, we end with Shan dead, the Black Lotus established as having its own huge network, and Moriarty established as killing those who fail him, which is pretty wasteful if you ask me. But, nu, I’m not a criminal mastermind.

In the long run this feels like it sets up Sherlock as secret service operative. Looked at as a “mystery” it’s not all that intriguing, it’s uneven, and it’s got too much hokum in the form of the circus and the idiotic crossbow gimmick. Looked at as groundwork for Sherlock being an internationally focused operative based in London and it starts looking better. Even the silly, weird bits keep feeding back to the conclusion that Sherlock’s got the chops for espionage Bond-style.
Yes. I confess. I'm not convinced by Johnlock. I mean, I'm not exactly against it, though I do think it's a weaker story than the tangled, not-Johnlock story I think MGT are telling. I LIKE the strange, uneasy, muddled monster they appear to be handing us. But I've been in contact with fannish writing since the 70s, and slash in and of itself doesn't bother me. It's just that some of it fails to convince me...and some fails to convince me profoundly.

Johnlock has turned out to be one of those instances where I just can't generate enough lift to suspend my disbelief.

It's not that I can't find it in me to believe that Sherlock's either gay or bi--both seem perfectly plausible to me, though with a rider that I do find it a bit difficult to believe he understands that about himself. Indeed, to me the most true seeming thing to say about Sherlock and his sexuality is that he appears to have stuffed it into a cupboard under the stairs about the time he turned ten, and starved it and kept it in the dark ever since, and now it's begun creeping out in multiple ways and he's entirely unsure what it is, what it wants, or whether he can't just shove it in the cupboard again. So I can believe Sherlock's potentially gay/bi.

I have a harder time believing he's hot for John. Believing he adores and loves John? Absolutely. No question. John is his bright sunshine. I just keep not seeing signs that this is true sexually. Indeed, Sherlock's sexual ambivalence seems to flare most strongly with the female characters he's dabbled with: Molly, Irene, and Janine. With all three he demonstrates a level of confounded bewilderment as his own responses don't *quite* land where he expects them to... He expects to be unMOVED, only to get that worried basset-hound look when he starts reacting to subconscious stuff he never bothered to deal with previously.

With John, though, there's no confusion, to my mind--at least, not sexual. His confusion with John appears to me to be a response to finding out he's not a solitary man any more, and does not want to be. The responses don't hover in little sexual pauses, but in little social pauses. For the first time in his life, Sherlock needs someone who's not immediate family: not Mummy, Father, or Mycroft.

Sherlock doesn't act to my eyes like a man who was living cheek-by-jowl in a small apartment with the object of his desire....or, if so, then that desire is entirely satisfied by companionship, without lingering, yearning bedroom eyes and ache to jump each other's bones. When Sherlock thinks of John, it doesn't appear to have anything to do with stolen kisses, tender words, longing glances, heated sighs, sliding genitals...

It's running through the streets chasing crooks, and showing off for an admiring audience, and knowing he's the Star of someone's world. That's love. It's just not romance or sexual bonding. Trying to turn it into sexual bonding, *to me* feels like turning your pet dog's adoration of stick-chasing into romance: it's really not the same thing, for all it may be as personal, as intense, and as adoring.

So, there's step one: I keep not seeing Sherlock seeming to have any physical hunger for John, for
all there's absolutely an emotional hunger. I do see some signs of physical hunger for Irene and Molly and Janine, though that's very tentative and quite obviously not anything Sherlock's used to experiencing. Most of all I see Sherlock as being sexually inexperienced to the point of cluelessness, with a heavy-duty addition of believing sex will give him mental cooties. Much like his quaint Victorian Mind Palace and his odd notion that he can delete information as though his brain were a hard-drive, he appears to think that sexy-times and sexy-thoughts will make him Teh Stupid, and he has been avoiding them.

He doesn't seem entirely comfortable with homosexuality in and of itself--his catty reactions to Mycroft's sex life and the rather icy summary of "gay Jim from IT" read as borderline homophobic--and, yes, that could be interpreted as suppressed desire being rejected through a homophobic reaction, but if so it actually tends to weaken the case for Johnlock. Because? Because if he's repressed and uneasy at even hints of other people being gay trips off homophobic reactions, then any hint of sexual response to John-the-Best-Friend-and-Roomie should be setting off anguished hysteria. Really, if just a hint of Mycroft having lovers can give Sherlock the twitch because of repressed sexual desire, then living with John should have Sherlock in a constant state of nervous breakdown...assuming he actually does desire John. He should be gibbering.

Then there's John. John's, what? Late 30s, early 40s? Trained as a doctor. Served as a soldier. Has a gay sister. Actually liked his sister's wife. Appears to really, honestly, unquestionably find women attractive, even if he's got a rather uninspired track record. Insists he's not gay, and does so in ways that seem quite honestly to rule out bi as well. John doesn't seem to use that phrase as weasel words that let him avoid admitting he's mid-Kinsey. He uses them specifically to indicate that he and Sherlock are not a couple, will not be a couple, could not become a couple, in a sexual sense.

If John were in his 20s I might find it easier to accept he's just deluded about his own responses. God knows, he lies to himself about enough other things. It's within his MO to lie to himself about who he really is and what he really wants. But in all honesty I find the idea that he could make it to his 40s with the training and experience he's got and not come to a pretty clear understanding of being bi or gay? That one seems like a long stretch to me...

Similarly, while John is obviously and inescapably infatuated with Sherlock, it keeps not translating out as a physical infatuation. He's shown no sign of wavering touchy-feely, or odd response to what contact he and Sherlock do make. He's emotionally on fire, but not apparently in a state of physical longing.

Could he be wrong, and suppressing like mad? Well...it could be. But most of the gay men I've talked to, including those who came out quite late after traumatic self-realization, admitted to being aware of and acting on physical attraction even before they were willing to accept that they wanted it or were going to someday consumate that desire. John, conversely, appears bloody-damned oblivious.

And, again, we're back to two men, living in a small apartment--working together, eating together, fighting with each other, sharing a bathroom, etc...

And not only do they not appear sexually motivated in each others' presence, they don't appear to ever be self-aware of such an attraction even when they think they're alone.

The closest we've come to John pining for Sherlock was at the graveside, when he mourns a best friend who died--and emotional bonding, not sexual loss, seems predominant. Similarly, the closest we come to Sherlock pining for John is that anguished, aching gaze at John's chair the morning of the wedding, knowing John won't be coming home to him. But, again, that's grounded in the emotional bond, with nothing to speak of the sexual bond.
Sherlock’s immediate response to the pregnancy? To immediately compare John and Mary to parents--his own parents.

Moffat, at one point, is quoted as saying he can’t see Sherlock intentionally rooming with someone who’d be a constant sexual temptation. Likewise, I can’t see John doing so. There are forms of torture you just don’t subject yourself to.

To me, the two men come across as being true, blazing, on-fire best friends while being quite explicitly not lovers, and not all that likely to become so. If they were to become so, it would, to me, require a very complicated series of revelations and experiences on both their parts...and would not be a case of two men at last overcome by their throbbing desire crashing into each other and falling conveniently onto the bed or sofa. Which leads to the NEXT step in my disbelief...

I don’t believe John and Sherlock as shown to date have the skills or self-understanding to walk that walk. Both are learning. But Sherlock’s still profoundly inclined to stay in the safe waters of Peter Pan adventure rather than emotional sensitivity, and John? John’s *committed* to his understanding of himself as a straight man. To move into a sexual relationship well, Sherlock and John would have to understand themselves enough, and understand each other enough, and be skilled enough at being kind and thoughtful toward each other enough to make it through the transition from platonic to sexual...and I don’t see that in either of them. John's more emotionally fluent than Sherlock, but in the end John’s a man of action in preference to being a man of thought or even a man of great heart. He tends to keep it simple and conformist. And Sherlock?

Sherlock did amazing things emotionally over series three, but none of that great growth brings him to the point of being a very nice man, or all that empathic, or all that mature. He's growing--but he's still about on a par with a middle-school boy.

I keep trying to imagine the transition--and every time I do, both men go scampering back to the safe and intensely rewarding boundaries of their platonic partnership, in which they don't have to question their most basic beliefs about themselves while also solving crimes and arguing about who did the dishes last week. Any attempt to get them making out on a sofa leads me to John throwing his hands up in the air and growling that enough is enough, he's straight, and Sherlock may be a pretty fellow and his dearest friend, but there are some things John won't do with him. And meanwhile Sherlock's muttering viciously that coming to terms with having a sexuality of his own is bad enough without having to put his one stable friendship at risk to explore that sexuality...and that really, he'd rather kiss Lestrade, or even Mycroft, and have John taking notes for later evaluation, than kiss John.

There's nothing "wrong" with Johnlock. Hell, it's fanfiction--ideally there's nothing wrong with any of the 'ships. Fanfiction is where we explore those ideas. But I really do feel unconvinced by Johnlock. Or...

Or, at least, I am unconvinced by Johnlock as a relationship that could ever be realized sexually. That's a rather sad, melancholy position to take, but it's quite true for me. I can get the men to the point where each can, in certain ways, confess to himself--or even to each other--that there's romantic love woven into the platonic friendship. I can't, however, really get the two to proceed to turn that into anything more than a soft, silent bittersweet understanding between the two: that what they have is so precious that they can't bring themselves to gamble it on a sexual alliance each would be more than a little ambivalent about.

I read a comment recently by someone who was quite sure that Sherlock and Watson retire together to that cottage in Sussex, where Sherlock raises bees. I was certain that was wrong, but took the time to look it up, as I make at least as many mistakes as anyone does. I was right:
Sherlock's living as a near-hermit in that cottage. John's still in practice in London and quite busy, and in "His Last Bow," he is just working with Sherlock on a special mission. Canon, taken seriously, ends with Sherlock in Sussex and almost certainly alone (unless you allow him to be "hermitlike" with someone else, which is doable, if a bit of a stretch), and John in a heterosexual marriage with a family of his own, still living in London. Canon paints them as the dearest of friends to the end, but also men who are able to move in and out of that Baker Street intimacy more than once within their lives without it destroying them or their friendship.

I can see that as a very sad story, looked at one way: if either or both really, really yearned for it to be a "gay marriage" within the available social loopholes of the time, then one or both men would be forced to live with a very big "what might have been" sighing mournfully in the face of what really happened. I can see it as a very happy story, too: of two men who, regardless of sexual issues, found each other, and were able to keep each other and love each other in the face of two very different, very separate lives.

Which is a bigger miracle, really? Sherlock and John together in Sussex, a couple, with the bees? Or Sherlock and John never a couple, yet still loving and enjoying each other so much as to maintain that intimacy and delight in the face of John's multiple marriages, Sherlocks' faked death, the obligations of John's professional practice, and eventually in the face of distance, time, and Sherlock's decision to leave detective and (most) espionage work? Of the two, I have to say the second is more difficult. It's rare for people to develop a non-sexual friendship that lasts through that much change and challenge. Couple are at least together, going through the same experiences. They have a chance at living in sync. Platonic friendships have to survive without that couple-bonding and proximity thing.

We all want John and Sherlock to last: friends forever. We want to know that if Winnie-ther-Pooh and Christopher Robin are forever up in the Hundred Acre Wood, a boy and his bear, so, too, are Sherlock and his John together, laughing, investigating, snarking at each other. I think both Johnlockers and non-Johnlockers want to know Our Boys are together forever. But I will confess I'm more convinced by a non-Johnlock summary of the relationship, and I'm more moved in the end by the canonical platonic version than I would be by the True Love Conquers All romantic version. Part of me dreams of Sherlock and his bees in Sussex glancing fondly sidewise at John and his beloved wife, ideally with children at his knee, and the two just... nod. And smile. And love each other. Always, always love each other.
Outstanding questions

Chapter Summary

Stuff from three seasons that keeps ticking my alarm buzzers.

What did Magnussen have on Janine? Did he have it before, or after the time of the shooting?

Why were both Mycroft and Lestrade missing in the second ep? Where they testing out the new team--seeing how John and Sherlock worked together without either of them ot lean on--or were they setting up for something else? Or was it just coincidence? (The Universe is Not That Lazy...)

Was Mycroft testing John's capability as a secret agent during Great Game? Did John fail the test? Was Sherlock an active participant in that test, as he and Mycroft were in mid-face-off when we first see the interaction, and Sherlock turns down the assignment--but keeps an eye on it in spite of that. Was he colluding with Mycroft to see if his new friend could also be a full-fledged MI5/6 operative? Again, did John fail?

Was Mycroft again testing John in the resolution of Scandal? (Ability to lie, ability to deny Sherlock his whims (phone) ability to detect manipulation, sentimental folly, etc) If so, again, was Sherlock in on it? Did John fail? If John has failed twice, is this in large part why he was left out of the loop regarding Reichenbach Fall?

Was Lestrade really married, or was that part of a cover? Where was Lestrade prior to Hound? Was the loss of the ring real, or again part of a more elaborate plot? Why did Mycroft feel it necessary to send Lestrade out? What formal professional relationship do Mycroft, Lestrade, and Sherlock have?

If Lestrade is, as it now seems, Secret Agent Man, how much of his "dumber than Sherlock" routine is role-play? I continue to find some of the "dumb Greg" bits to be unlikely and over the top...but acceptable as Greg playing dumb-cop to Sherlock's Clever Detective.

Was Greg actually in on Reichenbach, but unable to take direct action because it would break his cover? Was he maintaining the cover story and monitoring groups like Anderson's Empty Hearse as part of his professional role? Was he actually trying to hint to John that the Fall was a fake and that Sherlock would be back when he gave him the DVD?

Why didn't Mycroft fight back during "Vow" when Sherlock attacked him? At this point we have no reason at all to think Mycroft hasn't got the training to get around a simple twisted arm. We know that Mycroft's done "leg-work" now, and is reasonably good at it. In this 007-style fiction, that means he's at least got some fighting skills...enough to put up a reasonable resistance to baby brother on a tear. What motivated the choice to let Sherlock pin him?

Why did he have Anderson and his wife along? That, to me, feels painfully set-up, as though Mycroft knew going in that he wanted "witnesses" in place who would gossip within their tidy little circle.

To what degree was Mycroft actively against Sherlock dealing with Magnussen, and to what degree was he colluding?
Why did Sherlock kill Magnussen, and do so as openly as he did? Mycroft's got the ability to not only sweep everything under the carpet, but have Magnussen "disappeared," now that they know his information was always in his head, not in his vaults. Sherlock could have let Mycroft land, given him the skinny on Magnussen, and said, "You can now safely dispose of the bastard without fear that he's secured that information somehow...oh, and while you're at it, you might want to interrogate the hell out of him." Why did Magnussen have to A) die, B) in front of witnesses, C) at Sherlock's hand?

How much does Billy Wiggins know about what's going on?

Sherlock kept claiming he was doing the drugs for a case. We do know--unless Molly was lying for him, which we know she might--that he was indeed using. But again, Molly's testimony is suspect. She'd lie, and even slap him silly, if he and Mycroft asked her to for something vital.

If Sherlock was using, was he in or out of control? All evidence to date suggests he's not reliably in control, but his approach to stag night and his apparent conviction that having a case changed the nature of his use suggests he at least THINKS that he can control substances and his body's reaction to them. That's also consistent with how he manipulates his meds after the shooting.

What is Ugly Duckling? Is it, as it appears, so important that it would keep Mycroft from Sherlock's bedside in hospital, and keep him stuck in the office during his search?

If Ugly Duckling is that important, is Lestrade aware of either its nature, or at least of the degree of sensitivity and critical immediacy of what Mycroft does? I admit I am curious in part because how Lestrade would feel about that dismissive hand-wave in the office scene would depend very much on how he understood Mycroft's avid fixation on that laptop screen. If he knew Mycroft was juggling something ongoing and vital, he'd be very unlikely to be offended at that odd hand-waving dismissal. It would be normal for a man focusing that intently on something that important.

Is Ugly Duckling related to the assignment in Eastern Europe that Mycroft didn't want Sherlock to take, but then finessed him into after Magnussen's death?

What were the alternate solutions to Sherlock that were under consideration? My own sense is that A) prison was being ruled out by everyone, B) Mycroft was arguing the necessity of Sherlock Holmes specifically because the next option being considered was "get rid of Sherlock Holmes (ie.: Kill Sherlock)," and C) that Mycroft successfully twisted Lady Smallwood's arm by reminding her of her debt to Sherlock, and thus got Sherlock a stay of execution Mycroft might be able to work around over time. But we don't know. It makes sense, but we don't know.

Is Mycroft actually in on the return of Moriarty? It's awfully convenient, and usurpation of public communications systems is so very Mycroftian.

Is there a unified narrative arc in place from episode one onward, that's playing out in the World of Mycroft (Secret Agent Land)? To me it feels like there may be: a story that's playing out and causing narrative ripples in Sherlock's World that we don't know about...

Did Mycroft know about Mary?

Did Mycroft actually put Mary in place with John?

Did Mycroft *MATCHMAKE* Mary and John?

Did Mycroft know Mary shot Sherlock? If so, why did he not act? Was he satisfied (as Sherlock was) with her reasoning and motivation?
Why does Sherlock seem honestly surprised that Mycroft does not want him dead, in their conversation in the garden? It's...odd. So far we've seen no sign that Real World Mycroft wants anything but Sherlock's well-being and his involvement in the Queen's Secret Service...and of the two he seems to favor Sherlock's well-being. That Sherlock seems surprised that Mycroft warns him off a potentially lethal assignment seems...peculiar. Which leads to a side note that Sherlock's internal Mind Palace Mycroft seems consistently OOC for the Real World Mycroft. Sherlock's inner Mycroft seems very much the fabrication of a child regarding an older brother: exaggerated reaction, highly subjective reaction.

What caused Mary to part company from the CIA? I can see so many routes to take with this, given Mycroft was supposedly aiming for Magnussen--at least in Magnussen's opinion. CAM was quite sure Mycroft had been after him for years. Given Mycroft, that means that anything associated with CAM has to be questioned, which leads us back to Mary and her CIA connection. If Sherlock was trying to set up a "drug addiction" story to attract CAM, was Mary and her "freelancing" similarly a gimmick? Was she on loan to Mycroft? Or did she indeed break with the CIA, but flee to Mycroft for sanctuary? Given the timing, and given CIA hijinks at that time (and the way they are popularly seen in Europe and the UK), it seems like a very plausible plot-line for Moffat/Gatiss/Thompson to make Mary a heroine for leaving...whose freelance work is actually something we'd approve of. Or at least a UK audience of people hostile to much of the Iraq/Afghanistan mess would approve of. This is one of those things where I can see UK and US audiences feeling different about how a character's backstory arc plays out.

Why does John never seem to notice that even in close quarters it's superb shooting for Sherlock to be able to fill in "Smiley Face" with bullet holes while in a temper, including a behind-the-back shot? John's a skilled enough shotsman to know that's pretty damned fancy shooting...of the sort very few people in the UK in civilian life would be at all likely to achieve.

Why does John seem so amazingly slow to really deal with some elements of Sherlock? Like the secret agent stuff? It's like it keeps rolling off him like rain off a treated windshield. It bounces off.

Both Arthur Conan Doyle and extra-canonical Holmes material tends to migrate over time to Secret Agent activities, with the last ACD story being pure espionage (WWI Pro-English/Anti-German propaganda, to a degree...). Then there's Rathbone, whose Holmes goes back to war propaganda in WWII. And of course the ever-beloved "Private Life of Sherlock Holmes," which puts Sherlock and Mycroft pretty much in the thick of it, with Mycroft just plain secret service and Sherlock as very much an available adjunct of interest. How much have Moffat/Gatiss/Thompson always intended Sherlock to be a secret agent story in disguise as a mystery series? How deeply did they really plan that structure? Did that structure evolve during the time between the unaired Pilot version of "Study in Pink" and the final, second-round pilot? To me it feels like sometime between those two attempts, when they added Mycroft, they added an entire additional subtext. But it may just have not shown in the original because it was shorter, with no room to plant Big Brother.

Are MGT aiming Sherlock at retirement to Sussex? Is Janine part of a long-arc development that would naturally end there, assuming they were able to run so long (even if she died along the path of the arc)?

Is Irene now working as a double-agent for Mycroft? It seems such a logical thing for Mycroft, Irene, and Sherlock to sort out. And it would explain why she was in Islamabad, of all crazy places for a sex-worker to go, and why Sherlock was able to get in and out--Mycroft and the team tracking and helping set things up. Is Irene "on our side" at least for now? (I just can't imagine Mycroft wasting all that talent if he can help it. There she is, helpless and brilliant and in danger of her life. Why not smile a silken smile and say, "Now, Ms. Adler, about your future..."?)
Is the Blind Banker ever going to have repercussions? That one episode seems the least rooted in the series as a whole. I am uneasy about that. China seems such a useful element to play with.

Is the foreshadowing that Moriarty is plural going to be the ultimate resolution of the current Schrodinger's Moriarty situation? Do we end up with a dead/live Moriarty by having more Moriarty than we thought we had to start with? Will any of the surviving Moriarty be played by Andrew Scott? If so, twins? Triplets?

Are they going to be cheap and shabby and make Janine and Moriarty linked? That feels a bit ick. The Irish have a hard enough time of it in the UK when it turns to terrorism/conspiracy already, with good reason, but--can you say IRA? Thought so. Having Moriarty be Irish made sense. It's an Irish freakin' surname--only logical to have Moriarty be Irish. But having the next Major notable Irish player turn out to be tied to him would feel a bit too easy.

But I still want to know what Magnussen had on Janine. And she's one tough cookie to have the discipline to do the eye-flick thing. (Wry grin) Yet another agent? Or just a brilliant and talented amateur?

Ok. That's my list for today. Anyone got other really good outstanding puzzles hanging fire from the past three seasons? Because I suspect there are some more bits that just don't really make sense if we think about them. Like...Baskerville. There's a lot of Baskerville besides Lestrade and his gun that still doesn't quite make sense.
A Bit More Marian Doctrinal Consideration

Chapter Summary

Having just finished up a couple Mary stories, a few more things I've been thinking about her.

To begin with, the moral issues with her shooting Sherlock, and being willing to kill Magnussen.

At some point it seems to me that one has to draw a line between one's own ethical positions, those of the show runners, and those of the people inside a story. They're hardly ever quite the same thing.

Let's start with being willing to murder Magnussen. Why? Because that's the key action taken directly from the original story. Moffat and Gatiss may play patchwork games, may rewrite things, may reshuffle Arthur Conan Doyle's deck, but there's no escaping the point that CAM was the core, direct character and problem taken from the canonical story "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton." The story presented a vile, repulsive blackmailer who, for various reasons, was out of the reach of the law--a dragon who would not be slain by normal means. In the story he's even able to block Holmes, repeatedly. He's not going to fall to cleverness. He's not going to fall to legal action. He's a monster.

The monster is vile enough that Holmes and Watson are both quite willing to steal from him.

In attempting their theft, they witness his murder.

Having witnessed his murder, they have to make a decision: was the action justified? Will they allow the murderer to go free?

The decision of Holmes and Watson suggests that, within the fiction, the murderess did the right thing: she killed the monster no one else could touch.

The way the story is written, one suggests that Doyle, too, agreed with the conclusion: in this instance there appears to be no conflict between Holmes' opinion and Doyle's. Doyle might not have had the moxie to commit the murder, but he seems willing to turn his back and pretend not to see it, too, so that the killer can walk free.

As readers we might disagree, arguing that no one should ever kill an unarmed, non-violent opponent whose entire MO was limited to verbal games and manipulations. A worm-tongue is not, after all, a dagger-man. If we feel that strongly, though, we're reading the wrong story: the story itself continues to vigorously conclude that the world is better off with certain people dead. In canon, CAM's predecessor "needed killing." Our own morals may reign outside the story, but can't alter the logic in-story. By original canon logic, Mary is within her rights intending to kill CAM. (More about Sherlock in a minute.)

What about within Sherlock morality?

Well. Sherlock morality started us off at the very beginning of the series with a technically non-violent cabby dead on the floor of a science classroom for being a verbally manipulative little pill.
Jeff Hope is implied to win his little poison game through nothing but cleverness and implied threats. His victims could have walked away at any time. Sherlock, hovering on the edge of taking the pill, could walk away at any time.

We start the series with John killing a man in cold blood who's technically non-violent and in no way seriously threatening Sherlock. If anyone is about to kill Sherlock, it's his own unruly, risk-addicted mind. Do note that John doesn't shoot Sherlock. He shoots a vile little man who's never technically harmed a hair on the head of a single victim. Why?

Because he wasn't a very nice man.

We accepted that morality going in. If we watch the show and love the characters, we've already accepted that premise, at least within a fictional framework. By that standard Mary's fully within her rights--not only is Magnussen threatening her and hers far more directly than Jeff Hope's bizarre little game with a pistol cigarette lighter and a bottle of pills, he's used his games to cow and bully much of the Western world. By the end of the episode we will be able to count at least one death to his discredit. If John can kill Jeff Hope with impunity because he's "not a very nice man" and because he threatened Sherlock's stability, then by extension it's reasonable and right for Mary to kill CAM. Like Jeff Hope, he's simply someone who "needs killing."

Does the author agree with that logic? Yes. In an interview very kindly pointed out to me by wynneton, Moffat makes it clear that, to him, her attempt and intent fits within the moral framework of the story and within his own moral framework. CAM is what can only be called "fair game" within the parameters set out by the story and imagined by the writer. He's a villain designed to be a justifiable, righteous kill. Mary loses no moral points within the fiction for the action, nor in the mind of her writer. Planning to kill CAM was right. He was not a very nice man. John and Mary are both killers of not-very-nice men.

The viewer may differ, though one then gets involved in what, to me, appears to be some rather fine hair-splitting to differentiate between John as good, and Mary as not-good. The viewer has the right to split such hairs--but the viewer still can't escape the fact that Mary's intended action does fit the overall moral framework of the series, and of the author's intention. Mary's not intended to be seen as evil for planning to kill Magnussen.

Indeed, according to the author, if Sherlock hadn't gone crashing in "like an incompetent" she would have done the job, rid the world of vermin, all would have rejoiced at his demise, and she'd have gone on to live a happy married life with John, serving as John and Sherlock's invisible bodyguard--a protective force they would not even know they had on their side.

Don't look at me--that's what the author envisioned as the outcome if Mary had not been interrupted by Sherlock at his less brilliant and ept. Mary the protector; the boys just that little bit safer under her guarding wings. A future as a solid, loving wife and mother--and hidden hit-woman watching out for her guy and his BFF. All of which would be a lot stranger in a world that did not contain a Mycroft Holmes, dapper dandy and umbrella-wielding Super Spymaster, Greg Lestrade, Met Detective with Secret Agent Attachments, John Watson, Doctor, Detective, Sniper and (reliable) sucker-bait, etc. The Sherlock universe allows Mary-the-spy-hit-woman much more effectively than the real world would, because it's playing James Bond and John Steed/Mrs. Peel far more than it's playing Real World Espionage.

That pretty much walks us up to shooting Sherlock.

Is that good or permissible in the framework of canon?

Well, was Mary shooting to kill, or not? Sherlock insists she was not shooting to kill. The Blind
Banker logic that if an assassin misses killing you, it's because she wasn't actually trying to kill you, suggests that within the logic of the show, she was not shooting to kill. The knowledge that far, far better and more common targets were wide open to Mary suggests she was not shooting to kill. The fact that people trained in anatomical and medical issues *can* and have argued that Mary was choosing a non-lethal target suggests that Mary was not aiming to kill. The fact that John ultimately decides to forgive her suggests that, within show logic/show reality, a trained combat doctor would ultimately accept the theory that Mary was not aiming to kill.

She may not have been doing a brilliant job of not aiming to kill by Real World Standards, but by fictional standards within the Sherlock universe, she was plausibly not aiming to kill. Or even do "grievous bodily harm." Further, the fiction and the author both seem to suggest that this not aiming to kill thing really is supposed to be the conclusive take-away message. Mary wasn't trying to kill Sherlock. She was going for a tactical compromise, causing damage in the hopes of ultimately scoring a win for everyone: a long-game hope that in the end Sherlock would be fine, CAM would be dead, Mary's past would either remain secret, or at least be revealed by Mary in her own time and framework, rather than presented however CAM felt like showing it, and John would in theory never have to deal with Mary's past.

Not, perhaps, saintly. But on the other hand, not particularly evil within the framework of a show in which John's best man has drugged him without his consent, used him as a guinea pig for psychotropic drugs and in the process intentionally terrified him (ignoring his already existent PTSD), forced him to witness his best friend's suicide (and to serve as the suicide note for all practical purposes)(again without regard for PTSD, which is quite ghastly when you think about it).

 Seriously, folks, think about this: Sherlock and John manage to make Mycroft look mild, constrained, and etically conservative, in comparison with their own overall hijinks. They kill unarmed jerks, (and Sherlock adds in torture to unarmed jerks as they lie dying, just to keep things interesting). They repeatedly do stuff like try to trick people into ignoring patient confidentiality. They break the rules of police work right, left, and center. Sherlock lies, regularly, to almost anyone, but certainly to John over and over.

John and Sherlock are Big Boys in a very brash and ballsy world--a Boys' Adventure world. They kill people, hurt people, play rough with people, including with each other. It's that kind of world. As a fiction it has certain rules--but those rules allow for quite a bit of acceptable murder and mayhem on the part of Our Heroes and Their Allies.

Including injury against each other. We accept that John's "good" even if he does try to throttle Sherlock repeatedly. We accept that Sherlock's a rather peculiar variant on good even if he drugs his roommate, terrifies him, lies to him, grieves him to the point of breaking, contemplates ways to murder him, willingly and intentionally puts him at severe bodily risk...

If John had to shoot Sherlock to save Sherlock's life--even if John merely *thought* he had to shoot Sherlock to save Sherlock's life--the laws of the show would allow him to do so, and us to forgive him.

The only real question, to me, appears to be whether Mary is allowed to act under the same rule set. Do we accept her as one of the boys, playing by the same rules as the heroes, and getting the same "get out of jail free" cards that Our Guys are given regularly? Or will she be judged by the far more stringent standards we impose on villains and outsiders?

I honestly think that how Mary is judged is less a function of her actions than of where you already are choosing to categorize her. If you're categorizing her as one of the Heroes, on a par with John
and Sherlock and Lestrade and Mycroft, then her actions are forgivable and she's "good." If you're
categorizing her as a villain or an outsider, then your judgement will be affected in part by how you
personally evaluate those actions in the context of the fiction, and in part by where you're already
inclined to place her outside the charmed circle of Hero status.

My own sense is that to the writers Mary is a Hero operating under the same rule set as John and
Sherlock--that as John is forgiven for shooting unarmed cabbies who pose no physical threat to
Sherlock, and as Sherlock is forgiven for drugging and terrifying John, Mary, in spite of some
questional moral lapses, is still inside the charmed circle. She can shoot Sherlock and still be
counted as "good." Arguing that shooting people is wrong misses the point in the context of a show
like Sherlock, in which shooting people is where our heroes *START*. Putting our heroes at risk
is also missing the point in a show where, again, our heroes in various ways put each other at risk
pretty much all of the time. Within the fiction the question is not whether these things are right or
wrong, but whether they're done for the right reasons by the right people, with the rules being that
the right people act as they do without giving up on their love for each other (even when it seems
madly counter intuitive).

That's the biggie. Sherlock can drug and torture John and be forgiven because he doesn't give up
loving John at the same time. John can be forgiven for trying to strangle Sherlock because we
know that at the same time he loves Sherlock.

By that logic, again, Mary can shoot Sherlock because she cares about him, and wants him to live.
She can put John's happiness at risk because she's trying to save his happiness.

It's not a show that says, "and she has to be perfectly honorable and justified in all her actions." It
just says, "she has to mean well toward our Heroes and love them."

By that standard, taking the show at face value within the same kind of parameters we apply to
Sherlock, John, and the other "good guys," Mary's good. Her choices, even if not perfect, are good
enough, and sufficiently admirably motivated. Her loyalty is fixed and ongoing.

Mary, by the rules of the show, appears to be intended to be one of the heroes--and as ingenious
and passionately offered as the reasoning may be, she does not appear to be intended as one of the
bag guys.
Mary and Response to WoD

Chapter Summary

Responding to WoD's response to my prior post. NOT intended to be a fight, or a way of calling him/her out. It's just I had too much to say in a single response, and it's too much material that's of interest to several other people in this thread.

WoD, I like talking with you. I don't agree (any more than you do with me) but I DO like the discussion. Thank you.

Let's see--

Magnussen's MO of using people against each other, using blackmail that's not focused on fact, etc is shown repeatedly throughout the show. To assume Mary does not know of his MO is to assume she's not done her homework as a capable agent.

How long has Mary been planning to take on Magnussen? Well, at least as long as she's known Janine. Janine is Mary's Maid of Honor--counterpart to Sherlock as Best Man. By definition it seems almost mandatory that she's known Janine longer than she's been engaged to John--enough so that no one at all finds it odd for her to make her Maid of Honor, rather than just a bridesmaid or not part of the wedding party at all. We have no exact date, but in all honesty it seems safe to assume she's known Janine longer than she's known John. Certainly she's been planning to take on Magnussen longer than she's been engaged at the time of the wedding.

To have found Janine and recognized her as an access point to get at Magnussen, she almost has to have been researching prior to that point...and both she and Sherlock are in agreement that she encouraged the relationship with Janine specifically to give her access to Magnussen.

So we know, by simple logic, that Magnussen was a long-term target...almost certainly a target prior to Sherlock's return and John and Mary's engagement. We know that Magnussen was testing the limits and uses of his information on Mary in specific response to Sherlock (and thus Mycroft) during Empty Hearse. That's a test he would be unlikely to run until Sherlock's return and survival became known...so it's reasonably safe to assume that he's known he had Mary as a victim for longer than that, and is merely exploring a new use for her in response to the new possibility Sherlock's return presents.

We can strongly suspect that Mary, already aware that CAM is threatening her, eventually figures out who sent the skip-code and put John in the fire. We know that CAM was willing to remind her of the threat at her wedding, reminding her of missing family. So, again, by pretty direct knowledge we can conclude Mary is aware of Magnussen as someone who is quite willing to directly threaten John himself and attack her through her family ties. The one thing we KNOW Mary knows about CAM besides that he's got information on her, is that he will gladly place John's life at risk to coerce her. Part of his threat from the very first episode of the season includes willingness to threaten to kill John Watson to manipulate both Sherlock Holmes and Mary Morstan.

We know that Mary's one try to talk to Sherlock prior to the face-off in the Empty Houses with John is her attempt to at least tell him "we don't tell John" in the hospital, at a time when Sherlock was in no condition for further discussion...much less complex negotiation of working together to
beat CAM. There's not much time after that for her to mange such a discussion. We do know that at the time she's saying, "we don't tell John" she's NOT attempting to finish the job she did on Sherlock.

We know through Sherlock's own deduction that her original aim was Magnussen, with all the baggage that indicates and all the time and effort implied. This is further confirmed by interview with Moffat: Mary's intended action that night was simply to kill Magnussen. But we don't need to turn to that as a primary source: it's indicated by Sherlock's own deductions, and by the logic of the sequence. Mary was concluding her long-standing mission to take out CAM.

We know through Sherlock's own deduction that, within the fiction of the episode, killing them both would be the most logical thing to do—the most certain to gain Mary a secure relationship with John, assuming John never finds out what she's done. If Mary "shot Sherlock" to protect her relationship with John, she's stupid—stupid for not simply killing him outright, as she knows how to do. Stupid for leaving Magnussen alive to crank up the leverage.

Mary shooting Sherlock and failing to kill him does absolutely nothing good for her relationship with John. It's a bad move. Sherlock MIGHT tell John—everything. He's got every reason to do so: Mary shot him. Mary’s his rival...in love and friendship. John will survive Sherlock's death—he's done so once already under far more traumatic circumstances...but John's love for Mary may not survive Sherlock revealing her role—as almost does happen. It would be idiotic for Mary to fail to kill Sherlock—unless she cared about Sherlock and was trying to ensure he lived, in spite of the threat he posed to her relationship to John, whom she loves...absolutely and madly. I mean, I'm sorry, that one is obvious: the only reason for Mary to keep Sherlock alive, in terms of her own advantage and her own love relationship, is because she cares about Sherlock and wants him to live...and there is simply no advantage at all in shooting him without killing him, in that context.

The only advantage to shooting him without killing him is in the Magnussen scenario, as Sherlock himself lays it out: she leaves Mangnussen alive because she is giving him another threat to HERSELF. It's his MO. He now has three people to leverage, including more on Mary and a threat to John and Sherlock. That means he will not, in accordance with his own MO, turn Sherlock and John in to the police for breaking and entering. She puts herself deeper in jeopardy to Magnussen, but does so in a way that as Sherlock points out, protects John, who's broken in with Sherlock.

Again, and it can't be said often enough, shooting Sherlock but failing to kill him carries absolutely no advantage to Mary in her relationship with John, and carries enormous risk. She literally can't be shooting Sherlock for selfish reasons to protect her relationship with John unless she's monumentally, catastrophically stupid.

She only gains two things out of her shot: a situation that increases the odds of John not being turned over to the police for breaking and entering, and time to negotiate a better ending—with Sherlock, with Magnussen, etc.

Those are not things I have to make up to fill in Mary's motives. They're all logical elements of an admittedly complex script and complex season.

Do Moffat and the other writers sell all this too poorly? I think that may depend on who you are and what you expect. Me? I'm thrilled to have a story that doesn't leave me feeling pandered to and spoon-fed. I LIKE working out the logic—playing "Sherlock" with all the deductions. I love finding out how tightly it all hangs together without soft-soap and appeals to my sympathy and sentiment. For me the selling level on Mary's just perfect: we're given two marvelous episodes in which to see how well she works with the boys, and then we're given an episode that demands we test that, and shake the logic hard to see how it all works out. I find Mary of "Vow" to be logical, strong,
generous in her love for both John and Sherlock, determined to find a way to protect them both, and trapped by complex circumstances that force her into gambles she does not like...but which do work out in the end.
Sherlock and John, brief.

Chapter Summary

A minor bit of discussion with myself about me, headcanon, and Our Boys...

Ok, I am going to be honest: I know that for many people it's critical canon that Sherlock missed John every second of every day of his absence. That he loved John, knew he loved him, looked forward with bated breath to return to John, expected John to be there, waiting for him, ready to be thrilled at his return.

Here's the trouble: I don't buy it. It's another of those bits of fanon that just don't seem to fit canon - - ACD or Sherlock--to me.

If we are to take all of Hearse at face value, Sherlock didn't ask about John while he was gone. Didn't contact John while he was gone. Does not appear to have asked Mycroft about John at all until his return. Has not apparently checked on John through alternate sources, either--he doesn't know John's no longer living at Baker Street. He doesn't know John's dating, much less on the verge of a proposal. Appears not to have even been checking John's blog, or Mary would not have been such a surprise to him. Simply expected that boring old John would have no life worthy of even noticing while he's gone. In two years, in spite of seeing John mourning at the gravesite, he's given no apparent thought to how deeply he may have hurt John--John who's already dealing with some form of PTSD (even if not the form Ella thinks he's got) and who's been made to witness his best friend jumping from a ledge, using him as a suicide note repository, and confirming his death with his own bloodied hands.

I'm not saying I think Sherlock's a vicious sonofabitch...frankly, I'd almost find vicious sonofabitch reassuring in comparison with what I honestly think the authors wrote and the actors played.

What I think is that Sherlock, even more than most people, does "out of sight, out of mind."

Look, for me it's worrying about all the details before I leave home for a trip or a vacation. I make lists in my head. I worry about whether I'll leave a stove burner on. I worry about what appliances should be left on, and which should be left off in case of a power-outage. I run around making arrangements for the pets, and I flea-bomb the house just before I go just in case there are eggs lurking in the carpet just waiting to hatch and go insane the minute I leave, turning my place into a creeping hell-hole by the time I'm back. I worry right up until I'm about 1/2 hour out of town...and then I don't think about any of it again until I'm about 1/2 an hour from returning home. It doesn't necessarily mean I don't love my home, my friends, etc.--though having moved too many times in my life, I can say it works reasonably well for moves, too: you do all your grieving before you go, and then...you're gone. What I am saying, though, is that Sherlock already would have struck me as the kind of man to simply not think about John during an absence. What's real for Sherlock is whatever he's working on right now. John can leave the apartment, never be noticed as gone, come back, and Sherlock will simply pick up the conversation where he left it several days previously.

Does that mean he doesn't love John? I suppose that may depend on how you define "love."

Mycroft, to me, appears honestly a bit relieved that Sherlock didn't stay in touch with John during his absence, and a bit dismayed that Sherlock, on returning, is so determined to get back in harness
with his friend. IMO Mycroft did define "love" or at least "friendship" as some level of staying in touch, thinking about, missing John, checking how he was doing, keeping track of him. With the contacts Sherlock has, it would have been easy enough to do. Mycroft appears to have honestly thought that perhaps John was just no longer part of the picture: that John would go one way, into a happy marriage, and Sherlock would go another, perhaps back into MI5/6. Mycroft is defining love as reasonably continuous, ongoing mental and emotional involvement, and has interpreted the blatant lack of any sign of that as Sherlock not-loving John. I'm inclined to see quite a lot of fanwriters as sharing that definition and adding the missing mental dedication that canon actually seems to suggest is absolutely not there. Why? Because to them if it's not there, Sherlock doesn't really love John.

I think, though, with Sherlock, there's a slightly different element at play. No, I don't think Sherlock "loves" John quite the way many of his fans--including me--might prefer. I think his love is rather odd, and rather self-centered, at least at the start of Hearse, and that it has more to do with what he thinks John will give him than with what he owes John. If he's made Mycroft, for better or worse, the voice of both reason and self-criticism in his Mind Palace, John's apparently become the source of approval and often stupid dedication, but reliable dedication. He's the man saying "That's amazing!" rather than "Piss off!"

If you're me, when you're away on a camping trip, you may not miss having a shower. A shower might actually feel like an entirely problematic issue when you're out among the pines. As you approach home, though, you start thinking about hot and cold running water and decent water pressure and sluicing away the dust. One starts dreaming of utilities.

Sherlock "loves" John, when he's returning, but to a degree sees him as a utility. Of course the hot water heater will welcome him home: hot water heaters have no lives without their owners/tenants to provide for. John's Sherlock's cheerleader, and quite honestly, more than a bit the "pet" Moriarty calls him, and the "goldfish" more quietly hinted at in the conversation with Mycroft later. Worse, Sherlock's been free to treat him as a self-maintaining pet/utility. You can go off and it feeds itself, and waits, and when you come home, voila, hot water from the spigot, purring cat on the comforter, and John, praising your cleverness and telling you what an amazing fellow you are!

And then Sherlock comes home and finds out friends don't work like utilities--and friends who think you're dead, and who find you were gaming them, tend to react badly.

And then Sherlock finds out John really can love other people. He's never really had to see that before. He's been able to think of John as an owner thinks of an indoor cat: it's not going to up and love anyone else. All people-love is reserved for owner and family, if there is a family. In Sherlock's case, John's emotional life was presumably about Sherlock.

Sherlock would not see it this way, as Sherlock basically has refused to concede he sees anything much to do with himself as being emotional. Until he finds out all the layers of what he's done and what the consequences are, and has to deal with them and accept them, rather than just whisk them away.

He's really hurt John.

John's really found Mary.

John and Mary really do love each other.

Mary's even really worthy, and Sherlock likes her.

Sherlock really does have to choose--either to learn to have a friend who's not just a utility or a pet,
or accept doing without a friend at all.

If your friend is neither utility nor pet, he or she may need care, feeding, attention, freedom, support—all sorts of things that a water heater or a cat on the comforter didn't need.

I think what I'm saying is that the Sherlock they showed us before Reichenbach Fall is consistent with what they show us during Hearse and after, and that both Sherlock's suggest that even accounting for the growth Sherlock experiences in the first two seasons, the Sherlock who "dies" still dies without much understanding of John as a person—a vulnerable person who isn't just "out of sight, out of mind, come back where you left off." Sherlock comes back, having really and truly stopped thinking about John until his return—and that lacuna is vital because it's what forces Sherlock to then grapple with what happened when, for him, John almost didn't exist, or was at least safely warehoused. John, against all Sherlock's inner intuitions, turned out to be fully human, fully self-willed, fully involved in the mess Sherlock left him, and fully involved in digging his own way out. A real man was there, living a real life, and living it without Sherlock, because that's what Sherlock handed him.

Sherlock's throw-away line in response to Mycroft's point that John's "got on with his life" -- "What life? I've been gone!" -- is vital because it's real and true. He honestly did not consider John to have a life or a reality that mattered without him. Out of sight, out of mind. Out of mind--out of any vital existence.

Now, is that "real love"? I myself would think it's child-love, of a particular self-centered sort. Only when faced with the clear sign that this child-love was wrong-headed and mistaken could Sherlock start to change, and grow, and realize...

Sherlock starts real love when he decides to accept John and Mary and their wedding—to accept it in spite of his own loss of a reliable cat on the duvet. In spite of loneliness. In spite of having lost his best cheerleader. Sherlock decides Mary is worthy. He decides the wedding is right—and that he'll support it in all ways. In his own way, he tries to cut himself a tiny slice of platonic but "vowed" polyamory, a tiny little bit of a share in the new marriage.

The Sherlock who came home had not grown one iota in regards to John...and that's vital, because it's only in response to seeing the reality of what John's lived, lost, gained, mourned, rejoiced in—in accepting the validity and necessity of what John experienced—that Sherlock grows.

From our POV it's better story telling than saying, "And during the two years away Sherlock became a good and loving man who thought of his best friend constantly." It's also more honest story telling. Regardless of the leap from St. Bart's—indeed, because of the leap from St. Bart's—we have no reason to think Sherlock left really understanding John as a fully real human being who'd just been desperately hurt by his actions. Absence isn't going to fix that, especially absence as Sherlock appears to have done it, with no backward glances spared. The Sherlock who returns is a hunter who's not grown in his human warmth during his absence—he's hunted. Alone. Only when he comes home does he realize he's got to learn from what happened on "the home front" during the war.

I regularly think of Mycroft and Sherlock as being every bit as much veterans as John is—just of a very different war: one no one acknowledges, one they can't talk about, one that demands great courage and great isolation and great ruthlessness from them. Above and beyond their own peculiar Holmesian weirdness, they're both marked by their service experiences. Even if you don't believe that Sherlock had experiences prior to Reichenabach Fall—the Fall did happen. The Exile happened. The Great Hunt happened. The Sherlock who comes home appears to have hunted, fought, killed, been captured, been tortured, been rescued, and most of all been alone in ways a
man with a platoon and a sergeant and a captain and a chaplain and a reliable letter service home, and someone sending care packages would not be.

For that man, what happened on the home front wasn't real, any more than it's ever real for those who suffer and fight and grow while away. Only in trying to reintegrate do we or they find out that both realities happened, and what that means.

I do occasionally wonder when, and if John Watson will ever understand what Mycroft and Anthea and Sherlock and Lestrade seem to be: fellow veterans. I like writing it. I'm not sure it happens. But I hope it does. Because right now Sherlock's years of combat are no more real to John than John's years of mourning were real to Sherlock...
Chapter Summary

A discussion on the divergence between genre expectations and what Moffat and Gatiss seem to be aiming for/creating.

An associate/friend/acquaintance of mine shifted, at a point in her pro career, from writing fantasy to writing romances. I recall her in mid-transition posting once that the hardest thing was getting used to doing the exact opposite of what her prior training demanded, and letting her characters be stupid, self-indulgent, and sensual regardless of whether it made any sense at all for adult human beings to behave that way. The Romance Genre Expectations demanded it.

When you study pop writing, you learn about genre tropes and genre expectations. You got a mystery? You are expected to have a villain, who's not the hero most of the time, who performs a tidy, solvable crime of sufficient dastardly despicability to justify a novel worth of trying to catch him or her. You probably need a corpse. You need a character doing the detecting, and a lot of the time you need a character to serve as a Watson/sidekick. All elements in the story give way to the arcs of the crimes and the solution of the crimes, even when the result is ridiculous outside the realm of Mystery Tropes. Whether you're writing comfy cozies, or thrillers, or CSI prodedural mystery, the tropes will demand certain things of your writing, and those things may have nothing to do with how real people behave or what their real priorities are, or how real crimes get solved...or fail to get solved. Given the challenge of writing a mystery, your readers will expect you to not only permit, but encourage certain kinds of indulgence to ensure the kind of story they want: no loose ends left, all arcs making some sense, the criminal satisfyingly evil and more satisfyingly stopped at the end. It's not literary novel, it's genre, and it makes demands that the writer ignore reality no matter how silly that may really be.

Same with romance. Same with fairy tale. Same with fantasy. There are genre tropes and they're hungry, demanding monsters.

Here's the catch: the very best writers are the ones who manage to buck the tropes. Spit in their eye. Recognize them for soulless, ravening narrative monsters that strip the real humanity out of their characters. Terry Pratchett repeatedly illustrates this brilliantly, and even allows some of his characters to fight a subversive battle against narrative imperatives and genre expectations from within the novels themselves. There's nothing like Granny Weatherwax recognizing a nasty bit of fantasy foreshadowing and snarling that she ain'tn't havin' with it.

Real people do not live pop genre tropes. As my late father the Buddhist insisted, "In reality there is no story--we only make the story up in our own heads. Enlightenment means letting go of the illusion of story." I don't entirely agree with him. I think the stories we create matter in good ways—but they are ways we create and impose, and we create and impose them on a universe that does not clearly have ANYTHING to do with genre tropes for very good reasons.

In classic romance genre, the first suitor is almost always the best suitor. The second suitor is a rotten mistake who exists only to lure the heroine away from her One True Mate for a short time, only to have Second Suitor turn out to be a complete butt. In real life--how many of us would really, really, really like to be tied for life to our first suitor? Even our first MAJOR suitor? How
many of us have experienced staggering along in a half-assed relationship only to find someone who's simply a much, much better fit?

In mystery genres detectives are a bit noble, a lot nosy, and dead sure to go charging into danger—and it works and no one points at them and says, "You do know you're bug-house nuts, don't you?" The hero behaves heroically and it works every time. No one asks the hero to be sane, sensible, keep a day job, be a good roommate.

In real life? Not so much.

And, as I said, the realm of the greatest stories is within that narrow band where the author bucks the expectations. Refuses to do the done thing. Snarls bitterly in the face of narrative imperative and says, "Screw that, it's crazy."

For the record, that's also the realm of...

Wait for it...

I mentioned Pratchett for more than one reason...

That's the realm of comedy, and of comic writers.

Gatiss and Moffat, prior to Sherlock, were best known of all for their comic writing. Ok, yeah, and Doctor Who, which exists on the knife-edge between genre expectations and comic denial of those expectations.

Moffat and Gatiss are writing a "real" Sherlock and John: distilling what ACD and others wrote about those characters, and then setting them loose in a world with just a bit too much reality, and a tiny bit too little genre conformity. They are recognizing what many have recognized: if you move one step past comedy, you break through into revelation. You get a Sherlock who adores John but who has no idea what it's about or what to do with it--because the Sherlock ACD and others created doesn't have that capacity, at least at the start. You get a John who's a bit f*cked up--because when you think about John Watson through the blended lenses of realism and comedy, rather than through genre expectations, well--I mean, come on. A grown doctor and soldier chasing around after a more than slightly off-kilter genius of improbable origins in a state of overblown and highly public adulation and hero worship? John has to be a tiny bit f*cked up to work in any world even slightly less genre-dominated than pure mystery allows.

They're not writing genre. They're not allowing themselves or us the indulgence of genre tropes and expectations. They're writing very Pratchett-style comic drama in a pathos-filled universe in which narrative imperative doesn't quite work.

They're comic writers with exquisite training in pop genre and pop genre comedy, writing a love-song to what is both ridiculous and beautiful about genre heroes.

As a result they're almost certain to never fully satisfy our longing for pat tropes and reliable forms and structures--but, like Pratchett, there's a very good chance they'll keep breaking our hearts while making us laugh, and giving us happy endings at the conclusions.
Chapter Summary

Canon, Author's Headcanon, Viewer/Ficcer's Headcanon

One of the obvious things demonstrated by a long run of meta like this is how much mental analysis, speculation, and headcanon-building a viewer/ficcer can invest in a well-structured, complex show. Some of the material built up is straight observation; some is extrapolative; some deductive; and some downright inventive. Even the most light-weight viewer develops at least some headcanon--it's an actual cognitive necessity. If you doubt it, be in one of the situations where doctors and diagnosticians have to figure out what kind of brain damage you have, and notice how they like determining how, and if, you can put together narrative and determine context from limited cues.

We see fragments, and invent the other bits that go with it. We fill in the gaps with our own imagination. It is impossible to take part in story telling of any sort without investing our minds in the development of a headcanon. Show a kid five drawings out of order, and ask him to tell a story about what's happening in the pictures. Watch and ask questions as he plays Sherlock, sorting out the order, answering your questions about who the people in the pictures are, and what they're doing. If he can't do that, he's trapped in brain damage or cognitive handicap of some sort or another. If he can, he's at least got the vital tools he needs to understand narrative: in fact and in fiction.

It's really no wonder we all tend to defend our headcanon so passionately. Headcanon is about survival. Its about skill. It's about the kind of story you're witnessing. Getting it wrong can be humiliating, disappointing, angering...it can steal from you a story you thought you'd bought into, and replace it with something you hate.

The trouble is, the more complex the material, the easier it is to warp out of shape. The more layers and ambiguities, the more subtle and nuanced the themes and interactions, the more ways there are for people's own "native" stories and headcanons to try to hijack a story away from the actual authors.

I've talked about tropes: Romance, Mystery, Thriller, Westerns, you name it, fiction's got tropes. And, yes, I was using that term before TV Tropes was even imagined. Stories have classic currents, those currents act like riptides in our heads, we get swept away on the river of a particular story imperative. For those of you who've read the original "Princess Bride" by Goldman, you know the bitter dismay the boy/narrator felt when Westley died: the hero can't die. He mustn't die. The Princess must not marry the evil prince. Westley's the hero, Buttercup's the heroine, the story is the Olde Style of Romance (action/adventure with a love-story, a very medieval form!) and for the past few hundred years certain things do not happen in our Romances. Among them, the hero doesn't die and the heroine doesn't marry the villainous jerk. The only real trick is to be sure you know your genre.

Now, what happens when you land with a writer who's quite intentionally playing games with genre tropes, defying genre, expanding on genre, laughing at genre, resisting the flow of genre? What happens when a writer like that plays heavily with ambiguities, intentionally hides secrets to
be revealed only slowly, drags red herrings across the path, palms aces up his sleeve? What happens when he uses the tropes but refuses to swear any allegiance to them?

What happens when the pictures that you see are out of order, stripped of context, with their genre serial numbers sand-blasted off? What happens when the material is complex?

I will quote myself: "The trouble is, the more complex the material, the easier it is to warp out of shape. The more layers and ambiguities, the more subtle and nuanced the themes and interactions, the more ways there are for people's own "native" stories and headcanons to try to hijack a story away from the actual authors."

One of the most fascinating things to be seen in watching how people's headcanons play out, is seeing how much their own spin takes over. If the writers don't stand up front and tell the viewer directly what something is and how it's to be evaluated, it's startling how often viewers will look for tropes and conventions to tell them what they're seeing.

Now, none of us is free of that tendency--but there remains a huge difference between viewers who are observation and analysis driven and those who are trope and convention driven. It's like the difference between John and Sherlock: John has stories and tries to make the evidence fit the stories he expects to see. Sherlock has evidence, and goes looking for stories that fit the evidence. Two different ways of figuring out what's going on.

In either you can be mistaken: you can mistake evidence, select false clues, identify things as clues that are just errata, put the clues together in false patterns giving shadowy illusions of answers. But the converse is equally true: if you mistake what kind of story you're in, then trying to force your data to conform only gets you in trouble. It's one of the reasons I tend to be exceptionally uneasy with theories that demand I discount canon: there's a part of me that insists that if you're coming up with reasons to discount canon because it doesn't fit your sense of what kind of story you're in or what kind of character you're dealing with, there's a good chance you're actually just wrong, like a scientist who keeps throwing away any test results on experiments that don't conform to the theory being tested. It's also why I adore shows and works that buck canon--they can surprise me and make me work harder to evaluate what I'm shown, and what I'm shown is far more likely to actually be worthwhile and necessary, rather than just stage setting and props for a story that's already going to run on genre-trope wheels.

One of the reasons I love it when authors, actors, and show-runners give interviews is because I can use it as a way of testing my own deductions. In some ways it's both more fun and more precise specifically when the situation matches that for *Sherlock,* in which actors, writers, and show-runners are trying very hard to talk about the shows and characters without giving things away. It makes them talk more about who the characters are, what the development arcs are and have been, what the vision is, rather than driving me mad with boredom nattering on about the kind of details fans and entertainment journalists like to ask about: the obvious fuff you can see if you just shut up and watch the show for yourself. Moffat and Gatiss, to my mind, are not "liars." They're skilled writers trying to tell you the truth without giving away the magician's secrets, and as a result what they tell you about is the nature and intention of the magic--in a sense they're explaining the Moffat/Gatiss Sherlock trope: a specific sub-sub genre with its own rules and imperatives. Read enough of their interviews and you can start seeing the shape of the characters and the most vital dynamic of the ambiguities.

So you come to realize it matters to them that John, at least at this stage, is straight, sees himself as straight, is "wired that way," and is functioning in infatuation rather than in sexual desire toward Sherlock. It matters that Sherlock may consider himself "Spock," and emotionless, but in truth he's wrong about himself--dead wrong: he's not only emotional, he's inclined to a certain chivalry
toward women offset by his own social shortcomings and idiocies and empathy issues. It matters that Mycroft is at least one of the crucial keys to understanding Sherlock.

If Moffat and Gatiss are not writing straight genre, but are instead warping and twisting genre, resisting genre, using their skill as comedians to disrupt genre expectations, allowing them to write a character driven "Sherlock Growing Up" story and a "Sherlock and John, BFFs" love story, then it's worth realizing that the temptation to cling tight to genre expectations is exceptionally dangerous. Knowing mystery tropes will get you in trouble. Knowing romance tropes, likewise.

We all have no choice but to build headcanon. We all build it out of great hunks of different stuff: observations, logical deductions, extrapolations, familiar tropes and conventions. But when you're dealing with writers who buck conventions, it's important to become wary of your own gut response to genre tropes and genre expectations. They're not always wrong--Sherlock is often a mystery, and sometimes acts like a romance. But those tropes will betray you in your headcanon, over and over, leading you to assume certain things will happen in a certain way and a certain order.

Genre tropes and expectations tell us Westley will not die--at all...not even enough to need Miracle Max. Buttercup will not marry Prince Humperdink. The happy ending will not only arrive, but arrive without any of those uneasy, intentionally unsettling ambiguities and hints of trouble Goldman wove into the conclusion of "The Princess Bride."

Comic writers, ironic writers, aware writers bucking the genre assumptions, though? They can write anything, and they may need to write anything to tell the story they themselves are trying to tell. You're off the maps. You're out of charted waters. What you think you see may be an illusion.

Here there be dragons.

Moffat Interview:

This is one of Moffat's interviews from Season 2 that I find exceptionally interesting, informative, and a good corrective when I'm trying to think about who Sherlock is in the show. I turn to this and other interviews to try to determine if I'm reading canon clues correctly, and developing the right sense of what kind of character Sherlock's intended to be, as opposed to what kind of character genre assumptions added to viewer bias toward the protagonist would incline me to imagine Sherlock as being. Viewers tend to soften and rationalize leading characters, automatically airbrushing in halos where the writers and performers put none. That tendency combined with genre assumptions can be absolute death to accurate headcanon. It's so hard to hear the character's voice through the roar of 200 years of genre norms and viewer bias.
Comparative Analysis, Sherlock <= House, Mary/Amber

Chapter Summary

Spotted an interesting parallel between Sherlock and House, and feel like mulling it over.

So, what's a girl to do when Sherlock is in hiatus?

Catch up on other shows I never got around to watching the first time around. In this case, I've been doing some binging on House. Current position? Hugh Laurie rocks. Why do the best English actors always kick the ass of the best American actors when it comes to accents? I definitely want Sherlock to play rock-fiddle and be conversant with modern rock: it seems wrong for a drug abuser whose street name is "Shezza" to not know modern rock, no matter HOW damned given he is to deleting stuff. Sherlock is nicer than Greg House, and less screwed up. John Watson is less nice than Wilson--and more screwed up, though so help me it's a close call, as they're both a mess.

For all their problems, Sherlock and John have what is basically a reasonably functional mutual love-story. Greg House and Wilson have an bitterly dysfunctional love story.

And....

The show-runners for both shows have come up with the approximate same answer to the question of what to do with Mary to make her plausible. Make "Mary" a proxy for Sherlock/House, in which Watson/Wilson can match his platonic adoration of Sherlock/House with his heterosexual desire for a female sex partner. Both sets of show-runners are, IMO, pretty open and obvious about it, too. In House they go beyond being obvious and dive straight into posted announcements. House outright diagnoses her as Wilson's proxy for House. She fits: independent, demanding but not submissive/clingy, insanely competitive, insanely driven, obsessive, brilliant. She's a lot less addicted than House, a bit more overtly ambitious (though as she's at the start of her career working her way up, that's only logical.) She's House, minus a few outstanding problems and drawbacks with the added plus of being a gorgeous blonde female. House's sexy female clone...and Wilson falls for her so hard he doesn't know what to do with it all. It's all laid out, set in clear order on the screen: Wilson and House are both rampantly straight enough that no matter how much they adore each other, their love story is unlikely to end up in bed, however no one misses that both men have found their One Great Friendship in each other--they don't exactly complete each other, or heal each other, but their respective strengths and weaknesses, wounds and wholeness call to each other. Scream for each other, sometimes. House needs Wilson. Wilson, though, needs House.

Of the two, only Wilson is really plausible finding a lasting monogamous marriage, though. House, no matter how perfect the match, is unmatchable: to damaged to endure the prolonged intimacy. In Amber, they've created a female proxy who's just that bit less damaged, that bit more savvy about her own weirdness, to be plausible as making it work in her own relationships where House never would.

Moffat, Gatiss and Thompson are almost as open with Mary, but not quite. Still, they hand us a "tell" in Mary's very first scene, when John's telling her how wonderful she is, and she's the best thing that could have happened to him--and in perfect, pure Sherlockian style, she agrees cheerfully that, yes, she IS the best thing that could have happened to him. Logic and rationality, not
sentiment. Foot-in-mouth, but accurate. Throughout the first episode, "Hearse," Mary will over and over show off the ways she is like Sherlock--and unlike him.

She's logical: she knows Sherlock had to have co-conspirators to make his "death" work. She's got spy training--she knows a skip code when she's sent one. She's focused. She's socially quirky. She's at ease with the odd. She's surprisingly at ease with danger, even at the beginning, when we're not supposed to know she's an agent. In spite of not telling us she's an agent, they carefully write her as an agent. Level-headed, calm, quick to suss out a situation, skilled in her own kind of deductive abilities.

She's different from Sherlock in being at ease "sharing" John with his old, dear friend--a position Sherlock has to struggle with throughout the season. She's relaxed--Sherlock honestly isn't. She's much, much better at the game of "people" than Sherlock is, or ever will be. But even in that first episode, it's quickly clear that in many ways she and Sherlock are more alike than Sherlock and John.

(Which, as an aside, leads to an interesting consideration: she seems throughout "Vows" to simply expect Sherlock will actually understand her choices, where John will be destroyed by her choices--much as he was destroyed by Sherlock's choice to jump off St. Bart's. Mary, however, never has any apparent trouble understanding the logic of the jump. She knows why John's hurt and betrayed--but she has no problem at all recognizing that Sherlock did a perfectly logical and necessary thing within Sherlock's frame of reference. Which...wow...turns "Vows" into a mirror of "Hearse." And turns Sherlock's clear understanding of the pressures and motives driving Mary into a mirror of Mary's easy understanding of what drove Sherlock to enact The Fall.)

As well as setting up obvious behavioral parallels in the first two episodes, Moffat, Gatiss and Thompson start a long, steady arc of confirming pretty much completely that Sherlock can and does operate within the context of James Bond Secret Agent Man stuff. He's part of Mycroft's world, as is Lestrade. This is important for many reasons, but not least because it paves the way for Mary and Sherlock to truly understand each other in "Vows." By the time we get to the intervention in the heart of "Vows," we have to have been given at least some clues that Sherlock and Mary are "the same."

The funny element, in a sad, ironic way, is John's recognition of their similarity--only to assume that means they "should have married each other." It's tragic that John's so completely blinkered regarding who he's friends with versus who he sleeps with: he's got a wall up that forces him to miss the obvious--miss what Sherlock and Mary have both been bludgeoning him with for the entire scene: John loves Mary for the same reasons he loves Sherlock. They are dangerous. They are agents. They are even crazy in some of the same ways. They're the answer to his emptiness. The resolution to his own boredom.

I will admit, I'm always a bit puzzled at those viewers who don't see Sherlock as being downright fond of Mary throughout "Vows." To me, that intervention includes some of the most loving, tender body language and interaction Sherlock's ever shown--and it's not aimed at John, it's aimed at Mary. John's who they both love, and who they're trying to bring safely to shore. But Sherlock and Mary are working together, and Sherlock's empathy is actually for Mary. John's who he loves but is outright frustrated with. It shows when they hand dialog back and forth, it shows in exchanged glances, it shows in how they share space. For me, though, the most powerful moment is among the hardest to see, because it's staged so that you have to work it out almost entirely from stance, focus, response...

John's declared in his fury that ok, they'll do it Sherlock's way. Always Sherlock's way. And he's sat with a mighty huff in "his" chair. Mary's hovering at the verge, against the fireplace mantel.
Sherlock, wearily and in pain, crosses toward her and you can see that he and she are looking right into each other's eyes. Neither is aggressive. Sherlock's motions, to me, look tired, but also tender and apologetic. This is how it has to go. There's no way out but through. But he's on her side. He UNDERSTANDS. She understands he understands, and she knows why it has to go that way, and its his gaze, his body language, that makes it possible for her to go sit in the "client chair."

He crosses too far. He makes eye contact well beyond the point when he'd normally turn to sit. He almost has to backtrack to sit in "his" chair.

Sherlock loves John. Mary loves John. But in that scene, Sherlock and Mary know each other, understand each other, love each other, and trust each other to get through what both know is going to be hell.

For those who enjoy OT3 drama, the intervention scene in "Vows" is almost as good as it can get. Mary and Sherlock "share" their respective marriages with John, and enter into a marriage of their own, not based on "We don't tell John," but on "Now we do tell John." Between them they bring John through.

But that only works because they do understand each other. They are alike. John does love them both specifically because they're alike. Mary is a plausible proxy for Sherlock, just as Amber was a plausible proxy for House. They're not the same, but they're much alike. Profoundly similar. They share professions. Sherlock has almost certainly killed long before he takes out Magnussen: that's what the Hiatus was about. That's what Mycroft's using to justify his comment that England will always need Sherlock, the ruthless, the efficient, the remorseless. Sherlock and Mary are capable of being effective shadow warriors: killers. Assassins. John's had to int integrate that truth about Mary-and he's still avoiding the truth, refusing to actually look. He isn't even that far with Sherlock.

He sees himself as a soldier, a killer, a man with a gun--but he doesn't want to admit either of his dearest friends are, if anything, more lethal than he is...nor that he loves them for that very kinship.

We know that Moffat and Gatiss openly and freely looked at ALL Sherlockian material. We know that House was always openly a Sherlock retread, with House as Holmes, Wilson as Watson, and medicine as the crime scene to be studied and disease as the criminal to be detected. I can't help wondering if they didn't quite consciously study how Mary/Amber was handled in House to develop how to manage the same essential position in Sherlock. It's not that I don't think Moffat and Gatiss and company aren't ingenious enough to come up with the idea on their own. But they're good researchers, they're open and honest researchers, they draw on good work where they find it, and they don't waste time reinventing the wheel if it doesn't need reinventing. House's writers and producers came up with a very good way of dealing with adding a "Mary" to their complement of characters. It's a method that actually strengthens the implications regarding how complete and profound the love between House and Wilson is: that Wilson's best match is a female House with a few of the worst bugs removed. When House finally goes around the bend, Amber is both his hallucinated genius-self and his evil, self-destructive twin: a proxy House not only for Wilson, but for House himself. She IS House--everything he loves and fears about himself. It's a great solution, and one that, IMO, adapted well for Sherlock, too.

Now, I'm not an old fan of House. I don't know if Amber caused anything like the ruckus in House fandom that Mary's caused in Sherlock fandom....and I've already made it really obvious that I don't really get the ruckus over here, either. I'm in a poor position to discuss why it doesn't work, because for me the gambit works brilliantly in both shows. It deepens one's understanding of how close the two men are, it explains how Sherlock/House can actually love and be loyal to and understand Mary/Amber, it clarifies in an odd way that perhaps if you can't get a stiffie for your
best friend, you should find someone of the "correct" gender who's enough like your best friend to trigger the stiffie.

The biggest difference I see in the two shows is that in House, it would have self-destructed. Amber and House understood each other very well, but were also absolutely at odds over Wilson as "territory." Each wanted exclusive rights to Wilson's emotional intimacy. The biggest question would have been whether youth, nice tits, and greater sanity would win, or whether irrational obsession, vast experience in manipulative viciousness, and killer instinct would win. Either way, over time it would have eventually turned into a war, with really only three likely outcomes: House wins, and forces Amber out--and Wilson puts up with it. Amber wins, and forces House out--and Wilson puts up with it. Or neither win, because in the end Wilson can't endure seeing them killing each other, so no matter how THEY resolve their fight, Wilson has to walk away.

Mary and Sherlock, unlike House and Amber, are not at each other's throats. They decide in the very first episode to "share." In the second Mary and Sherlock find a way to accept Sherlock's "vow," which adds him to "her" marriage to John. And in the third episode, if you accept Sherlock's diagnosis of Mary's actions, then Mary and Sherlock between them become cooperative cospouses, working both independently and together to try to maintain their triangular relationship, in which both love John, but both Mary and Sherlock UNDERSTAND each other, and protect and support each other. They don't need to win over each other, the way House and Amber did.

In an odd sense, to me, Vows is about Sherlock at the start thinking all his effort--all of "Sign of Three" -- ended up failing. He turns in other directions--drugs, Janine, suicidal obsessive case work. In the end, though, as a result of all that, he and Mary "close the circle" and actually create an OT3 relationship, with Sherlock as a chaste/platonic member, but still a full member, as married to Mary in his way as he is BFF with John. The three at the end become a triad.

On the tarmac he's willing to be taken out of the picture in part because his proxy, Mary, remains in the picture, to take care of John. But on returning--he's returning to two people who love him. (And, of course, Mycroft, who loves him but is alone...)
Deducing Sherlock a Bit

Chapter Summary

This is by no means organized or comprehensive, but it is an attempt to think some about Sherlock as a character. Who is he, anyway? Besides having links to MI5/6, which at this point is pretty certain, and being Mycroft's kid brother and Mummy and Father's kid, that is....

Just stuff. Me trying to evaluate what's canonically firm, strongly indicated, weakly indicated, or at least repeatedly hinted at. Trying to sort out my headcanon for Sherlock.

What kind of guy turns "game on!" into his catch phrase? One who detests sports and athletics? Possible, but somehow I don't think so. And Sherlock shows every sign of having some level of athletic activity and interest, even if it is just a matter of martial arts training with an effort made to keep fit and in form. Sherlock simply doesn't work logically as someone uninterested in any form of athletic pastime. It's very close to impossible--close enough to lead me to rule it out until more information comes in. The non-athletic don't fight scimitar-armed Bedouin assassins or leap gleefully from roof to roof or out-juggle and out-fight the CIA operatives. And sports are such an equalizing factor among men and even women of Anglo and American culture...

I am afraid I can honestly see Mummy and Sherlock and Father watching a football or rugby game during a holiday, with Mycroft lurking in the background trying to pretend he's not interested, only to shout victory when his team scores. It seems quite unlikely that Sherlock knows nothing of sports.

Likewise, one suspects he knows quite a bit about common culture in regards to things like rock music: basic survival knowledge when you're going undercover among clubbers, street people, drug users, gang members, petty crooks: the kind of thing Sherlock delights in. He'll know the Clash from the Dead from Pink Floyd from Blondie. Anyone calling himself "Shezza" should and would. He may be able to quote bits of "Shaun of the Dead." It's not usually important from his POV to know about the heliocentric solar system; it is, however, important to know anything he needs to know to slip invisibly into a crack house or an abandoned doss-house inhabited by street people. Writing him as being unaware of the culture of his generation, particularly the low-life, do-nothing, know-nothings who fall into the criminal and vagrant underbelly of London? Critical. The ONLY reason he'd not know is if he "deleted" a less-used bit and over-wrote the file with something more useful.

We know from Molly that he's a "graduate chemist." Now, she could simply be talking about the level of skill he's demonstrated. It seems more likely, all said and done, that he did manage to make it up to at least a partially completed advanced degree in some area of chemistry. Toxicology or some form of chemical forensics seems likely enough. Just as his MI5/6 background gives Lestrade some justification and some cover-your-ass when it comes to letting Sherlock run wild on his crime sites, even if only in the form of confidence and people like Mycroft helping sweep up disasters like the aftermath of Riechenbach, a proper chem degree would give Molly some security in regards to letting Sherlock hang around like a tame moggy in her morgue, using her equipment and taking off with body parts he ought not have. No matter how in love she is, I have a hard time believing Molly would let him in without first checking his credentials--and her superiors who are
not in love with him almost have to have wanted a look. Either Mycroft performed a bit of magic, or Sherlock's probably got a chem degree somewhere in his background.

Drugs: He does them. We know that now. We don't know to what degree he currently thinks he "controls" his usage. Having watched him go out on the stag night with John, one suspects Sherlock at least thinks he can manage the usage of addictive substances with some level of reliability--and let's be honest and up-front about this: within limits he can. Medical science currently depends on being able to guage the use of addictive drugs within some level of safe limits, even in the case of the addicted. What's chancier is the pattern of addiction itself, which tends to be horrifically unpredictable and unique to individuals. It's hard to guess when you'll cross a line from "take it or leave it," to "I'd kill for a hit."

What drugs? So many people have sounded in on this, most more experienced and more trained than I am, but one thing none I've read so far has stated as a primary issue is that mixing drugs, and worse, mixing drugs and various physical and mental conditions, makes for highly difficult diagnostic results. We're in a poor position to know if Sherlock's using cocaine and morphine (his ACD canon drugs of choice) or crack and horse (somewhat modernized) or if he's into meth or ecstasy, or dope, or some rolling blend. We know he's often not using. Perhaps usually not using. We know sometimes he is using. We know--or have strong reason to believe--that there have been times in his life when he was seriously out of control: Mycroft's comments and Sherlock's reactions to those comments and John's own degree of worry suggest that Sherlock's had a few times when the drugs were using him, not the other way around.

We are in similar uneasy uncertainty about any mental peculiarities he's got--and again, what we see suggests a possible complex heap of different things.

People forget that most humans aren't a "pure" form of anything. They're blends. It's not hard to imagine someone who's bi-polar AND who has borderline autism-spectrum traits to their behavior. It's not hard to imagine someone being just ordinary neurotic, but with kinks ironed in through drug use and emotional damage (PTSD, frex). What we do know is that, so far as we can tell, Sherlock's "high-functioning" in terms of his daily life. He may not choose to pick up the milk or chat with the mailman, or make small-talk with Lestrade's team, but he's able to make choices and lead a "normal" life. Frankly, he couldn't be too damaged or MI5/6 would not let him play in their playground, nor would Greg let him swan around crime sites. There are limits to the amount of trouble MI5, MI6 or the Met want to make for themselves... Sherlock may be crazy, but he'd have to be demonstrably functional in his insanity. High-functioning. Weird, but not up there in the belfry squeaking at the bats.

Sexual status? "Whatever," with a few provisos. Moffat, post-Janine, suggested that at this point he'd have a hard time himself believing Sherlock's a virgin--though he also made a point that it can't be proven, and that it can never be proven. So somewhere between Irene and Janine there's at least a strong suggestion he's lost his standing as unicorn bait. Magnussen's own research suggests that Sherlock does use porn, and his use is "normal." There's a little shimmy room--but it's still very hard to believe that Magnussen would regard anything but vanilla as too normal to need any comment--a man who tends his blackmail information as closely as Magnussen, and who's aiming so hard at Mycroft, would not let even little things slip. Given Magnussen hasn't been able to learn anything about Sherlock's source of income (inherited, case-based, private trust of any sort, grant, public payroll, etc) no matter how deeply he's dug, and he digs pretty deep, well.... It seems likelier that Sherlock does use porn, within normal limits, than that he spends much of his time creating false porn trails to mislead Magnussen. Particularly as he's also the sort of person to tell you to take a long walk off a short pier if you did try to blackmail him for using the wrong porn. I can't even imagine Mycroft giving a damn, regardless of how sordid and depraved a kink Sherlock might show. Hell, I can even see Mycroft sighing over kiddie porn, and asking tartly if there was any
Indication anywhere Sherlock ever went near kids—and then saying that what he merely reads is his own business.

It's hard to blackmail the indifferent whose fame depends on a skill. It can be done—but it's no accident that it takes a three-person chain to get to Mycroft: Sherlock and Mycroft are largely apathetic regarding their "good name." Publish and be damned. Finding a weak spot they care enough about to surrender is a real challenge. After all, they both know quite well that "caring is not an advantage." Their solution? For the most part, it's "don't care." Gonna ruin Sherlock's reputation in the papers (a la Moriarty?) "Don't care."

(Aside: Which, by the way, is a vital issue people miss in the entire Moriarty plot-line. First, if Mycroft was indeed in cahoots with Sherlock in the planning of how to managed Moriarty before his release (which Sherlock's own "explanations" suggest repeatedly), then what was leaked to Moriarty was almost certainly chosen and designed by both brothers. There's a good chance that a lot of it isn't true—and a near certain chance that neither Sherlock nor Mycroft gave Sweet Fanny Adams if Mycroft let it loose. Just as Sherlock does not CARE if he's reported as a junkie, so long as it catches Magnussen—the whole "threat to my reputation" thing is largely a matter of indifference to both brothers. They're clear with the very few people they choose to be clear with, and beyond that, if you want to believe ill of them? Mycroft will sniff contemptuously and put Plan B into effect, and Sherlock will fly the bird and go home and play his violin.)

So. Back to Sherlock's sexual status: Probably but not certainly no longer a virgin—but room for ficcers to cut themselves some slack. Probably inclined to vanilla porn—though harder to prove, as the best porn of all is inside your head, where even Magnussen can't track it. Again, room for ficcers—though it reads better when ficcers at least concede that canon suggests he's probably leaning straight, probably a limited-experience non-virgin, and probably inclined to vanilla porn. Within that, though, there's plenty of room for the "whatever" so beloved by Moffat and Gatiss. There are ways to format what canon gives us to allow quite a lot of room for fun: my own favorite remains making Sherlock a mid-range Kinsey who leans heterosexual but bi-to-homoromantic: the people he becomes entranced with having elements Sherlock associates with men and with intelligence.

Income, to get back to it. Magnussen clocks that as an unknown. That's SUCH a huge give-away. It's virtually impossible to live like Sherlock lives with an untraceable income, unless you've got the government working to help you hide the lucre...which they make efforts to do for their secret service operatives, so that tax records don't show up at the front door listing your employer as MI6. We have both comments of Moffat's and logic suggesting that Mummy and Father have money—one doesn't go line-dancing in Oklahoma regularly unless one either lives in Oklahoma or has one heck of a lot of discretionary cash around. That nice cottage they have in the country is modest, but Mycroft is living in a bloody mansion--perhaps not authentic Tudor, but certainly Got-Rocks Victorian Industrialist made-to-order NeoGothic mansion. There are ways around that, but it currently looks like there's money and to spare in the Holmes family coffers...but Magnussen found no sign of it going to Sherlock, so again, we're almost certainly back to the government helping Mycroft and Sherlock hide the ebb and flow of cash under the carpet. There is money—Sherlock's clothes, his equipment, his taxi rides, his indifference to income even when John's facing hard times and the rent may be a problem—they really all point to Sherlock NOT being in difficult financial straits. He not only has money—he has money in a way that permits him to be blazingly indifferent to it. Unlike the classic noir gumshoe, who's living from private client to private client, and praying for a juicy divorce case to cover the rent, Sherlock's free to be bored and inactive without it having serious repercussions on anything but his, John's, and Mrs. Hudson's sanity.

Canon, both TV and ACD, would make him given to insomnia, likely to avoid food while on a
case (but not much sign he avoids it otherwise...). If Moffat and Gatiss play true to their rumored
intent of letting Sherlock grow toward the final version of ACD canon and the Rathbone end of the
spectrum, his social skills and empathy should improve over time. I don't know if fans can bear
this--so many are so hooked on Sherlock being socially abrasive and clueless... We shall see. It's
within both original and BBC canon, though, to let Sherlock have at least glimmerings of empathy
and remorse these days.

There is no sign, in either canon, of Sherlock being particularly traumatized by anything that's
happened to him, outside of what's covered within the context of the drug use and the mood swings
of the character. Much as we may long for a PTSD post-Riechenbach story of Sherlock after being
captured and tortured, it doesn't seem likely. The character for the most part seems designed to be
teflon: so long as HE thinks there's something he can still do, the emotional damage would be
limited--just another particularly tricky problem to solve. It makes enough sense: trauma is to some
degree related to feelings of helplessness and lack of control. Not entirely--but it's a large
component of how many traumatic events are processed. If you never actually feel out of control,
just challenged, it's not as traumatic. We've seen first hand: Sherlock doesn't even feel out of
control when he thinks he's probably dying. Instead he's working out whether to fall forward or
backward, and deciding how to not-panic and not go into shock, and how to reduce the odds of
bleeding out.

Has Sherlock killed prior to Magnussen? Like the virginity thing, it can't be proven, but it honestly
seems most likely. His association with MI5/6, his angry claims from the start of being a "high
functioning sociopath," his skills with weapons and fighting, his self-imposed apathy and lack of
empathy, his indifference to gore and guts except as evidence within a puzzle, even the mood he's
in when he does shoot Magnussen--all seem to suggest someone who's pretty thoroughly inured to
violence and its effects. To me Mycroft's argument that England will "always need Sherlock
Holmes," because he can act efficiently and without remorse, suggests that this is something that
Sherlock is known for, at the highest levels. Similarly the emotional connections and parallels they
build between Mary and Sherlock suggest likewise: that he at least at one time was as Mary was--a
professional bodyguard or assassin. To me it seems probable that his pre-show backstory involves
violence. Indeed, if there's one area where I would consider writing PTSD stories for Sherlock, it
would be in association with his prior service, and whatever pushed him out of that form of service
previously. I, for example, might write a PTSD of Sherlock finding now that he's back that he's
flashing back not on the time chasing Moriarty's people, but the time before that, when he hunted
with less personal cause and more ice in his veins: the trauma of the second hunt forcing him to
start dealing emotionally with the damage he did himself in the first.

We know his clothes aren't bespoke, but good quality manufactured wear. We know he's
accustomed to accepting service (like tea in the morning) as though little fairies brought it (either
Mummy's a complete push-over, or at least at one point they kept servants and the servants took
care of Sherlock and, presumably, Mycroft.) We know that he cares more about his appearance
than he likes to admit: at this point it's been pretty well established that John nailed him over the
"looking cool" thing. We know he turns up his collar, loves his cool coat, fluffs his hair because
God forbid he have hat-hair. That he hogs the tub, given a chance. He CARES about being cool.
He just knows it's not cool to care about being cool, and it's not what he wants to be seen as, so he
hides it.

He likes to dance. He thinks he has to wait until the right cases come along to get to play with the
things he enjoys but thinks aren't cool. The dance he cares about includes at least basic ballet
training--he did an iffy, but proper enough pirouette for Janine.

He has the discipline to play the violin well, if not professionally, and he does take care of his
instrument. Indeed, for all the mayhem he generates, he takes quite good care of his various tools
and treasures. His room is spare, but well-kept, far more so than the outer rooms of 221B. He has the discipline to stay in fighting trim—lean, exercised, and not too rusty. He can shot—accurately, even behind his back. That's actually pretty impressive, and should be kept in mind. He is a deadly shot—that takes practice and you need to keep it current, especially if you're playing with a weapon that's not your own.

Age? Appears to be approximately 36-37 at present. Early thirties when the show started—about 32 by my reckoning. Met Lestrade approximately five years prior to that, in Lestrade's version of things: so met Lestrade at about 27. Old enough to have a grad degree (particularly considering Holmesian ability to learn fast) and still have done quite a bit of work for MI5/6, especially if he started while he was still taking grad courses. Which most of us could not do without going mad and pulling our hair out, but again, Holmeses. :P

Not clear during what parts of his life he was dangerously using drugs often enough to have Mycroft in a perma-dither. It does appear to have been a recurring and serious issue. If he was grassed out of MI5/6 to a London assignment with no “hunting,” drugs may have been one of the deciding factors. One does not need a 007 careening around Europe or South America or the Middle East stoned out of his skull with a crappy attitude.

Relationship with family: He and Mycroft are essentially vitriolic best buddies in some ways. Yes, John's dear to Sherlock—but when the shit hits the fan, Mycroft's who Sherlock can turn to and trust to function on Sherlock's level, and to KEEP THE SECRETS. They get on each other's last nerve, infuriate each other, and yet the second something goes wrong they're both inclined to go back-to-back bad-ass and work together in one smooth, fluid team-up.

Mummy? Something went wrong there. He and Mycroft are both too irked with her for there to be nothing a bit raw. But, then, kids and parents so often do have troubles. Father right now appears to be an adorable silence. I hope we see more of him.

The Other? Who the hell knows...? I don't.

John: No question that Sherlock adores John. John is his first BFF besides Mycroft, and he's so much EASIER than Mycroft. Awed and admiring and not-the-smart-one. Easily tricked. Tolerant of the intolerable. A rotten liar—which is useful in some ways, even if a blazing handicap in others. The thing is, Sherlock loves John quite a lot the way one loves a pet, with that only beginning to really stretch out in Season 3. Before that John's Sherlock's new Redbeard: beloved, willing to go along, true-blue, loyal, brave, the perfect companion, but neither all that intelligent nor all that cautious of Sherlock. I'm not going to pretend Sherlock doesn't adore John all the way back to at least "The Great Game," when he realizes John would willingly die for him. But all the way through all three seasons, there's Sherlock's world—which interescts with Mycroft's huge world, and there's the world Sherlock willingly shares with John, which is much, much smaller.

Even if you don't accept the entire MI5/6 premise, and there are people who do not, the elements of his world that Sherlock will share with John are ALWAYS limited. They were in ACD, and they remain so in BBC. John sees only as much of Sherlock as Sherlock wants to show—and as John can occasionally ferret out or intuit. And with all due respect to John, he's no Sherlock Holmes--most of what Sherlock wants to hide remains hidden until Sherlock decides to reveal it.

On a related point—one of the things Sherlock reveals is that he's drugged John more than once, without John ever the wiser. I'd like to point out that if John loses days (and never picks up on it, which is SERIOUSLY psycho-spooky) then John is no longer any kind of good witness for Sherlock's whereabouts when Irene Adler was rescued. If Sherlock was working WITH Mycroft on that, rather than against him, using preexisting MI6 contacts and cover personae, rescuing Irene
could be a very short trip indeed, and back again before John ever realized Sherlock was gone.

After all, why just drug your roomie, if you can't get some use out of it?

If Sherlock is that dismissive of John, what's John's power over him, then?

Unfortunately, I think it's still a lot Redbeard love right now, though it is growing--Moftis keeps growing it each time around, making it deeper, making Sherlock and John both look harder and harder at what started out as a good romp but which is becoming a central relationship for both men. But I still think at heart John's--well, not a "goldfish." He's smarter in comparison with Sherlock than Mycroft's proposed formula of himself and ordinary people. But no matter how you boil it down, John's still for the most part someone Sherlock can and will manipulate, drug, trick, lie to, leave out of the loop, and intentionally leave in the dark. It's no accident that in Blind Banker one of the telling little scenes--funny but informative--is John returning from shopping, thinking Sherlock has done nothing--and Sherlock intentionally kicking the scimitar out of sight. Sherlock lives a life like a Walter Mitty dream, of which large parts are intentionally and eternally hidden from John, who never quite seems to catch on even when his nose is rubbed into it.

At best it's the patronizing love of a grown man for a kid sister or brother, or a Victorian husband for the "little woman," who can't be told ugly or difficult truths, but who must be kept in the safe, fun playground of chasing baddies and going home in time for tea.

More: Sherlock's vain, vain, vain, and, lest I forget, vain. He loves praise, he delights in his fandom no matter how he scorns it, he is a performer. He solves puzzles for the applause, while one suspects Mycroft solves puzzles because if he doesn't his OCD kicks in and he can't sleep at night. He--like Mycroft--has a sense of humor, but where Mycroft's is puckish and mischievous, Sherlock's is both very clever and very juvenile-cheeky: if Mycroft's on the very edge of shy in his laughter, Sherlock is Peter Pan crowing it out--to John, if not to anyone else. Sherlock's primary insecurity seems to be true dismay at not being able to match Big Brother--to an extent that suggests he takes Mycroft's criticism more seriously than Mycroft himself may realize or understand. (One suspects Mycroft has started assuming Sherlock just doesn't care, and won't even listen unless Mycroft turns up the volume...) Sherlock's primary measure of worth appears to be intelligence in the form of deduction, followed by discipline in areas of personal concern. (To hell with staying off drugs, but by all means, keep up your sharp-shooting skills!) Sherlock's comment that the downfall of genius is the need for an audience may or may not be true of others, but it's absolutely true of Sherlock: He hungers and thirsts to be seen. (Probably one of the less adaptive things about being a secret agent, unless his handlers nd partners are lavish with their praise....)

He's not good with people, except within roles he plays, and even then the results appear variable. As he himself says, he doesn't get human nature entirely. On the other hand, he wants them: his grandstanding, his vanity, his obvious satisfaction at being The Sherlock Holmes, his almost instant addiction to John, his vast network of homeless and various associates around London suggest that he does need contact. My take has always been that he's an extrovert who's very, very bad at it. I do have to add the counterpoint, though, that he's got the introvert's need for some time away from the mobs. I keep mulling this over: I think the character is believable, but I haven't quite worked out how to sort out the elements that drive Sherlock to experience people, and that drive him to avoid them. The vanity and the performance urge may be the trigger...when he feels he's "on camera" he's golden. When he feels he's having to "make nice" to "ordinary people" he is less so, and they seem to press in on him.

Anyway. That's all for now. As I said, just mulling a bit. Wanting to attempt some John and
Sherlock and (maybe) Mary material, and am warming up with Sherlock, before attempting John, whom I find Most Sincerely Difficult...as IMO what he passes as is almost entirely different from what he is when you peel off the Charlie Brown jumper and look at the ferocious, screwed up man inside.

Minor addendum: We also know Sherlock drinks what looks like Scotch (Hounds and I think a few other instances) wine, at least for the wedding, beer for the stag night, etc, and shows every sign of liking them perfectly well. Heh. But, then...he's a Brit, and I sometimes wonder if they don't kick you out of the country if you can't at least down a pint or drink a shot of scotch without a medical excuse.
Math

Chapter Summary

In which I have a small and pointless meltdown about time and timelines.

Sherlock, according to current BBC canon, is apparently a year younger than his actor, Benedict Cumberbatch, give or take a bit. Presumed birthday, January 6, 1977. 37. My math says, 2014-1977=37. I did it once with the calculator, once on paper, and once counting on my fingers. Just in case.

So Sherlock's 37, and BC is 37, soon to be 38...and if he's at all like me at that age, this "getting older" thing should be giving him the heebie jeebies right about now. I have news for him and his character--it only gets worse from there on in. Forty is a hiccup away. Welcome to Childhood's End.

Working from that premise, though--Sherlock is currently 37--then he was 33 when the show first aired in 2010. He was 28 when he first met Lestrade.

Mycroft was, according to canon, some value of age 7 at the time Sherlock was born. Thus Mycroft at the time of show-start was 40, and he's now 44.

We don't have an age on Lestrade, so far as I know.

Martin Freeman, we know, is five years older than Benedict Cumberbatch. For ficcing purposes I tend to make John five years older than Sherlock--it's easier, and it keeps them dead-on Real Life plausible. So if Sherlock's currently 37, John's currently 42. (September B-day. He won't turn 43 for half a year yet...)

(Of little lapses like this did we siblings in my family make hell for each other. Not enough to be "a year older." No, it had to be worked out to months and even days...)(I can imagine Mycroft insisting he's seven years, four months, and twenty days older than Sherlock, so there, nieder-nieder-neider, who's the smart one now, BABY brother?)

Beyond that, though, we start wading into muddy, muddy waters.

How do we work out time on shows? According to Moffat and Gatiss, "Scandal" took place over the period of a year...and damn their eyes, they aren't quite sure where in reference Hound took place. We know with pretty high certainty, though, that Hound has to have taken place clearly after Scandal...probably months after Scandal. Why? Because all the clues suggest that Mycroft and his people took Moriarty into custody after he made the last-straw pest of himself over Bond Air, when Mycroft commented that Moriarty seemed to be begging for his attention, and that Mycroft could accomodate him in that respect. And all the clues suggest he and his people held Moriarty for a period of weeks, or even months, before Hound occurs. And it is during or after the primary arc of Hound that Moriarty is freed--which ties to the fact that it is during Hound that Sherlock, to get full access to Baskerville the second time, negotiates an agreement with Mycroft--which one suspects was the point at which the two entered into full agreement on how to proceed to handle Moriarty. After all, while I am not convinced that the universe is too up-and-at-’em to permit coincidences, I am certain that Moffat, Gatiss, and Thompson are quite determined to play reasonably fair and include the major keys to their little ring puzzles, so we can go back and kick ourselves when we notice later that they told us right up front that Sherlock was cutting some form of nefarious deal with Mycroft at exactly the same time Moriarty and his release became an issue...
But then we get into working the time arcs out. Scandal takes a year: the second half of that year is from Christmas to Bond Air (when Irene says she left the phone in Sherlock's hands for six months, and he couldn't crack her password...) That means that the first passage and Bond Air happen at approximately Midsummer, a year apart. (Generally Midsummer is sometime between June 20-25). Summer, though it looks like a cool night regardless. But on the whole it links up: they give pretty clear season and weather cues throughout the episode, and it does look like it runs from midsummer to midsummer, with the first fairly warm and the second a rather damp, chill night as summer nights go.

Then we get to Hound, which looks quite a bit like it happens in late fall or winter, which makes sense of the time for Mycroft to question Moriarty. Then Moriarty is released to trial, is freed in summer sometime (perhaps once again around midsummer?) and starts his reign of terror, which leads to Sherlock jumping in what appears to be autumn.

Sometime during what looks like the winter following Bond Air Sherlock rescues Irene--whether with Mycroft's knowledge and collusion or not, we don't know, because those two brothers are twistier than puzzle rings and much harder to work out.

I think it works. I think it takes care of all the major keys they give us. Then Sherlock's gone for two years, and comes back on approximately November 3d or 4th, with John getting kidnapped on November 5th (Guy Fawkes Day), of what appears to be intended to be 2013. But that means that Sign of Three happened AFTER air date. And Vow may not happen for another couple months.

Which will all be silly and irrelevant in a year or so, but requires some serpentine thinking right now.

But if we push things back, we have to domino and domino the seasons. And the ages. And...

And my head ends up aching.

I choose to think Vow technically hasn't happened yet, and we got the video from Dr. Who as a professional courtesy between Moffat productions.

Things like this also let a person work out other good stuff.


You can go on like that, figuring out what would be happening in the world when they were certain ages. Mycroft's 31 when 9/11 occurs. Sherlock's 24. John's 29...and almost certainly with a med degree and in the service. He'll have lived through the entire meshuggah mess: Iraq and Afghanistan, both. The culture war over it. He'll have experienced that on the soldier's side of the discussion. Mycroft will have experienced it within MI6, as part of the ongoing discussion of terror prevention...thus explaining a lot about why he's got ties to the CIA, as well as MI5/6. Sherlock, at 24, may just be starting his work with MI5/6, assuming he really does do that. Or even have been serving a few years longer, depending on issues like getting a degree or two.

Did the boys go to school at standard ages? Early? Late? Did they jump over the usual time expectations, and get advanced degrees at obscenely young, Doogie Howser ages? Was Mycroft Dr Holmes with a doctoral degree in game theory at 17?

We don't know. WE can look at the time line and work out what the world would be doing at certain points in the boys lives. We can think about where they might fit in that. If Mycroft's gay, he grew up dead center of the start of the civil rights issues--and of the AIDS/HIV scare. Almost
impossible he was not emotionally and intellectually marked by those two events. Sherlock was
growing up just as CGI altered movie making forever...and the internet became a daily necessity.

Things like that.

They're interesting. They drive me crazy. Once you work some of them out, they make demands
on you, though. There are fics I will never write, because I'd have to ignore Sherlock's most likely
age at the time to write them, and only The Doctor and his Tardis would let me shuffle things
around to fit. Sherlock will never in my fic meet Lestrade as a starving juvie junkie. If I respect the
timeline suggested by canon, Lestrade won't know Sherlock any younger than 26 or 27, and then
only if Lestrade was rounding off rather enthusiastically. Or lying to John outright for
professional/espionage reasons. Which works, sort of, but... eh. It feels like so many cases where a
fic is developed by saying "what they say happened in canon didn't really happen." I hate when
that's the place we start.

I prefer outright AU, when you can take the canon and deep-six it if you must. And even then, I
prefer ingenious AU that manages to weave the solid points of canon into the AU.

I do know that time and timelines are an eternal bete noir in my life. Like Sherlock muttering about
his deducing issues, "there's always something." In fanfic and real fic, I always run into some
niggling, petty, annoying little brick wall that won't let me accomplish something. Or I overlook an
obvious scheduling problem. Or I forget and make an event happen in two or three different times.
It drives me crazy.

I think you've got to be OCD to deal with time in fiction--and not in a good way. Definitely not in a
good way.
A Very Short Question: Cloud Sourcing Responses. Phones on Sherlock.

Chapter Summary

Trying to work out if there's a pattern or not.

Ok, this is odd and hinky and strange, but something I "thought of" while writing one of the fics has been niggling at me.

I had Sherlock and Lestrade exchanging espionage data regularly by direct exchange smartphone to smartphone. Frankly, if I understand this right, IF you know how to play the tech properly, the smartphone is a brilliant device for espionage work: it can be secured, it can be taught to "talk" in encryption, it can be used for long-range communications but also for direct proximity forms of data exchange. If you know what you're doing (and I would not and do not know) it looks to me like you could do a huge amount of spy interaction by smartphone. Sherlock shows up at Lestrade's Met site and the two in passing exchange info on their phones. Stuff like that. With the right protections it should be a brilliant spy's tool, in so very many ways. Minicam. Recorder. Removable data storage in the form of mini SDs and so on.

Which got me thinking about what characters are specifically shown as being tied to their cells...keep them ever ready, use them often.

Irene.

Moriarty.

Sherlock.

Mycroft.

Anthea.

Lestrade.

I'm not saying that they're the only people who use cell/mobile/smartphones. They are the characters I can think of who have all been given clearly marked phone-centered sequences and key actions. Irene and Moriarty are obvious. So are Sherlock and Mycroft and, OMG Anthea(!). Lestrade was non-obvious until the call during "Fall," when he warned John the arrest was coming...but season three had four distinct instances of reminding us Lestrade's phone-centric, and in truth his connection goes all the way back at least to taking video of drugged Sherlock during Scandal. For season three there's the exit from "Many Happy Returns, when he's quite pointedly working with his mobile when he spots the "Game On" newspaper, the help-me call from Sherlock at the start of "Sign of Three," the threat to film Sherlock doped up in his hospital room, followed by his immediate contact of Mycroft during the hunt for Sherlock.

I can't recall if anyone else has been strongly established as a serious "can't live without my smartphone" character, though. John's not. He has a phone, but he's not himself a dedicated user—it's something Sherlock uses to contact him (or borrows from him) more than it's anything he himself uses all that much.
Another point, made early and strongly, is that Sherlock *chooses* to use other people's phones--presumably to cover his trail and prevent people from tracking him. It's kind of a big deal: it's why Sherlock first asks to borrow John's phone after the warehouse scene with Mycroft--to contact someone when he doesn't want to use his own phone lest it be recognized...

I find myself wondering if it's being used to some extent as a an artistic motif/character clue--yes, many people have smartphones, but The Spies in the story--the people who live in Mycroft's World--Have Smartphones, and are regularly shown using them. We've already seen the phone used repeatedly as a way to hide secrets, collect secrets, pass secrets, store secrets... track people. Identify people.

So, here's the thing. I'm too old to be really cell-phone/smartphone sensitized. I have a hard time focusing on the buggers. Can you guys help me work out if anyone else in the show BESIDES our known/most likely espionage agents or Mycroft's World Villains are strongly cameoed as using smartphones as a regular key character behavior? Because to ME it looks like it may be a hint, if not an outright clue, to what a character's role is in a show.

Huh. Mary--who recognizes skip codes and uses her phone to receive fake calls and to communicate conflicting messages to John and Sherlock to get them both out on a case...

Hmmm. Yeah. Mary counts.
Agency: Sherlock, Mycroft, And The Denoument at Appledore

Chapter Summary

Minor bit of analysis dealing with who's zoomin' who in Vows.

One of the things several of us--probably quite a number of us--have fussied about trying to sort out Vows, is the role of Mycroft in the planning for the Showdown at Appledore. Did Mycroft know what was coming? Was he an active player--or did Sherlock really have him drugged and snitch his laptop without him expecting it? Was the conversation in the garden "real," or part of some complex, layered fake?

When you start dealing with characters who lie, scheme, and play layered games, fiction becomes complex, because even the camera itself becomes an unreliable narrator. What you see, what you hear, what you witness, may prove to be untrue. The sleight of hand practiced in Season Two, between "Hounds" and "Fall," in which Mycroft was dragged across the trail as a red herring "betraying" his brother to hide evidence of what was coming--and why--and the fact that it was all part of a great scam--leaves the audience with the unending realization that what you see with Mycroft and Sherlock may prove to be a trick. Smoke and mirrors. In a situation such as that presented on Christmas Day in "Vow," that becomes almost impossibly disorienting--the moreso as the viewer is also dealing with the feints offered earlier in the show, with Mary and the shooting, and Janine: as viewers we've had our noses rubbed in the fact that what we see may well be nothing more than a complicated construct put in place by characters who lie, and presented by cameras and script writers who DO NOT play omnipotent narrator and give us paternal warnings of the deceptions in play. Therefore it's not surprising that all of us are second-guessing Christmas.

I'm going to deal with two basic aspects of the show as my center pieces, and to some extent I'm going to be moving back and forth between arguments internal to the story--how characters behave, how they're performed, what the internal logic of a scene is--and arguments that are external to the story--based on structure, form, and the logic of how stories work. Most of all, I'm going to be discussing agency, and the role of the leading character.

Let's start there...

The leading character of a story--the protagonist, hero, etc--is the character within a story whose agency is most critical to the story's central theses and the resolution/outcome. It's important to realize that this means the protagonist of a story may not be the narrator, or even the apparent "lead." In some cases narrators and leading characters serve primarily as witnesses to agency. Thus Nick, in "The Great Gatsby" is a narrator and witness--but not the protagonist, a role reserved for Jay Gatsby. Jay's agency--the choices he makes, the reasons he makes those choices, his flaws and strengths, are the bits that are central to the story's thesis and resolution. Nick observes, and while he has agency of his own, it is nothing compared to Gatsby's roaring flow of actions and desires and choices.

While any series can have an episode where the "lead" steps aside for another character to serve as the protagonist, taking the secondary role of witness for a round or two, you can take it as a general rule that in most circumstances the titular character of a show will also generally be the character with agency--the character whose choices carry weight, lead to resolutions, carry the burden of the
themes. Good writers will not fuck this up. If they do want the "lead" to serve as witness, they'll put in a bit of extra effort to make it clear by the end that it was the Gatsby character who made the critical choice, rather than the Nick character. They won't tell you right up to the rolling credits that it was "about" Nick, if it was really about Gatsby.

That's not because writers are honorable men and women altruistically committed to never deceiving their viewers/readers/audience. It's because creating clear, relatively honest lines of dramatic agency is good theater, and muddled, unclear ones is stunningly bad theater, and bad theater loses in the end.

There are exceptions, in a sense. J.R.R. Tolkien always claimed that the true hero of The Lord of the Ring was Samwise Gamgee...and it's a fair call, in some ways. Sam, if nothing else, is the future Frodo fights for. But in truth, Frodo remains the character with agency, of the two.

So, Ok. Maybe Sam's the "true hero," but by Jiminy, Frodo's the protagonist, at least of his arc of the narrative. He carries the burden not only of the ring, but of the meaning of the story. It matters that it's Frodo who falters, and almost loses his entire quest, only to be saved by the madness of Gollum who lived by Frodo's mercy. It's Frodo's ability to choose, throughout three eternal books, that serves as the central spine of the story and its thesis.

Now, how does that apply to "His Last Vow" and Sherlock and Mycroft?

Let's start with the discussion in the garden. (Which, so help me, sounds so Eden/Gethsemane I want to scream and hide...) If it is "true" -- if we can, on the whole, take it at face value, as a real dialog between Sherlock and Mycroft playing no role but their own brotherly roles toward each other, and playing no particular games beyond the rather ordinary ones we all play, then we have to conclude a number of things.

First and most critical, that Mycroft truly believes his little brother has gone off the entire Magnussen project. He may want to get Magnussen more than he admits to Sherlock, but he's not "pretending" Sherlock's quit while knowing his brother actually has not, and colluding with him.

He may not think Magnussen is as harmless as he says, but he thinks Sherlock will accept that explanation in good faith—and he thinks it rather than presenting an argument Sherlock will know is bogus as part of a performance Sherlock will know is a performance.

Sherlock in good faith will berate his brother for failing to attempt to control Magnussen, rather than pretend to be berating him while knowing that in reality Mycroft is supporting and playing along with Sherlock's own vendetta that is already under way.

The comment about the punch will not be a shared irony, in that both brother's know the punch is spiked and that Mycroft will either a) not drink it, or b) drink it only to provide himself with a cover story, but will be a much simpler irony consistent with the apparent action, in which Sherlock will encourage his brother to drink punch he knows is spiked--but Mycroft doesn't--rather than Mycroft pretending he doesn't.

And so on.

How does this relate to agency? If both brothers are colluding, then the actions throughout the entire conclusion of "Vow" except for the shooting are joint actions, a joint plan, joint agency, and in all honesty are almost certainly MORE Mycroft's than Sherlock's, if only in that Mycroft is the senior warrior in the War of Shadows. For that sequence to be collusion, Mycroft has to have approved the risk of offering his laptop, approved the apparent treason (even if it was on some level faked), approved putting Sherlock and John in the fray, approved scamming a foreign
national of power and substance: in the end it will be happening because Mycroft approved it, and Mary and John and who is the pressure point for who will actually be pretty irrelevant to why the decision was made. Mycroft will in many ways have primary agency. Worse, he will have primary agency without his own motives and drive having ever been followed.

This is unlike the situation that happened over Moriarty, in which Mycroft's own agency was tracked from at least "Scandal" on. We had some reason to know, from the start of season two, that Mycroft had a vested interest in resolving the situation with Moriarity. We were allowed to know that Mycroft and Sherlock were colluding on SOMETHING (Gatiss is careful to be sure we KNOW that Sherlock negotiates with Mycroft during "Hounds." We know the two brothers have cut some kind of deal.) We know throughout the season that while Mycroft can appear callous toward Sherlock, he most definitely is not: they're quite careful to demonstrate repeatedly that Mycroft is actually intensely committed to his brother's well-being. We are given reasons that allow us to understand that, while the final actions of "Fall" are Sherlock's own--his choice, his judgment, his sacrifice, his love of his friends--Mycroft's participation and support is not deus ex machina--potent action out of the blue sky--nor is it usurpation of Sherlock's agency, but parallel agency that in no way detracts from Sherlock's decision alone on a rooftop with information Mycroft did not have, and fear for friends Mycroft does not entirely share or value as deeply. There's no particular conflict or detraction from Sherlock's agency in allowing Mycroft to ally with Sherlock, even as the senior, more powerful piece on the chess board.

If the garden scene of "Vows" is not "true," though, Sherlock's agency does fall apart. Too much becomes Mycroft's choice, Mycroft's sacrifice, Mycroft's reasons for doing this, and Sherlock merely his cat's paw to accomplish what Mycroft wants in his private and silent struggle with Magnussen. Not only that, Sherlock becomes a cat's paw who will commit murder because a plan that's not even his fell apart. Which is agency of a sort, but only of a sort of "Gollum biting off Frodo's finger and falling into Mt. Doom" kind of way.

If the scene in the garden is real--if Sherlock and Mycroft really do have exactly the discussion they appear to have, then we have Sherlock as the active agent throughout, planning a series of actions Mycroft has no idea of, arguing with his brother in absolute sincerity and good faith over a man he honestly detests and doesn't understand his brother not appearing to tackle, urging his brother to go drink punch that will drop ensure Mycroft is powerless to prevent what will follow. If the scene in the garden is "false," and the brothers are playing a complex charade, in a very real sense it becomes Mycroft who has agency: he and Sherlock are staging a complex cover performance that exists primarily to provide Mycroft himself with cover-your-ass credits should something go wrong at Appleedore, and to ensure that if anyone is listening in, Mycroft (but not Sherlock) will appear innocent of culpability. Meanwhile, though, to have planned such a scene, worked out such a cover, played his part in the pantomime, Mycroft becomes the most active player and most of all the person it's all about and all for: the entire scene becomes about protecting Mycroft from the consequences of his own willing actions and willing collaboration. It's ABOUT Mycroft's agency, and about Mycroft's and Sherlock's efforts to ensure Mycroft will not be held accountable for his own agency.

Worse, it's BADLY about Mycroft's agency and about the attempt to shield him from that. You have to work to get that meaning out of it, because the obvious meaning, the meaning that the clear top-line addresses, appears to be about the exact opposite. Take the scene at anything like face value, and you lose the whole "Mycroft is the agent" drama, poof. Worse, you not only lose it--you don't get it back until you've gnawed it to bare bone. It's not one of those magic theater moments when what you thought you knew suddenly turns 180 degrees and means something entirely new--like Bond Air. It's a case of "It made sense one way, and a long time after the episode ended I figured out you *could* spin it another way but I still wasn't sure."
That may be good puzzle-building, but it's crappy theater and pretty crappy fiction. The drama lines suck. To some degree the poor innocent reader should not be left scratching his or her head and muttering, "Oh. It was about *MYCROFT'S INVOLVEMENT*? Oh." If Moffat really did intend it to be a hey-presto flip, he did it really badly. I say that even in light of the possibility that the pay-off of the flip may only come in future seasons. At some point if the garden scene was a lie--then all of "Vow" becomes bad theater.

So, ok. Let's go with the assumption that the garden scene is, within pretty close parameters, what it appears to be: a more or less honest discussion between two brothers who almost certainly are both lying to each other about some things, but who are not lying together to put on a pantomime to fool person or persons unknown AND the watching audience. Just as Moffat has said that Sherlock and Moriarty "didn't fake suicide at each other," let's say that Sherlock and Mycroft didn't perform an entire interactive private dialog in which nothing was real, but was all a misdirection in which the audience was the primary dupe. If that's the case, then Mycroft almost certainly really is drugged, Sherlock almost certainly does steal his laptop against Mycroft's own likely preferences, John really is going along with Sherlock's enthusiastic approval, but not with Mycroft's chicken-shit unspoken approval, and the entire Assault on Appledore really is as stupid but sincere an effort as Sherlock presents it as being to John. Sherlock is not misrepresenting to John. This isn't another lie in which John is involved in a bigger plan that Mycroft his helping mastermind. Instead Sherlock's going in because, as he's been presented as doing all along, he hates Magnussen, and because Magnussen threatens John and Mary, and because Sherlock has indeed made a huge, huge mistake in what's going to happen. It's not fake--and the confrontation between Sherlock and Magnussen will not be fake, either. The underlying mistake will be Sherlock's, and Sherlock's alone, not a mistake arrived at by Mycroft and Sherlock in tandem, in which Sherlock will only have "agency" at the very last, when he pulls the trigger.

This will be his own error, his own disaster, his own failure--and his need to resolve it will be his own clear and unmistakable dramatic arc. It won't be half Mycroft's while at the same time no one, including Mycroft, ever ADMITS it's half Mycroft's.

I said ages ago that "Vow" is Sherlock failing by the numbers--making critical mistakes in the context of the case. The drugs, the invasion of Magnussen's office, the conclusion at Appledore--Sherlock makes a bad mess of this case. He fails. Which is fine--there's a place for "the hero fails" stories in a series. Indeed, you almost can't have great development arcs without the characters having the occasional "Boy was I dumb" episode. But for it to work as drama, the mistakes have to be Sherlock's own. The agency has to be Sherlock's own. Much as we see and learn about Mycroft, and about him and Mycroft, we don't learn the right things this season to have a shared agency the way we were able in Season Two.

Once we're in Appledore, Sherlock's plan starts to fall apart, and things are said that have to matter, or again it's bad theater, and misaligned agency. Sherlock's look of complete personal horror when it is revealed that there IS no vault has to be real, and his own. His belief in that vault has to be his--not simply something he believes because Mycroft believed it, too. For that look of stunned, sick realization to be *good actingI*, Sherlock has to regard the theory of the vault to be his own, something he's invested in heavily. Ideally something he's invested in in the face of Big Brother's objections and attempts to deflect him from the trail. For Magnussen's sharp comments about showing off for Mycroft to matter, Sherlock has to have a personal desire to be right ON HIS OWN, rather than right in collaboration with Mycroft: if they were both sharing the same conclusion, there would be no pay-off of "Mycroft will be so proud of his little brother" to anticipate, to long for.

If agency belongs to Sherlock--if the goals and motives are Sherlock's, if the deductions are Sherlock's own, if the choices were his own, then the final scene is insanely powerful. Sherlock's
in a very real sense "invited' both John AND Mycroft to witness his victory over the dragon that threatens John, Mary, and Mycroft. The three most important people in the chain, all at risk through Sherlock, the junkie detective little brother, but he will save them. He will save the people he loves from the dragon. And Mycroft and John will witness his victory.

And it all goes to hell, and instead they're going to witness his utter defeat, as he accidentally hands them all into Magnussen's clutches. The big, beautiful, shining Christmas present he was going to give them all turns into a horror story...and it's all Sherlock's "fault." He was wrong--wrong from pretty much the start. Wrong because he let pride, and hate, and vanity, and hubris, and a goodly dose of drugs get in the way of good sense.

Agency. Choice. The old dramatic riff of personal flaw leading to personal tragedy. It matters, and there's no place for Sherlock to hide. No big brother sharing the guilt, no big brother making the mistakes, no big brother hiding behind a Sherlock's who's being used as a cat's paw by his brother. It's Sherlock's plan, Sherlock's mistakes, Sherlock's love and hates, Sherlock's final resolution in desperation and self-hatred and absolute conviction that somehow Magnussen has to be beaten. Mycroft's grief is simple and honest and from the gut, not half-faked to maintain the illusion put in place during the garden.

I love me some clever Mycroft. I love Sherlock and Mycroft working together. But making Mycroft a collaborator with Sherlock in "Vow" simply damages Sherlock AND Mycroft, while blowing the b'jabbers out of every single arc of the script *except* the Mary/John/Sherlock face-off/intervention arcs...

Well. Actually it even weakens those, because Sherlock and his follow through stop being so much about how much he loves John, and Mary, and their marriage, and the three-way relationship they have, and it starts being about playing Magnussen to protect Mycroft, and about an elaborate dance to protect Mycroft from both the consequences of action and inaction.

I'll tell you something simple: you can always subvert a plot line. I mean, I think it's even possible to come up with some transgressive spin on "See Spot! See Spot run!" Twisting in another interpretation, kinking a plotline to mean something quite different than its superficial indicators might suggest isn't as hard as you'd think.

Doing it so that it's good theater, though? Difficult. "His Last Vow" means something if the through-line is that this is about Sherlock's love, Sherlock's desire to defend his beloved John and Mary, Sherlock's hatred of Magnussen, Sherlock's willingness to fight--and fight hard--to be "faithful" to the weird marriage he and Mary and John have formed. Sherlock's desire to show off for his big brother. Sherlock's vanity messing him up. Sherlock's need for love muddling him. Sherlock's hatred of his enemy muddling him.

Any plot that weakens that--that takes the choices away from Sherlock, that makes them in any way less his own by inception, his own by accountability, weakens the show. Making Mycroft a collaborator and large patches of Sherlock's own actions be nothing more than a deception of the audience (often for no particularly obvious in-fiction reason) only damages the line of agency and the dramatic build.

I love me some cunning Mycroft. But I simply can't believe Moffat and Gatiss and for that matter Cumberbatch and Gatiss and Freeman are STUPID enough to weaken Sherlock's absolute agency in this. I think the garden scene is what it appears to be. I think that Mycroft really is out of the loop. I think Appledore falls apart purely and specifically because Sherlock made major mistakes all on his own, without Big Brother being a participant in those mistaken conclusions. I think
Sherlock absolutely does have to be acting dramatically and powerfully AGAINST his brother's wishes, in the hopes of a glorious victory and a glorious Christmas present not only for John and Mary, but for Mycroft. I think when it fails, it has to be Sherlock's own personal, private failure. His own private humiliation. His own private, personal grief and guilt. His own resolution. His own private and legitimate acceptance of the price of that resolution.

Agency. It has to be about Sherlock's own agency. Or it's a remarkably, outrageously bad episode, that fails at doing well any of the clever things it might be attempting, while screwing the hell out of the powerful, true drama of everything that we've theorized might be a superficial "cover story."
Chapter Summary

Speculative pondering on *Sherlock* and on the ACD Homsian Canon.

Mary....

Mysterious, contested Mary. Mary with a hidden backstory. Mary on the run. Mary a former American undercover operative. Mary who kills people.

I think I've figured out at least one of the keys to Mary.

Of course, we know going in that Mary's "Watson's wife." Likely to die, but someone Sherlock is supposed to like and respect, at least in original canon. The original Mary had a tragic background, orphaned, and tied into a mystery as Holmes' client...but she's otherwise pretty lightly sketched. Holmes likes her and thinks well of her. She's a good sport and lets John "play" with Sherlock. She's apparently not God's gift to housekeeping. Beyond that, not much.

BBC Mary implies much more. A.G. RA Assassin/body guard/operative. Whatever Magnussen has on her is damning...or she fears it is, so much so that John might no longer love her. We are never told enough to know why this is--whether she truly did vile things without sufficient cause or with an excess of glee, or what. Whatever happens, though, she's been given a set of attributes:

American.

Undercover agent.

On the run from powerful enemies.

Incognito.

Married (now).

In hiding under an assumed identity in England.

Clever, quick thinking.

Beloved by her spouse--regardless of issues.

Has many of the skills and attributes of Sherlock...strongly parallel.

Here's the thing: we have a character like that in Sherlock canon. Multiple identities, on the run, living married under a pseudonym in England, hunted by powerful parties with a lasting grudge, former undercover operative.

His name is Birdy Edwards. Or McMurdo. Or Douglas. He's a hero of a very Holmesian sort: an undercover Pinkerton agent who infiltrates a rebel socialist terrorist group based on the Molly Maguires, in America. He succeeds in breaking up the local ring, and gets out alive, but the greater group (which has contracted Moriarty for advice) swears blood oath to kill him. He and his first
wife flee, under assumed names. She dies eventually, he remarries, and again is forced to flee. Ends up in England, where he's still being followed--he kills one of his attackers, tries to cover it up by passing the corpse off as himself with his wife and friends' collaboration, starting the mystery that leads Holmes and Watson into *The Valley of Fear*. Holmes gets him off the legal hook--he's acquitted of murder on the grounds of self-defense. But Holmes warns him he's still hunted, and that he and his wife should flee England. The last we hear from him, he's "disappeared" while at sea, leaving no corpse, a grieving wife, and Holmes theorizing that Moriarty has completed the hit, as his clients were unable to manage it even with him holding their hands and giving them hints. Holmes then says he can defeat Moriarty--but that he must have time.

So, yeah, okay. We know by straight logical deduction that *The Valley of Fear*, the fourth and last Holmes Novel, has to get used at some point. It's problematic--so much of the "real" story isn't about Holmes at all, it's backstory for Edwards/McMurdo/Douglas. The structure of the novel itself simply sucks. Sorry--it does. Nice medium sized Holmesian mystery with not all that much to be said for it, followed by this huge, huge backstory infodump that's really a much better story from the start, with an interesting Holmesian hero in his own right, and romances, and multiple rounds of disappearing into new identities, and a death that has to have Gatiss and Moffat screaming because there are no witnesses and no body and no proof of anything but the lack of Douglas and a message that *might* be from Moriarty, using the "Dear, dear, Mr. Holmes. Dear, dear," that Moffat and Gatiss "repurposed" for Moriarty in "Scandal." I mean, the "end" of Douglas just begs and pleads to be one more disappearance into a new identity--one more step into an infinite regression of cover identities, thus making Holmes' promise to settle things with Moriarty not only an issue of, well, Moriarty--but, done right, the necessary factor to bring "Douglas" back from this new disappearance.

It looks to me like there's a better than average chance that, with *Fear* looming as the next necessary book to tackle, and with *Fear* as it stands being rather a flop, they got clever, and layered Edwards/McMurdo/Douglas onto Mary Morstan Watson, gave her a backstory that will lead to her being pursued by some group of Moriarty clients, then being pursued by Moriarty himself. From Mofftiss' POV it's just better story telling: it integrates with Sherlock and John themselves; Mary's superb backstory becomes integral and something they can slip in over time, it makes the elements of her flight, her hiding, and her attempts to escape the hunt of passionate personal interest to Sherlock and John, it's set up to allow them to kill Mary then bring her back if they so choose--or not: it's an end point that can be adapted to audience response, and to things like continued contracts for new seasons. If, for example, it ends before they can bring Mary back, there's still a canonical justification for the apparent ending. It's a game they can play while still playing fair with fans, because canon would technically give them room for either answer, with death actually the slightly more canonical. (Though it's a dreadfully unconvincing death. If Moffat and Gatiss didn't scream and piss and moan they should have....)

That does still leave us with a question of how "Moriarty" continues to be alive without Sherlock and Moriarty having "faked suicide at each other," which I am quite strongly convinced is the case. This is an instance where I think Moffat will once again be quite literally true to his word: the man we knew as Moriarty is dead. Whether we are now dealing with his twin, or his computer AI ghost, or with a consortium, or with grieving and equally brilliant siblings, I do not know. I'm just convinced that the death we saw was death: the first Moriarty we met is deceased...but the loophole provided at the very beginning, by Jeff Hope, that the Moriarty is a "they" not just a "he," remains. Some element of the "they" has lived on, and some aspect of Moriarty remains to hunt Mary Morstan Watson.

Now, if this parallel is true, Mary may be rough and tough and deadly, but she's not simply "evil." She may have done atrocious things while undercover, either in her own role as hunter, or in her undercover identity as infiltrator of some group or another. Sometimes when you go undercover it
means you take part in horrible things you can't prevent, and can't oppose, because you HAVE to remain in cover. But John Watson would find that hard to forgive--and Magnussen would see her as a very naughty girl, especially if he didn't get all the facts quite right.

Anyway. That still leaves HUGE space for Moffat and Gatiss to surprise us: it just means that there's a recognizable canonical frame for them to hang new stories on, if I'm right. How they do it will be the fascination. But I do think I've nailed Mary and how she slots into the upcoming arcs.

How's it look to you? XD
Oh. Oh, Sh*t. (AKA: Moriarty)

Chapter Summary

So I had a brainstorm for how one might do Moriarty as multiples that's just--wonderufl and terrifying and I don't even know how you'd win in the end. Or even if you can.

IF Moriarty is legion, and IF Moriarty's cloud-sourced genius coupled with computational and interenet "powers," and IF Moriarty's actually rather similar to Anonymous...

Then.

Then try this on for size...

Not only can anyone be "Moriarty," anyone can be "Moriarty" without even knowing it.

Let's play out a hypothetical story.

Mummy Holmes, who wrote the BBC version of the monograph Moriarty writes in ACD canon, is commissioned at a mathematician to design a cloud sourcing sytem and a war-games program that uses the system, to train brilliant operatives: you can play both sides of the board, you can throw problems online to online non-Moriarty and actively Moriarty think-tank social media...

And someone, someone bored and amoral, decides this is a fun game.

And boosts the software or the design, and puts it into play as "Moriaty." Core group are bored online gamer geniuses. "The Empty Hearse" combined with "Ender's Game," combined with your favorite social media where you can--and do--put a question out there. Depending on how the inner circles feels, you may never even know what you're doing.

Let's again, take a hypothetical: Moriarty has decided to pillage a dungeon. S/He/The Inner Circle contact a low-level member and say, "Need you to get us some dynomite. Gonna run a game this weekend." They contact an "Out Of The Loop" player, who is valued for his brilliance but known to be too upright to "play along" with the "real" Moriarty, and they tap HIM in the "persona," of a valued online contact in a For-Your-Eyes-Only government thinktank BB. "We have an access problem for a classified project. Can't tell you the specks, but these are the core parameters. Can anyone suggest a way around problem A? Mr. Out-Of-The-Loop MInor Government Official, happily filling his friendless life with online geckery, likes the style of the problem, and suggests ten ingenious solutions, and doesn't think of it again because the dungeon isn't within his purview of antiterrorism, ane with the serial numbers sanded off and the problem cut into small bites, he didn't think to associate it with a private crime being committed in South America. Yet Mr. Out-of-the-Loop has just "Been" Moriarty for the crucial twenty minutes he spent eating his sandwich for lunch and solving a neat little problem for an associate. Yet he has no idea he's "playing Moriarty." He's become a viral element Moriarty can use to solve problems. In-the-Loop, and especially
advanced, "real" Players can provide coordination, and "The" MOriarty at any given time is merely whoever had the highest in-game score at the time a prior Moriarty died.

Now let's try taking it a step further: at some point or another "The Other" was "The Moriarty." May still be in some sense or another. S/He could have been the one who took Mummy's work and set it loose in the world as a criminal hobby and pastime. It could have been Mummy herself, still thinking she's just managing an online war game, Ender-style, not knowing she's been subborned.

You can see how fluid this could be and yet still work as "Moriarty." You can have a personalized enemy hidden in the innermost ring. You can, as I chose to do, have Mummy Holmes and Mycroft actively involved and contributing with no idea that they ARE a large part of "Moriarty's Genius," because they don't play on the "Moriarty BB," they just oversee the development of the expert program, or the cloud data, or they just go to a "safe and secure" professional BB and solve problems for people online to amuse themselves. Yet it leaves room for there to still be very real humans with personalized, "good drama" attributes driving the online game. You can tell stories that make Mycroft or Mummy or The Other, or Lestrade, or Watson look guilty of being "the Real Moriarty," with convincing, powerful proof that they are indeed the mastermind behind the madness. You can even decide that one of them really IS.

The program need never die: done right it perpetuates itself, assigning a new "front" whenever the old front dies or quits playing. It can have inner cores, and behave just as though it's really Legion, because it is...

I could do so MUCH with this. Mycroft as an unintending contributor...never knowing he's contributing.

Anyway. It looks like something one could make work.
Caught a reflection of something from "The Valley of Fear" in the garden scene in "Vow."

Ok, this may be meaningful, or not, but it does give us one clear instance when we do know that the "garden scene" involved coded language and subtext.

First, the original: McMurdo, the undercover operative, has a discussion with a member of the terrorist group, which covers the complex issues of whether the "Molly Maguire-ish" group is righteously fighting against Big Business and abuse of employees and slavery-in-all-but-name, or if they are themselves nothing but bullies. In the process a fair lot of solid information is willingly given by the local man to the operative. (Thematically I think that the Labor versus Tory themes may be involved in things like Mary's "disillusioned lib dem" status and the whole Guardian thing (imagine if she's a guardian of John, a former body guard, a guardian of civilians, and a reader of The Guardian (lib dem paper.).)

As the conversation is concluding, the senior local says something like, "WE've been talking a long time. There's a chance they're going to want to know about what. I'm offering you a job in one of my shops."

McMurdo, without skipping a beat, says, "And I'm turning it down." He later actually uses that cover story.

That's so close in pattern to the back and forth between Mycroft and Sherlock over the Eastern Europe mission. The offer that is to be declined, with Mycroft having to state he wants Sherlock to turn it down because there is no "listening enemy" to make the context for a lie obvious. Two brother's talking on Christmas day, in spite of past hostilities, is not remarkable enough to require a cover story.

But the back and forth is in place: The job offered with the actual desire that it be refused, the refusal, the exchange of goals--Mycroft wants Sherlock focusing on dragons at home, in London. If we take the main dialog as true, then the dragons are not Magnussen: Mycroft needs Sherlock home looking for OTHER dragons.

Dragons who may be flying over London, who may be threatening Mycroft, who may be important enough that, from Mycroft's POV, Magnussen was always and forever a mere irritant with rare utility.
Once Would Have Been Nice. (Janine)

Chapter Summary

Janine, and a few miscellaneous comments.

Having come fresh off a Sherlock story centering on Janine, I'm still drifting around in the whole issue of "Once would have been nice." That sly, ambiguous little comment they give Janine in the hospital, when she just plain cleans Sherlock's clock for being a complete dick.

Transcription, via Ariane DeVere:

JANINE (softly): You lied to me. You lied and lied.
SHERLOCK: I exploited the fact of our connection.
JANINE: When?!
SHERLOCK: Hmm?
JANINE: Just once would have been nice.
SHERLOCK: Oh. (He looks a little shifty-eyed.) I was waiting until we got married.

That looks so much like it implies no sex. And, yet, it doesn't make sense as no sex.

Well. Maybe if one assumes Moffat and Gatiss really don't have a clue about women. But I'm actually not in the camp that feels that way.

So, ok, here are my problems with it logically meaning Sherlock and Janine didn't have sex. To begin with, the very bit in the first three lines; You lied to me; I exploited; and "when?"

If you're complaining that a man lied to you about his actual interest--that he didn't love you, but seduced you into thinking he did--seduced you to the degree we are actually shown in the Baker Street scene with Janine and Sherlock--then there is no "when" needed in response to the question of when he exploited her. Even if he didn't have full-bore sex with her, his exploitation is obvious--not only the exploitation of using her feelings to trick her into giving him access to Magnussen, but of using his lies to lure her into committing and participating far more emotionally and physically than she would have otherwise. Her behavior in Baker Street is open, and quite explicitly includes physical, sexual exchanges. She's spending time in his flat, and he and she are both spending that time in ways that have allowed them to reach a comfort level with mutual nudity. Her in his shirt, him in his bath, her using the bathroom at the same time he's there, her knowing his bathing habits enough to laugh about them--they all make it quite clear that he and she are not just playing Cluedo. Not even strip Cluedo. Even if Sherlock did not actually have full penetrative sex with her, they show every reasonable symptom of having made it right up to that line...and Janine shows every sign of believing in that romance.

So, perhaps she's complaining that it was never consumated? That she would have liked just once to have had it go "all the way"?

Under many other circumstances, I would agree. But not when the bone of contention is that he lied to her. Not when he was using her and playing her for a fool--and doing so by way of her
desires and affections. That just doesn't make sense...not for something said in the middle of a confrontation over the *wrongness* of what he did to her.

You lied, and lied, and lied--you used my feelings against me. And you bastard, I wish you'd taken advantage of me just a bit more--why didn't you screw me, too?

Nnnnnnno. No, that just doesn't work for me. Nor does "When?" in response to "exploited our connection." She does not need to have been involved in penetrative sex to feel exploited and in a position to name any number of "when" events. When he invited her out. When they first kissed. When they first got undressed together. When she first sat on his lap and they made out. When he offered her a ring in a proposal he had no actual intention of honoring. When he placed her job at risk and exposed her to the anger of a man he considers insanely vicious and dangerous. There are a million obvious, overwhelming elements of exploitation in what he did--no "when" makes sense unless that "when" indicates something else. I suppose it might mean "when did you actually take me to bed, you tosser?" but then we're back to the question of what kind of insane woman in the midst of her revenge complains that the sonofabitch didn't go and make it worse by having sex with her *WITHOUT MEANING IT.*

It might be plausible if she had any sense he would have meant it. But the whole point of this scene is she knows now that he didn't mean it. No wedding was meant. The entire thing was a lie.

You don't ask your betrayer why he didn't please-God make it worse while he was at it. You really don't. You don't ask why he didn't complete the hat-trick and add penetrative sex to heavy petting, emotional seduction, and faked engagement. You certainly don't suggest that just one token manipulative, intentionally deceitful screw would have been nice.

On the other hand, there's another way to go with it, and that's almost implied in Sherlock's "I was waiting until we got married," and her response, "That was never gonna happen!" And in their body language...and Sherlock's regrets.

The only way I can make it work is if, under it all, she was and is convinced--and rightly convinced--that he's far more affected than he thinks, and that in character he's compartmentalized to an insane degree. That the fantasy he lived while he was with her was very, very real, and within that framework he was very, very involved.

Which brings me to the obvious fact that their first encounter was framed by him serving as wingman to her search for a likely sex partner. Yes, she's a bit blushy about her first rather blatant hit on him, when she gives him permission not to have sex with her while reminding him quite overtly that it's a common stereotype. She knows who he is. She's clearly attracted. In short, her very first interaction with him is to hit on him...followed by the two forming a partnership to find her someone else, followed by their increasing emotional and social intimacy, followed by his admission he loves to dance--followed by his disappointment when he proves to have done his work too well, when she ends up dancing with the very man he picked out for her, rather than being available for him to dance with.

Moffat has made it quite clear that at least in his perception "Sign of Three" establishes that Sherlock really likes Janine. That his choice to use her to get to Magnussen is at least partially motivated by an actual awareness that he will enjoy her company. That, to me, suggests we look at "Sign of Three" as being very much about the little demi-romance Sherlock and Janine play out in that episode. It's sexual from the start. It's sexually open and trusting from the start. He manages to decline her pick-up, but instantly allies himself as her wingman, and proceeds to enjoy and become interested in finding her a partner...and succeeds. Part of the arc that is important is to remember that her dance partner at the very end is the man he himself stopped in mid-deduction to point out
to her. She accepted his decision to decline her approaches, but also accepted both his friendship and his judgement, and moved on to his pick. Which then moves us back to the fact that he himself shifts from locating her a potential shag...

To dancing with her. Teaching her to dance, even though she's quite bad at it. Admitting to her in very vulnerable, non-Sherlockian intimacy, that he loves dancing, that he longs for a case that will let him dance, and his little demonstration of the pirouette. And then--to throw her his lapel rose, at the end of his rendition of his waltz for John and Mary...a rose toss that's just loaded in so many ways. He's got it ready to throw--he is *planning* on throwing it. He is planning on throwing it to Janine—he indeed visually flags her to be ready, before he throws it. He throws it to Janine in spite of the fact that Molly, who he does care about, is right there, capable of being hurt and jealous.

Maybe he wanted to make Molly hurt and jealous? Honestly, no sign of it--on the whole, ever since his vicious false-step during "Scandal," he's made increasing effort to at least be kind. He's actually tender toward her when he realizes she's dating someone else in "Hearse." He's amused by Tom, not apparently offended or territorial. He shows no sign of trying to dislodge Tom...

It's simply more likely that, as the rest of the show arc itself would indicate, he simply, plainly, uncontroversitely, chooses to make a romantic gesture to Janine that is both in keeping with the "tradition" of Best Man and Maid of Honor getting it on as "junior couple" of the wedding, but that appears to be in keeping with his growing interaction with her as his female "partner" over the period of the wedding. To me it appears he deduces her a potential sex partner, only to then slip over some invisible boundary and start wanting to play out the game with her himself. By the end he wants to play his beautiful waltz, throw his beautiful counterpart a rose, toast his beloved friends' wedding and tie himself to it—and to the whole idea of romantic love—and then indulge in his romantic love of dance with his chosen romantic dance partner, chosen not because she is a good dancer—he makes it quite clear she's not—and not because he feels obliged to play out the "must pair off" of "tradition" —again, he makes clear he does not—but because by the time he's pirouetting for her, murmuring asides to her as he deduces the criminal, escorting her in high formality from the "revelation of the criminal" scene, throwing her the rose.

By that time he wants to dance with her because he fancies her. Quite a lot. Not just in crude, lewd fashion, but in romantic, high-chivalry knight-to-his-lady-love fashion.

With Janine, for the first time, we're given someone with whom Sherlock is willing to be *romantic,* in both the dramatic and the intimate meanings of the word.

If that's true...if, as Moffat seems to imply, Sign of Three is "proof" that Sherlock likes Janine, and likes her enough to actually consider her a possible pleasure to date, regardless of his framing it all as a case, then it's quite possible that on some level Janine knows perfectly well something we can only guess: that Sherlock was far more besotted than Sherlock let himself know.

That does change some of the elements of the confrontation, though, because at some level she herself can be staggering between two different ways of seeing what happened between the two of them: as him lying to her—and as him lying to himself. He lied, and lied, and lied. But who did he lie to?

Did he lie to Janine, and mislead her into thinking he was "really" attracted, really liked her company, really was aroused by her, really wanted to get naked near her, really want to share space with her to a degree that led to the kind of bathroom/flat intimacy demonstrated, really did want to kiss her, really did want to cuddle her, really did .... etc, etc...

Or did he lie to himself in believing that it was all just a ruse?
If it was the first lie, then she has no cause to regret that they never consummated it, or to ask when he exploited her. It's obvious when he exploited her--pretty much every second of their interaction over months, culminating in a huge betrayal of her trust and risk of her safety and her livelihood.

If, however, it was the second lie--if he lied to himself, then he never did "exploit" her in quite the way he thinks--if anything he exploited himself by lying to himself about what his real desires and goals were. And, yes--if he lied to himself, then she can regret that they didn't actually have full-out sex at least once before he so betrayed himself and her that some form of distancing was necessary. And she can reproach him, gently if with exasperation, for his comment about "saving it for after they married," because there he is, having blown it all to smithereens, and, yet, the fantasy he hid from himself is still there, trying to offer itself up as why he hesitated. Maybe even why he did hesitate.

After all, love--if it was never going to happen, if you were never going to marry me, why not shag me? And if you really wanted to marry me, if it really was a sober, sweet, innocent courtship on some level you refused to face, then isn't it a tragedy you've bolluxed it up so badly, and isn't it time you stopped and looked at how sad that is...that you've lost a dream you never admitted you had?

I just don't believe in the woman wronged regretting her betrayer didn't add insult to injuring by screwing her on top of everything else. It makes no sense--especially in light of sturdy, sensible, sexually experienced and adult Janine. I find I do believe in the regret if she knows, better than Sherlock himself, that it was actually quite real, and that the biggest lies he told were, in the end, to himself.

And, on an added note, I've been trying to figure out accents on "Sherlock." On the whole I go with Wellington Goose's breakdowns, but want to underline her slow claim of "Estuary" for Lestrade, and make a point in passing.

Lestrade's accent is a dilly to work out. It's recognizably his--consistent enough, stable enough, that I can always hear that it's not Sally's, or John's, or Sherlock's, or Mycroft's. I can also, as an American coming to this as much through painful analytical academic break-down as through actual in-culture experience, see why it's not "classic" Cockney. But to me all the ways Lestrade is hard to place suggest something quite real and sensible in terms of Real Life and character development on Rupert Graves' part.

If I understand WG's break down, and the material on Cockney, Estuary, and Somerset/West Country accents I've been digging through, Graves is producing something that's a bit of a blend. He has th-fronting (replacing th sounds with F or V sounds, such as "fa-ver" for "father."), but on a variable basis, and it's soft, not hard. He's got a soft glottalization of his Ts-- thus would pronounce his own name as Ruper', not Rupert. Soft, though--glottalization can range from a soft, almost aspirated pause over the missing T, or a hard demi-gulp that generates a solid sound replacing the T. Graves is producing a soft glottalized T, a soft and occasional TH-front. He's also doing vowel shifts of the sort that turn a Cockney "five" into a "foyve" and "vain," into "vine," and so on--but they, too, are softened. His placement of his voice, though, "feels" like a lot of Cockney and lower-class speech to me (granted, to me as an outsider). It's a bit forward in the mouth, with a round, resonant note, drawing out the oo-ah sorts of tone just a bit, as though savoring them.

Going by the analysis I've read, it blends a bit of Estuary and a bit of Cockney, with possible elements of his own West County, to generate a blend that leans toward a bit more clarity, a bit more "posh" usage, but with no pretence at all of being an attempt to "level up" socially: the
choices made by a man who's more educated and socially experienced than a lot of blue-collar, lower-class folks, and who has to deal with more professionals and a much wider social group, but who's not trying to go upscale—just trying to adapt a compromise that's clear, and no so heavily branded as "lower class" or "regional" as to get in his way professionally. He can testify in court, for example, and his speech patterns now say he's "educated professional from working class background, and neither ashamed of it, nor too proud to change a bit to communicate better."

Which, to me, is not only how individual compromise accents really happen, but is perfectly in keeping with who Graves plays Lestrade as choosing to be. Whatever his "real" involvements -- pure detective or MI5 agent, etc.--he chooses to be Lestrade: a good bloke, not much front, proud of himself without being vain, unashamed of where he came from, but willing to adapt to demands that might make him stretch a bit. It's the perfect accent for a modern update of canon Lestrade blended with what Moffat and Gatiss seem to want to do with the character.

In other words it's not "bad Cockney," it's "good Lestrade character accent, blending Cockney and Estuary in ways that makes sense in the context of the character."
A bit on the nature of theater and film, and how it may apply to questions of interpretation of Sherlock.

In the effort to interpret *Sherlock*, there are obvious reasons for focusing on the roles of Moffat and Gatiss as the creators, writers, and show-runners: theirs is the vision, and theirs the source of the adaptive dream of how to bring ACD's Sherlock into a modern setting. It's very easy to believe that they are all-powerful, much as a fanfic writer is all-powerful within his or her little realm of creation.

There's one problem with this: theater, and especially film, is collaborative. Every single detail Moffat and Gatiss imagines must then be read, contemplated, interpreted, and ultimately executed by others. By extension, each episode of *Sherlock* has at some level been vetted, and beta-ed, by every professional in any way involved in the execution of any element of that episode, and often by multiple layers of other professionals.

In normal television, that may mean very little. Old-style American-style episodic TV is put together in a rush by a cast and crew often made up of who is available at the moment a pilot is first cast and crewed, with rotating directors who come and go, tech crew who may do the same, actors who may be dumb as stumps and desperate for work. Scripts in this system may be put together in a matter of days, "corrected" and "tightened" literally as the show goes into shooting, and may have no higher aim than to for God's sake make at least something resembling enough sense so as not to leave the audience whimpering in agony. There is little or no safety net in this system, and often the pressure on all parties is to put up and shut up. In a system of this nature, the "vision" of a writer or a director or a producer tends to go unchecked: often only one person involved on that level ever gets a *chance* at exerting "the vision-thing."

Then there is *Sherlock*.

*Sherlock* is produced within the British system, which already alters the nature of its production. While a show like *Doctor Who*, with its large episode burden and the current pressure to produce yearly or near-yearly serieses in some ways at least approaches the pressured production of American-Old-Style TV, even that sort of show has more latitude for a bit of quality control and collaborative beta-oversight than US material. *Sherlock*, though, is even further from that A-O-S system. It was originally imagined by two men as what Moffat has called a "vanity project"--something done for fun and artistic prestige, rather than for popular demand. It was expected to pay off, but on a small scale. It was cast, with people the writer/director/show runners wanted to work with and respected, who they felt like including in their fun little project, who would have a commitment to the product, and share the vision. They've shown strong tendencies over time to continue to regard the show as a collective, ensemble, "family" production--a small and closely controlled community doing what they do for love and loyalty and shared vision. There is every sign that each of the actors, and all of the team, care profoundly about the quality of the show, and the complexity and integrity of the work done. Martin Freeman, for example, has been very outspoken about his complete lack of interest in continuing to remain involved if he does not continue to feel the character work is challenging and worth his attention. New characters are
added with care, cast with care, and brought into what is an opinionated and insanely intelligent family. Nor are the cast members exceptionally dependent on the show in ways that would drive them to remain silent or fail to fight for the integrity of the show or their character development if they didn't feel that Moffat, Gatiss and Thompson's scripts didn't meet their own standards and vision.

None of the primary people is precisely suffering for lack of work...none is stupid...none is indifferent to text or subtext. They constitute some of the most interesting and fluent celebrity interview subjects I have read in ages. Whether it's Loo Brawley commenting on the sad and complex obsession her character has for Sherlock, and how it's understandable but makes her behave in ways that Brawley clearly knows are *NOT* idealized feminist independent behavior, or clever, extremely experienced Una Stubbs chatting about the fascination with growing Mrs. Hudson, or Cumberbatch commenting quite clearly on the ways Sherlock is a right-bastard, but a fascinating blend of the admirable, the vulnerable, and the despicable, you're dealing with men and women with high levels of understanding, education, professional experience, ability to analyse and then interpret text. They are not in most of these cases economically dependent on this one gig--and in the case of Freeman, Cumberbatch, and to a lesser degree Stubbs, Brawley, and Gates, they actually have to make some sacrifice of income and convenience to fit Sherlock into their busy work schedules.

They are not a silent, passive, go-along-to-get-along group, and they have individually and collectively expressed intelligent, non-lip-service opinions about the quality of the show and why it matters to them. They are not, collectively, misogynists, cynical game players, back-stabbing audience teases, nor nihilistic twats laughing at their ability to pull one over on an unsuspecting public. They have time to analyse the scripts, they have an ensemble to support them if some element worries them, they have what appears to be substantial input into the development of themes and the raising of character issues.

The production team is similarly intelligent, professional, skilled at script analysis and interpretation, economically and professionally free of dependencies. They are similarly woven into an ensemble and a "family" or "company" that shows signs of deep and ongoing commitment to quality and the original "vanity project" aesthetic of good work done at an insanely high level for love. As group they appear to take pride in what Moffat his discussed as the ability of telly to fly the finger at movies when it comes to quality and complexity, and on the chance to develop a whole new model of television production that would permit that kind of vanity-project quality. It is to the advantage of the collaborative company to serve as constant on-going beta readers, from the top, with Sue Vertue and Beryl Vertue as first-readers down to the costumers and lighting techs and production techs developing novel and effective ways of conveying the lyric, fantastic, profoundly filmic vision of the show.

For many of the current meta-theories of *Sherlock* to be true, especially those regarding season 3 and the upcoming seasons 4 and 5, it would be necessary to believe that none of this vast, intelligent, skilled, dedicated, and outrageously opinionated mob either noticed the vile and insidious nature of the stories, or gave a rat's ass.

Martin Freeman would have to not CARE that his character was shown as loving a vicious, heartless, manipulative monster who would turn him and Sherlock into dupes, destroy the heart of their friendship, etc. He would have to approve of bringing in his main squeeze to play a cast-iron, repulsive b*tch whom John would love only as an act of stupidity, and forgive only out of inadequate moral fiber or as part of an prolonged deception in the context of marital intimacy.

Cumberbatch would have to be willing to play an entire season in which he played an angsty Sherlock rocketing around between UST and idiocy and downright malicious manipulation of his
best friend and his best friend's nasty villainous wife whom he pressures his friend to stay with for reason or reasons unknown and largely incomprehensible.

Una Stubbs, Loo Brawley, Amanda Abbingdon, Yasmine Akram, have to have all either not caught how repulsive Mary is as a *woman,* or not given a whoop how loathesome a moral message was being secretly, covertly coded into the show.

Sue and Beryl Vertu would have to be sufficiently pleased with the Vile Mary plotlines to enthusiastically back them.

Or...

Or the Good Mary interpretations, and the "sufficient cause for the shooting" arguments, and the ever strengthening and more complex friendship of Sherlock and John, and most of all the overall surface meaning of love and commitment and ever-increasing integrity has to be the most likely "right" interpretation.

I keep trying to imagine the team of actors and production crew Moffat and Gatiss have put together willingly throwing themselves into some of the meta-interpretations of Sherlock making the rounds, or failing to see them if they really are what was intended, and wanting to fall on my face in amazement at the implied collusion in audience-abuse that would have to be occuring. The level of malicious collective glee or stupidity. The passive acceptance of a Moffat-Gatiss desire to pervert the vanity-production pristine integrity of the show and the love invested in it. To betray their own dream.

I have dealt with actor and cast mutiny once. A production of The Taming of the Shrew that became so sick and unkind and mysogynistic in the hands of a recently divorced and bitter man that it was upsetting the entire production ensemble at all levels. When someone with power and the vision-thing corrupts and distorts a production, actors and producers and techs fight back. Sherlock is not being acted in or produced by people who are weak, stupid, malicious, or unable to see and understand when their beloved vanity show has been betrayed at the highest level. Likewise it is not being produced in such a way as to make it hard for the rats to leave the ship if the standards fall or the love is lost. Indeed, right now the core actors and production team have to work to take part.

That does not mean that each must feel he or she is playing an idealized, flawless, perfect role-model for viewers. Loo Brawley, a passionate and pretty militant feminist, plays Molly, who betrays her own integrity regularly, and does so with understanding of the character, her pressure points, and what her character adds to a non-mysogynistic show about a central character who is not very good with women. She doesn't appear to feel she's got to play Gloria Steinem to validate her own feminism. That said, there is also no indication she would sit still for five seconds if she had any sense in dealing with Moffat, Gatiss, and the company, or when reading the scripts, that she was being subverted to support a vile mysogynistic screed. She would fight, she would quit, or she would walk out if she felt her character "meant" what some metas of the "Moffat is a mysogynist" philosophy have suggested.

That does not mean that various political or personal factions within the audience may not have legitimate disagreements with what the collective hath wrought, or hath failed to see was morally or philosophically suspect. It does mean that if you fly a meta, at some level you're saying that the meta was either approved of by a superb cast and crew with time to study the scripts, freedom to fight back, the independence to leave, and the dedication to care--or that this intelligent, caring, dedicated, aware, experienced lot just consistently went a whole season, or three whole seasons, or whatever, without realizing that the Moriarties of the telly, those master minds of vicious audience
betrayal, were merely using them as cat's paws to perpetrate a crime upon the viewers.

Or, just possibly, your meta interpretation and analysis is not what Moffat and Gatiss intended, or the cast and crew saw, or anyone intended. Perhaps a legitimate catch of something subconscious that got embedded, yes--but not the conscious and desired interpretation. Not the planned take-away or the pursued long-arc development goal.

Either the team is part of the betrayal, or they're idiots--or you're probably wrong in the sense that this is not what the shows were thought to mean, or produced to mean, by the people who made them.

Me, I tend to believe that on the whole the cast and crew WANTS to be collaborating in and investing themselves passionately and at some degree of dedication and sacrifice in something they love, believe in, and think worthy and loving. Not just lovable--something they think is ABOUT aspects of love, friendship, and commitment between flawed, vulnerable, caring human beings that they themselves believe in. Not just a game, or a clever series of dramatic feints, but an act of love, a production of love, a story of love, done by a team in love with their precious little vanity project and their miraculous ensemble family company in the midst of a community that too often does not permit the development of professional families of any permanence. A tiny little ongoing "Harry Potter" style community but with adults whose first, last, and eternal priority is the vision-thing of the vanity-project dream and the professional daydream: to produce great and original stuff about wonderful characters with a team of top-flight professionals you really love to work with for an audience that appreciates the work and the intelligence and the integrity involved.

I think that *Sherlock* and its message and meaning is guarded by collaborators committed to making it better, not collusive conspirators all willingly turning a blind eye as Moffat and Gatiss manipulatively corrupt and warp the vision to make everything worse.

It really is that simple: either that team is willingly or stupidly letting Moffat and Gatiss produce something amoral or even immoral--or none of them think it means what you think it means. Because otherwise you've got to believe that team willingly did produce something willfully nasty and that they intend to keep doing so--or you have to believe they are morons drafted into a cynical little game all unawares, and that they are too unskilled and too naive to see the evil lurking in the ambiguities of the text.
Chapter Summary

How might *Sherlock* end?

All things end, of course. Most, in all honesty, with remarkably little planning or organization to make the end either easier or more meaningful. Someday the show will complete its run, and the Great Hiatus will begin. It could happen for the usual haphazard reasons: loss of popularity, loss of a key actor or more, loss of interest on the part of any of the primary participants. Pure unadulterated scheduling hell making filming impossible. You name it, there are reasons the show might conclude production—and quite a lot of them have the potential to leave things unresolved. Certainly with Holmes himself as the presiding source of precedent, anything goes—having attempted to kill his hero off once only to be badgered into bringing him back to life, Doyle chose not to make a second attempt on his creation’s life, apparently feeling he’d accomplished a nice balance by splitting up Holmes and Watson, having Holmes retire early to the rural life of a farm and bees in Sussex, and involving him in either mystery or espionage on what was clearly a rather spotty basis. When Moffat, Gatiss and Thompson run out of material, they could easily opt to just trickle to a weary end. Or start swiping plots from other Holmesian resources—Holmes has been brought back so often by so many in so many media, and MGT have been drawing on subsidiary Holmesiana enough that it’s not impossible to believe that the will venture out into other admirable Holmes plots from non-ACD sources.

Or they could decide, even with Moffat’s stated dream of making it a lifetime project for all of them that they would be doing into old age, with love and affection...they could decide to wrap it up just a bit more completely.

Ah, but no! you might say. Ah, but canon! Ah, but the sacred memory of Doyle!

You know what Doyle said when asked if a playwright could marry Holmes off at the end of a play? Did he fly to poor Sherlock’s defense, raise up the spectre of The Woman? Insist on the monklike celibacy of the Great Detective? Argue that Sherlock was never at ease with women?

Er, no.

And I quote: “You may marry him, or murder or do what you like with him.”

Which I must say I find a rather bracingly complete and coherent summary of an entire philosophy of writing of which I actually kind of approve. Once lit is out of its author’s own hands, it’s free, free, free, and all a sensible author insists on is clear royalty and copyright rules. Beyond that, let the fanfic and the tie-ins begin—ho-yeah! Ring the bell and let the fracas get under way!

So, if we take that as our guiding principle, where might this end? Assuming one does hold with canon up to the point where Doyle himself quit.

Doyle left us with John involved in his second marriage, in medical practice again, and apparently in London. Sherlock was in Sussex, with a farm and a lot of hives. Sherlock was apparently single, but there’s room for a bit of fancy footwork, especially in light of that Doyle quote. That means you can’t, canonically, *START* your resolution with Johnlock—though if you can figure a way to
shimmy out of John's wife, and his med practice, and either move him to Sussex or Sherlock back to London, you can probably even pull off a happy Johnlock resolution. It's kind of a happiness-in-Golden-Years resolution, but it's possible. You can possibly bring Irene back from where ever she lands in MGT canon--she's already so many miles from her original incarnation canonically that she's pretty much fair game if you think you can get her to Sussex even on a bet. Or you've got Molly, Janine, and any other female characters MGT may want to bring in. Or for that matter, charming male characters. Break Mymstradian's hearts by sending G. Lestrade out to live with Sherlock and cuss when he gets stung by the little striped darlings.

Once one is clear of ACD canon, anything goes, and to some degree any reshaping of canon goes. "Hard" canon--explicit landmark elements like John's marriage and medical practice and their separation in late years--are harder to get around than others, but it can be done.

That being said, if anything goes, what are MGT looking most likely to aim for?

My own bet would be to choose out of three options: first, quite honestly, seems most likely to be straight marriage in Sussex: The Janine and the Hives option played out with some character or another. Molly, Janine, Lestrade. Molly and Janine seeming most likely at present, but it's early days yet. Hell, Irene may decide she loves the country air and the honey after all. Second most likely to me looks like Johnlock--but I say that with a lot of reservations. I honestly think Johnlock is something none of the primary three see as their target, but instead a thematic subtext they're using to talk about love and friendship. I seriously think it's far more important to them to keep pointing out how hard it is to tell, and how little it matters, than it is for them to go for consumation of that option. Indeed, in a demented way, I feel like confirming that thread would invalidate their argument: if they ever let the two match up sexually and romantically the entire world either shouts, "You lied to us," or "We knew all along," and either way it starts becoming about gayness, not about love beyond all orientation. Last, would be the Sherlock Alone ending, with a cottage and hives and solitude. I think that's last, because I think that's farthest from their central thesis of a Sherlock becoming closer and more human and better loved and integrated into friendships with every year.

That never was Doyle's thesis or theme, though he did accomplish it in effect by softening and enriching the character over the years. It is, however, absolutely Moffat and Gatiss and Thompson's theme, and has been since Lestrade first posed the question of whether Sherlock would ever be a good, as well as a great man, and Mycroft, the other half of the Greek Chorus, pointed out that John could be the making of Sherlock--or his ruination.

What do MGT seem to see as the definition of a "good man"? In Sherlock-land, it's not about being law-abiding. It's not about being non-murderous. It's about loving and being loved. Human beings love and care about each other, be they ever so bad at it. It's this that sets the Holmes Boys apart; it's why Irene and Jim Moriarty are terrifying, it's the key element of where Sherlock crosses from adorable scamp to nightmare brat from the outer depths. That suggests that any conclusion will focus on Sherlock's final integration into human love, which suggest either some ultimate integration with and among his friends--the ultimate Uncle Sherlock--or it suggests marriage. Those are the two big ways we measure relationship--with the friendship community and with a central beloved. One or both seem like the answer that Moffat and Gatiss both seem to lean toward in their own writing and their own lives. Further, it seems to be a core sensibility of all the primary actors and production team: family, friendships, social bonds. How many shows have a leading actor practically sulking that he's not yet found the mother of his children, or looking with awe at a fellow actor with a marriage and five kids--and managing to sound as envious as he is awed?

If I had to bet, I'd bet on an unresolved ending, just because "statistics." The odds of the show having to end for keeps at the end of any given season go up and up. Each end-season is yet
another chance to find scheduling impossible, or public interest down, or one of the key players unavailable forever, for any of a number of reasons. That said, if I had to bet on an end game, I'd go with some form of either marriage, or of some other clearly NOT-alone Sherlock in Sussex. "Living with" someone, or living with someone without the scare quotes: whether potentially sexual or merely fraternal--such as living with Mycroft in contented retirement--it seems most likely with this particular lot of creators that Sherlock would not end his days alone but for his bees and his correspondents.

But, nu. Who knows for sure? Me, I just like to guess...and I find it delightful that, thanks to ACD's cavalier attitude toward the fate of his own creation, I feel like Moffat, Gatiss and Thompson have license to open the question up and aim for some real extracanonical goals.
Yes, I like Janine. Adore the actress, adore the vibe between her and Cumberbatch. Adore what she does to Sherlock. That said, what really drives me nuts is that she's also a major vector for potential sleight-of-hand plot turns.

Look, we KNOW Mary's backstory is going to complicate things. It's the obvious source of incoming plot complications. A.G.RA--John's Lying Wife. Even if her lies turn out to be for good reason, and Mary's a hidden hero, she's a hidden hero with a story waiting to be told. Magnussen knew who she killed, and knew who'd be interested--that's an open door for plot complications.

Janine? In the Ordinary World of mysteries, she'd be at worst the two-shot throw-away pseudo-love-interest. At best she'd be an amusing recurring character, but seldom substantive, because so apparently non-integrated into any of the major arcs. Disposable, both in terms of story and in terms of emotional investment.

It doesn't work that way with Sherlock. If Moffat and Gatiss and Thompson want her back, and have already thought it through enough to know explicitly that Sherlock likes her, that they'll have fun together, that he'll con her into helping him when he needs a female side-kick...then they have real plans for her. That's not just a statement that they think they can tuck her in. They don't work like that--not with a mere three shows per series, all closest-packed with twists, turns, and hooks. Everything they include is there because it can serve triple duty.

Can Janine do triple duty? Oh, yeah. Here are some of the little Janine hooks I want addressed, and think offer hooks that may equal or exceed Mary's more obvious narrative charms.

1. "I know what kind of man you are, Sherlock Holmes."

A show that does not waste time on fluff reprises that motif not once, but three times. Three that I can recall, anyway. Once, when in TSoT, she says she wishes he were not "whatever you are," with phrasing that comes across more as euphemism than ignorance. She may not be able to NAME what he is--but she's got a rather solid sense of what it is, and how it might limit them. (And in all honesty, judging by Sherlock's response, he regrets it, too--and does not doubt that she has a clue...) Then again, in HLV, she states specifically in her "cuddling with Sherlock" scene, that she "knows what [he] is really like," (specifically in relation to a line about him being missing doing work the night before!) and he requests with what appears to be fond irony that, yes, she does, but not to let on about it. To which she responds that she may actually do so... Then the third time, in their confrontation in the hospital, when she says one last time, "I know what kind of man you are, but you shouldn't have lied."

At no time whatsoever does Sherlock ever suggest she doesn't have a clue who he really is. Not once. Sherlock-bloody-Holmes has no moment when he appears to want to round on her and tell her in exquisite detail how very much she is ignorant of anything he truly is. Not when they are first meeting, not when they're "in a relationship," and not when that relationship ends, when she says quite concretely that she knows his nature.
Three times. Not once. Three times. Always set up to seem like an ambiguous, teasing bit of possible gay/ace teasing, but always with what is logically a far more likely and sensible element of Janine knowing—as at this point we know—that Sherlock's involved in a life that puts relationships, by their very nature, at risk and complicates them with deceits. Janine knows what Sherlock is, Sherlock knew that she knew—and he chose to lie and fake her out anyway, for some reason or other. And then shows every sign of having real regrets—honest to God emo feels about it all.

Is Janine another spy on "our" side, if not one of Mycroft's Own? Or a player on the other side—Sherlock's corresponding counterpart and technically his enemy, but only in a rather theoretical sense—the sort of enemy who may be closer to you than a friend who doesn't actually understand the game? Is she a victim/player who's dealt with spies/detectives before? A cop? Whatever she is, she "knows what kind of a man Sherlock is." And Sherlock appears to agree with her.

2. Magnussen had something on Janine: we don't know what, but we know that whatever Magnussen had, it allowed him to put her through the eye-flicking game.

We know Magnussen's MO. He doesn't threaten people directly, he threatens them through their loved ones. It's how he goes after John, and after Sherlock, and after Mary, and after Mycroft, and after Lady Smallwood. If you're standing there being flicked, it's not just because of what you did—even if you're Mary. It's because of what that knowledge will allow Magnussen to do to the people you love. Now, with Mary we may be dealing with the "bottom of the stack." His first instinct before John was in the game may have been to threaten Mary directly—but the two times we know of are all tied to his choice of using her hostage to fortune--John--against her. "Wish your family could have been there," is, among all the other things it could be, a comment that she has a new family, now, and they're as vulnerable as the first family was, whoever they were and where ever they've gone. That suggets that whatever is in Janine's background, there's a good chance she is protecting someone. We don't know who, and we don't know why.

Again, another superb door to walk through.

3. In spite of being a victim of Magnussen's, Janine is also his PA. She's in a trusted position with access to major information on Magnussen. Both Mary and Sherlock appear to have targetted her as being perfectly placed to get them closer to Magnussen. Mary appears not to have seen her as a door in—or she would not be out cold on the floor when Sherlock and John come in—but on the other hand, she may have let Mary in and been coshed on the head as a way of providing her with a cover story. Maybe Mary was smart enough to not lie to Janine, where Sherlock just had to be a clever-dick. But—she was Magnussen's PA. She knows at least a few of his secrets. She was perfectly placed to have access and a chance to observe. And we're in a show where everyone is dangerous.

Is she a spy? An undercover cop? A criminal herself? One of Moriarty's crew? Is her knowledge left over from her CAM days going to matter?

I have this idiotic image of Mycroft considering the wedding: his brother, who's worked for him. Mary, who's a CIA spy—and who I have hypothesized worked for him. Janine, who is...whatever she is.

Can't you imagine poor Mycroft thinking of the complexities of trying to navigate this in front of John, perhaps with none of the various players knowing about the others, and deciding that, yes, he is absolutely going to give the "night-do" a miss!?! Last place he wants to be...

That's assuming he knows.

4. We've got Valley of Fear coming up as the underlying logic story. I still think Mary will prove to
be the Bridey parallel. But there is room for Janine to be any number of possible parallels from within the story, including the girl "Birdy Edwards" marries, switched over to Sherlock instead of Mary/Birdy. They are adept at that sort of swap-around, as with giving Sherlock the ultimate job of assassinating Magnussen, rather than letting Lady Smallwood do that deed. It would not be unlike them to realize that the love-story told in Valley of Fear is *dramatically* better if it's attached to Sherlock, rather than the mysterious one-shot Birdy: the girl entangled in a web of murderous conspiracy, jumped up a notch or two, given some danger and tough of her own, and attached to our lead, instead of some narrative interloper we not only didn't care enough about in the original, but whose parallel character is now married to John Watson. I want to know if Janine is some version of "Ettie Shafter," the character who is Birdy's beloved within the story.

While I'm here: We've got Janine in Sussex with the cottage and the bees, and we've got Valley of Fear coming up as the next likely book/story to work with--and Valley of Fear begins and ends in Birlstone, Sussex. So we may have more "end game" elements being presented.

I am sure I will think of more when I stop typing. But in the meantime, I really am looking forward to seeing how they use Janine, as she's NOT a simple throw away even now.
Huh. Narrative Imperatives, and Expectations Going In.

Chapter Summary

Me trying to work out why a particular flavor of Sherlock interpretation exists, when, to me, it's strongly dis-indicated by the series.

These, to me, are hallmarks of Sherlock writing/scripting, and the Sherlock show aesthetic:

A world-view that's ironic, meta, and po-mo, and intensely structuralist. A sense of humor tied to the irony that Sherlock Holmes, as imagined in the Victorian Era, juxtaposes quite humorously when played out in a rather more modern setting. A highly structured style, with distinct elements: the Mycroft's World of Bondian/Le Carre espionage, poised between sober drama and high camp as the underlying logic, the decided high camp of much of ACD Holmes, all wrapped up in a very non-camp, profoundly touching and empathic modern "character and relationship" story that is rooted in the assumptions and expectations of the two original genre formats. Emotion, but limited sentiment, and that sentiment offset with irony and humor and sarky mischief. It would, perhaps, be possible to run a Real Romance Genre narrative through *Sherlock.* But it would have to do so without being taken all that seriously. The ironic po-mo meta stuff would kick the tar out of it.

Indeed, in a sense it does. Sherlock *sees himself* as a sort of odd romantic hero/heroine. Mycroft, in HLV, nails him: he thinks he's the hero, out slaying dragons. It doesn't matter how many times he claims to be a high-functioning sociopath, or declares he's no hero. Even in saying so, he's playing out his inner drama of himself as the star of his own life--and everyone else's life, too. He's so self-centered and so NON-empathic that he tries to warp the entire world around his ego--and as a result he's maddening, lovable, easy to understand, he has enormous pathos. That intersection of Victorian High Heroism planted helplessly in a far more ironic, far less impressionable age, makes for both humor and vulnerability.

But to be a *Sherlock* story, there's got to be at least a touch of irony. A recognition that hand-wringing is a bit not-good. That real people do not have archenemies--as John so brilliantly points out. It may be more boring, but there it is. Archenemies are seldom on. Even when they are on, these days they have cell phones and it's easy to determine that they are stark raving bonkers. Completely mental. These days, if you're as close as John and Sherlock were in the original, people assume you're a couple, even if you're not. These days, if you work with the Met, you almost have to have some kind of hidden professional credential like being an MI5/6 analyst, or you're just not going to be allowed on site. These days, if you have recurring rounds of self-medication with opiates and coca derivatives as a way of dealing with boredom, people eventually notice that you're a bit of a junkie, and it has repercussions. These days, if you appear to die and don't bother to tell your "best friend" you lived, you're likely to find yourself facing a really, really pissed best friend. Heroism meets reality. Ironic humor wins. Sentiment isn't done away with--but it's required to quit swanning around taking itself so damned seriously.

Sherlock is not a romantic melodrama. It's an ironic, loving, respectful but very funny pastiche of romantic melodramas, from two primary genres: Holmesian Victorian Detective Mystery, and Flemming/Le Carre spy chic, which serendipitously have both always had deep roots in Sherlock
ACD canon AND in later derivative Sherlock Holmes spin-off. But it is always fondly taking the mickey out of the more hand-wringing, wrought elements of the genres, while turning around and replacing the fake with the stunningly real.

It's not real *Sherlock* if the hand-wringing anguish wins. They are all hardier, healthier, and stauncher than that. The world is funnier than that. Sherlock is not a world of tragic, thundering loss.

But...

But Sherlock to some degree sees himself through a lens very similar to that of the classic hand-wringing heroine. His ineptitude with feelings and his self-centered fixation on his own role in everything--his vanity and his drama queen nature--make it very easy to "write" him and his world through that "naive" eye...

Strip away the irony, the meta, the ways the Real World denies the romantic genre tropes of High Victorian Detective Mystery and Secret Agent man hero-porn, and you're just left with the hero-porn.

It is a rule with hero-porn that all the hurts, they burn like the death of a thousand suns. All loves are pristine and pure and compelling and the One True Love. All romance is ultimately sexual romance--all passions sexual (at least in modern day interpretation). All conflicts are soul-crushing. All sorrows are soul-destroying and unendurable. All true loves are devastated beyond recovery by the loss of the beloved--they certainly don't mourn, then get back up, brush off and get on with life, and find a new beloved. In hero-porn chiaroscuro rules, dark and light flash in brilliant shattered extremes, hands are wrung endlessly, and Twoo Wuvv is worthy of Mad Max the Miracle Man's best cure.

If you miss the irony and the meta and the detached but loving act of taking the mickey out of the genre norms, I think Sherlock himself, by his nature, and by his own internal hero-porn, makes it easy to mistake the show for what it is not--an epic saga of romance and melodramatic heroism, where instead it appears to be a kindly but laughing love story about a gawky genius with a bad case of internalized hero-porn finding one man who's willing to be Hobbes to our guy's Calvin...and who as a result manages to live, laugh, and love in the weird and complicated grey spaces where no genre norm has been before. To be human, rather than cardboard.
I take on what I consider the toughest character in the BBC *Sherlock* canon.

I don't do John much. I do analyse him, some, and I do love what he and Sherlock are together, but John's...eh. I feel a bit about trying to talk about John as I feel about grabbing a downed live wire in a storm. There's a lot of ungrounded voltage there, yeah? And most of all, it's voltage in a fuzzy wooly jumper, pretending ferociously that he's just this guy.

He wants so much to believe he's Arthur Dent, or Charlie Brown, or Neville Longbottom pre-Dumbledore's Army. Yeah, ok, he's got the gun. Yeah, ok, he's a doctor. Yeah, ok, we are told--HE is told--on page one that he's an adrenaline addict with a strong but startlingly unusual moral compass. He doesn't seem to point to true north at all, exactly. Maybe he's reliable at pointing out the phases of the ever-changing moon. I dunno. But in spite of our having been handed a clear statement that John works with Sherlock because he's just what Mycroft says he is--someone who's not quite right if he's not in a war zone, running a mild adrenaline high--John wants to sort of believe he's just this nice sort of bloke. Maybe not as smart as Sherlock, but saner, more stable, better grounded, above his adrenal urges, plenty of common sense, good at reading people.

A lot of this is not true.

Good at reading people? There is a reason John is not the solver of puzzles. He doesn't read people, he knows norms, averages, and social conventions. Show him part of a pattern and he fills it in to look like he expects, rather than waiting, or wondering if it may not quite match the pattern. But he doesn't read people themselves all that well. In some odd ways, Sherlock is better, because Sherlock is under no illusion that he's good with people OR that his social assumptions are reliable guides.

Less addicted to danger? No. If anything, more--I think Sherlock given exciting enough ideas might be able to pass on the race through the night streets. You can imagine him being as fascinated with bees in Sussex as with crooks in London. John? Five weeks max, and then I swear he'd take a sledge hammer to the hives and then run like hell, laughing, with the bees roaring hot behind him, because at least then there would be a chase on.

Nice? Actually, John's sardonic, grumpy, testy, quite aware his best friend is a pillock, and utterly unafraid to say so.

He's loyal. He's loving. He's intelligent in his own spheres. He's not half so Charlie Brown as he pretends. He adores the puzzles, which he's bad at but which fascinate him. He's not very good at consciously thinking on multiple planes, though--or keeping track of layers. He tends to lie terribly because, well--he doesn't believe a word of it, now does he? He's far, far, far too easy to lie to...

One of the great lines in TSoT is Mary telling Sherlock she's "not John. I know when you're fibbing." John truly has no clue when his best friend is bullshitting him, in spite of years now to get a clue.

Mycroft's right in that first encounter. He's loyal--too fast and too completely. He trusts Sherlock Holmes, and he really, really ought not. He's addicted to danger, he's dismissive of men who he
feels don't play by quite the same two-fisted book he himself admire (and admires in reckless Sherlock). His sense of humor is only slightly less juvenile than Sherlock's can be--the two at their worst are two middle-school boys loose on the world with a high opinion of themselves and an infinite supply of water balloons for everyone else. He's in a war zone, and needs that war zone, but damned if I think he admits it even now. The woman he picked to marry was chosen because in spite of her best role playing efforts his subconscious told him she was a tiger. Otherwise there were dozens of other, tamer women he could have picked long before.

He has patterns you can detect: anger not always well managed, a habit of putting himself in the running with people who are dangerous, but who don't pass as well as he does, so he can feel superior. Blind loyalty, but often not wise loyalty. A tendency to idealize and air brush the flaws out of the people he does love and worship, so that he doesn't have to see his own addictions too clearly. He's easily manipulated, but resents it, but won't change it.

God help me if I don't sometimes think that without Sherlock and Mary he'd devolve into a surly, fight-picking, resentful man with both anger management and self-honesty issues...and an illegal handgun. Without two people to "give him a bit of a run" and make him laugh--at himself as well as then--and a feeling of focused combat with all he finds annoying in the world, he'd be scary. And potentially dangerous--in odd ways more likely to be the serial murder than Sherlock-the-high-functioning-sociopath.

John's a tough little bastard, under the wooly jumpers and the lies he tells himself. What they call a "hard man." Tough. A bit mean. Not someone you cross.

It's not just John who humanizes Sherlock. Sherlock humanizes John. He pulls him not just from his despair, but from his ill-contained anger. He provides him activity, laughter, companionship, a sense of purpose, a desperately needed sense of superiority in all things but brilliant deductive stuff.

A lot of people seem to see John as warm, compassionate, fuzzy, tender, an open book, a good guy. He's more difficult than that. He's conditionally some of those things, and in many cases the one condition is that he have Sherlock and someone to chase with a gun. Give him those? Yeah, then he can pass for Charlie Brown between bits. Not entirely convincingly. But--at least he's got the right sweater. Or Arthur Dent--again, he's got the bathrobe, and one suspects he knows where his towel is at. But in spite of it all, he's not Charlie or Arthur. Because under the sweater, in the pocket of the robe, hidden by the towel, he's got that illegal handgun....and they told you on the very first show that he'll shoot it at people who are not, technically, physical threats. Shoot to kill.

I don't often write John, because he lies to himself about most of that. He lies to himself about who he is, what he wants, who the people around him are. What he doesn't lie about, he misses. He's easily deceived. He's proud of his strength and good sense and even his basic intelligence, while betraying both his pride and those attributes far too often. I can manage Sherlock--Sherlock at least knows he's f*cked up seven ways to Sunday, and knows at least some of how. And Sherlock can be heartbreakingly humble when he's created his own bed, and realizes he has to now lie in it.

John? Not so much.

I don't write John much. He's fascinating, but very hard--and when I get him right, I am often worried that I'm going to have to wade through the folks who want him to be Teddy Bear John, in a sweater and a Macintosh with a "Please Take CARE of This Bear" label tied on.

But...

Just between us? I think John's a rather brilliant creation, on the part of Moffat and Gatiss and
Thompson and Freeman. Original ACD John was a bit of an idiot. At least this John is an idiot with teeth, and clear strengths and flaws, and a slightly screwed up psyche that explains in large part why he'd want to spend his life racing after a man who insults him, abuses him, drugs him, lies to him—but always keeps him interested.
More on Time

Chapter Summary

Just a quick look at time in Sherlock again--second and third seasons, plus hiatus.

If you ignore time in John's blog--which, quite honestly, is wise--it's possible to make sense of time for at least the second and third seasons of *Sherlock*, not to a perfect degree, but close-ish.

Season Two starts with Moriarty and the face-off at the pool, which is I am told supposed to occur in May. I am fine with that, as it gives Moriarty and Irene a chance to discuss the juicy bit of blackmail material and espionage info she's picked up, and what to do about it. Irene's own story starts at roughly midsummer, which can be backtracked by her own comments during Bond Air, when she announces she's left the phone with Sherlock for six months, and by taking into account Moffat and Gatiss' public statements that Scandal by intention took place over a single year--an episode that contains careful and decided time markers throughout to establish the passing of that year. I will say it appears to be a cool summer--but it's full-leaf, with the grass just beginning to put up some tawny seed heads. Summer seems quite right. So Irene initiates in summer, then dodges out. Then recontacts at Christmas--the season of sentiment, though neither brother would admit it, the season of knowing you're alone, the season for wanting a bit of romance...and Irene comes back with her phone, her "death," and an apparent mystery in the form of a password puzzle. There is totemic snow...improbable snow, as London is not well known for providing snow at Christmas, but it helps pin down the turning of the seasons. Irene leaves Sherlock to solve it for six months--he appears to do the X-ray at St. Bart's in spring, with the leaves just coming into full green again. Then we land at Bone Air, which is "six months" after Irene leaves him the phone. Midsummer again.

Baskerville appears to happen in Autumn or early spring--wuthering weather. A gothic sort of show. Moriarty is released, then performs his balletic breakins to the Tower, Pentonville Prison, and the Bank of England. That appear to happen in summer, which makes sense. Even Moriarty takes some time to set up his special effects and performances, and this is to be a grand performance indeed. So--released in what looks like either late autumn or early spring, putting on his performance in summer, and coming to trial in autumn. Then the Bruhl children's kidnap, which is during the school year, but right at Parent Day--usually mid-semester. They're settled in, they know their spaces. This isn't year-start. I'm guessing that, with some narrative elegance, the final stages of Reichenbach fall almost exactly two years prior to Sherlock's return mere days before Guy Fawkes' Day.

We can time Season Three almost as closely. Return on Guy Fawkes' Day. Marriage in May--Mary is just developing signs of pregnancy, probably only conceived within the month prior. The cases before the wedding, then, happened over the winter in the lead-in to the wedding...indeed, the two he covers, The Mayfly Man and the Bloody Guardsman, are both quite proximate to the wedding. Indeed, there is some question whether the villain planned the crime until after he found out about the wedding in the first place, gaining his window of opportunity. Mapped over this is Lestrade's ongoing fight to bring in the Waters Family, a process that appears to have taken at least eighteen months, suggesting that this subarc began about exactly half-way through Sherlock's hiatus. Which now has me really wanting to study "Many Happy Returns," because while I am quite sure Anderson is wrong, I am equally sure that there are important clues woven through that....
Anyway, one year into the hiatus an insanely skilled group starts a series of major bank heists and getting away with it—to the point of having poor Lestrade spitting nails, kicking his poor innocent tyre, and boomping Sally Donovan on her tushy as he slams his car door open, growling. One wishes to suggest, for what it is worth, that this and all three of the "cases" Anderson is tracking suggest that someone is still operating as a Criminal Mastermind in Eurasia. Possibly it's part of Sherlock's hunting trip—but it would be even more fascinating if Anderson was, accidentally, tracking the return not of Sherlock, but of Moriarty setting up crimes that are blocked, whether by Sherlock (not knowing its Moriarty returning) or by serendipitous luck. I mean, Moriarty won't win all the time. Consultants don't--success depends on the skills and abilities of their consultees, as well as of the consultant.

Arg. Back to paying attention. Marriage in May. John and Mary gone a month, suggesting June or early July for the start of "Vows." Christmas for the conclusion—with Mary apparently "great with child." As she should be--Christmas after her wedding in May. Depending on just how far before the wedding she conceived, she should be within a month or so of delivery. She's still pregnant at the time of the flight and the East Wind, so...that's probably no later than early January, and Mycroft managed to rush it through.

In the meantime, though, there's the timing on the shooting. And the question of when, exactly, John and Sherlock fell out of touch for a month (was it right after the wedding, and no word from the time of the honeymoon on, or did they get back in touch, then drift as John and Mary try to settle in and do the suburban couple thing?) A month seems a bit short for the state of affairs when John finds Sherlock in the crack house...but the markers seem to indicate it's not that long after the wedding.

In any case, we can go from midsummer with Scandal, and make a plausible argument for how almost exactly four and a half years go by and where the cases fall, and what you can sort of reckon the characters were up to at least by season. You can also see the beginnings of a plot coming into shape underlying that, with the Many Happy Returns and Waters Case material, which may prove to be intentional set-up providing foundation for later seasons, though not proving critical to THIS most recent season.

The writers do seem to think very roughly in terms of year-quarters and turns of the year: solstices and equinoxes. Not, so near as I can tell, in any occult or symbolic sense, though I need to check that over again, but at least as landmarks to help them keep their own bearings in "when" things happen and how long off-screen events are likely to demand to be plausible.

Addendum: And, like the Waters Case and Many Happy Returns, you can plot the likely arc of Moriary/Mycroft in Second Season: Mycroft, having reached his annoyance limit, suggests Moriarty can have his attention if he really wants it at midsummer of that year. By Hounds, Moriarty has pissed him off enough to be willing to bargain with Sherlock to break the git--though I honestly do not believe he or anyone serious ever believed in that idiot code. It was just a mutually accepted cover story that Moriarty offered and that Mycroft and his people were willing to play within, while REALLY worrying about the network of criminals developing. In any case, by Hounds Mycroft and his people have had time to find Moriarty, catch him, question him, and get stinking sick and tired of making too little progress. So that brings us to the release, followed by going on nine months or so of Moriarty moving up to the concluding events of The Fall...and do I believe Mycroft and company did not watch him? No, I don't. Though I will concede I think Moriarty may be skilled enough to be unwatchable more often than Mycroft and his people would like.
Sherlock, Mycroft, and Reputation

Chapter Summary

Modus Vivendi, the Holmes Boys

A Study in Scarlet:

"What you do in this world is a matter of no consequence," returned my companion, bitterly. "The question is, what can you make people believe that you have done?"

Part 2, chap. 7, p. 83

I have used this quote before. I will use it again. I honestly think it's one of the key ACD canon quotes helping define how BBC *Sherlock* functions, and how the Holmes Boys think. There is reality—which they deduce, through their refined and highly developed skills and brilliance. And there is what everyone else sees, which is almost always a highly fictionalized version of reality filtered through assumptions, expectations, preferred narratives, false reading of clues and cues, wishful thinking, fearful thinking, avoidance, ignorance, and acceptance of various forms of spin and BS. In the Holmes Boys' world, almost no one is dealing in reality—most of the people around them are dealing with fictions...and most of the people around them are better dealt with through more fictions.

Like the Doctor, the Holmes Boys lie— and they lie about themselves more than almost anything.

Sherlock's a "consulting detective" who implies that he's an amateur who's accepted by the Met, and particular by Lestrade, because he's so brilliant and amazing that all rules and regulations are overturned for his exceptional self. He never really focuses on his increasingly clear involvement of *some* sort with MI5/6. Never admits until "Hounds" that Lestrade himself has a tie to Big Brother's espionage work. Still hasn't clearly sat down and discussed his various roles with John. He works to maintain the illusion he's just this genius guy who solves crimes for the Met and for private clients. And doesn't accept pay from the Met. He implies he needs a roommate for financial reasons, but the financial reasons never make sense—even accepting he's got a good deal from Mrs. H, we're talking a fairly expensive little flat right near Regent's park and downtown London, in easy walking distance of Mayfair, right near a tube station, with a working fireplace and two great windows looking over the front street. AND what appear to sort out to at least two bedrooms. And a living room. And an extensive kitchen. This is not chump change in London even with John pitching in. Sherlock wears expensive clothes, uses expensive tools and equipment, runs around in expensive taxis, turns down expensive commissions, refuses payment from one of his chief clients, can afford recreational drugs...

And somehow he's still got John accepting the story that he's in need of a roommate to go halvesies with him.

Sherlock lies.

Sherlock lies about his brother, and what his brother does. Sherlock lies about what Sherlock does.
Sherlock lies about who he is, up to and including trying to pretend his rather ordinary seeming parents out of existence. Sherlock lies to John--about dozens of things, over and over. He lies by omission, he lies by misdirection, and he lies by direct misstatement. He's most involved not in what's real, but in what he can make the people around him accept as real. "I am a high-functioning sociopath." A lie--one we all recognize at this point, but a lie Sherlock finds useful.

Sherlock manipulates perception; he especially manipulates perception about himself, whether that means kicking a scimitar under his chair so John won't notice and ask where it came from, or hiding the skills that led to the scimitar being there in the first place, or hiding the background that leads to veiled, caftan-wearing assassins attempting to take his life at all... He fools the eye. He games his audience. He's a trickster, pulling the wool over people's eyes. Right now there are only two people who seem highly likely to "know" who Sherlock is when all the fictions are scraped away: Mycroft, and possibly Lestrade, who have views from both in front of the footlights and from behind them. John doesn't. Mary, who knows when Sherlock is fibbing and who's led her own illusion-draped espionage life, may guess. Janine, who keeps dropping hints about knowing what kind of man Sherlock Holmes really is may know more than we realize—or not. But on the whole?

One doubts. One of the tragic, and rather grotesque things about Sherlock's relationship with John is that, just as Mary attempted to hide her real self from John, Sherlock hides himself from John. He doesn't want John to see him. Part of that is because he can't trust John to lie well enough to help Sherlock maintain his secrets. But I find myself increasingly suspecting that Sherlock, exactly like Mary, fears that if John ever really knows exactly who he is, what he's done, and how he's lied to John, John won't love him any more. Even as blunt and apparently open a statement of self as Sherlock provides in describing himself in the Best Man Speech avoids and evades detailed facts, rather than broad brushstrokes.

Sherlock is a man who will drug his friend and roomie. Repeatedly. To the extent of causing John to lose days...days during which John can't testify to what Sherlock has actually done. Sherlock hides things like Irene's survival, knowing that John lied to him....badly.

What about Mycroft?

He occupies a "minor position in the British government." A lie Sherlock, in an act of fraternal warfare, intentionally shoots down.

When you think about it--when you REALLY think about it--how would any professional agent feel about a friend or family member who intentionally, extravagantly outted him or her to a comparative stranger? Blew his cover story to hell and back? Ripped away the entire illusion? Sherlock has just informed a near-stranger that his brother is somewhere up there with M, in the James Bond mythos, or with George Smiley in the Le Carre novels. "Hi. My brother is one of the most powerful spymasters in England. Don't listen to his BS about minor positions with the government: this man determines life and death for individuals and nations, and is under oath to the highest powers in the land--among whom he must be counted."

Not that Mycroft isn't compromising himself with John, repeatedly. but much of that is its own sleight of hand. Kidnaps that are not really kidnaps so much as exercises in arm twisting and posturing. Magic tricks with CCTV cameras and ATM machines. But Mycroft dances at the edge of implied power, not stated power. He doesn't say what he is, he merely and repeatedly indicates what he isn't--he ISN'T some powerless schlub. What he is, though, is hidden. Even Sherlock in his temper ultimately chooses to end his revelations where he leaves off at the end of "Study in Pink." John's been given bits and pieces beyond that. He knows Mycroft consorts with Royal Level government, that he's at least involved in the resolution of Irene Adler, that he's got some say in
what John and Sherlock are told. He knows Mycroft has access to Baskerville--magic, bullet-proof access to Baskerville. He knows Mycroft works with the problem of national threats like "idiotic super skeleton key codes" and with Moriarty directly.

John technically knows Mycroft is operating at the very highest level of security. What's odd is he keeps acting like he doesn't understand what that means, including the fact that any story he gets from Mycroft is always going to be only what Mycroft thinks John can or should be told.

With Mycroft there's what he says, what he acts out, and what he actually does. Of the three, only what he actually does is reliable, and even what he actually does may be misleading.

Think about the face-off in the Diogenes in "Reichenbach Fall." Mycroft cites an utterly idiotic super code--a code even Moriarty admits is pure bogus mumbo jumbo. That Moriarty thinks Sherlock should never have accepted as true.

Do we really believe that Sherlock and Mycroft fell for the code thingy? Really? That they and all their minions were that stupid? And, honestly, it's stupid. It's just monumentally stupid to anyone who knows anything about computers. It's a lie you could sell John, but not a lie Sherlock and Mycroft should accept, with their computer literacy, much less Mycroft's tech experts. Moriarty's code was always bogus at a level that Sherlock and Mycroft should never have believed.

And, according to Sherlock's admittedly questionable "confession" to Anderson about how the Fall was engineered, the code was never an issue. It was Mycroft and Sherlock, together, trying to root out the details regarding Moriarty's international cabal. Not trying to break Moriarty over a silly little bogus code, but trying to break Moriarty over the far more "realistic" network. Feints within feints, with much of what we saw go down between Moriarty and Sherlock on the roof a lie. Sherlock pretending to believe in a code he never believed in, to lure Moriarty into a final defeat from which he would not recover. (And, no: I'm not fully convinced by that, either. But it's closer than what Mycroft told John. What Mycroft told John was always totally bogus...)

And if what Mycroft told John was bogus, then it's time to evaluate how Mycroft (and Sherlock) are likely to have lied.

Moriarty fed Kitty Reilly personal information regarding Sherlock Holmes. Things that, in John's estimation, only someone very close to Sherlock could know. Enough truth to form a matrix of detail in which to suspend a secondary network of lies. John presumably knows some of the "true" things Kitty Reilly reports--enough to be convinced. But we already know and have repeatedly seen that John knows remarkably little about Sherlock's past. That leads to the suspicion that John is accepting most of Kitty Reilly's reporting as true, with only a substrate of lies woven through to serve Moriarty's purposes. John interprets the situation as Mycroft having, without Sherlock's knowledge or permission, given away Sherlock's private details...details John didn't know, either, and which upset him with their personal nature. Big Brother betrayed Baby Brother.

Mycroft accepts the accusation. But...we know John is specifically one of the people Mycroft and Sherlock are intentionally misleading. As Sherlock points out in Hearse, they don't believe John can keep up the lies necessary to keep Sherlock safe during his hiatus. So John, like the public, is being fed a lot of big lies.

He's fed the lie of the magic code.

He's fed the lie that most of what Kitty Reilly reported is "true" for a value of truth that Sherlock gives a damn about.

He's fed the lie that Mycroft willingly betrayed his brother on that scale: that Sherlock was
innocent of all the planning and all the cascade leading up to the fall.

He's fed the lie that Sherlock really was a fraud. (even if he refuses to accept that...)

He's fed the lie that Sherlock has killed himself.

Virtually nothing that John Watson is led to believe about the Reichenbach Fall is true. Even if one does not accept Sherlock’s explanation for the Fall, either, but accepts that even that is a game of illusions, nothing changes the fact that what John was encouraged to see and believe about all aspects of those events was false on some level.

Here's the thing: even if Sherlock was lying to Anderson, what he's saying, ultimately, is that he and Mycroft game reality, spin illusions, use even their own lives as props in a giant game of fool-the-eye. And even if every other thing you come away from that story to Anderson proves false, what must prove true is that Mycroft and Sherlock are illusionists.

Which brings me back to that first quote:

"What you do in this world is a matter of no consequence," returned my companion, bitterly. "The question is, what can you make people believe that you have done?"

Is there any reason to think that what Mycroft fed Moriarty was "true" rather than just one more mix of reality and fiction used to achieve the response Mycroft and Sherlock desired?

Is there any reason to think what Moriarty fed Kitty Reilly was actually anything Sherlock or Mycroft together gave a good goddamn went public? Anything they could not simply disprove at their leisure?

Is there any reason to think Sherlock considers even his own life as much beyond a resource he can tap to good effect?

Think about his tactics with Magnussen. He's on drugs. He's on drugs specifically to get caught and reported in the scandal rags. He's gambling with his health and his reputation and his own self-control in an effort to spin his life into yet another illusion that will draw a response he desires. He doesn't care what the drugs reporting will do to his reputation. He doesn't think twice about that. It's the game. It's the fool-the-eye. It's all about putting the enemy at a disadvantage. If he wins, he will write the final history, after all. Or John will. Which given John's tendency to be led by the nose, is about the same thing.

Sherlock and Mycroft are deductive whizzes. Ultimately they trust their own ability to read "truth" when handed BS. They trust their own ability to see through the smoke and mirrors other people may employ. In some ways their scorn for mere mortals has to do with the inability to simply observe what to them is the obvious--the tendency to sucker for fictions when evidence suggests otherwise. That said, though, they will use that weakness in others over and over again. Mycroft shows signs of repenting that and consciously limiting his games to "work." for the most part, with the proviso that Sherlock himself is always to some degree part of Mycroft's work world, as well as being Baby Brother for whom rules are bent and stretched a bit. Sherlock is only just beginning to understand that his willingness to take advantage of the "sucker born every minute" dynamic of the world as he experiences it may be, at some level, unfair to suckers. Or, perhaps more accurately, that there are suckers who deserve better than to be conned...and who he loves too much to want to hurt that way.

I keep thinking of the face-off between Mycroft and John in the Diogenes. Ultimately we know logically most of what Mycroft "admits" there has to be BS--part of the bill of goods Mycroft and
Sherlock are selling to the world, and to John as *The Primary Witness to the World*. Mycroft lies to John. But Mycroft at least seems honestly unprepared for John's accusation, and appears also to honestly regret John's pain. When Sherlock comes back, Mycroft is the brother who understands and expects John to have a hard, hard emotional response to Sherlock's return. Mycroft, of the two, is the one who has at least some empathic understanding of "human nature," as Mary puts it. He understands that John will be hurt, and with reason. That reconciliation may be difficult--again, with reason. That what he and Sherlock, between them, have done to John may have been necessary in their frame of reference, but will never be anything less than brutal from John's frame of reference.

It's one of the interesting things about the two brothers. They may come to exactly the same conclusions much of the time. They may game the suckers. But Mycroft, for all his Big Brother rep as the Iceman, understands and even feels for the suckers at least somewhat. Sherlock does not understand. Or he's only just barely beginning to.
Thinky-thinky. Why DID Sherlock 'confess" to Anderson?

Chapter Summary

Things I think when I should be sleeping.

There are two men Sherlock makes a clear and obvious effort to "confess" to. John, and Anderson.

The two have something rather intriguing in common: both are perhaps best known for their online/social media distribution of Sherlockian materials, John through his blog, and Anderson through his Empty Hearse group *and subsidiary social network.*

In Anderson's case Sherlock is outright making a video for/with Anderson.

He's also giving Anderson a version of the Fall that sounds quite a lot like the pat formulaic stuff he tries to give John...and fails to give because John a) wants why, not how, and b) wants it on his terms, and c) keeps losing his temper and trying to strangle Sherlock. So with Anderson we once more get the speech about the thirteen ways off the rooftop...

Sherlock's going around folks like Magnussen and trying to get his version published online. He has a narrative he actively wants to make public. And, yes. I do think he'd consciously and knowingly use John to get his version up in a blog, even while attempting the welcome-me-home thing. Sherlock. I mean--SHERLOCK.

Given Sherlock and Mycroft, I am inclined to think this is also the version Mycroft wants in play.

Both men want it now known that together they took down Moriarty's network. They're publicising.

(Which, BTW, has always seemed to me one possible reason Mycroft was willing to endure Magnussen for at least the time being: he was someone whose press might occasionally prove useful. Even if negatively so. One does wonder if Kitty Reilly worked for one of Magnussen's papers...)

Mycroft, for all he's aghast when Moriarty-tape first runs--or at least putting on an act for his superiors--is so purringly HAPPY when he can call Sherlock home. And, yes, some of it has to be "Bringing Baby Brother Home Alive." But...

I have always suspected there's something about Moriarty's return in and of itself that pleased Mycroft to pieces. No matter how happy he is about Sherlock's return, I don't easily believe he'd be that content and smiley and squiggling with Teh Happiez if he were terrified of the news coming in. I'm more inclined to think the manner of Moriarty's "return" disconcerted him--but the existence of his return pleased him. A trap sprung, a big fish hooked.
Chapter Summary

Thoughts about John and Sherlock.

In quite a bit of the Johnlock I've read, Sherlock confides all the important, vulnerable things to John, and what he does not confide John brilliantly, empathically intuits. In many fics there is no one--no one in the world--who understands Sherlock Holmes like John Watson.

One of the saddest things that has come to me, over the time I've spent analysing Sherlock, and Mycroft, and John, and the structures of the show, is that MGT caught something vital, true, but previously unstated or unclarified about John and Sherlock.

John barely knows Sherlock at all. He loves him. He's got an unmistakable life-long bond with him. John and Sherlock are the making and breaking of each other. But John no more understands Sherlock than fish "understand" water, non-physicists actually understand gravity, or babies understand why Mommy and Daddy make the choices they make. Sherlock does not confide in John: he performs for John, in part out of vanity, in part out of utility, to manipulate him into behaviors and beliefs Sherlock finds useful. Sherlock does not, however, confide in John, and even when he does, his confidences are suspect at best.

John only met Sherlock's parents because he stumbled on them and Sherlock could not shoo them out quite seamlessly enough.

John still shows very little understanding of what Mycroft does or Sherlock's role in it.

John still has no real idea what Sherlock felt about Irene. Or Janine. Or Molly, for that matter.

John can say, and does, with a straight face, that Sherlock does not feel things like ordinary people do--which is actually false. Sherlock does feel them the same way, he just doesn't allow himself to engage in the first place a lot of the time, and he lies to himself and everyone else even more of the time. But John can buy Sherlock's denials so completely that he seems to truly believe that Big Brother's concern that Little Brother was emotionally engaged can't be possible. (And let's not, for the moment, discuss the fact that to some degree Mycroft was testing John--IMO John's assumption Sherlock could not feel was just one more test Mycroft observed John failing....)

John believes all sorts of things about Sherlock, that Sherlock is happy to let him believe. Many of them are not true. Others are only contextually true. John regularly and reliably misses elements of Sherlock's life and thoughts and heart.

He has to: ACD created a man who must, always, fail to understand Sherlock and his method and his way of thinking, from first meeting to dying day. He must fail to follow Sherlock's deductions. He must fall for his lies and games over and over again. Unlike Mary, he must never know when Sherlock is lying to him..and Sherlock in canon and in BBC canon will lie to him often, sometimes grievously. John will accept abuse, papering it over with stories to himself about Sherlock being unable to be caring, when in fact often Sherlock either can't be arsed, or he gains something concrete out of being abusive.
Sherlock does not share his past, veils most of his present, does not discuss his hopes for his future. He's a spy who never quite comes out and admits he's a spy--and that's really just a logical extension of what ACD wrote for Sherlock and Mycroft, but never expanded on--or allowed Sherlock to lay out for the original John.

Equally, John does not confide in Sherlock. We get limited rhapsodies about anything, or tears, or stories of the war, or discussions of his past, or his ambitions.

I would not, in the normal sense, compare John to a "pet," regardless of Moriarty's comments or Mycroft's goldfish line. I would, however, say the relationship between Sherlock and John has many similarities to the relationship between man and dog, or between two dogs of a pack.

There are no words, you see: no profound confidences. No past to be revealed, no future to be planned. No words. They talk, but they talk about ephermera, for the most part. Passing details flow out of their mouths. Tea and milk and rent and cases and dates and phones and newspapers and clues and schedules and...noise. Most of what John and Sherlock exchange is noise.

But in the noise, they are friends as a man is friends with a beloved dog, and vice versa. He can tell you how the dog moves, when it wakes, where it sleeps, how it sits beside him when he's tired. The dog, if it had words, could tell you where he and the man walk, and how they hunt birds together, and what it's like to stand point for the man as the quail fly overhead and the shotgun fires. The man knows nothing of what it is like to curl in the dog bed beside the other puppies at the dam's side, or to follow the scent-demand of a bitch in heat, or to whine at the sting of perfume in sensitive nostrils. The dog may scent a woman on the man's skin, or know the stress in his man's voice after a hard day of work, but he has no idea what it "means"--in the context of the world, or in the heart of the man.

Man and dog love each other, because they love being together, working together, doing together what they do. They do not confide. They do not, in many ways, know each other. It is mute love, but profound. The dog may pine by the master's grave. The master may pine when the dog has died. They may each risk their lives for each other. They may each value no one more than the other.

But they do not confide, nor do they understand. They love in a fog of uncertainty, and value each other for qualities that have no name.
There are three outstanding appearances of Sussex that I can think of in the Holmes canon. (See Tammany cover her butt--I am not one-hundred percent up on all Holmes canon, and I may have missed some more Sussexiana...) There is the Sussex Vampire (that seems absolutely ripe for anyone wanting to play with Sherlock and Mycroft and The Other themes....). There's Sherlock's retirement cottage in Sussex, with bee hives and no Watson. And there's *The Valley of Fear*, which seems to at least some of us as a likely source of material for the next series or so: that story *starts* with a case in Sussex, in which a man who proves ultimately to be the protagonist of a long backstory arc appears to be murdered...leading to a long cascade of revelations about events in the past that do involve Moriarty, but which do not involve Holmes until the tie-up in the narrative present. (Note: And the material from *His Last Bow*, which gives us the retirement cottage, ALSO gives us the very clearest espionage plot, also Sussex-related. Mycroft Territory in Sussex!!!)

I've already theorized that Mary Watson could fit very, very nicely as the backstory-protagonist, Birdy Edwards. As a former agent on the lam from threatening people in her past, Mary slots right into the role--and the "apparent death" works. But she could also be flipped, and as a killer she might, just possibly, be the threat to another Birdy.

In the meantime we've got Janine, who's given us a beachhead in Sussex, who thinks she knows something about what kind of man Sherlock Holmes really is, who seems to get along with Sherlock in a way no one else quite matches, and who, intriguingly, had a backstory for Magnussen to torment her over--and who had the force of will to keep her eye open during the eye-flick game. And who may have someone to protect, just as John had Mary to protect during the eye-flick. Magnussen's MO, after all, was to threaten people through their loves. Magnussen didn't so much try to find dirt on Mycroft, for example: he tried to find threats to people Mycroft cares about--Sherlock, and by necessary direct extension, John and Mary. So it seems possible that Janine has hostages to fortune.

Which leads to some real questions.

If Janine is the door into Sussex, is she the door into the Sussex Vampire, or to the Sussex murder that opens Valley of Fear, or to Sherlock's retirement location? Or all of the above. Moffat's talking about her as a buddy and turn-to date for Sherlock when he needs female arm candy, but, I mean--Moffat. I am not saying his misogynistic--I actually don't buy that line. I do think he's going to give the least useful, most sit-com/rom-com no-content explanation for Janine possible, and hide her actual contribution to plot and structure.

Why? Because Moffat doesn't give away plot and structure if he can humanly help it...and because Moffat, Gatiss, and Thompson do not bring in characters who exist only to be arm candy. To bring in a Janine, they almost have to have a serious use for Janine, either in terms of serious character development or serious narrative plot development, and most likely both. Why both? Because they do not waste their time on empty calories. They're perfectly happy to pretend something is empty calorie--but then they use it to sneak in spinach and broccoli and all sorts of vitamin-bearing
substance. If they can arrange it, everything they do serves triple and quadruple and quintuple purposes.

So here we are. We have two female characters, both of whom offer us a route into *The Valley of Fear*. One of whom offers entry to all things Sussex-ish. We have no idea what they are planning to do with it, but it does mean they've got tools in the tool box that we can recognize as tools.

Similarly we have, in a completely different way, what I currently think of as the Lestrade material. I keep coming back to the fact that, in a season that offered RG very little crucial material with Sherlock, MGT went *expensively* out of their way to ensure Lestrade was given material. That mini-episode was a good investment, but it's the kind of investment even a teasing Moffat and Gatiss don't get to make unless they've got something useful to do with it above and beyond tease a public that's already ginned up to screaming level. And then the entire little Waters Gang intro--even more peculiar, as it takes up space in an episode that does not NEED that mini-plot line. And then the final, ultimate confirmation that, yes, Lestrade works with Mycroft...

We've got another tool in the toolbox. I simply don't believe that was wasted footage, or random, careless junk tossed in for a punch-line or two.

It's interesting looking at the building blocks.

It's interesting thinking about things like the fact that Mrs. Hudson's reasons for leaving Baker Street untouched are just plain dubious.

It's interesting thinking about Molly and her growth. She may love Sherlock still, but she's not loving Sherlock in the way she used to. She's grown, and she may even have grown beyond him.

It's interesting thinking about her comment that maybe high-functioning sociopaths are "her type." In particular in connection with the thesis of John and Mary, that people are drawn to particular sorts of relationship. What we know is that Molly was drawn to an appallingly abusive Sherlock, and then to a deceptive and sociopathic Moriarty. Her relationship with Sherlock has become far less abusive--but also far less clearly understandable as anything but a friendship which still retains abusive overtones. Is there yet another high-functioning sociopath waiting for Molly? A reprise of Moriarty? Or will she and Sherlock ever make it to a relationship that doesn't make healthy people wince a bit. (And, for the record? Much as I LIKE the John and Mary thesis, I also think it does make Magnusson more than a little right in calling them "Mr. and Mrs. Psychopath." They are killers. Danger addicted killers, who do not either of them appear to really do remorse, at least not if they think their victims are deserving of death. Both seem to understand at some level Mary's statement that "People like [Magnussen] are what people like me are for."

It's interesting to know that Jeff Hope classified Moriarty as a plural they, not a singular he/she.

It's interesting to know Irene is still out there, in play. (And, yes, I do adore the theory she now works for Mycroft. I do, I do, I do...)

It is even interesting to think of all that footage they shot around "The Fall," like Mycroft with Moriarty in Sherlock's coat, that they claimed was intended just to add red herrings to the aftermath....

And, yet. And yet, it's footage. That they've got in the can. That they can then repurpose...

Sigh. Intrigued. So many really *good* tools in the toolbox. So many really useful bits and bobs they can fold into startling new forms.
Chapter Summary

What it says on the tin.

Here's the thing: Sussex--just the LOCATION of Sussex--ties us to three distinct Sherlock stories, one of them the only remaining novel. Just as portentiously, it's tying us to where Sherlock chooses to retire, early.

By implication it is very hard not to regard the county as important, and Janine's departure to tie us to the county as also important. Which not so subtly also suggests Janine herself is important.

Yasmin Akram is yet another comediene being added to the Sherlock roster. Writes her own stuff, too. Bright, capable, witty. And, so help me, no one seems to ever pay attention to the comedy roots of so much of the Sherlock cast and creative team. Gatiss and Moffat, of course, are obvious, having run their own successful comic series previously. Benedict? For all people do remember "Cabin Pressure" and similar, they tend to forget to think of him specifically as a comedic talent, as he's done so much else, and has done so much else that's brooding and important and serious--but missing his comic work is a mistake. Freeman? "The Office." Una Stubbs? Grande Dame of telly sit com, among her other skills. It goes on--there's a sweet spot for comic talent in Sherlock. When you realize how much of the core of the show depends on people with comic chops who can also move into drama if called to, well--knowing you've got another comic talent being brought in for recurring use seems almost like a red alert flag. It may be a false lead--but Yasmine Akram looks like she's got the chops to carry a big burden if they want her to.

The fact that Mary can, within reason, be seen as mapping on to one of the Sussex-based narratives, either as hit-woman or as Birdy Edwards substitute, or in some odd way as both...that just makes it all seem more portentous.

Sussex works as a place, and in working as a place it offers power and importance to at least three of the known long-arc characters. Mycroft, as a result of the "Last Bow" spy tie-in--which could give Lestrade a legitimate role in Sussex, too, in spite of it pulling him out of London. Mary, as hit-person or Birdy. Yasmin as victim, or Birdy parallel with or instead of Mary, or spy, or....

It's like you can pull in half the show just by invoking Sussex and the Sussex plot lines. And once you have, and start asking yourself how MGT can reimagine those plots and characters, slicing and dicing and reapportioning roles and functions, and reclaiming the importance of certain elements...

It just keeps seeming more and more promising, knowing that Janine's in Sussex. So--right. So very useful. So intriguing.
Ok, first things first. The *Sussex Vampire* was published in 1924. That may cause copyright issues for use of any of the material--though, frankly, Moffat and Gatiss are "transformational" enough and include enough subtext critique of the originals to probably pass legal muster if one got a fair trial. Unfortunately quite a lot of copyright trial seems to involve final judgements that don't get farther than "can any possible claim of theft be made at all if you squint?" But unfortunately *Sussex Vampire* won't clear copyright until 2022 in the US.

That probably means that if Vampire shows up, it will only happen if *Sherlock* has the monumentally long run Moffat and company sometimes dream of--a life-work of ongoing material. Or if they figure a way to dodge elegantly around the US copyright law, as I think it's clear in the UK. And, frankly, the entire copyright situation looks a bit silly when it comes to prosecuting MGT's stuff.

That said, what does SV offer in terms of BBC *Sherlock*?

Well, to start with--Vampires! Or the lack thereof, but, hey. Vampires.

Second? Sussex, of course.

Third? An old friend of Watson's who played rugby with him! Of course our banty little Watson is a rugger player, not a footie player!

Fourth? A marvelously dysfunctional family with a substantially older crippled brother by a first marriage and a beloved baby brother by a second marriage, in which Big Brother proves to be trying to kill Baby Brother using poisoned darts. As written one almost ends up feeling sorry for big brother, who's been permanently crippled, lost his mother, had to deal with a new stepmother who beats him (granted, because she knows he's trying to kill baby brother. Maybe.), and a baby brother who's doted upon by both father and new stepmother.

I might want to dart Baby Brother, too.

But it opens all sorts of lovely doors for snide comments about Mycroft, or suggestions of The Other.

One of the advantages of having cast Benedict Cumberbatch's own parents as Mummy and Father is that BC has a clear resemblance to both: you can see Wanda Ventham's and Timony Carlton's features reflected. It's a harder challenge, for obvious reasons, to be as sure of Mycroft. He's got the height, and the long neck to match Timothy Carlton, but not the facial features, and while he could be thought to look like Wanda Ventham somewhat, it's less obvious or sure.

I've wondered occasionally (as I wonder quite a lot of things) whether they at some point intended to make Mycroft and Sherlock half-sibs, not full. Likewise I've wondered if The Other might prove a half-sib. A second marriage would explain issues like the long distance between Mycroft and
Sherlock--seven years being fairly unusual spacing in most families, unless there are sibs in between.

Obviously one could go all sorts of ways with the Holmes Family as illustrated to date. Mycroft could be full sib--or he could be the Cinderella leftover from a prior marriage, dealing with Mummy and her "real" child(ren). Or he could be a full-sib facing yet another half-sib. Or it could all be illusion, and there could be no Other, or an other that's full-relation. But I do find the scenario of *Sussex Vampire* interesting, if it proves to be something that is within fair and legal use. The truth is I can't imagine Mycroft ever harming a baby. It seems entirely out of character. I CAN see family doubts and family myths, and most of all Sherlock sibling rivalry fantasies growing up around misunderstandings. It would involve a flip-flop of the actual SI plot for the older brother to be suspected, only to have it either be the mother, or a misunderstanding. But, then, flip-flop is quite a lot of what MGT do, after all.

The family as ACD write them are pure melodrama. Adoring crippled elder son of fourteen, madly jealous of the new stepmother and baby supplanting him and the memory of his dead mother, and drawing the father's attention. But, on the other side, the father entered into a marriage with a woman he'd known only weeks, of a different religion and culture, whom he could honestly say he didn't know all that well even at the time of the crimes--so much so that her companion is a better character witness than he is. And she's such a classic late-Victorian "hot blooded, passionate foreigner." All hand-wringing and retiring to her room to weep and bemoan the doom and the injustice of it all.

If there IS going to be "the Other" on the way, and if, as hinted, Mycroft at some time has chosen to reject him/her or not intercede in his/her behalf, it could fit into a crazy set-up like *Sussex Vampire* with some inversions and flips. But, likewise, even without The Other, it could explain Mycroft's faintly "outsider" seeming status and Sherlock's Favored Boy-Child standing.

Or it could be nothing. Or it could be cock-blocked by copyright. Or it could be cock-blocked by copyright and still used as never-stated backstory presumed by MGT but never made explicit. Or...

I don't know. But it's an interesting separate story to consider.
Deducing Lestrade

Chapter Summary

Just trying to sort the logic lines some more.

Let's see what I can do with what we know about Lestrade--know stone-cold for certain, canon-clear.

1. Lestrade really is a Met Detective, with seniority.

2. Lestrade survives the entire mess of "The Reichenbach Fall" intact, in spite of logic.

3. Lestrade shows every sign of not only forgiving Sally and Anderson, but caring for them and watching out for them.

4. Lestrade keeps Sally as his DS/second in command/partner.

5. Lestrade knows Sherlock uses drugs. He also chooses to use it as a lever, but not bust him or remove him from his consulting.

6. Lestrade gets away with it.

7. Lestrade claims desperation as his reason for applying to Sherlock for help. Logically that desperation does not appear to have anything to do with anything BUT a passionate desire to see crimes solved and wrongdoers taken into custody. That said, we have been given reason to think Lestrade's reasons for linking with Sherlock may be more complex than they first appear. At the very least, it seems possible that there are secret service elements to the situation in play, rather than just "detective" stuff.

8. We know Sherlock accuses Lestrade of being his handler under Mycroft's direction.

9. We know that Lestrade denies this, and denies just doing what Mycroft (your brother) tells him...but does not deny working with Mycroft, nor that he's been sent out by Mycroft in that instance. (Hounds)

10. We know Lestrade actually, absolutely does work in tandem with Mycroft, in some context featuring Sherlock. (Vow) We know this partnership extends to direct phone exchanges and to Lestrade having access to Mycroft's more private office (which to me appears likely to be in the MI6/SIS building). We know that, whatever else, Mycroft trusts him in the sense of sharing office space with him while observing what appears to be highly critical ongoing material, and he trusts him to then go out and perform in a "hunt Sherlock" role that one would normally expect to see Mycroft doing himself.

11. We know Lestrade carries a gun he should not have in circumstances where he should not logically be carrying.

12. We know in the face of all "ordinary" logic that Lestrade can be called away from (either) his
work or his vacation to stick with Sherlock.

13. We know that at the same time Lestrade is insisting to Anderson that Sherlock is dead, he is also making a fairly heavy-handed point of delivering a DVD to John that in multiple ways hints otherwise...and that his reaction to the "Game On" headline is...odd.

14. We know his greeting of Sherlock, on Sherlock's return, is peculiar for a man who thinks Sherlock dead, though not sufficiently so as to evade interpretation as "Just Lestrade being Laid Back." That said, I still, myself, feel that "You Bastard!" followed by that big, fierce, grinning hug feels more like the laddish, "Sonofabitch, you berk, why didn't you tell me you'd be back this week?" than it does "You berk, you fooled us all!" We absolutely know, though, that unlike John or Mrs. Hudson, and like Molly, he was not frightened or upset or shocked or stunned or hurt or in any way appearing to feel abused in any sense at all.

15. We know Sherlock's comment on returning is "It's time to come back. You've been letting things slide, Graham." I'm honestly surprised that this hasn't drawn more attention. It's a direct suggestion that Sherlock has come back specifically because of situations that are in Lestrade's "division." We know why Sherlock has come back--to deal with a terrorist threat. Yet he gives that line with a dead-straight face. It seems at least likely that he's at least tweeking Lestrade for having let anti-terrorist activities slide, rather than, say, Met cases. Especially as there is NO indication anywhere in the season that either Lestrade or Sherlock feel there's all that much Met work hanging fire. I mean, the one case they work together is the idiotic fake case Anderson set up--the Jack the Ripper thing.

16. We know that canonically and BBC canon, Lestrade is Sherlock's preferred Met partner (one of them, in ACD canon, but they've streamlined a bit for BBC). That he's good at what he does--one of the best the Met has to offer, which does have to mean he's good. He's got a brain. And, yet, he not only puts up with Sherlock endlessly suggesting he's a moron, he puts up with sly digs that almost suggest his Met status is suspect...or outright questionable. (Again, the accusation of being a "handler," is one such. And I keep looking at his comment during "Sign of Three." "Scotland Yard! Have you got a theory? Yeah, you. You're a detective--broadly speaking. Got a theory?" Followed by one of the silliest theories ever--so silly as to be incredible. It goes down like a practiced comedy routine, and one that contains the sly dig that whatever Greg *really* is, his status as Met Detective is a bit of a stretch. Only we know Sherlock does think Lestrade's one of the best. His pick. Add this to his current schtick of never seeming to know Greg's name, and you've got what is looking more and more like a wicked, teasing leg-pull of Lestrade by Sherlock, and a routine the two have down cold. Lestrade's *playing* Sherlock's straight man. He's *letting* Sherlock tease him, goad him, insult him. And that teasing is looking more and more complex every time it comes around again.

17. We know that Lestrade appears to have almost as much intimate friendship with Sherlock as John does--and, quite honestly, actually understands Sherlock's nature a lot better than John does. He doesn't seem to idealize him the same way, or lie to himself as much about Sherlock's shortcomings.

18. We know he's part of a small group of people Sherlock truly does love and count as a friend...enough to care about protecting.

19. We know Lestrade's had a problematic marriage--OR has lied quite monumentally. (On bad days I dream the wife is entirely imaginary, as is the reconciliation, as is the breakup--just an aspect of the cover story. But, then...I also think otherwise.)

20. We know that he removes his wedding ring within roughly six months to a year of being told
his wife is cheating on him with a PE teacher. (You can recheck my posts on time, but basically it's six months from Christmas to Bond Air, and Hound shows every sign of being several months to a full half-year or more later than that. And the removal of the ring appears to be fairly new, as sun-tans fade and white marks where rings once were disappear within months. In any case, it looks like Lestrade is at least officially separated within half a year to a year of the PE teacher revelation, or is fully divorced. Of the two, separated seems most likely, logically—if you're officially separated you don't hang on to the ring unless you're pining over the wife, and he didn't seem all that involved with the wife...)(That said, even if there's a divorce, it's not yet clear if Lestrade or the ex initiated it. Nor is it clear what Lestrade is moping about during SoT... or how long he's been officially divorced at that wedding.)

21. We know he gets along with Molly.

22. We know he could, theoretically, be "interested" in Molly. If so, we also know he does not appear to be pushing it very hard at all. So far no sign he's moping *over her.*

23. We know that if he's in fear for Sherlock, or asked emphatically for help, he'll leave critical Met work he cares a lot about to go to take care of Sherlock.

24. We know he can get away with it.

25. We know that he appears so far to be the only person trusted both in terms of loyalty and in terms of competence by both Holmes brothers. That one just floors me. Insofar as I can see, both Holmes brothers trust John in terms of loyalty, and neither trusts him in regards to competence in the world of espionage. And while Lestrade *may* have actually been out of the loop on Moriarty/Reichenbach Fall, I am less and less convinced of it. I keep thinking of that phone call to warn he was coming to arrest Sherlock: that, to me, keeps reading as someone in the know who is literally pinned down by the obligations of his cover story: he has to play along with the Met's orders and expectations. But he ACTS not just as a loyal friend, but as a good spy, keeping his "other" team aware of what's going down. But even setting details like that aside, his relationship to both Sherlock and Mycroft suggests both brothers trust him deeply, rely on him, and use him as, among other things, their networker. Which leads to...

26. We know that Lestrade seems to be the man who knows everyone, and knows them for what they are. He knows Mycroft and knows what he is. He knows Sherlock and also knows what HE is. He knows John, and knows how John is limited. He knows Anderson, and also knows his limits. It's not so clear if he knows Mrs. Hudson--but you sit there and work out who Lestrade is, what he does, and the degree to which he knows precisely who's in the loop, who isn't, and what he can reveal... and we know he appears to watch over them: Sherlock, John, Anderson, Molly, Sally: they all seem to benefit from Lestrade's caring eye and cautious intervention.

27. He appears to like his pub.

28. For all his skill, he appears to be a smart—very smart—"normal goldfish," not another Irene or Sherlock or Mycroft.

I can come up with more, but stop and think about this: Lestrade "passes" as a character who's rather peripheral. There are a lot of people who really sort of regarded him as walking set furniture, to a degree—very much the classic not-very-useful doof the original Lestrade was. And further, he "passes" as a character who's not been developed much.

Then look at that list. That's a complex character. And that's leaving out all the emotional
resonances Rupert Graves adds, and that the other actors add in dealing with Lestrade. Just think about Sherlock: he teases Lestrade remorselessly. But at this point, it's almost impossible to believe he "really" doesn't know Lestrade's name. There is something else going on there--part teasing, yes, but also something profound enough that Sherlock really does forget Lestrade's name "for real," as during the discussion about John's Best Man. Something is keeping Sherlock Holmes from reliably recalling Greg Lestrade's apparent first name.

This could, theoretically, all be "stuff" thrown in at random, to get laughs and to fill space. But Sherlock is not a show that needs empty calories to accomplish either--nor is the pattern looking random. IMO Lestrade's developed.

The trouble is, he's not yet REVEALED. One can deduce things about him--but one can't yet be sure about him or his role.

But I adore what they are doing with him. It's just plain fascinating.
Sherlock and Molly

Chapter Summary

Contemplation of a relationship and of a paradigm.

I am not, or was not, or may not be, inately against Sherlock and Molly as a couple.

Is that ambivalence you hear? You betcha.

Prior to Mary and Janine showing up, I was, very warily, a Sherlolly shipper. Sort of. To a degree. With reservations. Indeed, the combo of mixed approval and intense caution led me to what is now a not-quite-completed Sherlolly epic that continues to wait for me to write the last five or so chapters...and that I do intend to complete, but I keep having to work through my ongoing sense that, ultimately, I'm not all that comfortable with Sherlolly.

Those two. One can love them both and even see the degree to which they have potential--and still feel like there is an inescapable element of doomed illness to matching them in a long-term romance.

Here's a simple truth: the apology at Christmas, when Sherlock has savaged her, is one of the most important, moving, and meaningful interactions in all the show. More than most of the interactions with John except, just possibly, some of what happens in Season 3. Molly is the first person to force Sherlock to the realization that he's doing real, brutal damage to people he actually does care about: that it's not a game, that it's not clever, or amusing, that they're not "deserving" of whatever he chooses to dump on them--and that far too often he speaks without understanding the context and consequence of his words. That truth is not truth if it's not integrated into the big picture...and that far too often he has not one single clue as to the big picture, just the little blinding revelations and deductions. It may be the single first time in the show we see Sherlock humbled, moved, and utterly sincere.

Molly, like John, has the potential to be the making of Sherlock, or his ruin. He, likewise, has the capacity to be her making or her ruin.

Back before Season 3, Molly, to me, looked like the primary person who might, just possibly, be the right one for both shipping and for "make that bratty boy grow up." It was clear he did adore her, in his own insane way. My comparison was always two socially hopeless geeks who might be a good match if they could just somehow get past vanity, fear, insecurity, and a simply terrible power dynamic.

That last, though, is where it did and does fall apart for me.

So--how does a woman end up writing an almost complete Sherlolly saga if she's not sold on the dynamic? As an attempt to see if it's possible to write them in such a way as to make them a plausible and NON-horrifying couple. If one could make slow, understandable shifts in characterization that seemed in keeping for the two that would lead to something strong and sweet and good, not, er...icky.

Icky?
Yeah. As in, "Lamb, meet lion. I am sure you'll be very happy together--or at least, the lion will." "Butter, meet hot butter knife." "Bully, meet dweeb." In Ye Olde Catholic School Morality, Molly is an "occasion of sin." Someone who by her very nature is going to tempt Sherlock to behave badly, whether he ought to or not. In the realm of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, she's almost born to play Martha to Sherlock's George.

Writing my Sherlolly epic, I wanted to see if it was possible to morph Molly into someone whose innate instincts are not to willingly lie down and let Sherlock trample her--or if Sherlock could, given a bit of a revelation or two, might grow enough to check his own habitual tendency to trample over the tenderest of shrinking violets. On the one hand, I came to the conclusion that it could be done--at least to a degree. I felt and continue to feel that it pushes the characters well outside their norms, though, and demands an assumption that, on some level, they will spend their entire lives "watching what they say and do." Their natural tendencies and instincts are at odds with the skills and strengths they'd need to be long term lovers, to my eye. It's doable. I can write it so I am not utterly dismayed at the OOC madness of it. Yes, I'm forced to "change" the characters, but I can do it within the framework of the series, the characters' own potentials, and plausible growth. What I can't do is convince myself that it would ever be anything but an ongoing effort to escape their own core personalities.

I don't know if anyone but me has seen, studied, or cared about Shakespeare's "The Taming of the Shrew" and "Much Ado About Nothing," or the comparative difference between them. I've worked both shows, studied both shows, loved both shows since I was a teen. But, in the end, "The Taming of the Shrew" can only be played as a woman's tragedy, unless one quite intentionally subverts how the show is interpreted and resolved. It isn't about the taming of a shrew, it's about the breaking of a woman, using Stockholm Syndrome games and willful manipulation and spite. In the end, Katherine surrenders: gives up belief in the worth of her mind, her wit, her rights, her dignity, her anything.

My mind hath been as big as one of yours,
My heart as great, my reason haply more,
To bandy word for word and frown for frown.
But now I see our lances are but straws,
Our strength as weak, our weakness past compare,
That seeming to be most which we indeed least are.
Then vail your stomachs, for it is no boot,
And place your hands below your husband's foot:
In token of which duty, if he please,
My hand is ready, may it do him ease.

She must commit suicide to achieve peace and the approval of her husband. Only when she surrenders her own worth, her own integrity, her own self, is she "rewarded."

Conversely "Much Ado," in spite of a similar apparent dynamic of witty man and witty woman at dagger's drawn, is about two people, man and woman, who are able to express their own natural selves more fully together than apart. Both surrender one form of pride, but both are rewarded with a different, less isolating pride in choosing each other, rather than choosing their conflict. They are literally matched: equals in wit, equals in passion, equals in honor, equals in care for their family and community. They may be "too wise to woo peaceably," but their banter and merry war of words in the end plays to their strengths, and they can be LESS guarded and controlled around each other, because they tempt each other to their strengths, rather than tempting each other to their weaknesses.

I was, to a degree, willing to at least hope Molly could grow that direction in the "real" *Sherlock*,
just as I at least attempted it in my own fic. In some ways, I was actually pleased. That said, they gave us too many elements that convince me that at core, Molly chooses to be a doormat, and at core, Sherlock is unable to resist being an abusive sonofabitch.

I keep thinking of Molly's comment in Hearse: that maybe high-functioning sociopaths are "her type." In light of their position regarding John and Mary, that's frightening--it's one thing to have a bad habit of falling in love with a Mary if you're a John, who's at least capable of playing Mr. Psychopath to her Mrs. Psychopath. It's another to be Molly, hungering for the sonofabitch who WILL behave abusively toward her. Then there's her thing with Tom: so unsettling that she's so lacking in self-awareness that she's picking pseudo-Sherlocks who just as obviously won't satisfy any of the apparent longing for not just bright--but edgy. When you think about it, Tom seems to be a good man. A nice man. A steady man, apparently a passable lover, and... Molly wants the abusive bastard. She's the nice girl who wants the bad boy.

Well, maybe he'll bring the best out in her? She is getting very good at nailing Sherlock over and over: as Moffat points out, she beats him every time. Smacks his face when he goes back on drugs. And it really is obvious he cares for her and is trying to moderate his behavior for her.

I'm uneasy with that--that comes too close to another form of George and Martha/Petruchio and Katherine behavior. But, OK. I was mostly ready to go with it. Until they gave us that one squib in "Vow." He's added her apartment to his list of bolt-holes--and he has conned her into giving up her bedroom "because he needs the space." And dammit, she's let him. And she admits it. And is willing to stick with the rationalization that he needs her room more than she does.

I have to admit, I think that's the point at which I lost heart. These are two people, to me, who can care about each other, be close friends, help each other grow--but I swear, to me, long-term romance looks like an invitation to Molly being taken apart, and Sherlock being tempted into becoming her willing abuser. Or to the two living lives of constant self-censorship and self-editing, forever trying to be "right" for a match that forever tempts them to be "wrong."

That was made worse, and underlined, by Sherlock's relationships with Mary and with Janine. Both were "up to his weight." Yes, Sherlock in the end was terribly abusive toward Janine--and she beat him at his own BS, and managed him without harming either of them. There was incredibly very little angst and melodrama in their face-off--and, yet, there was also great feeling and an open door to something more later. Janine can cope with Sherlock, and I simply can't imagine him ever talking her out of her own bedroom--much less her rationalizing that as "all right." As for Mary? "I know when you're fibbing" Mary? Mary who, whether you forgive her or not, can and will shoot him if he's a problem? Mary who can love him to pieces and still maintain the individual ego to resist him?

That's the thing: Molly's dear, loving, fierce, and trying so hard to at least make it to a level where she's holding her own with Sherlock. But she's also inherently the woman whose first instinct over and over is to give way to him. And worse, to consider him sexy when he's being his most horrible.

There are lines in fiction I deplore. The line from "Shrew," about placing your hand beneath your husband's foot, is one. Then there's the line from "Carousel," about how a blow stuck in anger feels like a kiss.... I can't hear that line without wanting to scream at people. And then there's the entire sappy "Nancy/Bill Sykes" dynamic from Oliver--no matter how horrible the man is, "As long as he needs me, I know where I must be." I hate it. I hate the entire romantic trope that says true love is most true when you allow your lover to slice you to pieces and hang in there anyway, because "it feels like a kiss," or "He needs me," or "He didn't mean it," or "he's my man."

Molly, I swear, to me feels like an invitation to that dynamic. One can grow her up, but one can't
grow her away from the core dynamic of being the kind of person who not only allows that kind of abuse to herself, but who is attracted to it. "Beat me, whip me, make me write bad checks."

If we had not seen Sherlock with two women for whom he does not have to pull his punches, who are up to his weight, and who he clearly cares about--even if Janine rather caught him off guard... Well. Molly did look like the best available choice, at one time. Better than Irene, who's just not likely to ever stop being a lesbian with no clear domestic longings whatsoever, at least not with Sherlock. But now we can SEE that he can have more equal, less forced relationships. Relationships that don't demand he and his beloved "change for love" and live forever after trying to maintain that artificial self-configuration.

I love Molly. It's hard not to. We've all got a hidden Molly inside. But I find it far easier to accept the moral resolution of Molly and Sherlock being dear friends who educate each other in their respective roads to damnation, than I can accept them trying to then live that learning out over and over within a marriage or romance. For me the most marvelous resolution of that relationship would be for Molly to look at Sherlock and say, "OMG, you're my Petruchio--my Bill Sykes--my Billy Bigelow! God, if I go into a relationship with you, I'm pushing us into a nightmare! I think I need to learn how to find satisfaction with something a bit more like Tom, even if I do have a weakness for high-functioning sociopaths." And for Sherlock to look at her and be able to say, "I adore you, Molly. You're one of my best friends. But if we were matched, I'd sink over and over into sarcasm and cruelty and impatience. I can't do that to you--and I can't do that to me. I need someone who doesn't invite that and who won't tolerate it if I fall into it." Sometimes the truest form of love is knowing what you can't do within that loving relationship--where you can't go without damning each other. I love that the two characters are teaching each other some wisdom. But even admitting that they are growing, I don't feel good about that wisdom being enough to change their fundamental natures.

I do love that they're growing, though. Sherlock has learned to value Molly. Molly is learning to be wary of Sherlock while still loving him. She's coming to understand him. And for that, I thank Moffat and Gatiss and Thompson, who let both of them be flawed, and let both of them care anyway, and let both of them grow and learn because of it.
Mycroft and the Canons

Chapter Summary

Me. Doodling around thinking of one of my faves. Rather similar to the deducing Lestrade post, but a bit wider ranging.

We squabble. We brood. We pick through various bits of canon. But--

I was running through Mycroft-related material the other day really to track down elements of espionage in ACD canon, only to run smack dab into this bit, which I have read before and KNOW I've taken reasonably seriously, but which somehow never quite smacked me so hard previously.

"The Diogenes Club is the queerest club in London, and Mycroft one of the queerest men."

I looked at that. And I looked at that. And I thought about two fanboys writing an update of Sherlock Holmes, from Victorian to present-day. Who loved "Private Life of Sherlock Holmes" and loved Christopher Lee's tetchy Mycroft. Who *wanted* a sexually ambiguous/gay element to the entire show. Who are comedians and comic writers. One of whom was gay and went on to play Mycroft--and who has stated his headcanon sees him gay and who patterned his performance on one of the first outted gay British politicians...

And I asked myself rather rhetorically what the odds were that Moffat and Gatiss didn't simply take that line as confirmation, and update Mycroft's "queerness" exactly as you might expect of comedians with low senses of humor.

I am sorry, but having found that line and added it to what we already have gathered and brooded over... I'm afraid I consider the case for "gay Mycroft" --and actively gay Mycroft--now so strong as to spin the burden of proof to the opposing side. To argue Mycroft as straight, or even bi, to me now looks like the challenge. The overall implication of BBC canon, combined with that one rather extreme but workable pun seems to indicate someone who is simply, plainly, actively on the high end of the Kinsey scale. Not just queer, but among the queerest. The superlative suggests someone who knows his preferences, and practices them.

Now, taken with the entire "goldfish" conversation, one does suspect he at least currently does sex, but not relationship. (Ah! The Tramp! (falls on the swooning sofa)) But, really, we suspected that anyway.

Do any other things from ACD canon jump out to provide direction to our interpretation of Mycroft?

Well--it does not look like in BBC canon Mycroft actually founded the Diogenes. It looks older and more established than all that--and the modern world is not as fond of "clubbign" as the Victorians, who established clubs at the drop of a hat. Or for the purpose of dropping hats. Or to share in the collecting of hats dropped by members of other clubs. Or to mutually deplore hats altogether. The Victorians loved clubs. We, as a culture do not appear to, to anything like the same degree. So--we may wish to let Mycroft off the hook when it comes to establishing the Diogenes.

That said, however, I do think we can review Sherlock's key comments about the Diogenes in light
of Mycroft. Do I think it should be considered as a "gay" or queer club, just as I think Mycroft should now be accounted gay in BBC canon? No, actually not. MGT seem to have opted for limiting the pun to Mycroft, and making the Diogenes "queer" for its actual original rule set, and for the implication of espionage and political membership. I am still quite fond of Mycroft's summary of the membership to John, and his restrained shudder at the idea of these men being allowed to talk to each other. Heaven forfend! However, Sherlock also says something specific about who joins...

Men who are either shy, or misanthropic. Men who are otherwise socially unclubbable. Men who want comfy chairs, nice drinks, and access to newspapers...and, one suspects, the comfort of social contact without having to put out social effort. Social contact by proximity rather than interaction.

Is Mycroft, then, misanthropic? Actually, he does not appear to be. Mildly acerbic, yes. Mildly cynical, too. But his overall attitude toward mankind as a whole seems, actually, best summed up by his arguement to Sherlock in the first episode regarding the rightness of their possible alliance: that people will suffer because he and Sherlock are not fighting on the same team. Or his anguish at the collapse of Bond Air, and the nature of what he tried to accomplish with that plot: to spare lives in both the short term and the long term. Or his concern for Sherlock. Or his regrets upon having to lie to John. Mycroft may not want to have a nice little chin-wag with the goldfish, but he does, oddly, seem to *care* about goldfish in a positive sense.

What he does not appear to enjoy is having to interact with them. "Listen: do you have any idea what it was like, Sherlock, going ‘under cover’, smuggling my way into their ranks like that? The noise; the people?" That can be interpreted as a petty little whine on the part of a self-centered big brother who didn't want to bother bestirring himself. But given that he did bestir himself, and with energy and good effect, that seems a rather pissy interpretation. It seems far more likely, given what we see of Mycroft, that it is the comment of someone who is decidedly uneasy in social settings--and who expects his little brother to know and understand that it took some willpower and a lot of love to force Mycroft out into "fieldwork."

What do we know about Mycroft?

Well, let's start with his first appearance: isolated, in complete control of his setting, surrounded only by his small cadre of trusted associates and John. Standing alone. He doesn't choose to meet John in any of a number of other settings--in part, of course, to intimidate John. In part, no doubt, to keep the meeting off the record and off the CCTV cameras. But also, just possibly, because it's away from the madding crowd. Mycroft can concentrate on this one new person and control the situation, rather than having to let go of control and face possible lack of control and unplanned intimacies.

There's that sedan: Mycroft, silent in the back, either alone or accompanied by Anthea. Private, and in control of his human contacts.

He doesn't have friends.

His professional/social club is notorious for its non-social element.

He is not, according to Gatiss, married.

He may have sex, but he does not, according to the goldfish conversation, have relationships or friends.

He is alone at Christmas in "Scandal."
Further, there’s his own demeanor. When he wrong-foots it socially, Mycroft *flusters.* More, perhaps, than anyone but Molly, he can be reduced to a stutter--by John, in the verbal confrontation over the "leaks" to Moriarty. By John and Sherlock and Mrs. Hudson when he tells Mrs. Hudson (not that unreasonably) to shut up. By Sherlock during the goldfish dialog. Mycroft, when socially off-balance, falls apart...and Gatiss plays it gently and kindly as dismay, rather than affront or injured ego. It's more Molly than Sherlock in its flavor and manner. Mycroft may maintain his dignity somewhat better than Molly does--but his core response to being off balance is to retreat, flustered, than to advance, annoyed.

And then...and then there are the flashes of humor and warmth. Those, dammit, I swear Gatiss plays as a shy, quiet boy peeking out from behind the facade: someone mischievous and witty revealing himself.

Shy. Mycroft does not appear to be someone who joined the Diogenes in response to being misanthropic. Even accepting his primary reasons may be professional, having to do with the political and espionage links to the club, his *personal* reasons seem more likely to grow out of shyness, introversion, and, quite possibly, a solid dose of agoraphobia. He is a member of a club designed for the unclubbable man: the sort of man who would despise back-slaps, or idle chats at the bar, or impromptu discussions with fellow members. Someone who may very well easily burn out with too much sensory input or too much social contact. "The noise. The people."

In original ACD canon, we get two conflicting images of Mycroft. On the one hand Sherlock tries to suggest Mycroft is impractical, no good at the sort of chain-of-evidence systematic work that is required to develop a court case:

*I said that he was my superior in observation and deduction. If the art of the detective began and ended in reasoning from an arm-chair, my brother would be the greatest criminal agent that ever lived. But he has no ambition and no energy. He will not even go out of his way to verify his own solutions, and would rather be considered wrong than take the trouble to prove himself right. Again and again I have taken a problem to him, and have received an explanation which has afterwards proved to be the correct one. And yet he was absolutely incapable of working out the practical points which must be gone into before a case could be laid before a judge or jury.*

ACD, The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter

Lazy. Armchair detective, if a brilliant one. Disinclined to connect the dots or work out the practical implications involved in putting together a legal case. And, yet...

*I had some vague recollection of an explanation at the time of the Adventure of the Greek Interpreter.*

“*You told me that he had some small office under the British government.*”

Holmes chuckled.

“*I did not know you quite so well in those days. One has to be discreet when one talks of high matters of state. You are right in thinking that he under the British government. You would also be right in a sense if you said that occasionally he IS the British government.*”

“*My dear Holmes!*”

“*I thought I might surprise you. Mycroft draws four hundred and fifty pounds a year, remains a subordinate, has no ambitions of any kind, will receive neither honour nor title, but remains the most indispensable man in the country.*”
"But how?"

“Well, his position is unique. He has made it for himself. There has never been anything like it before, nor will be again. He has the tidiest and most orderly brain, with the greatest capacity for storing facts, of any man living. The same great powers which I have turned to the detection of crime he has used for this particular business. The conclusions of every department are passed to him, and he is the central exchange, the clearinghouse, which makes out the balance. All other men are specialists, but his specialism is omniscience. We will suppose that a minister needs information as to a point which involves the Navy, India, Canada and the bimetallic question; he could get his separate advices from various departments upon each, but only Mycroft can focus them all, and say offhand how each factor would affect the other. They began by using him as a short-cut, a convenience; now he has made himself an essential. In that great brain of his everything is pigeon-holed and can be handed out in an instant. Again and again his word has decided the national policy. He lives in it. He thinks of nothing else save when, as an intellectual exercise, he unbends if I call upon him and ask him to advise me on one of my little problems.

ACD, The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans

That is not the description of a lazy man—not intellectually, and really, not professionally. And that’s *before* the later implications of espionage in ACD canon, and the far more elaborate suggestions of espionage in derivative material and in *Sherlock*. Mycroft does not appear to be "lazy" except when Sherlock chooses to accuse him of such, whether to bolster Mycroft's cover story of being merely a minor official or to soothe his own ego. Mycroft appears, from both ACD and BBC canon, to be focused, capable, hard-working, intensely practical in his own areas of activity, competent, thorough...if he has a weakness that matches Sherlock's original attempt to portray him as a bit of an armchair theorist regarding detection, one suspects it may be that Mycroft's at his best as a big-picture man, and as a predictive force, where Sherlock is most brilliant at small-focus deductive work based on past events. Sherlock could read the minute clues in a room to tell you what once happened there. Mycroft, reading the same clues, might merely ball-park what happened, but would have a much better chance at telling you what would happen next. Further, Mycroft's core abilities seem to be relational; Mycroft would appear to see how things relate to each other interactively in what one would consider a non-linear, chaotic system--much the same sort of understanding implied by Mummy's "Dynamics of Combustion" monograph, for what it's worth. It sounds from ACD's description like Mycroft can watch the butterfly flap its wings in Brazil, and tell you how it will affect the price of bananas in Indonesia next year.

In ACD canon, Mycroft Holmes is not in the game for the prestige, the money, or the power, in the normal sense of things. He is not ambitious, in the normal sense of things. ACD's description seems to rule out the Bond Villain, "Rule the World" kind of megalomania common to a Moriarty-type or to many politicians or civil servants. (Again, see the quote from "The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans.") He takes a modest pay, he demands no public praise, he is content in his unique position, using his unique talents for the good of his nation as he understands goodness.

In ACD canon he is someone Sherlock protects (lying about Mycroft's actual role to John prior to the point at which he knows John very well), relies on (turns to for case work, turns to when in danger), and trusts even more than he trusts John--certainly in respect to espionage/deception skills, and possibly in regards to personal loyalty and affection.

Even in ACD, there are hints of a competitive relationship between the two men, if not the active annoyances and frustrations that BBC Sherlock and Mycroft inherited from "The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes." In "Greek Interpreter" they spar over deduction--even though Sherlock has assured John of his dispassionate ease with the idea Mycroft is categorically better at deduction
than he is, his vanity and his spirit still demand he go a round with Mycroft--and vice versa. And Sherlock's cover story for Mycroft in "Greek Interpreter" does carry the faint, acrid scent of Sherlock's own vanity talking. Big Brother is a lazy slug...

Mycroft is canonically involved with Sherlock professionally from before the time John first meets Our Hero until at least "Bruce-Partington," with implications that the connection with the government runs to the last days with "His Last Bow," when Sherlock spies for England in the years leading up to WWI. If MGT stick with canon implications, it at least appears that regardless of any competition or sparring, the boys remain a team of sorts throughout their professional lives, appealing to each other when need arises without any sign of resistance or serious reluctance. They have their own lives and their own purviews, but they complement each other.

More ACD information/implication. Mycroft is presented as being outrageously predictable in his habits: rooms on Pall Mall, walks to Whitehall every morning to work, gets off in time to go to the Diogenes directly across the road from his rooms, then home to bed only to repeat the cycle the next day. BBC Sherlock seems to have opened that up a bit--if nothing else, Mycroft appears to have more than one office: one on the ground-floor of what appears to possibly be an older government building, in keeping with his cover as "minor position in government," the other more modern, with windows that appear to look out over London, and with a roof that allowed the Sherlock team to send Sherlock directly from Mycroft's office to a panoramic shot of London-from-the-roof mimicking the Babylon-on-Thames/MI6 building shot from Skyfall. Some people have assumed the second office is in the Diogenes. I am more inclined, myself, to imagine Mycroft as working out of three primary locations: his cover office in Whitehall, as a minor official; his "real" office in Babylon-on-Thames, with the incredible bars of light and the extra-fine Anigonni portrait of Elizabeth II; and the Diogenes, which may also have an "office," but from which he often just works mentally, while appearing to lounge around being a lazy club member, drinking his scotch or brandy and reading his newspapers. In any case, the trope many of us use (me included) of Mycroft as forever jetting around the world seems less likely, IF MGT are keeping to that sense of a very, very rigid public lifestyle, in keeping with his cover. A man who we know can travel, and who traveled to Serbia for Sherlock, but whose own statement suggests dislikes it intensely, and who may well avoid it under most circumstances, especially as he now has the power and position to delegate, delegate, delegate.

Other things implied by both canons taken in tandem: Mycroft is one of the "angels" for a rather Sherlockian dirty-winged value of angelicism. Mycroft and the people he fights to protect are, ultimately, the "angels" Moriarty and Sherlock discuss on the roof of St. Bart's: neither of them is one of the angels. But Sherlock has chosen to fight on the side of the angels. Big Brother, as implied by ACD canon, and by a fair lot of BBC canon, is sea-green incorruptible: loyal to his nation and his queen, committed to the well-being of the goldfish of Great Britain, and, to a lesser degree, the world at large, beyond bribe or blackmail, with only one outstanding weak spot--Baby Brother Sherlock. He is unowned, so far as we know, and so far as Magnussen knew. His behaviors looked at from one perspective demonstrate an excruciating degree of idealism and dedication to service. Looked at another way, he runs grey--though not as grey as sometimes suggested. Yes, he spies on John and Sherlock, but at this point we've been told that Sherlock's been under surveillance for some time, with reason. Sherlock and his associates are "persons of interest" and Mycroft's surveillance of them, and his use of things like the CCTV cameras, while brash, remains within the constraints of legitimate observation and communication--to the degree that Mycroft can probably list those activities on the books with no fear of repercussion. He is willing to allow a degree of what I would consider torture of a prisoner (Moriarty), but that torture appears fairly limited. Moriarty is healthy, mobile, and still spitting fire upon release, with normal body weight, no broken bones, no altered mobility, etc... Waterboarding is possible, but on the whole whatever Mycroft permitted seems to have been more for show than the serious stuff--part
of a pattern of manipulation aimed at convincing Moriarty he'd been put through the wringer and won, rather than the REAL full-monty of torture would have entailed.... On the whole Mycroft at least appears to fall on the "right" side of the line between black and white--a pale grey, perhaps, not always pure of action, as the world does not permit him pure actions, but overall he appears pure of heart and intent, and pure of allegiance and moral understanding. Right now Mycroft does not appear to be a devil so much as an angelic trickster, with some sooty smudges but without true evil.

So, an openly gay man--decisively so. Very shy, but in control of that professionally, at least enough so to *succeed* as a professional. Possible (even probable) agoraphobia on top of shyness. Not ambitious in the normal sense, but with the capacity to invent his own role in government before Sherlock ever gets a similar idea in regards to consulting detective work. Sexually active but not socially or romantically involved. Wary, steady in his habits, reserved. A big-picture man, but not always good at the little picture. In a complicated and difficult relationship with his brother, but one that is ultimately always loyal and loving and mutually supportive, once you get past the rivalries and frustrations. Isolated. Ethical, within the limits his role as a master of espionage and *realpolitik* would allow. To all appearances a fierce patriot, and even a man with commitment to a greater humanity--though one does suspect he sees his natural purview as the UK, and more specifically Great Britain. Powerful but not really ambitious in any normal sense.

At least, that's what I get out of ACD canon with BBC canon layered over it. A good, quiet, shy man, but one wicked spymaster, and good only if you accept that not all angels have snow-white wings.
Bond--Sherlock Bond.

Chapter Summary

Shaken, not stirred....

I am, rather at this precise minute, watching "Casino Royale." I recently watched "Skyfall." I'm planning on watching "Quantum of Solace" soon.

One thing I have to say, that hits me every time I do watch modern Bond, is that it *feels* like it is the unspoken style of backstory for Sherlock. M's blend of acid critique over a real fondness for Bond (and vice versa). M kvetching about Bond breaking into her house, stealing her passwords, demonstrating no bloody judgement. The strange intimacy between Bond and M. The Daniel-Craig Bond's scary capacity to simply go into overdrive. The espionage that's sort of halfway between the campy stuff and the gritty stuff.

The M's speech at the beginning of "Casino," in which she explains that she's got to be able to trust Bond and to trust his judgement, and she can't, so he should go find someplace to bury his head and think about his future because *SHE* has to go think about whether to hand his head over to the Powers that Be who are screaming for his blood... That feels so much like the sort of conversation Mycroft would have had with Sherlock any number of times--not least over the killing of Magnussen.

They've written and filmed any number of little homage hat-tips to the Bond milieu in *Sherlock.* But it's still easy to lose track of how resonant that fiction is if you slide it quietly under Sherlock, the deep-water current hidden under the surface. It's...strange. Interesting, and very strange.
On Her Majesty's Secret Service

Chapter Summary

First thoughts about re-booted Bond-verse and Sherlock-verse.

Let's start with a fast review of the known, canonical BBC *Sherlock* espionage elements. I'm not necessarily going to take them in the order we received them in--indeed, in some ways it's more useful to start almost at the "end" of the show up to this point, and work backward. Why? Because at the beginning we knew nothing for sure. Now, at this point, there are things we can say with certainty--or some reasonably high level of conviction, in any case.

Mycroft is high-ranking MI6, according to Magnussen's research. Likewise, within that role and any auxiliary duties/authority, he is the most powerful man in Great Britain, at least by Magnussen's research, again. That's a huge claim, especially when combined with the MI6 association. It appears to hold water, though: while Mycroft appears to have people who outrank him in certain ways, and people close enough to being peers that he must move warily around them, the current signs would indicate that in the eyes of all the members of the Star Chamber we witnessed at the end of "His Last Vow" Mycroft is not just a player, but a critical player. Someone they may challenge, but not lightly...and even after a cataclysm like the shooting of Magnussen, he's not someone they dare attempt to push too hard. The maneuvering in that scene where Sherlock's fate is determined is too cautious and valenced for Mycroft to be anything but a power, even when at bay, as he is after Sherlock's actions.

We've seen that Mycroft is the go-to for many issues. He's the go-to when Irene has a phone with top secret information of interest to both the CIA and MI6. He's the go-to who not only designs, but coordinates Bond Air. He's the man you call when all indications suggest London is going to suffer a major terrorist attack. He's the man you go to when Moriarty appears to return--so important that he's on the top of the call-list. He's the man with the massive authority. His access rating is quite literally "unlimited." (Hounds) It's not just specific to Baskerville, it appears to apply to anywhere within his purview as "the British Government." Sherlock either stole an access card--or, logically speaking more likely, Mycroft a) turned a blind eye, or b) actually gave Sherlock a card to use in critical instances. The odds of Mycroft being pickpocketed of something that crucial and not knowing it seem limited. But we learn just how extensive Mycroft's authority is--and how quickly word gets back to Mycroft if there's so much as a ripple indicating that authority is being usurped.

His key activities so far have seemed to focus most intensely on anti-terrorism and similar threats. Bond Air, Empty Hearse, and the entire background assumption of the campaign to eliminate Moriarty all focus on the "kinds" of threat posed by terrorists--Moriarty and his network are "more like" a terrorist organization in method, resources, and aims than they are like a classic old Cold War enemy, and Moriarty and his network are willing consultants to terrorists. Whether that makes them part of the terror network or the terror networks members of the Moriarty network is quite possibly merely a matter of perspective.

Mycroft is also, to all appearances, the primary target of all the "major players" shown so far. In spite of Moriarty's fixation on Sherlock, his actual power plays are aimed at Mycroft and Mycroft's various campaigns. As a result Mycroft is also Irene's primary target, with Sherlock merely a pawn to be used against his brother. Likewise Magnussen's true target was Mycroft. Sherlock, for all we
love him, is not the central figure in all these power plays--he's the bait, the pawn, the level to be used against Mycroft, the access point.

What they've created in Mycroft is M-Plus. M in the Bond series has greater checks on her power and authority. Mycroft still appears to have some checks and balances: Lady Smallwood and the Star Chamber members have the power, at least working in tandem, to slow Mycroft down and call for an accounting, and they do so. However, he's got more latitude to fight back to all appearances than M does in the Bond reboots, where the flunkies of the Prime Minister can call her on the carpet and try to force her to abandon Bond. Mycroft is, in character, much like M, too: "maternal," and unquestionably fond of and protective of his own "Bond." (Sherlock). Patriotic, stuffy but with some flex and wit and mischief. Set not always comfortably between his "Bond," his superiors, and his own sense of honor and duty. Buyt perhaps most of all--that maternal, protective, caring thing that goes on between Daniel Craig's Bond and Judi Dench's M: the sweet, deep, largely unstated sense of affection and dedication between the two.

I've read comments about Bond/M in this reboot as being faintly "incestuous," or at least "sexual," as being maternal/son, as being mentor/student. It all boils down to the sense that, somehow, those two prickly, difficult, uneasy characters love each other--though not aways well or without profound frustration on both sides. No matter how you parse it, though, there's something, er....(oh, hell, forgive me...) "Bonded" about James and M.

Is Mycroft a good character match for M? Both are reserved. Both controlled. Both tend to claim themselves detached and professional while regularly demonstrating far more sentiment (especially toward James/Sherlock) than they would admit. Both appear to be honorable within the context of espionage--which means soot grey but always trying for better. Bpth appear to care quite honestly and openly about the cost in lives--of espionage itself, and of failing in accomplishing espionage. Either way, lives are lost. Either way, Mycroft and M appear to be struggling to contain the damage, limit the losses. Both are trapped between loving James/Sherlock, and being outright desperate to deal with someone reckless and impulsive and emotionally cut off from empathy and humane impulse.

There is a scene in "Casino Royale," in which a woman who's been implicated to the enemy ends up dead. The poor woman was married to the wrong man, and was seduced by the wrong man: she ends up tortured and killed because James used her. M, having already taken a few good solid cracks at James for managing to get someone killed, finishes the scene thus:

M: I would ask if you can remain emotionally detached, but I don't think that's your problem is it, Bond?

Bond: No.

That entire exchange--and the terminal bit--feels so much like a Mycroft/Sherlock exchange to me. On the one hand, Mycroft has no doubt that "caring is not an advantage." You need to maintain a level of dispassion. But the counterpoint is that you also need some level of connection, empathy, and vulnerability. You have to care enough to protect the innocent, or even the rather guilty but not death-worthy. You can see Mycroft himself waltzing between those two poles: Sherlock, reckless, capable of shutting down all remorse, putting others at risk, putting plans at risk. Conversely Sherlock failing to even understand HOW he's hurt John. And then Mycroft, like M, trying to deal with it from within his own emotional Fortress of Solitude, and not always succeeding very well.

Mycroft and M are not "the same person." They are, however, cognates of each other: similar in critical meaningful ways. They "mean" much the same thing, both within their own worlds, and within the fictions that portray them.
Sherlock? To my eye he's our "Bond" figure, with a vital difference: Bond is never quite pulled from the field. Or at least, it simply never sticks worth a damn. Bond's dramatic job is to be a loose-cannon demi-rogue Double-O agent with a license to kill and no discretion about it whatsoever.

Sherlock, like Bond, is brilliant, observant, reckless, defiant of rules and authority, tolerated in spite of that for the results he gets. We have only one Sherlockian "kill" on screen, but logic suggests that Sherlock has always been deadly: from fights with robed assassins with scimitars to dead-accurate shooting of walls into smiley faces to races over rooftops in pure Bondian Parkour chases, Sherlock has always given the not-that-hidden impression of being a dangerous man. Like James, he is also absolutely below his "M" in terms of need-to-know--and not always gracious about it in the least.

Here are Mycroft and Sherlock during "Scandal," the "Bond Air is go" sequence:

(Mycroft comes back into the room, still talking on his phone.)
MYCROFT: Bond Air is go, that’s decided. Check with the Coventry lot. Talk later.
(He hangs up. Sherlock looks at him.)
SHERLOCK: What else does she have?
(Mycroft looks at him enquiringly.)
SHERLOCK: Irene Adler. The Americans wouldn’t be interested in her for a couple of compromising photographs. There’s more.
(He stands up and faces his brother.)
SHERLOCK: Much more.
(Mycroft looks at him stony-faced. Sherlock walks closer to him.)
SHERLOCK: Something big’s coming, isn’t it?
MYCROFT: Irene Adler is no longer any concern of yours. From now on you will stay out of this.
SHERLOCK (locking eyes with him): Oh, will I?
MYCROFT: Yes, Sherlock, you will.
(Sherlock shrugs and turns away.)

(Thanks to Ariane DeVere)

This isn't the first time or the last Mycroft and Sherlock face off over this sort of problem, but it's one of the clearest and best "resolved" to illustrate what's going on.

Mycroft, in his role as The British Government (aka M), knows things to which Sherlock is not privy, and to which it is possible Sherlock may not/should not be privy. Sherlock has actually deduced something that should make things quite obvious to him: that there's something much bigger going on regarding that phone than Mycroft told him. Given how much Sherlock's already shown to understand about Mycroft's work, that *should* suggest to Sherlock that there's a good chance Mycroft is out swimming in very deep "need to know" waters, and if he's not telling Sherlock (indeed, has been handing Sherlock cover stories) then it's probable that Sherlock is absolutely not on the "need to know" list.

Here's the catch: Sherlock does not accept that he can/should be ruled out of insider information, and has often shown that he also does not really accept that Mycroft has a right and an obligation to limit Sherlock's involvement in some things, or command them in others. Sherlock, exactly like Bond, wants to know everything, act on his own discretion, and deny authority when it suits him. We've seen him do that to Lestrade--hell, we virtually started at that point with SiP. We've also seen it repeatedly with Mycroft--it was just less obvious at first that Mycroft, as MI6, has as much authority in his sphere of influence as Lestrade has as the DI in charge of Sherlock's preferred crime sites. At first it was made very easy to simply assume Mycroft was bossy, fussy, interfering,
and a control freak. It's only over time we've been shown enough to see Mycroft repeatedly trying to function as a responsible "M" figure, while Sherlock hovers on the knife's edge between being Bond and being the Bratty Little Brother who simply can't bear to be bossed by Big Brother. (At this point I swear, poor Mycroft could not keep a diary, hide when he first started smoking, date anyone, or skip class without Baby Brother finding out and tattling...I swear it...)

Here, though, to me is where we run into the biggest disconnect between Bond and Sherlock...

M repeatedly threatens to pull Bond from the field.

To me, it looks like Mycroft actually followed through, and made it stick.

We know that Sherlock can function as a true classic Bond figure: The Reichenbach Fall and the Cleansing of Moriarty's Network during the hiatus, and the forced return to deal with the terror attack in London pretty much clarifies what was only suggested previously. The implied events of that two-plus years up to and including Sherlock's return make anything less than Bondian mayhem improbable. If nothing else, all information suggests that Moriarty's network really was vast, effective, and deadly. Sherlock did NOT resolve that network and wipe it out by catching a few bad boys and getting them sent to jail. We really are talking about activity in Mycroft's World: helicopters, torture in dungeons, being retrieved by one of the heads of MI6 personally. Everything we are shown--and more, everything we are NOT shown--from the Reichenbach Fall to the turning off of the bomb under parliament suggests a Sherlock acting fully within a Secret Agent premise close to that of a Bond agent. This narrative simply begs for the kind of racing-around-wrecking-havok sequences you see in any Bond movie. Death-defying derring-do.

We also know that Moffat and Gatiss are quite open about loving the espionage elements of both ACD canon and of the derivative Holmes material: from "Private Life of Sherlock Holmes" to the old WWII Basil Rathbone stuff pitting Holmes and Watson against hordes of Dragon Ladies, Mata Haris, and German Intelligence Operatives. Both have come right out and said, up front, that they delight in those evolutions of Holmes... and are certainly well within traditional fanon to deduce such a connection for Sherlock. Even sticking to Olde ACD Canon, the implications of Mycroft's role, and the suggestions of long-term involvement of Sherlock with Mycroft's world, largely unbeknownst to John, offers a superb basis for writing a Holmes who "looks like a detective, waddles like a detective, and quacks like a detective" to John, while actually being a spy quite a lot of the time from *MYCOFT'S* frame of reference. ACD canon makes it quite clear that Sherlock's been working on and off with his brother, in mutual supportiveness, since well before John ever showed up--and that Sherlock does lie to John about it. Repeatedly.

So insofar as I can see, there's nothing ruling out having a Bond-style narrative running as the "hidden backstory" for Sherlock. It fits old ACD canon, it fits derivative canons, and it fits the fanboy delights of the creators. It also provides a superb and logical way of complicating Sherlock scripts and arcs without having to reveal the complications. It's a good, logical source of hidden layers and hidden levers.

Is Bond a source of material for *Sherlock*? I'd say not directly, on the whole, though elements like the cognate roles and echoes between Mycroft and M, and Sherlock and Bond, may apply. Not "copying" but "Influenced by." The first two installments of the Bond reboot, "Casino Royale" and "Quantum of Solace," had been released in the six years prior to *Sherlock* being released. Those, combined with the work with "Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy," drawing on the Le Carre George-Smiley-verse would be logical and predictable sources to help define "what should a pop fiction Mycroft's World look like"?

Where are the most profound differences between *Sherlock* and either of the spy franchises?
Sherlock should, ideally, always retain a layer of "detective." It's how John sees him, it's how his audiences always see him, and in the end it's what he's known for.

Sherlock does appear to be in deeper shit than Bond, though for similar reasons. But Mycroft appears to be a sterner disciplinarian in the end than M is. I do not even want to think what Mycroft would say if Sherlock left the kind of rubble, chaos and corpse count in his wake--much less diplomatic disasters--that Bond does.

Sherlock is an English, London-based story. One of the advantages of presuming Sherlock's a Bond who's been pulled from field work to strictly England/London analytical is it explains his anger at Mycroft, it explains his restlessness and recklessness, and it still keeps him in Baker Street with good reason. Where Bond is all about the exotic locations and the turquoise Mediterranean vistas and the castles and deserts and Luxe Hotels and High Life, Sherlock's down to living with battered veterans, annoyed coppers, eating fish and chips and Chinese take-out, and fighting Big Brother for information any time anything really *exciting* is coming down the pike.

Bond is about the excitement of the gun and the high-speed chase and the aerial stunts without a net. And the sex, and the women.

Sherlock, in the end, is about two best friends, and their friends and family who love them, trying to get just a bit of that Bond thrill from the deductions. It's about brains being the new sexy. It's about friendship trumping the solitary, Bondian High-Functioning-Sociopath ideal.

Anyway. That's first cut. I'll see what else I think over the next week or so, as I review the Bond material and try to correlate it more closely with the Sherlock details.
Chapter Summary

Mainly me murbling along... Semi-liveblogging "Skyfall" as I watch it in bits and pieces...

I am afraid I quite adore "Tanner," played by Rory Kinnear, who appears to be M's PA/EA/right-hand Anthea--and I adore him not least because he reads to me as Mycroft-in-training. He's slightly balding, steady and unwavering as a gyroscope, and endlessly a bit horrified by the data he filters and assesses for M, mainly because he keeps getting stuck assessing James Bond's data. I'm rewatching "Skyfall" right now--first sequence. Poor Tanner is trying to track Bond, and when asked by M where Bond is, he says in controlled dismay--though great accuracy--"They appear to be on the roof of the Grand Bazaar." He manages to cope with such aplomb--without blinking, but while radiating a sort of existential horror. Pure Mycroft.

And a Very Sherlock Parallel from "Casino Royale." James and Vesper meet, and proceed to quite literally play the deduction game at each other, as each openly dissects the other based on clues and cues and small details. It's just so Sherlock/Irene-ish. Two brilliant minds discovering smart is the new sexy.

And, Jeez, I forgot how effective the conclusion of the first sequence of "Skyfall" is. That is so much the flavor I myself project onto Mycroft's World. M has to decide, long-distance with no visuals whether Moneypenny should attempt to shoot the baddy, knowing she could hit Bond. M, knowing the cost, says to shoot anyway--and Moneypenny DOES hit Bond, and it looks to all concerned like Bond dies. And we get Tanner's sober, still, sad face and M spinning from the desk to stare out the rain-streaked window, obviously shattered at the outcome.

That is always the sort of reality I see Mycroft juggling: the kinds of costs that have him at the point of tears in "Scandal," and so very stressy and focused on the lost agent in "Hearse." For all Sherlock's snark and sass, Mycroft is dealing with daily questions of whose lives to risk, whose lives to spend, whose lives to sacrifice. And he's had to do that with Sherlock, too--for all he is protective of Sherlock we have already seen that he WILL permit Sherlock to risk all. Again, that's what the two-year hiaitus chasing Moriarty's people is: it's Sherlock risking life and limb with little or no backup, and Mycroft allowing it knowing it may lead to Baby Brother's death.

(flails) And OMG, M with the coffins after the bombing of MI6.

I really do not know to what degree this "mood" is just how I see Mycroft, and to what degree it's what they intend us to be able to find under the red herrings and the facade. But M standing in front of the row of honored dead, mourning her people--that, to me, is Mycroft's dismay that Sherlock refuses to honor the agent who died to get word of the terrorist attack to MI6.

Meanwhile we've got Bond "going native" until he realizes M's been threatened... Yassssss.

Lord. I'd forgotten how much I love the subtext of this movie. M juggling ethics all the way. What pawns do you sacrifice? How do you live with it afterward? "Regret is unprofessional." A Mycroft sentence if ever there was one--and, yet, she knows her agents by name, remembers them, remembers each choice, including the choices to sacrifice--and what was gained thereby. "I got..."
back six agents and a peaceful transfer of power." She gave the life of one agent who'd begun screwing up and got back six agents and saved lives and benefitted her nation.

I find myself praying that at some point we get to see poor Mycroft trying to make the cold equations balance.

Oh, and I thought of an alternate scenario to Mycroft "grounding" Sherlock--that Mycroft was pushing Sherlock further into wet-work/Bond stuff than Sherlock wanted, and Sherlock walked out. But--it doesn't feel right. If Sherlock left, he'd leave for good and all. None of this hovering in the wings in a position for Mycroft to throw him bones of case work and point out that he CAN give Sherlock orders. If Sherlock had been the one to change status he'd have quit outright, I think. So I still come back to Mycroft being the one who changed the rules on Sherlock in ways Sherlock resents....but who would very much like to get Sherlock back if they can just stabilize him.

It really is impossible not to adore Q, by the way. "Shit. Shit. shit. He hacked us."

So much good in this movie.

I have to figure out what Rupert Graves' project just prior to Season 3 was. I'm going mildly mad muttering that his S3 haircut is a ringer for Daniel Graig's Bond in all three movies. But for some reason it's tagging my brain more in "Skyfall." Not sure why.

Eh. More later. For now, I want to get some sleep I think.

No, no. I have to come back, because it's THIS scene, when Dame Judi pulls out the stops and gives her "shadows" speech and then smacks them upside the head with Tennyson.

And we are back to the shadow-world implied by "Mycroft's World" in Sherlock.

How many of you have noticed that they do Mycroft and his sets in chiaroscuro, every single time they reasonably can? His offices are shadowed grottoes. His solo pictures are always dark and light. His world is the world of Dame Judi's speech, and his England is the reduced land of the Tennyson quote--no longer a towering Empire, but still, like Galadriel, reduced but unchanged.

I will probably continue tagging in to add things, as this is just....Unggggggh.

Aaaand, Ralph Fiennes makes such a superb Next-M. I really like Gareth Mallory...who has his own set of Mycroftian notes to add. Looking forward to seeing his chops in the next Bond movie...
Molly

Chapter Summary

Minor deductions and fact collection.

Note: gowerstreet, in the comments sections below, has interesting and British-native observations to add, and I am hoping will add more. Please check her comments, particularly on Molly's class and on her education!

Watching the Season Three bonus material section "The Women," produced by BBC as extra goodies for Sherlock, I breathed this giant, mighty gust of relief when Molly was introduced clearly and specifically as a "lab technician." Oh, the lifting of burdens! Hallelujah!

It cleared a matter of head canon I'd built specifically for my Sherlolly epic. As I've said elsewhere, I really wanted to see if I could grow Molly up a bit, and give her some of the personal strength to hold her own against Sherlock. One of the things I chose to do was go with one of several theories about Molly, and make her a lab tech. It had always worked best of all the possibilities for me, after all, and it accomplished three important things.

First, it took the kiss of death off Molly's behavior within her place of work. Basically she's a doormat, from the first time we see her--and a rather girlish, immature doormat at that. Whether she's clutching her little fists together watching Sherlock whip the corpse--very like a teeny bopper caught between horror and awe at a sexy vampire movie. (How terrifyingly Twilight!)--or whether she's actually allowing Sherlock to demand coffee from her and agreeing to step and fetch it, or any of a number of other things, Molly does not behave as one expects a fully trained medical practitioner AND specialist to behave.

Training does alter who you are. Medical training, and specialist training, no matter what, knock one heck of a lot of twittery teeny-bopper off of your behavior. By the time you've completed a full medical training program, have a specialty, and have attained a rank as a professional licensed pathologist in a prestigious teaching hospital, you are very unlikely to allow even a mad crush to order you to fetch coffee like a lackey. That training forces students to develop social armor in the face of grilling, and the ability to face down draconic teachers, fellow students, head nurses, patients--To hold a GP medical degree and a speciality, have done all the UK equivalent of resident/intern, to have competed for a place...It may not be the same thing as learning to be a Marine Sergeant, but it does demand spine and balls and enormous aplomb in the face of public pressure.

A med tech/lab tech, however, has received far less training, jumped through fewer hoops, had more room to get what is a trade degree/certificate without having to learn how to handle him or herself in public. A lab tech's standing in the work place is enough lower that being step-and-fetchit for anyone is still possible...and a lab tech will almost certainly not have had to develop the authority to maintain dignity in the face of someone like Sherlock.

Second, it clears up the fact that Molly's shown as being an expert at very little. She isn't devoid of skills, but a true pathologist in a morgue should actually know more about the kind of work
Sherlock is doing than, say, John. Indeed, John should be treating her as either his academic equal, if he holds a surgeon's degree (likely, as much combat medicine is surgical) or even his superior if he's just a GP, in which case her specialization would trump him, as would her position in a teaching college. On the whole, though, Molly is shown as performing tech-level tasks, rather than forensic or clinical post-mortems under her own recognition. If she had been a pathologist she was being presented as a very limp one--and, further, being portrayed as socially pretty stuck in the same rut you'd expect of someone with a trade school degree, rather than an advanced degree in medicine. There are many things school does not do--but on the whole by the time you're out, you'll have learned how to present yourself with more polish and more of the "gloss" of education than Molly demonstrates.

Third, from my point of view, it opened up the possibility of Molly growing by choosing to aim higher, and decide to go back to school for a med degree as part of the growth arc I wanted for her. Just the choice to go for that, and the courage and spine to go through the system to apply, find mentors, etc, would be a good dramatic device to show a Molly who had realized she was often her own worst enemy, and who had the strength of will to do something about it. And, dramatically, it was a flag waved under Sherlock's nose to announce to him that Molly was indeed more than the doormat he so often treated her as.

And, yet, I picked that route thinking it made sense--but worrying, because I could not find one single place that really confirmed Molly's standing one way or another. A huge portion of the fandom took it on faith she was a full doctor with a specialty and a licensed UK pathologist able to do things like forensic post-mortems on her own. Others argued lower or different standing. No one--NO ONE--seemed to really have a clear firm canonical proof.

So I'm desperately relieved that we've got Word of God now: She's a lab tech.

She makes so much more sense as a lab tech! And her fears and failings and lack of self-respect make so much more sense in a lab tech than they did in a licensed pathologist with a GP and a Pathology specialty.

With that resolved we can look at a few things about Molly:

She's "out of her class" with John and Sherlock. Her accent, like Lestrade's, is educated but with a working class background. Lestrade, as a DI, probably has more education (though likely to be specialized police-related training and degrees in law, law enforcement, and anything he's got through MI5 if I'm right about that hypothesis.) A cop, though, is not socially as much higher than Molly as a graduate level chemist or a surgeon. Lestrade and Mrs. Hudson, though, are likely to be in shouting distance of Molly in terms of background and attainments. Molly shows signs of social uncertainty. She overdresses for simple events, and her taste is a bit off: both the Christmas dress and the wedding dress were off key for the overall situation.

To *me* Molly looks like blue-collar who's made good: she stayed in school, passed what she needed to pass to go on to a medical trade-school style training program, she's smart, she's expanded her learning, she's earned a place of trust in her morgue. She's got enough freedom to suggest she's been given a lot of latitude within her role. But she's the dental assistant not the dentist. She's the phlebotomy tech, not the RN. She behaves like someone who knows too well where she came from, and knows that her rise in status has only taken her the first few rungs up the ladder toward people like John or Sherlock socially or in terms of professional standing.

Her relationship with Tom seems to match that profile. Tom's not apparently anything special professionally...or it would seem likely to come up. Any standing in the professions or rank in business would rate comment. Tom doesn't even appear to rate "Jim from IT." He's just Tom.
They met through mutual friends, which suggests a similar social and class--best odds he's at most a college degree and a low-ranking white collar position. He could even be any of a range of in-between things: accountant, low-level manager, established barkeep. Their courtship rituals are pure middle to lower-middle class: dog, pub, meet the folks, plenty of sex, diamond ring. He's not terribly astute: the meat dagger is moronic. It's possible he's a millionaire entrepreneur with three degrees from Oxbridge and a promising media empire--but it seems profoundly unlikely. What he looks like is Molly, during Sherlock's absence, trying to find a "practical" match with enough Sherlockian glamour to convince her it's "enough." Her age, her social strata, roughly her economic level, roughly her educational level. Not a sociopath.

I'm an Amurkan. We have major class issues, but we do them differently than the English. There are refinements of British class structure I do not get or process properly. In spite of that, I do think I'm reading the markers more or less right: she's Rose Tyler and Donna Noble--she is NOT Martha Jones or Clara Osgood. Molly's a chav who made good, more than she's middle- or upper-middle class professional. She's comfortable with Lestrade and Mrs. Hudson--and even then, both of them have more mastery of social dynamics and class manipulation than Molly appears to.

Here's the thing: Molly's not stupid. Nor is she weak in the sense of breaking. She's socially insecure, she's very bad at controlling her emotional reactions, she doesn't appear to know quite where she WANTS to fit, and she definitely does not know how. But she's not dumb: she's bright, capable, intuitive, brave, loyal, and unfortunately if she can't get her sh*t together in a number of ways she is going to spend her life floundering and out of her depth without ever figuring out how to swim with the big fishes. I have heard and read the British using the term "wet." Molly, in desperate, sad ways, appears to be what is meant by that term, when it comes to getting her life sorted out and her head on straight. Where John wants to be Charlie Brown--Molly IS Charlie Brown.

But that is why we love her, and why I, at least, fear for her. Charlie Brown should not still be suffering under Lucy Von Pelt's tortures in his thirties. Charlie Brown should not still be losing his kite to the kite eating tree. The indignity of eternal wet wobblyness is not a good way to go once you're grown up. So I pray for her, and love every moment she wins her round with Sherlock--and pray and pray and pray that she will choose to become something FOR HERSELF, and not for him.

Like a doctor. Or even "Just" the head of morgue management. But something that will make it easier for her to face what life hands her and feel good about who she is. Because Molly is pretty great.
Clearing the Deck--Multi-purpose post.

Chapter Summary

Going to try to do several things here, including bring in a pair of posts from the comment string of one of my stories. Also deal with Mary, Moriarty, Mycroft, and Season 4 questions.

First order of Business:

**hotshoe2014** has put together two fanmixes of music, one for "Alone in the Cage with Tiger," and one for "The Land of Fair Cockaigne." Both are wonderful, fascinating, unique works of selective art in their own right, and a really nifty window into one creative and intelligent reader's reactions to the story. I really encourage you to go check out the music, especially if you liked the stories--or if you want an intro into the stories. And my thanks to Hotshoe2014.

**Alone in the Cage, with Tiger**

**London night masquerade fanmix**

Next: The following are taken from a chain of posts attached to my recent "In Friendship and Good Accord." RavenMorganLeigh got into an interesting meta-discussion. Most of it I just recommend you going over to check out in the comments thread, but this has some things I want to consider pursuing a bit further, either in this post and comments, or in later posts.

**Comment on In Friendship and Good Accord**

1. [RavenMorganLeigh](#) Fri 04 Jul 2014 02:17AM EDT

   One of the theories that's been posited and makes some sense, is that she might have worked for Moriarty. I'd love to get your take on that.. but we'll have to catch up a bit later, I gotta crash. Catch. You. Later. :-)

2. [Tammany](#) Fri 04 Jul 2014 03:13AM EDT
My own take?

Ok. First--we know--we've been shown--that Mycroft did keep John under surveillance during Sherlock's absence. We also know Mycroft knew John was out to dinner with Mary the night of Sherlock's return, and it's at least rather implied that Mycroft knew that John would be proposing. It's not certain--but, Lord, does it seem implied by all Mycroft does know, and by his attitude and hints to Sherlock.

That leaves the obvious question of whether Mycroft would let the relationship go that far without having done a background check on Mary--and we know Mary's background is not only a mere five years back, but that Sherlock was able to trace her "original" Mary Marston ID to a dead baby within a matter of hours while injured and in pain. Which suggests her cover ID would not have stood up to Mycroft, either.

On top of that Mycroft's ALWAYS been set up as being liaison and sometime administrator of CIA affairs. Between what he would know or have access to legitimately and what he would be able to access through dirty tricks and hacking, the odds of him NOT managing to trace Mary back to her CIA roots seems, well, dubious. It seems most likely that Mycroft knows perfectly well who Mary was and is, and let it proceed because she passed his own standards of worth. He may not love John the way Sherlock does--but he does CARE about John and watch over him.

Now add that fact that at some point Magnussen gained access to what appear to be surveillance files and background on Mary. Someone has her dossier, and at some point Magnussen gained access to that dossier. One doubts it's CIA. She left them, and went freelance, and is hiding in England. They may be tracking her, but it's dubious. Further, we have no reason so far to know Magnussen had access to anyone with high clearance levels in the US. He probably does, but it's not been confirmed. We do know Magnussen had access to high-clearance people in the UK--that's the entire point of the hearing at the start of HLV: he's had extensive access to *MULTIPLE* Prime Ministers, and there are hints he's got access throughout the UK's government. If MI6 is keeping a dossier on Mary--even if Mycroft's people are keeping a dossier on Mary--we've been given direct reasons to believe Magnussen could gain access to those files, thus explaining how he knows she was CIA, went freelance, and is a very wicked girl of a type to appeal to John and Sherlock.
That, then, opens the next door: IF the dossier came from MI6, or from any of the Secret Service branches of the UK, would a connection to Moriarty be missed? Especially when so much is already known and implied? Especially if Mycroft didn't intervene to protect John? Especially when one of the major turning points that led to the Fall was fear for John at the hands of assassins of Moriarty's?

My own take is that the minute Mycroft did a background check on Mary, he'd find her fake ID, and as soon as he followed that up, he would, like Sherlock, work out the odds of a CIA connection, and that from there on in it would be no more than weeks till he knew everything--and that given the situation with Moriarty and her background as an assassin that's one of the places he'd be most determined to look.

Mary may have some kind of connection with Moriarty: she seems upset as anyone when it turns out Moriarty may be alive. But that to me suggests she may fear him more than she once worked for him. Magnussen made it quite clear that there are people who hate Mary, and they're the kind of people who murder for revenge.

On top of that, my own guess is that Mary's going to incorporate elements of "Birdy Edwards," the real protagonist of "The Valley of Fear." He's an American Pinkerton agent who goes undercover to break up a Molly Maguire-style primitive "Union" that is sponsored by and endorsed by "Moriarty." That looks like it will match Mary's backstory--and Birdy Edwards is ultimately "disappeared" by Moriarty in revenge for breaking the union. So even if she does prove to have "worked" for Moriarty, I would myself expect it to match the Birdy Edwards tropes and be undercover work.

Last Edited Fri 04 Jul 2014 03:14AM EDT

Ok. All that being said and accounted for, I want to add a few more points.

The dossier we see on Mary, in HLV, looks almost identical in "style" and content/presentation to the dossier Mycroft kept on John, that we see in TEH. Now, I'll be honest: to some degree a dossier is a dossier is a dossier. But the cut and dried feel of the two seems intended to set off bells for viewers if they think about it.

As I speculated above, there's a reasonable canonical chance that Magnussen got his material directly through UK officials with clearance. That could get us involved in plots in High Office. It could also, though, get us involved in a "mole" plotline.

Right now we only know four people in Mycroft's chain of command. Mycroft himself, Anthea, Lestrade, and Sherlock. Sherlock won't be the traitor. Anyone else could--or could be trailed as a red herring covering for a Treason In High Office plot.

Meanwhile if I am right about the dossier, I think it makes it absolutely necessary that Mycroft at
least knew perfectly well who Mary was/is--unless he is terribly, terribly fooled by someone he trusts. Basically if it's an MI6 dossier to which Magnussen gained access, Mycroft knows John married a former CIA assassin. And made no move to intervene.

Further, it opens up the odds he knew she was after Magnussen--and that he even guessed what happened in Magnussen's office.

It also forces another question: Magnussen says with absolute conviction that Mycroft has been after Magnussen for years. He doesn't think--he believes he knows. Yet even Lady Smallwood and Sherlock appear not to know that Mycroft was after Magnussen. (Well, yes, we've had debates about that, but right now I'm still going to hang on to the fact that the most obvious reading of the events shown suggests neither of them believed Mycroft willing to take Magnussen on.) In any case, it's not something Mycroft's exactly putting up billboards to announce. Yet someone's leaked to Magnussen that Mycroft's targeting him. This again suggets a mole or Treason In High Places.

We already know one Traitor in High Places: Moran.

We also know that in original ACD canon, Moran was Moriarty's man. Yes, we've taken him down in TEH. Do you want to bet on that staying as it is?

We also know that Moriarty worked in sync with terrorists. We've known that for certain since "Scandal," and had reason to at least wonder about it as early as "TGG."

I'm still brooding about the fact that the two spectres at the feast during Mary and John's wedding were Mycroft and Lestrade. Mycroft was downright maudlin. He couldn't ahve been more morose if you stole his cake and his umbrella. Lestrade, while not as bad, was far from a happy camper--I think the only real grin we get from him is a sweet, soppy, sentimental one as John and Mary waltz.

If Mycroft really does have a leak, we could be looking at Mycroft finally not just threatened at a distance, but as the direct target/victim for a round or two. Or for a long arc.

I know I've forgotten something. I just know it. But--I'll remember later, and either tuck it in as an addendum, or in the comment strings, or in the next chapter. It will come back to me. It always does....eventually.
Ah, I remember, now!

Chapter Summary

Now I remember some of what I didn't include in the last post.

It occurred to me last night while considering the possibility of Mycroft's agency/department having a leak or a mole, that it could cast the goldfish discussion between Sherlock and Mycroft in a different light.

Enough elements have been involved in the past two seasons that it would not be unreasonable for Sherlock to wonder if Mycroft's got a mole even without having gotten to Magnussen and his files on Mary. Moriarty knows far too much--and Irene, too--and there are too many bits of TRF that are a bit odd--the degree to which Mycroft and Sherlock's original plan with Moriarty appears to have fallen apart, for example. Toward the end of that, it's pretty clear that Sherlock's making chunks of it up as he goes along--drafting Molly at the last minute, dealing with Moriarty shooting himself, dealing with the assassin element, dealing with the chaos that happens in the Met. (Side-note: I postulated in comments with RavenMorganLeigh that IMO the entire Donovan/Anderson "investigate Sherlock" thing threw Mycroft and Sherlock and Lestrade's plans off track: that something else was supposed to happen with Greg. The forced investigation made it impossible for Greg to act without breaking his cover. If that investigation is one of the prime moments when Mycroft and Sherlock's plan starts to skew out of line, it makes Greg's behaviors--including warning John and Sherlock--make more sense.)

That's not even bothering to play wild speculative games over what Sherlock may have learned while gone.

The thing is, there's reason for him to at least wonder if Mycroft's got a leak--and if he's wondering if Mycroft has a leak, one of the questions he'd be asking is if Mycroft had recently gained any new confidants.

One thing I keep thinking about is the degree to which Mycroft and Sherlock have maintained complex illusions to keep the world from seeing them working together too obviously on good terms. They use that in "TRF," in which Mycroft's safe behind the firewall of presumed mutual enmity with Sherlock and Sherlock's set up to be seen as anything BUT an MI6 agent or contractor. And then Sherlock goes off and spends the hiatus doing MI6 work "without portfolio," pretending to be anything but Mycroft's man.

That alone suggests Mycroft and Sherlock may have some long-standing worries about the security of Mycroft's own department and associates.

The mole-hunt is a classic spy plotline. A mole-hunt in which Mycroft was the target and also the King-piece on the chess board, and had to sit very still and pretend to be helpless and oblivious while Sherlock skulked around the board as the active player would be a very Sherlock-friendly kind of story, and good for long arcs with plenty of ways of keeping the audience guessing.

I keep coming back to the list of possible leaks. At the moment we have Anthea, Lestrade, Mycroft himself, Sherlock himself, and no one else to date. I can't think of any evidence we've seen to suggest Lestrade's been double-dealing. Indeed, such evidence as we've got suggests he's not.
Anthea is an enigma.

Conversely, we're just beginning to see behind the scenes into Mycroft's World. And we've just been handed Lady Smallwood and that odd, weasely man who confronts Mycroft during the Star Chamber scene, and who's the one to confer with Lady Smallwood during the ruckus when Moriarty's recording airs. So this could be the very start of the introduction of new layers of Mycroftian reality.

Now, here's the OTHER thing I forgot to talk about on the other post.

Ok, Moffat and Gatiss have been openly, loudly, fondly appalled at how ACD handled Sherlock's death in "The Final Problem." As professionals of modern narrative, their loving scorn for ACD for failing to kill Sherlock in ways the audience could see, and for having no body is kind of cute. They know how the game is played: they're modern, meta, po-po kinds of guys. If a character is not actually seen to die, and his body is never found, then it's by necessity a certainty that the genre-savvy audience member will instantly discount the probability of the death being real: to manage a real surprise you have to show the death and the body. Only then is the resurrection even remotely impressive to the genre savvy, who can then admire the artistry of the illusion. They made a point of this.

Here's the thing: we also now have two upcoming canonical deaths that seem very likely to occur within the coming seasons. We have the death of Mary, John's wife. We have the death of Birdy Edwards, the "real" protagonist of "The Valley of Fear."

Both deaths occur off-stage. The death of Birdy Edwards leaves no body.

The death of Birdy Edwards, further, is set-up. He is pursued by Moriarty, who is determined to kill Birdy for foiling his plans in the Vermissa Valley in the USA. Holmes, knowing this, suggests that Edwards must once more flee for his own safety. Edwards then disappears from a boat at sea, and Holmes believes utterly that Moriarty "done him in," and swears that given time he will defeat his nemesis.

Mary Morstan Watson isn't even killed, so much as refered to as John's "recent loss."

And if, as I suspect, Mary Morstan's plot line is going to be layered over Birdy Edwards' plot line, turning the two characters into one character, then we're left with one major character with a major, big-deal death that nonetheless breaks the dramatic structure rules Moffat and Gatiss are so clear about knowing and valuing--and that they gleefully played with in TRF, having Sherlock's "death" appear on screen, corpse and all. In the same way, they killed Irene--but made sure we saw the body the first time. and the second time they made sure we knew even before we had time to doubt that Irene had survived and was still alive.

So there's Mary, due to die in some fictional amalgamation, and the two most obvious deaths she could die break the rules.

And we've got John, whose "marriages" range somewhere between one and seven, depending on how analysts of the canon choose to parse the record.

And we have Moffat and Gatiss, who at this point really do have to be held to have turned the "death and resurrection" thing into a theme and an ongoing motif. Three seasons and they've killed and resurrected Irene twice, Sherlock once, Moriarty once in some sense or another. How much are you willing to bet they aren't going to find some way to use Mary/Birdy's "bad theater" deaths
to play similar games? Games that allow them to reuse Amanda Abbingdon and that allow John to "remarry" at least once to the same woman, reducing their character overhead and allowing them to condense and intensify plot lines and character arcs?
Details to Brood Over

Chapter Summary

Just me murbling again and trying to ignore the serious firecracker addicts in my neighborhood.

I don't think anyone--ANYONE--has ever commented on the fact that Sherlock appears to misidentify Irene's body. In my opinion it's one of the strongest arguments for a) straight/bi, especially when coupled with his ability to determine her measurements. It suggests that Sherlock was so fixated on the pneumatic aspects of her figure that he downright failed to evaluate her actual identifying features beyond that. Now, one does assume she found someone with similar nipples and so on--but there's so much diversity to the actual bodies of naked women. (Come on, folks, I grew up in the years of open locker rooms, shared showers, dorms where modesty was variable, and theater groups where privacy in dressing rooms didn't even always extend to separating the genders, much less the individual cast members. AND I've done life drawing. With naked models. I can promise you, the odds of two women with the same measurements having visually identical bodies approaches nil, and a mind like Sherlock's would ordinarily notice the details, UNLESS struck dumb by hormonal response to all that naked pulchritude. One suspects his mind kept shouting "BOOBS" every quarter second.)

The thing is, there is no sign he knew she lived. I've run that episode over and over, trying to figure out if he knew she wasn't dead, and I'm with John: I think that for a brief few days he thought he'd seen her body on Molly's morgue table... I also think he responded as an infatuated male lover responds, not as a mere intellectual competitor responds--both in his mistaking the corpse, and in his emotional behavior afterward.

I continue to brood over his emotional reaction to overhearing John and Irene's conversation. My own take on it continues to be, over and over, that he's just heard the two people he might honestly consider as lovers both proclaim their true, real affection/infatuation for him, but do so in terms that make it clear that the waking sexual response he feels at least toward Irene rules out a stable, really content sexual relationship. There's a lot of room to parse it all sorts of ways--but Sherlock's demeanor to John does not change, which I would honestly expect if he were more focused on John's statement of boundaries than Irene's. If anything I think that hearing it all laid out that clearly may underline for him how decidedly Irene is "not straight," in exact parallel to John being "not gay," which has been John's stated stance all along. If John is, in one sense, the measuring stick by which Sherlock can evaluate Irene's affection/attraction, John is ALSO the measuring stick by which Sherlock can evaluate her lack of "natural sexual" attraction.

The thing is, in some real ways Sherlock learns nothing "new" about John in that scene. Everything John says had already been pretty well established prior to Irene and John's discussion: that John and Sherlock operate as a couple, set off "couple" vibes, that John's got at least a charisma-infatuation with Sherlock, and most of all, that John's not gay. I can hypothesize that hearing it all laid out that clearly could still hurt--but given Sherlock himself, I'm hard put to believe he'd get as spun-up by hearing it as is indicated in the reaction sequences that lead up to Sherlock venting his misery as well as his righteous wrath on the idiot CIA agent. It seems far more likely that he's that overwhelmed because he's been offered the mixed heaven and hell of a beautiful woman with whom he himself is suddenly infatuated--who is willing to admit to being utterly infatuated with
him, but who also makes it clear that she'll never be one bit more in reach sexually than his striaght roomie. Swapping it the other way around and having his anguish be over John when nothing John said is new--when the entire relationship with John is not new--seems pushing it a bit.

Another detail to add to the "Bond--Sherlock Bond" elements of the show from that episode--over and over Sherlock beats trained CIA agents at their own game, including combat with armed opponents. The high-speed camera work for the "Vatican Cameos" sequence, and the entire set-up after Mrs. Hudson's capture and mistreatment basically require the assumption that Sherlock's got the skills to beat James-Bond types at their own James Bond games. That, again, is just not a level of skill or expertize one comes by accidentally, and it tends to imply espionage training, or at least pretty sophisticated hand to hand. Sherlock doesn't just out-clever them--he outfights them, too.

The CIA is definitely set up in Sherlock to be the not-so-smart, definitely-not-so-ethical cousins to MI6 in Sherlock, making me more suspicious that Mary's departure from them will prove to be admirable, not evil. They're the people you leave to redeem yourself. And they're the sin-eaters for the darkest aspect of what Mycroft stands for--as set up, Mycroft is almost the force that keeps their darkness in check, and occasionally fails when the choose to act independent of his desires.

I am still intrigued by the absence of both Mycroft and Lestrade from "The Blind Banker." Gatiss has spoken of that in regards to Lestrade as an attempt to plausibly break up the presentation of recurring core/regular characters, but in truth that's an aesthetic that's mostly in that single instance of breach. Part of me still thinks that hides the two--spymaster and handler--taking a step back, watching how Sherlock and John function as a team, and then putting their heads together to plan how to test John--and what elements to watch for later.

I'm really curious what they want to do with Billy Wiggins. They have made him so very much "Sherlock Jr." Drugs, street ties, deductive abilities, chemistry skills--and thanks to Baring-Gould they even have the same first name--William. (grin) My headcanon INSISTS that just like Mycroft's family name is "Mike/Mikey," Sherlock's at least started out as Billy, just like he calls Wiggins. Right now Wiggins looks perfectly placed to become a full apprentice.

Love the dynamics in the "pee in a jar/Molly" scene of HLV, by the way. The level of cross-play and issues simmering just below the surface is just awsome. Subtext everywhere. Molly's rage at Sherlock, Sherlock's awareness of her ended engagement--and the edgy spite that trips him into using that as his return blow to answer her slaps and rage. John angry at Sherlock only to find his own behavior under scrutiny. Sherlock and Billy. Mary trying to track it all. Just gorgeous. Back and forth and around. Zip. Zoom.

I tend to think Sherlock really is rather smug about having a girlfriend, for what it's worth. Yeah, he's enjoying John's amazement. And yeah, he is convinced it, like the drugs, is "for a case." But he's also just plain preening with Teh Smugz as Janine wafts in and out of his rooms at Baker Street. And there's one shot--

Ok. We know that after Janine kisses him and leaves, he slips right out of lovey-dovey mode and makes no pretense to John that he's still focusing on "girlfriend." So he's not driven to fake all that much in front of John. I'm inclined to mostly trust his facial and body language when he's responding to Janine's presence BUT SHE CAN'T SEE HIM. When he's not putting on an act for her...or, I think, for John. And there's this one little shot when Janine's in his bedroom, getting ready for work, with her back to him--ass shot--and they cut to Sherlock sitting in his chair and he just looks--

It's that guy look. The "Pretty woman, nice ass, all is right with my world, mine-mine-mine, life is good" face. Not the downright gloat and drool, but the slight, steady borderline happy-high.
There's no question that he's faking elements. There's no question that he's playing games--and that he deserves her wrath later. But Cumberbatch is also playing someone more involved and more content and more interested than Sherlock himself knows. His performance really pleases me.

And I really, really want to know what the entire byplay about "where were you last night?" "Working?" "Only I know what you're really like." "Don't let people know." "I think maybe I will."

There's something there that's NOT sex related. It doesn't read properly as sexy-talk. There's some other subtext, because sex and love don't tie to knowing something about him working all night. It could be the drugs, but that doesn't feel right either.

I'm really intrigued how hard they worked her "I know what kind of a man you are" hook. That almost has to go somewhere and tie to something. And I am dying to know what.

The fact that she knows Mycroft as Mike--so completely she barely registers him as Mycroft, and fails to believe people "really call him that," and that she knows they fight all the time...That implies she knows and has witnessed quite a lot, some things more deeply than John ever did. She almost has to have picked up "Mike" from Sherlock....you learn people's names from their intimates. It sounds like she's witnessed a lot more informal Sherlock/Mycroft than John did. It also sounds like poor Mycroft has never been able to make his "adult" name stick in the boundaries of family. Poor bubbeh. I really want to know the story of how Sherlock managed to be Sherlock while poor Mikey struggles on with the fight...
Chapter Summary

Very fluffy little meta....

So as I get used to the new work gig, and make enough money to at least strip the worst layer off of the current finance issues, I have been unwinding with Supernatural...a show I have not watched until this year. Really, until this past month.

Nine. Nine freeping seasons. I find myself looking at Sherlock's three seasons, three shows per season, with sweet relief: a manageable corpus. Supernatural is this messy, sprawling thing that shows both the virtues of Standard US/Canada TV production, and the vices. I will say, the writers do care about arc and narrative and story, and they've got a deft hand with the fine balance between silly camp and High Pretension Graphic Novel. On the whole I'm pleased.

But I'm also fascinated, watching the character dynamic. Older, protective brother, with no real emotional tie but his brother. Younger, resentful brother, trapped between admiration/adulation of older brother and flaming resentment. Codependency. Poor boundaries.

Holmes Brothers territory, yet such different characters. Watching Dean and Sam, I am left snarling about how freakin' SANE and decent and stable Mycroft is in comparison--and that's in spite of the fact that Mycroft's World of MI6 appears to share elements of dark dementia with with Dean and Sam's Monster Mash.

Conversely I look at Dean and see--John Watson. At least in the anger, and the lack of real emotional fluency. In the emotional lies he tells himself. In the urge to plunge headfirst into codependency, where Mycroft tends to hover on the edge, longing for the bond but also recognizing the value of distance and boundaries and clearly marked out personal zones. Dean and John both seem to kind of want their limerance--their state of somewhat dysfunctional emotional entrapment.

Sam and Sherlock--the "emotional" ones. The protected ones. Both more erratic. Both more inclined to just plain get their asses in trouble. But Sherlock's the one with Dean's Bad Boy bravado--though a very refined, high-brow, evah so intellectual variant. Not macho but still often dick-head.

Then Castiel and Lestrade--both complex, quiet, strong men, lives being woven between the two brothers...yet Castiel so much less grounded, and so much more a melodrama vector, where Lestrade is the mystery being shown in tiny little fragments, a clue at a time...and appears overall far less fraught. (And please, if there be gods of fiction, may he continue to be far less fraught. I'm enjoying Supernatural quite a lot, but the fraught levels occasionally get to me.... It is, how can we say, a bit juicy and ripe over in Dean and Sam Land...)

It's all rather intriguing. I can say now that I will not become as firm a fan of Supernatural as I am of Sherlock--the production values are not as high, the writing is not as tight and trim, the actors, while admirable, are not in a position to work at the level Sherlock's team is able to accomplish. The sheer mass of shows to be filmed makes it a wonder they're as good as they are.
Here's the thing: they've got rather similar cultural roots. Pop lit with edges of camp horror/penny dreadful amped up by some pretensions to art and craft. Roots in the Victorian era and the tropes and fascinations of that period. Thriller sensibilities. Traces of blended Golden Age comics and Po-Mo Graphic Novel artiste comics. They rely on some similar chemistries: Central bromance, tensions between relatives, dark shadowed worlds underlyng the lighter "normal" world, strong supporting casts.

Someday, when I've had months to think through Supernatural, it would be fun to do a more extensive compare and contrast.

Right now, though, I'm trying not to scream "Boundaries, entanglement, codependent" at Dean every time he's on screen... and finding the odd lace of parallels and differences entertaining and fascinating in their own right.
The Casual Brilliance of Modernized Sherlock.

Chapter Summary

Short. I should be sleeping. Tomorrow I will be working--then, please God, writing some of Time and Memory...

Meanwhile, I smile at how well Sherlock is transposed from his original Victorian setting.

It starts, as we all know, with a hard-up invalided veteran of Afghanistan trying to figure out how to afford the cost of London on the limited pension of a half-pay officer. John Watson--larking about in London, reluctant to give up the big city, with no living relations (unlike OUR John, but not by much...). All things change when John bumps into an old buddy, they exchange news, and Stamford introduces Dr. Watson to Sherlock Holmes--a character.

Sherlock is described, among other things, as "bohemian," a word with very specific connotations at the time. Bohemians were among other things, living embodiments of the roguish, wicked, scandalous but not quite depraved demi-monde. It was among the bohemians of London that gay and lesbian activities were allowed to thrive, with little comment and less dismay. Artists and madmen, actors and writers, dancers and singers, painters--these fit implicitly into bohemian culture, as did a vast array of "intellectual elite" liberal urban and suburbanites.

Sherlock belongs in this world--and is tailored to fit it. His eccentricities, his genius, his violin, his drugs--if one is transposing the original "style" of Sherlock to the modern world, it's critical to understand what that style originally indicated.

That's a tricky feat for us in our modern era. The cultural expectations and red-flag indicators of the Victorian era do not carry well to us in the present day, and have not done so since the end of WWI, when the underlying assumptions of "Western civilization" had to be defibrilated after severe heart attack. If the decades of the Industrial Revolution had altered the Western World--and in particular, England--beyond all recognition from the culture that had existed at the end of the 18th C, WWI took that vast sea change and multiplied it by infinity. The shock of the war, layered onto all the changes already under way as a result of the Industrial Revolution, turned the Victorian Era into that "foreign land" that is the past. If you doubt the level of emotional change, the sense of loss, the nostalgia and uncertainty that England felt about the world as it had been before WWI, and that of post WWI, you really need only read "The Scouring of the Shire," and some of Tolkien's associated biographical and analytical notes to start to grasp how vast an abyss there was between Then and Now--a now that has only grown further away from the Victorian era.

What does that matter?

Because it leads us to make false assumptions about what Arthur Conan Doyle is telling us, as we lose track of what his cultural referents originally meant.

Here's an obvious parallel--one most people can follow.

The King James Bible--still among the most commonly used translations into English, and the translation that has most affected our understanding and expectations of "Bible Language," was
remarkably well and carefully translated for its time. If not quite the "Good Word Bible," it used the language of the period with exquisite care and choice. That Elizabethan/Jacobean language has been etched into our brains...but time has warped our understanding of its meaning.

Isaiah 41:10, King James Version

10 Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

Hardly any of us, in this day and age, read this "naturally" as anything but highly stylized, formal, pompous writing. It sounds stuffy, stilted, ritualistic, ponderous, archaic...

It is, to most moderns, the highly charged and extremely "sacred" formal tone of "God Talk." After all, God likes words like "unto." And "thus saith." And so on.

The trouble is, we are far too often reading the exact reverse of the intended tone into our understanding of KJV English. The give-away is the use of "thou" and "thee" in God's speech. English at the time had a formal/impersonal and an informal/familial-intimate mode. "You," which we use for everything, was the all-purpose three-piece-suit formal language one would use with almost anyone but family, very close friends, and lovers. "Thee" and "thou"? Those words were intimate--tender. Verging on scandalous. They were somewhere between the flannel nighty and the sexy silk negligee of pronouns. Just as French retains "vous" and "tu," and you'd be very much better off remembering that for most people you had better use "vous," and for your husband or wife you'd better use "tu" or be thought to be insultingly cold... That's "thee" and "thou," in KJV English. God speaks to his children in the voice of lovers, of family, of long-term beloved besties.

We moderns read the lines and hear God On High Talking Formal God Talk. What the translators write, though, was God climbing down off his high horse and using the language of the kitchen table and the bedroom to speak to his creation.

Time changed how we heard what was said.

Time has done the same thing to how we hear Sherlock.

I've read a number of people from Old Fandom over the past year, complaining that "Sherlock" has stripped the character and his world of the dignity, majesty, reserve, and respectable probity of the character. It's easy to understand why: we read Victorian literature almost as we read KJV English. A Dickens can, to some degree, overcome our limits and convey subtle elements of class and culture, making it clear much of the time who's formal and who's a mere rowdy, who's an arsty dilletante and who's a serious scholar, etc. But on the whole Arthur Conan Doyle has a bit of a harder time of it. We don't differentiate as easily, and Sherlock, perhaps most of all, suffers.

Moffat and Gatiss got it quite right, starting us off with Sherlock beating the corpse with the riding crop. It helps...especially as we have to lose the pipe and John's bulldog and the emotional burden of Sherlock getting right in and cozy with London coppers, hanging out with street people, having chums in boxing clubs and among tradesmen...

Much as I admire Jeremy Brett's interpretation of The Great Detective, and the versions presented by those before and after, I often think we've been badly misled. In trying so hard to create a "Victorian" style and setting and tone, we fall into the same trap as those who read the KJV's "thou" and "thou" and see formality and distance and an authoritarian voice, where the original readers would have seen informality and intimacy.

It is one of the things I most enjoy about watching Cumberbatch and Freeman play Sherlock and John together--they transpose the easy, bantering, teasing, informal relationship of two rather
ramshackle chums so much better than anyone else I can think of—even better than Downey and Jude Law. John's annoyance and willingness to snap back at Sherlock—it seems so perfect a translation of that shown in, for example, the introduction of "The Valley of Fear," or in "His Last Bow." I look at the lovely, comfortable, easy exchanges during "The Sign of Three," and am charmed that Mary's actually shown doing what Doyle largely TOLD us about—Mary Morstan fitting in comfortably with a Sherlock Holmes who admired her heartily.

It's a pretty thing to look at. It reminds us that ACD's Sherlock was always a bit of a rogue, a bit of a ne'er-do-well, behaving scandalously, living his bohemian life to the dismay of all right-thinking men and women, existing at the edge of all classes and subcultures, wandering merrily in and out of dives and dumps and theaters and music halls and chop houses and alleys and whereever it so pleased him to go, chattering a mile a minute to John Watson—and then going home to indulge in his pipes and cocaine and to drug the bulldog, to John's annoyance. The original Sherlock was not presented, by the standards of his era, as a formal, stuffy, or even a dignified man. Reserved, private, and insanely geeky? Yeah. Absolutely. But NOT formal, or stuffy, and his dignity is that of a cat (I meant to do that) rather than of a Mycroft or a minister.

Moffat and Gatiss got that—and Cumberbatch and Freeman have made it real. For that I can only praise them.
Sherlock, Doctor Who, and Predictions

Chapter Summary

Meditation on a range of considerations.

Yes, I AM working on "Time and Memory." I just--derailed a little.

One of the things I've noticed feeding back and forth between Sherlock and Doctor Who, under the shared control of Moffat as showrunner with both Moffat and Gatiss as key writers, involves shared themes.

Note, I am not saying they have shared plots, or even that Moffat and Gatiss are reusing material in any sense. Instead I'm saying that, to me, there are shared questions, shared perceptions, shared dramatic themes that are worked out in very distinct ways in each show. Consider, for example, the ongoing question of "goodness." The question of the goodness of the two respective leads--Sherlock and the Doctor--has been central and brooding over the two shows since Moffat initiated the first and took over the second.

Is the Doctor a good man? Moffat's answer is a modulated "yes," with elements of Chaotic Good and Chaotic Neutral tossed in for depth--sometimes ignored or shoved aside, but never truly forgotten, at least by the show's writers and actors. The Doctor may swing "user friendly" as Capaldi puts it, during the eras of Tennant and Smith, but he's never, never, never a tame lion, and sometimes he's not even a "good" one. Just...mostly good. Mostly.

Is Sherlock a good man? He's a great one--but as Lestrade says, we'll have to be very lucky if Sherlock himself is to turn out to be good. We were told from the very start that the question was in play. John tried to figure it out, never very effectively. Mycroft brought it directly into question when he suggested that John was an idiot to trust Sherlock so quickly and so completely. Sally outright said Sherlock was a nutter, a serial murderer waiting for the right moment to crawl out of the boring old chrysalis. And Lestrade? Who in that original episode plays the part of the God-Writer's Gabriel, the Metatron of Moffat? Lestrade tells us the jury is out...or maybe hasn't even seen all the evidence yet. It's an open question.

Moffat and Gatiss gleefully tempt the viewer to take sides, like John. To throw their hearts over the fence and cheer Sherlock on. It's like giving candy to a baby....yes, giving, not taking. They hand viewers the poisoned lolly, and we cram it into our mouths, forgetting over and over that there's more at stake than meets the eye or answers to the heart of the viewer who just wants a clean, unadulterated hero. They warned us that wasn't what we were getting--and over and over, they invite us to forget, so they can lure us another layer down into the labyrinth, another layer down into the question of who, in the end, Sherlock Holmes really is.

Which brings me to the current first hints dropping about Sherlock Season 4 and current just-arriving Doctor Who (reboot) Season 8, with Capaldi riding the winds of the Oncoming Storm. The current Doctor is, as stated before, "less user-friendly" than Tennant and Smith's Doctors. He's being promoted as being darker, more dangerous, more alien, less cuddly. Two eps in and we've been asked to consider whether the Doctor would push a foe out of the Tardis to its death. We've been told that the Doctor has "made mistakes." We've been shown a number of undesired deaths and a mysterious "Missy" waiting to receive the Doctor's errors into a mysterious "Heaven." We've
been reminded that, in the view of two different not-very-good Daleks, the Doctor is a very good Dalek. We've been told that, at the heart of the Doctor is not just vast love of the life and creation and beauty of the universe, not just care and commitment to the strange, erratic, flawed race of humans--but also hate. Hate so pure it serves as a driving muse even to a Dalek, inspiring it to betray its own race and eradicate its own kind. We're told that neither the Doctor nor Clara feels quite safe saying whether the Doctor is, stricktly speaking, "good."

We've been reminded in odd ways that the Doctor is both a doctor--and a soldier. A healer and a destroyer. A savior and a harsh judge. And did I say a doctor and a soldier, in conflict between those two roles, trying to deny the killer aspect of his personality and cling to the healer?

A theme reflected in John, on *Sherlock*, just as it's also looking like it will be the central focus for Season 8 on *Doctor Who*.

How does this apply to our Sherlock?

The latest dribs and drabs coming in from the Moffat/Gatiss/Freeman/Everyone seep-line is that Season 4 is going to get dark. Very dark. As Gatiss has suggested, a reintroduction heading toward a dark season resolution. Start light, fun, warm--end with questions, right?

First season we were asked to consider that Sherlock and Moriarty were brothers under the skin--that the reckless mayhem evaded in "Study in Pink" was always there, under the surface, waiting to break out given any excuse. That theme continued in "Reichenbach Falls," when we were shown in ugly beauty the kinship between Sherlock and Moriarty--and were invited to believe Sherlock had chosen the side of the angels, while being encouraged to forget that in making that choice Sherlock gamed his friends and the world just like a Moriarty-grade devil, leaving a mourning and misled John, a Met in chaos, and Mycroft to hold it all together while Sherlock went a-huntin', having a delightful, dark holiday as the little man who wasn't there.

Moffat has pointed out in some bewilderment that audiences do seem to forget, over and over, that Sherlock and John are not exceptionally "good," by normal standards of goodness. They're vigilantes. They're rule breakers, and not always out of anything but boredom and the desire to stir up horns' nests. They're both suggested to be killers--and, as Moffat also suggests, are much in the same class as Mary. Or Mary's much in the same class as Sherlock and John.

I have mixed feelings about Moffat's beagle-browed bewilderment at the forgetfulness of audiences. On the one hand, I've frowned on occasion myself, when I've seen audiences, including my own, white-wash clearly soot-gray angels. On the other hand--Moffat and Gatiss and Thompson do hand you the poisoned lolly with a beaming smile and a happy run of feel-good. They invite us to believe...and they know bloody-damned well that they're gaming the human tendency to demonize antagonists--and angelize protagonists. The human tendency to cheerfully put a positive spin on "our guys" and a vicious negative spin on "the other guy." They know we're editing out all Sherlock and John's failings, prettying those two up, clinging to the sweet, the sentimental, the appealing, the warm and affectionate, the *good*. We do everything we can to convince ourselves that Sherlock and John are good, even when they're really only somewhat good. Some of the time. Mostly...

So what does it mean that Moffat and Gatiss and Freeman are all hinting that the coming season is going to go dark? That it made even some of the castmembers cry when they heard the arc?

Well, we could go much the way many fanwriters are already going, of course. Evil Mary, John betrayed, maybe even Mycroft proving to be the devil in disguise. Moriarty back, and our two boys back to back against a world in which no one is true or faithful but each other. What's the fine romantic line Sherlock spouts in "The Empty Hearse?"
The thrill of the chase, the blood pumping through your veins, just the two of us against the rest of the world ...

The trouble is, that's not the question that's been on the table since the very start. It's not the issue that got called directly into question at the climax of "His Last Vow." It's not central to the show. Mary can be evil, and it challenges nothing. Mycroft can turn face, Moriarty can be the very devil...Irene can come back and burn babies. Janine can prove to be a serpent. Molly and Mrs. Hudson can join a coven and stab pins into puppy dogs. None of that would be "dark," if it left Sherlock and John as the clear good guys.

But Moffat and Gatiss, in both shows, seem very much NOT to want to write about clear good guys. Their question, their key theme, is not built on a foundation of certainty that their protagonists are "good." They're built on a very real and brooding question of whether they're good and, if so, how and why.

In the most recent episode of Doctor Who, "Into the Dalek," the answer, as nearly as could be stated by Clara at present, was that we don't really know if the Doctor is good, but we know he tries.

With Sherlock the question is less easily answered, because at rock bottom we're not that sure how hard Sherlock tries. He's a far angrier beast, and far less convinced of the worth of "goodness," as such. And this time around he's claimed his "high-functioning sociopath/murderer" persona as his very own. He and Mycroft, in different ways, and different voices, have both seemed to accept that Sherlock, whatever else he is, is a murderer. He's a killer. He's dangerous--and as Sherlock himself put it to Moriarty, he may be on the side of the angels, but he isn't one himself.

In the same sense, the past season forced us to start questioning John. Last season in many ways was "no more Mr. Nice Jumper" season. We were reminded that John's capable of anger, that he reasons subjectively and in many ways selfishly, that he lies to himself and others about who he is and what he wants. We were reminded that he tries to force people into narrative pigeonholes that flatter his own fantasy notions of who he wants to be or ought to be. We were reminded that John's a killer, and that, like the doctor, he's a contradiction in terms: doctor and soldier. Healer and killer. Peacemaker and addicted warrior. Mr. Psychopath to Mary's Mrs. Psychopath.

In short, the biggest questions left outstanding at the end of Season 3 had nothing to do with Mary, or Magnussen, or Mycroft, or even Moriarty and his surprise return. The biggest questions we were left with have to do with the issue of both Sherlock and John's "goodness." If our heroes are flawed, if they have the ordinary human feet of clay, if they're vigilantes because they quite like dark alleys and high rooftops and dark deeds done at midnight--then what, if anything, redeems them? What is the gold mixed in with the gleaming black coal?

Sherlock was in the process of being developed and shot at the same time Moffat was preparing to take over as showrunner for Doctor Who. It's no surprise that the question of fundamental goodness of the protagonist glimmers in each show. In the same sense, Moffat's been preparing for the introduction of Capaldi's Doctor and the development of Sherlock Season 4 in roughly the same time frame. The stories they're now dropping hints about--that we will not see until sometime in 2016 from the looks of it--were being developed at the same time Moffat's answer to the question of the Doctor's goodness shifted to "He's good--but he's darker than we've been showing during the Matt Smith days." His comments and those of others suggest strongly, to me, that his answer to Sherlock's and perhaps John's goodness will similarly be, "they're good--but darker than we've said before."

That would be "dark." That could lead to arcs that reduce cast members to tears. That sounds like
the sort of edgy stuff Freeman and Cumberbatch seem to love, where human virtues are always a bit dicey, and always counterbalanced by human vices. The two actors have made it clear they love and are committed to challenging material—material that pushes them out of the easy envelopes provided by standard serial television and many popular movies. They would not be excited by a season in which the darkness was all about the other characters.

They'd want to get their teeth into a season when the darkness was about Sherlock, and John, and how they fail each other—and love each other anyway. How they are imperfect, and dangerous, and dark, and still beautiful and trying to become something greater than their failures might suggest.

Whoever and whatever proves dark in Season 4, the heart of the darkness will involve Sherlock and John, their friendship, and their own souls. The rest will simply be set-dressing and McGuffin, designed to bring that out in them.
More Predictive Pondering and Analysis

Chapter Summary

As I review where we've been, where it seems to leave us, and what seems possible in the upcoming season...

Probably wildly wrong, but, hey...if they're going to take the high road and only give us three/four eps every two/three years, they're going to have to live with how much I can speculate in the ensuing down-time....

I ended up writing the most recent story, "Calling, Each to Each," directly as a result of trying to work out some way of describing where I feel the BBC canon has left us as of the end of Season 3, with some consideration of hints they've dropped about Season 4. It's challenging, to say the least.

First, some obvious elements: Mary is staying on, which most of you know I don't mind--but which does leave us with some likely limits on where they will go, or how. So far they show no serious sign of concluding Mary and John are a poorly matched, unhappy couple, in spite of the drama and conflict of "His Last Vow." I still feel they resolved the emotional aspect of that pairing pretty conclusively and, to my own mind, plausibly. Please note this is NOT a comment that there's no drama left to be played out--it's just my standing position that the "not aiming to kill" argument is "true," that Mary never intended to kill Sherlock, that Sherlock himself not only holds no grudge, but is sympathetic to Mary's choice and her reasoning in not-killing him, and that John himself has accepted that logic. I really do not see any convincing signs that from the "reveal" in the Empty Houses on Sherlock and John are "lying" to Mary about how either of them feel, or trying to trick her in any way.

But if this is true, then further drama is likely to come not from the relationship's inherent problems, but from outside stressors--further reveals of who Mary was once, further threats from her enemies, and, of course the usual array of situational drama that comes out in any Sherlock mystery. Stuff will happen, and John, Mary, and Sherlock will respond in keeping with their characters, but the originating issues may not begin with John/Mary as such. Again, I'm one of the obdurate doubters who finds Evil Mary singularly unlikely and unconvincing--out of character for Moffat, Gatis, and Thompson, out of keeping for the original ACD characters and canon whom MGT respect, and out of keeping for the actors as we know them to be enthusiastic over. I just have a very hard time imagining Amanda Abbingdon, Martin Freeman, or Benedict Cumberbatch being thrilled out of their socks, and moved to the point of tears over Evil Mary plots. It seems improbable to me.

We know Janine's going to be back--and that Sherlock still very definitely likes her, as a person if not as a romance. Moffat and Gatiss us he really likes her. So Janine-in-Sussex is on the slate to show up.

We know that Moffat and Gatiss expect this season to go dark and stormy. A tear-jerker--maybe even a tear-jerker from the very beginning, depending on how we interpret Gatiss' comments about how they always start with a reintroduction and then go dark. He seems to imply that this time they may go for a reintroduction and start dark. We know it's supposed to be dark in ways that make the actors cry.
One assumes they are not weeping with laughter--though MOffat and Gatiss are quite capable of sleight of hand in that respect.

We know we're getting four eps to work with this time out--a Christmas Special that Martin Freeman is actually enthusiastic about (which given some of his overall attitude to the fluff-pieces of standard TV suggests it's NOT your average all-sentiment/no-meat Christmas fare).

If Mary lasts the season--the WHOLE season--it seems likely that the baby will be born early. If the powers that be are smart, they may even get the wriggling little worm born before the first episode. Or not. I can see them getting some mileage out of Sherlock and John and Mary with a baby on the way, rather as they got great mileage out of the assumption that Sherlock HAD to be John's Best Man. Granted, that leads to Lamaze breathing and Sherlock taking over entirely and absolutely requires that the baby be born in the back of a cab, because where else is Sherlock's godbaby going to be born, after all? With all the time that lot spend in cabs it would be a statistical anomaly if the baby wasn't born in one--or at least almost born in one.

I keep imagining the Christmas special as being built loosely around "Blue Carbuncle," but with poor Mary as the goose in the end, delivering her precious treasure as Sherlock pronounces the solution to the mystery. That's mainly just me waxing silly, though...

Now, on a more serious note, where are we at the end of Season 3?

Sherlock has committed murder and claimed the "high-functioning sociopath" title as his self-identification once more. Mycroft, seeming more than a bit grim and stunned, appears to have accepted that "murderer" is in fact the correct classification for Baby Brother, even if he maintains Sherlock's worth and use--and appears thrilled to be able to call Sherlock back from exile. One still has the feeling that the act of murder was a meaningful line for Sherlock to have crossed over, in Mycroft's understanding of reality. Further, there's still the fact that Sherlock appears to have betrayed Mycroft on the way to the murder--meaning to win against Magnussen and show off for Mycroft, Sherlock placed Mycroft in a fairly embarrassing position, what with the loss of the laptop and the special ops team and the kid-brother-committing-murder and the whole question of what to do afterward. So at least some degree of wariness between the brothers seems possible, and some areas of renewed distrust on both sides.

Lestrade's a fascinating question mark at this point: he's absolutely a valued element in the show, MGT work hard to find ways to keep him part of the arcs, but Season 3 didn't have him working closely with Sherlock--and did reveal an odd, unexplained, and dramatically game-changing alliance with Mycroft. That's a biggie, and of course as a Mystrade lover, it's got me pacing up and down everything we've been given about the two men, trying to work out what MGT are doing with them...and, yes, I do honestly think they're *doing* something, not just doing any old thing so long as it keeps Lestrade in the picture for another season.

Looking just at Lestrade and Mycroft, we're left with an odd, odd track. The first suggestion the two work together comes in direct association with the first clear hints that Lestrade's divorced or separated from his wife...and comes with an edgy, complicated little sequence between Sherlock and Lestrade that I keep poking at. Those two actors were *acting* for that scene. There's nothing in their interaction during "Hounds of Baskerville" that seems empty or casual...each phrase, each beat of timing, each moment when eyes meet--or avoid meeting--suggests that there's a vast ocean of unstated subtext that John misses completely, and that we viewers in the audience can only guess at for the moment, because the data just isn't in. But--it's such a dense little scene, when Lestrade materializes at Baskerville. The explosion of pouting, tantrumy anger when Sherlock sees Lestrade. The accusation of Lestrade being Sherlock's handler, and Lestrade only being there at Mycroft's insistence. Lestrade's impressively tense insistence that he doesn't just do what Mycroft
says. The careful visual framing of the now-empty ring-finger, lacking the wedding ring. The statement that Lestrade's just come off holiday--brown as a nut, after all. Only...was he on holiday, or was he overseas on yet another assignment for Mycroft? What in the world is his role?

John misses all that. Misses the tensions sweeping back and forth between Sherlock and the usually imperturbable Lestrade. Think about it--he's more disturbed by Sherlock's attack at Baskerville than he is by Sherlock's prior revelations about the sinning wife, or even about the way Sherlock takes down Molly. That fight, over Lestrade's role as Sherlock's handler and as Mycroft's subordinate *matters* to both men--and John barely notices, seeming to see it merely as yet another example of Sherlock's social abbrasiveness, which he can write off as meaningless, and sweep under the counter by giving Lestrade a "job."

If that scene really says anything important, then all the rest of the Mycroft and Lestrade material is colored by it--and that suggests that Season 3 and the lead-in, "Many Happy Returns," may be complicated. I've done most of this before--the questions about what Lestrade knows and does nto know about Sherlock's death and absence. The suspicion that Lestrade "handles" Anderson and John and others during the Hiatus, under Mycroft's supervision. The peculiar feeling that his greeting of Sherlock is too knowing and easy for someone who truly believed Sherlock dead and feeing the worms. The timing of the Waters gang material, which suggests laying down foundations for later reveals--ensuring that the apparent "hand out" of a mini-story for Lestrade is no hand-out at all, but good advance planning. Then you add in both Lestrade and Mycroft, in their varied ways, appearing profoundly glum and unsettled at the time of John's wedding. And the scene in the office, somehow hot and cold, distant yet intimate at the same time...

There's a story being told and sometimes I go half mad wanting to rip aside the veils and refuse to wait any longer, wishing I could "interrogate the text" far beyond what the performances and white spaces seem to offer.

All of that stuff seems to leave us, to my eye, with Lestrade and Mycroft joined--but separate and isolated from each other in some ways. They leave us with *Sherlock* seeming more and more isolated from both older men: John and Mary and Janine and drugs and Magnussen and even the fight with Molly have pulled him away from Big Brother and Big Brother's right hand man. Yet the marriage with Mary has in some profound ways isolated Sherlock from John, too--or at least changed the basis of the relationship, while expanding Sherlock's social ties. He's gained Mary and Janine at the least--and he does appear to value both. He's about to have a pseudo-neice.

So--where do we go with all this to "go dark"?

The murder/sociopath elements seem possible. Especially as John, Mary, and Sherlock all seem to come under the heading. One high-functioning sociopath with Mr. and Mrs. Psychopath, forming a happy little tri of violent, dangerous players. Indeed, given last season it seems almost essential at some point to go dark on that subject material--it's been brooding under the surface since John Watson, formerly of the Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers, showed up with his service revolver and his bitter despair and his hunger for action, only to be introduced to the Great Detective--a man some people thought was a serial killer waiting to blossom forth. Moffat and Gatiss and all the actors seem quite in sync with each other on that: these are not safe, "nice" people. Not really. Not when you think about it much. John's a vet with some form of PTSD, even if it's not the form poor Ella thought. John may not want to escape the battle-field--but there's simply no room for doubt that the battle and the violence haunt him, set him at odds with himself, provoke hungers and doubts and desires he's not easy with. John's conflicted--in ways Sherlock never can be, never seems to even consider.

(Sorry, OMG, I have to stick this in here before I forget it, because it works... If John's a conflicted
killer with a powerful attraction to danger and to dangerous people, and he's in love with and married to Mary, who's a former assassin who nearly killed his best friend, and Sherlock's a killer (as implied by his time taking down Moriarty's network, at the very least) but has never been in a position to demonstrate that to John--and has indeed thought of John as a life-saver and a healer *MORE* than he's tended to actually think about John as a dark knight warrior... If Sherlock, on some level, really does feel in competition with Mary for John's attention and affection on any basis at all...romantic OR Platonic... If Sherlock's aware of himself as being in some respects Mary's rival....and if Sherlock himself is just beginning to come to terms with John's fascination with danger and death...

What are the odds that at least on some level killing Magnussen was a monumental case of showing off like a peacock for a very select audience--for a man who responds to that sort of thing?

Sorry-sorry-sorry, but that just clicked into place for me and made the most disturbing sense...and could go so very far in adding to a "dark season." And so help me, what we've got on Sherlock so far suggests already that his capacity for violence was a form of showing off for Mycroft....

Oh. My. Ok. You know, there's a tendency to turn all affection, all envy, all showing off, all jealousy, all possessiveness, into SEX. But it's not. We posture for everyone we care for. We show off to the people who matter. We fight them and love them and hurt them over and over. And there's Magnussen, the nexus of all Sherlock's major loves in Season 3: John and Mary and Mycroft and Janine, all under Mangussen's cold, cold glare...and killing Magnussen rewarding so many different motivations for Sherlock, both good motives and bad....

So, yeah. Anyway, coming back out of that parenthetical haze of conjecture, the whole danger/death bond between John, Mary, and Sherlock looks like one heck of a likely choice to take our heroes down dark paths for Season 4.

Another, that I think less likely as overt plot/narrative material, but quite a lot more likely as covert, subtext material, is the entire question of what John and Sherlock are to each other, and whether either of them have the tools needed to maintain the relationship without destroying each other and the people around them. Right now they've got John self-identifying strongly as straight...yes, I'm sorry, I've said it before, but given the context and the use, I see no reasonable argument that John's a happy and stable bi using verbal evasions to tip-toe around social conventions. So far every sign seems to lead to John's understanding of himself being heterosexual, period, full-stop. If John's gay, he's in such deep denial that "conversion" becomes a major soap opera. Sherlock's...whatever. I find him plausible as any number of things, but most plausible as a somewhat self-delusional bi with some odd hangups that look more Victorian than modern--but to me he and John absolutely are emotionally entangled, in a state akin to limerance. It may be asexual charismatic obsession. It may be suppressed homosexual romance. It may be a lot of things. But as expressed to date, it's lock-step mutual fascination and partnership, regardless of sexuality, and a level of jealousy, possessiveness, and fixation on both sides.

Exploring that could easily take the two down a dark path, and given John as written to date, I think it could lead to a season-ending cliff-hanger that would reduce not just the actors to tears. If John's as self-identifyingly straight as he seems to be, if a large part of his core sense of self depends on his assessment of himself as straight, then Sherlock challenging that self-understanding could be a breaking point--especially if Mary dies or is lost in some way, and Sherlock blunders into offering himself and his friendship as a compensating bond. Even if Sherlock doesn't see his offer as implying sexual association, I can easily see it raising John's hackles, and threatening his sense of self and his sense of loyalty to his lost wife. So, yeah. That seems like another possible route into darkness.
Mary? Truth? I don't think they're going to make her the center of things, except perhaps to the degree her backstory will make her the major McGuffin. I can see the reveals of her background, the entrance of her enemies, the threat to her family all being dark elements--but I really do think the majority of her own personal dark-soul reveal happened. If anything I think her coming reveals are going to lighten her back up a bit, in terms of the Good/Evil front.

Mycroft and Lestrade and darkness... Those two have become more and more deeply and delicately woven into Sherlock and John's story, all without ever giving away the real central secrets. I do think Mycroft and Lestrade are lawful good, where Sherlock and John and Mary waver a lot between chaos, law, good, and neutral. Mycroft and Lestrade are government and law and order and stability and tradition and righteousness--even though Mycroft is also dark and deceptive and at home amongst the shadows, he keeps coming across as someone whose ideals and goals align with lawful order. Even his lies will be lies in service to Queen and Country, if that makes sense. Again, sooty angels. But in an interesting way that suggests that Sherlock and John and Mary could drag Mycroft and Lestrade out into the extremes of their own comfort zones, and torment them with ambiguities and compromises that will haunt them--and that Mycroft and Lestrade could, in the service of light, find themselves calling on Sherlock and John and Mary to be powers of darkness.

Moriarty?

I'm sorry, I still don't take "Moriarty is alive" all that seriously. Not the Moriarty that shot himself. I'm with Moffat: he shot himself in the face. You don't come back from that. It's not like Molly would have been helping cover his death, too. So, no: the guy who shot himself is dead. That leaves open the question of whether he was the One True Moriarty--and whether there ever is such a thing. It does feel, given the promo hits, as though Andrew Scott will be back, but no way of knowing if he will be back as Moriarty, or as another character, or as flashbacks, or as a character haunting Sherlock's Mind Palace, or what.

The Seven-Percent Solution was such a popular hit, and the mutual admiration between Nicholas Meyer and MGT is so clear, that I can't help being a bit tempted by the idea of Sherlock going more than a bit mad, more than a bit druggy, and becoming obsessive about a largely delusional Moriarty. Which could certainly take us down a dark path again. Sherlock's descent into darkness; John's Orphean trip to bring him back up into the sunlight of sanity. I'd be amazed if MGT didn't at least haul that notion past us as a hat-tip, a homage--and a fine red herring. It would be almost too tempting to resist, really.

I don't know. I keep looking at what they've given us, and at the hanging threads and the foreshadowed elements, and the half-hidden plot and character arcs, and thinking of their push to say they're going dark...and wondering. This isn't just a "darker Doctor Who." Not with the kinds of tropes they're tossing out. This looks like a planned trip to the darkside of the moon...

It's Sherlock. It's still going to be fun. It's still going to be loving. It's still going to be funny as hell a lot of the time. In the end, given all the individuals involved, i think it's still going to be ironically optimistic and redemptive and joyful. But--yeah. This one feels like it's going to actually pay some attention to the truly dark, scary elements of the characters that they usually plaster over with wit and clever editing.

And, to go back to a previous thing...because it just drives me mad--

Really, that scene between Sherlock and Lestrade at Baskerville...does anyone else see that as being some condensed, complex, intricate acting on the part of Cumberbatch and Graves, with poor Freeman having to play clueless in the face of serious interpersonal riptides? I've been an (amateur)
director. No, actually, I've been a semi-pro director, now I think about it, and a semi-pro assistant
director. I'm used to taking performances apart--and this one just keeps leaving me all jaw-dropped
and fascinated. I mean--really. Is it just me? Or do any of the rest of you find that tiny bit of
interplay really intriguing, and really, really not accidental on the part of the performers?
So If He's Not Sherlock's Handler, What IS He?

Chapter Summary

A brief brood. Just--trying to make sense of it.

I keep trying to make sense of Lestrade--I think there is a sense to be made. I mean, I don't think they're just throwing in odd bits and pieces rather arbitrarily when they are convenient for the show. It's just, I feel like I'm not seeing something.

We have the argument at the Crossed Keys in "Baskerville." Sherlock directly accuses Lestrade of being his "handler" under Mycroft's command. Lestrade insists he's not Sherlock's handler, and he doesn't just do what Mycroft tells him. He doesn't manage much of an argument that he's not there at Mycroft's request, though, and he manages to make a dog's dinner of any claim he isn't at least in part under Mycroft's command. He just have areas that are not under Mycroft's command.

One of the most interesting things, though, is once you know it's true--that Lestrade really does work with Mycroft and that part of his job includes surveillance of Sherlock--you can go back and watch that scene play out again and notice that, yes, the actors were performing two men who both knew quite well there was a huge subtext. They're short-handing, but they're reacting to ideas larger and more complicated than the shorthand accounts for.

The very first time one heard it, if one was watching in order as they showed, the argument sounded most of all like Mycroft had informally abused power to sort-of kind-of conscript a Met Detective to play nursemaid to Sherlock. Yes, the word "handler" is specific, but with Sherlock pouting and flouncing away like that, and the lingering sense they'd created of Mycroft appearing to exceed his proper authority to keep an eye on baby brother, it's easy to just hear "interfering Mycroft has once again misused power." Time has suggested since then that Mycroft probably does not misuse power, in that Sherlock's doings are in some sense well within Mycroft's purview, though. Just as importantly, we've seen enough more to make it seem more likely that terms like "handler" are being used in the espionage sense, not in the civilian sense of someone who wrangles difficult entities. It shifts just a bit from "Greg Lestrade, Holmes-wrangler" to "Greg Lestrade, spymaster of Holmes, under authority of Holmes."

But Greg insists he's not Sherlock's handler, and that he's not just under Mycroft's command. That suggests that whatever and whoever he is, if he's under Mycroft's command it's conditional, with his true loyalty to other, or higher authorities when Mycroftian conditions are not met. It also suggests that regardless of Sherlock's ego, his key function is not hovering over Sherlock keeping an eye on him. (amused grin) That he may even find that particular aspect of his job a bit annoying, and prefer when he's not obliged to treat Sherlock as a wayward wild card who needs to be watched over, and can teat him more like a colleague and an independent member of the team. Whatever, it's clear from his own harried sulk as Sherlock lights into him that Sherlock's picture of things isn't entirely accurate, and to the extent it is accurate it's annoying.

In "Many Happy Returns," we see Greg appearing to do some management of Anderson and John--with the one insisting on Sherlock's apparent death, with the other seeming to want to remind John of Sherlock's complexity. He pushes John hard to watch that disk, all the while kind of pretending he's not pushing...but, yeah. He's pushing. When Sherlock does return, I still hold that Lestrade
doesn't read as though he'd completely believed Sherlock to be dead--but he also doesn't read as someone who was in the loop as to his return, either. To me, he comes across as having at least had severe suspicions Sherlock lived, but no suspicion he was going to show up in that car park that night.

We still have no idea how he survived the kerfuffle at the Met with his rank intact and his team missing only Anderson. Nor do we know how Anderson ultimately ends up serving Mycroft later, in "Vow." Those points are unsettling in their own way, suggesting that fairly early in the investigation following Sherlock's death, someone stepped in and cleared Lestrade completely and categorically of having been suckered by a Vile Criminal Mind. Why do I say that? Because a two-year investigation that's only being wrapped up during "Empty-Hearse" would have derailed Lestrade for much of that time, and done odd and distressing things to his team. Now, I will admit, Anderson's Sherlockian monomania would be grounds to remove him from the team no matter what the findings--but leaving Lestrade in command over Donovan and Anderso, who'd gone over his head to push their Evil Sherlock theory--in the process revealing that Lestrade had been dodging Met rules for Sherlock for ages--should not normally have resolved in the Met leaving Lestrade in charge, with authority over his two "betrayers." A serious police force running a serious investigation would have separated Lestrade from Donovan and Anderson because it's too easy for him, as their superior, to take his revenge in nasty little ways, and to attempt to pressure them to change their story.

The only thing I can imagine is that the "real" investigation ended within days, if not hours, of Sherlock's jump, with a revelation to Met command that Lestrade was working as an an agent of government WITH an agent of government--that he and Sherlock were where they were, doing what they were, because it was required of them. Someone in Met Command should ideally have known this, unless Met Command was being investigated in its own right...but one can easily imagine that any knowledge of Lestrade and Sherlock's activites was a very limited commodity, and that it was strictly on a need-to-know basis. With the apparent death and the hella outcry over Sherlock's supposed Vile Evilness, need to know would extend a bit farther. There may have remained an ongoing investigation of some sort--but it seems more likely that there was merely a front of some sort for the public, with the Met itself returning to business as usual after reporting that Lestrade had been cleared of negligence, criminal actions, or rule-breaking. Then the "real investigation" would resolve only when and if Sherlock came back: a "completed investigation" that happens only when the powers that be determine it's useful.

That does add an interesting layer to the question of how much Lestrade knows about Sherlock's return. I still hold he didn't expect Sherlock in the car park that night. But--given what we KNOW he knew, and what has to have happened to return him to his position as DI over Donovan and Anderson, and given that he almost has to be aware when the "official investigation" is wrapped up that it has to be a ploy of some sort for the convenience of higher powers, one suspects he has to have had some suspicions. Of all the people in the show, Lestrade's got to be the most aware of the bogus nature of the real investigation and the PR/manipulative function of the public resolution and clearing of Sherlock's name. I mean--I don't see any way for him not to be aware that the whole investigation thing was "resolved" early--thus allowing him to return to his old post--and that the public resolution is, therefore, "really" about something else.

We know Lestrade was back on duty with Donovan as his DS because we know he's after the Waters gang eighteen months prior to John and Mary's wedding--which occurs just about a half-year after Sherlock's return. I suspect he was back on duty earlier than that--there's no sign at any point in the little Waters Gang story that Lestrade's just returning from disgrace. And while Sally's unhappy that another copper is going to grab the credit from Lestrade when he bails to go "rescue" Sherlock, she doesn't read as being frightened for his continued career--so her own experience would seem to suggest that she's seen enough to guess that the Met will treat his actions as
legitimate. I'm fascinated at that. I keep trying to imagine any other commander abandoning the point in mid-raid for anything less than a catastrophic family emergency, and i draw a blank. "Sorry, I knew we were about to bust the bad guys, but I got a call in on another line" just doesn't seem to cut it, unless the Met on some level now knows Lestrade answers to a higher authority.

That authority really doesn't look like it's just Mycroft. Lestrade and Mycroft, for example, have two different sets of information about Sherlock in their respective files--Lestrade knows one set of Sherlock's bolt-holes, Mycroft knows a larger set. It could be that big brother just knows little brother better, but they're working very much as though they're sharing data on a subject both surveil. Lestrade reports to Mycroft--but his voice doing so "feels' more "partner" than "subordinate to superior." Mycroft waves Lestrade away, but it's an "I'm working on something critical here" wave, not really a "get thee hence" wave.

Mycroft's got enough power and authority that it complicates trying to work out a command structure in which he doesn't become the black hole that sucks up all other authority--but it does look as though Lestrade really doesn't "just do what [Sherlock's] brother tells him."

I still like my Mi5 agent seconded to MI6 theory. But I'm having a hella time trying to work out how the background heirarchy would work and be structured, and to what degree Mycroft and Lestrade work as peers, and to what degree Lestrade works as subordinate to Mycroft. And what the whole point is. Keeping watch over Sherlock really does appear to be part of it.

I haven't read any fan meta giving much consideration to the fact that when Lestrade's reporting to Mycroft over Sherlock's escape from hospital, he reports "known bolt-holes," in a style and voice that suggest this is official case information: something that is known about Sherlock through surveillance. Mycroft responds in much the same voice. In that section they appear to be talking about a subject of investigation at least as much as they're talking about a friend and brother. Maybe even more. And we've known since the first episode that Sherlock's under surveillance: Mycroft jumps him a level and adds in John to the subject list when John first shows up. We were encouraged to think of that as Mycroft exceeding his proper role--but more and more it looks like it was Mycroft faithfully performing his proper role. His JOB includes spying on Sherlock. Lestrade's job also, apparently, involves spying on Sherlock. Sherlock appears to know this at some level, based on a plethora of comments, and on things like his reaction to Lestrade arriving at the Crossed Keys. On some level Sherlock resents it all. On another he seems to consider it at the very least inevitable. He's certainly not raging against it as uncalled for or unjust--which he does about anything he does think crosses the line.

Thus I conclude that Sherlock feels that, for better or worse, much though he may resent it, there is reason for him to be the subject of intense governmental espionage oversight. He's a watched man...and has been since the beginning of our association with him.

Which leads me to another conclusion: we may not know who and what Lestrade is, until we know why Sherlock's the subject of ongoing surveillance while at the same time being someone the various spy agencies will trust out in the field chasing Moriarty's network. I mean, Sherlock's a spy--and at the same time he's a spy the other spies spy on, with his knowledge.

It also leads to the inevitable questions about The Other One. I mean--Mycroft's one mention of The Other One is in such a fraught setting and in such a context as to suggest that The Other One got him or herself into some bodaciously bad trouble. Does Sherlock rate surveilance in part because of what The Other One did?

I know the entire world and all are delighting in guesses that Tom Hiddleston is "The Other." Or will play "The Other." That seems dubious: first, Hiddleston's distinctly younger than
Cumberbatch, which means that unless the do a flashback they have to deal with Hiddleston as the youngest brother. That flies in the face of all the Great Game conjecture of Sherringford as the oldest--but also tangles us up in that Sherlock so very much reads as the baby brother. It's almost impossible to imagine Sherlock as the middle brother--at least, not unless he were the middle brother, but the first and only boy, or in some other way set up for spoiling the other kids do not get. Maybe the invalid? In any case, it just seems an odd choice, and an odder choice logistically in a show that's having trouble setting up schedules because its two stars are already so successful. Adding a major light like Hiddleston to their scheduling nightmare seems masochistic at best, unless everyone is frantically delighted with the idea and fighting hard to make it happen.

Hmmmph. I digress. But, then, I always digress. Back to Lestrade...

He's Met--we know that. He does that job, and he does it even when Sherlock's not there. He also works with Mycroft keeping surveillance on Sherlock, and the two definitely seem to work in partnership to keep Sherlock safe. Mycroft's in a position to at least suggest Lestrade head out to Baskerville when he thinks baby brother may be in over his head. Sherlock's presence in Baskerville suggests that he may have had yet another motive all along--to penetrate one of big brother's secret sites. He doesn't take the case until he sees a connection between Bluebell the bunny and the Baskerville Hound story, leaving the intriguing question open that Sherlock's real interest from the beginning was to learn what goes on at Baskerville. Why does Sherlock want to spy on his own country's top-secret projects? Why does Mycroft let it happen, and send him Lestrade as wing-man? Why is Sherlock furious at first--then happy enough to make use of Lestrade when he needs backup and guns?

Mycroft and Sherlock don't work on "the same side." And yet, sometimes they do. Sherlock surveils projects in Mycroft's purview. Mycroft trusts Sherlock to work on cases inside Mycroft's purview--cases that involve classified information. They work together--except when they pointedly don't. And somewhere Lestrade fits into all this--trusted by both brothers, working with both brothers, apparently more aware than we knew at first of the secrets of both brothers--and NOT ultimately just under Mycroft's command OR purely loyal to Sherlock alone.

Dang it. He's such an intriguing character. I do hope it's not all just accidental "epileptic trees." It seems intended and thought out, to me--but, then, it would, wouldn't it? Sigh...
EDITED and REVISED: Sherlock, through the lens of his relationships

Chapter Summary

Let's be honest--I don't do Sherlock all that much as just Sherlock. I suppose in part it's because everyone else has done Sherlock and a whole lot of you have done him well. But tonight for a couple reasons I want to try looking at Sherlock...

"A riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma."

That was the aphorism coined by Churchill to describe Russia to much of the West. It's a lovely coinage--layer after layer of ambiguity. It seems perfect, in many ways, to grab it for Sherlock...Sherlock, who's so reflexively unwiling to be "understood."

He's got a point. There's an old children's classic called *Understood Betsy* that points out the constant dangers of being too well understood by people around you. Their very understanding limits you, muffles you, closes off choices, points you in expected directions. If you're too understood, you may miss something about yourself you never knew before, that you would never have learned about doing the things you're understood to do, in the ways you're understood to do them.

Sherlock does not much like to be too well understood.

It is, perhaps, one of the most obvious things about him, when you come to think of it. He's a genius, with extensive learned recognition of human behavior, even if he may be a bit limited in intuitive, instinctive understanding. He's verbally fluent--indeed, often so exact and precise that he sends truths out into the world naked and ashamed, when anyone else would have draped them in a modest robe of evasion and ambiguity. If Sherlock wishes for people to understand him, it seems quite probable he could make himself understood. It isn't accident or pure inarticulate befuddlement that reduces Sherlock to riddles and mysteries and enigmas--or at least, not always.

Sherlock seems to enjoy playing on the fact that people don't think in the patterns he thinks, or feel in quite the ways he feels. The lack of understanding gives Sherlock power, freedom to maneuver, protection...and he often uses his ability to obscure truth to trick his way to the outcomes he wants.

When refusing to ever quite tell John directly if he's straight, or gay, or bi, or neither, or some odd combination of the all that, or arroused by the corpses in Molly's morgue...Sherlock keeps the upper hand. "Not gay" John has said something to define himself at a core level. There's something he's NOT. He's closed a door. Sherlock? He's married to his work, girlfriends (and possibly boyfriends) are not his area, it's all good...but we don't know a damn thing for sure about his sexuality at the end of that conversation except that he's encouraging John to consider it irrelevant to their rooming together. The question is a non-starter. Sherlock? We honestly learn nothing from that dialog except that he's not choosing for JOhn to think of him as anything but a sexual null zone.

That's powerful. Sherlock knows and understands something about John. John actually knows far less about Sherlock and Sherlock has far more room to determine how he wants to proceed.
(Addendum: In retrospect, we do learn one thing that fans often seem to ignore. When Sherlock first suspects John's coming on to him, he's uneasy, embarrassed, and in a very rare show of mannerly tact, he declines what he thinks was the start of....hmmm. Not an invitation, but a guided exploration. We learn that whatever else is true about Sherlock, he was not expecting, seeking, or inclined to encourage John as a suitor. We also learn that while embarrassed and unwilling, he's also inclined to be quite extraordinarily socially gentle. I bring this up, because to me it sheds a lot of light on Sherlock in ways seldom considered. He's not offended, he's not defensive, he's not interested, but he is kind--and for Sherlock to be kind suggests that somewhere, at some point, he was shown the damage caused by the unkind. And now I think I need to write a story....)

Sherlock hides so much about himself, choosing not to promote being understood or known. John, his best friend, a man he is willing to admit he loves more than anyone else in the world, doesn't know Sherlock has living parents for something approaching five to six years after meeting him--two years after losing him. John only knows Sherlock has a brother because Mycroft refuses to disappear into the veils and mists Sherlock hangs around himself and his background. (Gawd, I am now imagining Sherlock in the very center of a maze of sheer veils and draperies, all hanging from a labyrinth of clothes lines--and Mycroft stomping directly to the center of the maze batting sheer fabric aside with his brolly and muttering about idiot romantic notions his baby brother inflicts on him...)

Sherlock tells the bits and pieces of his past that, in his mind, reflect on who he wants to be seen as. Well--we all do. Sherlock's better at his PR-spin, though.

We know he's got Mrs. Hudson, and that he helped her get her husband electrocuted....which should have told us early that Sherlock's not too nice to see someone die if he thinks the world is better off without them. We know he went to uni. We know he can play dodge-'em with bureaucracies on a level that is positively scary: his access to the Met and to Molly's morgue should not, rightly speaking, be possible. We know he's amoral as a cat, or worse. He'll filch Lestrade's warrant card, toddle off with Mycroft's highest-security ID pass, and sulk like a bear with a toothache if he's scolded for it. He's perfectly delighted that his best friend and roomie can and will kill for him.

We think he has a degree with suggestions of an advanced degree in some field of chemistry. Or...no. We know Molly thinks he has such a degree, which is a totally different thing. Molly's "understanding" of Sherlock ranges from brilliantly perceptive to bitterly clueless, and it's not easy to tell which is dominant on any particular issue.

What do we KNOW about Sherlock?

We know with fairly high certainty that he's the brother of one of the most important men in Great Britian--possibly the single most important and powerful man.

We know he's got fighting skills and weapons skills that complement the career expectations of a James-Bond style fictional secret agent.

We know he can go underground for two years, dealing with and eliminating professional criminals, terrorists, thugs, murderers, spies, traitors and assassins. He can beat them at their own game so well that he's a one-man exterminator with only such support as Mycroft and MI6 can supply on an improvisational basis. In the Exile, he takes the whole Dark Knight vigilante thing and kicks it up a notch. (Addendum: this is another little thing few fans seem to comment on. Neat, clean, well-groomed Sherlock's response to the hunt appears to be to go seriously feral.)
Even assuming his hair grows quickly, there's little sign he ever cuts it from the time he begins the hunt until he lands in the barber chair in Mycroft's office. Seriously, that looks like just about exactly two years' growth. While he doesn't quite to dreads, he does not appear to have made much effort at upkeep. He's matted, unkempt, half-wild, grubby... He shows every sign of having gone Tarzan or Mowgli during the exile, as though for two years his complete and obsessive focus was on the hunt. Just as he is known to abuse and neglect his "transport" on a case, he neglected his transport and its care and grooming on the hunt.

We know he and Mycroft are very close, in spite of their issues--and that within their difficulties, they still maintain a tight relationship that is often expressed through teasing, snark, hyperbole on both sides, stroppy sulks on both sides...

And we know by now that all that verbal firestorm is far more armor and disguise than it is loathing on either side. They love each other, and that love not only survives their mutual "merry war," but is often expressed through the fireworks.

Does that tell us anything?

It might. Judging by what we've seen, it seems likely that Sherlock himself doesn't know how to express that much close, loving intimacy *except* through the teasing, mocking, conflicted exchanges he and Mycroft fall into. If you look at Sherlock's behavior toward Lestrade and John, the more he trusts them, the more he cares about them, the more they're entrenched parts of his life--the more likely he is to razz them, take them down a notch, show off and try to get the better of them. It's as though the only way he knows how to say "I love you like a brother," is to treat John and Lestrade much as he treats Mycroft: competitively, rudely, judgementally, aggressively, insultingly, but always with a tendency to hang on tight and never, never let go.

One suspects that neither Lestrade nor John fully get this, nor would entirely appreciate it if they did.

I myself think he has different rules for women he loves. He can be horribly hurtful, and he doesn't easily "walk a mile in their shoes." But he's got a hidden streak of gallantry and chivalry that rises when "his" women are in danger.

Moffat has commented that the women in the show--women largely not present in ACD canon--are the ones who have sussed out the most of Sherlock's true nature. The razzle dazzle and gamesmanship he uses to keep his male associates off balance seem to work rather poorly with his associated women. Even when his BS works--it misfires in ways that tie to the women's ability to still see farther into truth than Sherlock expects. Sometimes farther than he himself is willing to admit until they nail him for it.

Irene, Molly, Mrs. Hudson, Janine, Mary: each of them has managed to land staggering body blows on Sherlock that left him gasping and fighting to recover. Each, though, has also summoned up a tender, fragile, spring-green sweetness in Sherlock, too.

We don't know if Sherlock is straight or gay or bi. We do know that the women in his life are holding increasingly vital positions in his life. (**Addendum: We also know he cherishes the women in his life. As terrible as he can be, his actions demonstrate the scope of the value he sees in the women in his life.**)

With other men, Sherlock's someone with the attitude, aggression, and competitiveness to be a pack alpha, but none of the desire to take on the burdens that go with that particular form of dominance. He feels compelled to fight for status and dominance--and then run before anyone can
ask him to sign a contract and agree to any mandatory duties.

In interviews that seem to be walking delicately around issues of slash, Cumberbatch has commented on the very "male" nature of the relationship between John and Sherlock, and particularly in Freeman's performance of John. I'm in a very poor position to try to talk about all the ways professional actors, writers, and show-runners dodge too much reality in interviews, but I've always myself felt that Cumberbatch seems to be trying to say that the relationship shown, and the love Freeman plays, matches Benedict's experience of and understanding of male friendships, entirely aside from sexuality. "This is how men who love each other behave."

Looking around at the men I've known, that rings true. Men, as I have experienced them, often aren't able to eliminate status challenges, or showing off, or jockeying for dominance, or teasing, or mock battles, or "play" that is buried in mock combat forms. Men ARE, however, able to subvert those patterns into pure play--deep, loving, inarticulate, but still understood.

Sherlock seems to say so much about men's love, entirely aside from sexuality. It's in Mycroft's constant worry for his baby brother. It's in Lestrade's growling, "You bastard," before clutching Sherlock tight. It's in Sherlock's mute, dumbstruck endurance of that embrace. It's in John's instant loyalty, beyond all reason, beyond all justice. It's in the constancy of the pack. It's in the showing off--John, Sherlock, Lestrade, Mycroft--all showing off for each other, finding such very British ways of saying "Hey, hold my beer, Bubba--watch this!"

In a very odd way, it's not that Sherlock doesn't know how to behave around friends--it's that he ONLY knows the modes of close male bonding. For anything but the kind of intense affection he experiences for John, Mycroft, and Lestrade, he's either too hot or too cold. Too strong, or too weak. Too MUCH. Far, far too much.

If so, it makes sense in the context we're seeing and learning. If he indeed lived inside the private purdah of his family without outside contact until at least somewhat late in the game, he'd have learned only the patterns of intimate relationship.

Mycroft, who knows the patterns of *adulthood*, can pass--but it's worth noting that while Mycroft appears to pass better than Sherlock as a professional, he appears to do even less well that Sherlock when it comes to building a new "family" of friends. Sherlock learned how to have a big brother from his cradle on. Mycroft only learned how to have a baby brother, and he didn't really have to start navigating that terrain until well after he was seven. Sherlock would have had to hit toddler age before Mycroft would have really started modifying his social skills to take Sherlock into account.

But back to Sherlock--

Sherlock knows how to be a brother among brothers. He knows how to tease. He knows to keep a stiff upper lip. He knows how to manipulate big brothers...and he does so with all three of the primary men in his life.

Sherlock is only just beginning to learn about having sisters...and he seems to be quietly, slowly amazed.

He's lucky in his sister/friend/lover/mothers. Every one, even Irene, is tender and aware of his fragility. As much as Irene hurts him--she spares him many of the worst blows, and leaves him with his core intact--not least because, like him, she's far more interested in the game than in the "relationship." They both bring a certain odd, dispassionate joy to their interaction based on the degree to which they love because of the game, rather than in spite of it.
Molly sees him and is as faithful and as firm as John. Mary knows when Sherlock lies--and understands the fears he may not even admit to himself. Mrs. Hudson wraps him in a warm, accepting, cleverly, wickedly weird love that he thrives in.

Sherlock--the details of Sherlock--are riddles, mysteries, enigmas. His relationships, though, are not. We can see them acted out, and see the flaws, the mutual misunderstandings, the failures to connect, the abuses, the moments when each character hurts the other. But we don't have to wonder at this point, after three seasons, whether Sherlock really does care, whether this isn't all just some sociopathic game.

It's not. We've seen too much to doubt, now.

The "answers" to who Sherlock is may be slow coming, if they ever come. Moffat and Gatiss KNOW the old Sherlockian Great Game of rationalizing canon and gleefully papering over contradictions, gaps, outright errors, etc. I don't think they are unaware of the fact that you not only can't tell everything about Sherlock without ruining the game--you would probably break the viewers' hearts if you did. But after three seasons we do have what we need to be getting on with. We know Sherlock loves and is loved in return. That, yes, his brilliance, his contrary nature, his vanity and his insecurity combine to make him a holy terror and a brat--but that he still loves, and is loved. He may be Peter Pan crowing out his wonderfulness, and Maurice Sendack's Pierre who didn't care and Max who sailed over a year and in and out of weeks to join the wild things. But in the end, he comes home to those he loves, and wants a button, and a hot dinner, and the warm strength of the people he loves loving him.

He's awful at it, and tomorrow he will STILL be rude to everyone in his life, and he will still sail off to be king of the wild things. But we know he will come home if he can, because we now know, completely, that he loves his home and the people who create that home with their own love.

And that may be the biggest, sweetest riddle of them all...
Sherlock and John

Chapter Summary

What it says on the tin.

As I have said elsewhere, I find John a very difficult character to discuss--much less fic. And I often leave Sherlock to others--there are so many perceptive and passionate others dissecting him. And I'm not convinced by Johnlock, which means I'm in a poor position to discuss their relationship in the eyes of many. And, yet, I do think it is their relationship--their love for each other--that holds the show together and defines the primary theme for Moffat and Gatiss.

Moffat and Gatiss have said as much, as have Cumberbatch and Martin. It's a love story about two friends who find each other and save each other. Part of that is obvious and made clear with John--John, falling slowly into suicidal despair. Mycroft diagnoses him as missing the action. Ella, the therapist, diagnoses him as injured and needing to escape the action. I suspect both are right--for all John's addiction to danger, for all his "God, yes," need to for the adrenaline rush, his nightmares of action are indeed nightmares. He needed to go back, never could go back, and might well have been turned into a monster if he had gone back.

He's a city boy, at heart. A London boy: Mike Stamford's comments make it clear. John's heart is in the city, and the economic challenges to staying in the city are one more thing pressing on him.

John's a doctor--a doctor-soldier. A soldier-doctor. He heals. He saves lives. Going by what we see on the show, he's honestly not all that fond of family practice, though he works as a GP. It's when there's injury and trauma that he wakes up, though: saving the life of the soldier in the shower. I sometimes wonder why John doesn't choose to work in an ER: it would satisfy so many of his innate longings. The right kind of stress, the adrenaline flow, the right kind of injuries to work with, the right challenge of something new every time he turns around. John seems made for an ER, or working an ambulance crew. But then he'd have less time for Sherlock and for cases. Then he might not have needed Mary.

What do I see when the two meet? What do I see? Through the changing lens of ever-increasing knowledge?

I think of that wink, as Sherlock goes out the door of Molly's lab, and I hear Sherlock telling Lestrade, in the video shown in "Many Happy Returns," that he has no idea why people like that wink, that it humanizes him or something. It's something he does by rote, as a ploy. Sherlock's told Mike Stamford he needs a roommate--a roommate for a difficult man. Mike Stamford has returned bringing John. Sherlock's deduced that John is the response to the stated need, and has assessed John--and is railroading him. He's pulling out all the stops: showing off, grandstanding, being both annoying, but intriguing. Applying his charisma.

We don't know why Sherlock needs a roomie. Finances has never seemed like a plausible answer, really. Moffat and Gatiss have both as good as admitted that Sherlock's from money in ways that have nothing to do with John's honest need for income. Sherlock's clothing, his cabs, his equipment, his fussiness about what cases he will take, his pro bono work with Lestrade and the Met--they all announce that Sherlock's not looking for a roomie to help cover expenses--at least,
not primarily to help cover expenses.

At the time they hitch up, Sherlock's on horrible terms with Mycroft—all the way up to the "archenemy" schtick. Further, Mycroft is truly worried for him--constant worry. Lestrade's worried, too—I say that not because of his willingness to play the "drugs bust" card on Sherlock later in the episode, though that, too, matters, but because he's willing to tell John that Sherlock's great--and that Sherlock being good is to be hoped for. That's the evaluation of someone who is actively worried for an associate--someone who's given some thought to his moral standing and emotional stability. Someone who's just a little afraid that Sherlock will choose to go Bond Villain instead of Bond Hero.

Again, in light of growing information--Sherlock's two "senior officers" and closest male associates are scared for him, to the point in both cases of opting for heavy-handed interventions. Mycroft, for all his general reserve, chooses to coerce John into a warehouse for an interview; Lestrade, fearing Sherlock's gone haywire with evidence, chooses to attempt the "drug bust" option. Both are moves of men who are worried enough to take action rather than attempt reason or to sit back and see what happens. Proactive, determined, controlling moves taken to cope with someone they're afraid is out of control. I keep thinking of Mycroft's bitter reaction to John's trust and loyalty to Sherlock. "Could it be you've chosen to trust Sherlock Holmes, of all people?" His dry, acid comment that he's the closest Sherlock can come to having a friend--and that Sherlock, at least, sees him as an enemy. That scene is just loaded with a Mycroft who's dead out of optimism, isn't it? Someone convinced John can be bought out as a spy even if he can't be discouraged from rooming with Sherlock and associating with him.

Really, the only upbeat element in all that is when Mycroft realizes John's a danger addict, a soldier in search of a war. Then, and only then, does he appear to accept and approve this new element being added to his brother's life.

In retrospect, we now have at least reason to suspect Mycroft and Lestrade, between them, have been running Sherlock for some time. Perhaps not the entire five years Lestrade cites as having known Sherlock...but it does seem to fit. Mycroft's so dark, so worried. Lestrade's more upbeat, but even he's frightened. Sherlock's trying to set up a new household, moving out of wherever he was to someplace new, getting a roommate he doesn't economically need. Why the roommate?

Because a roommate complicates the ways Mycroft and Lestrade can deal with him, forcing them to step back a bit, forcing them to evade certain things?

Because Sherlock, by his own natural arrogance, thinks a goldfish roomie can be manipulated to see what Sherlock wants him to see?

Because it's a new game?

Why John? When you think about it, there's very little reason for it to be John in BBC canon. There's none of the sense one gets in ACD canon of the two men really hitting it off on first meeting. John's far more wary that that, and Sherlock's at his cold, deductive, manipulative best--and, yet, Sherlock's railroding John into that apartment. Sherlock's DETERMINED to live at Baker Street, and having a roommate is a necessary element of that move. And, as stated, economics does not really seem to be the core issue. Mrs. Hudson's cutting him a deal, he's got family money, he's not hurting, and he's got employment options. Sherlock's just plain determined to get into Baker Street--so determined that when John arrives to view the place, Sherlock's already moved his own things in.

So, hypothesis:
A. Sherlock has an actual need to be either in Baker Street--or out of somewhere else.

B. Having a roommate makes that more possible or plausible, and does so for reasons other than pure finance.

Now, another point to consider--Lestrade knows where to find Sherlock *when in theory Sherlock is just looking over the apartment with John.* At some point in time either Sherlock has given Lestrade the address, or Lestrade has been determined and desperate enough to use the GPS in Sherlock's phone to find him.

I have always been a bit startled that no one else ever seems to notice the oddness of Lestrade racing up the stairs of Baker Street to draft Sherlock onto a case. It's not just a little odd, it's outright weird...unless Lestrade already knows pretty much everything. Not just the address, or just that Sherlock's interested, or that he may have found a roomie: Lestrade practically has to know Sherlock's as good as moved in, and that he will be at Baker Street with John at a given hour.

So Baker Street is something Lestrade's in on--which automatically suggests that Lestrade's closer to Sherlock than he or Sherlock are letting on to John. Or, if not "closer," at least more enmeshed in some sense. Did Lestrade help Sherlock move his stuff over? Or is Lestrade part of the group Sherlock's got to satisfy if he's going to attempt this new venture? Or has Mycroft updated Lestrade, Sherlock's "handler"? Or is Baker Street something they all know about--but Baker Street is part of a cover, and the cover is more convincing with a roomie, if Sherlock can drum one up?

We don't know. But we do know--far better than we did when we, like John, first encountered Sherlock--that it's a lot more complicated than it looks going in. Even the things we thought we got at first turn out to be more complicated than they looked. Mycroft's far more appropriate and far less freaky and out of control. Lestrade's not quite such an open book. Sherlock's goals are more obscure than ever. And, yet...

It's John. It's John who clicks. Sherlock may have been willing to room with him for purely pragmatic reasons, but by the time they go off for Chinese dinner, leaving a dead cabbie in their wake, it's more than just Sherlock finding a roomie to fill out his cover story, and it's more than John taking a roomie because it allows him to stay in London.

We all know those magic moments: John telling Sherlock he's amazing, and Sherlock glowing with the pleasure of not being told to sod off. Sherlock realizing John's the one who's shot the cabbie. John being fool enough to think Lestrade's out of line in thinking Sherlock abuses drugs. Sherlock's frantic response to the search as Lestrade pins him between who he really is--and who he wants John to see. The delicate little dialog in Angelo's, when it first occurs to a startled Sherlock that John may think he's gay and be trying to initiate a more intimate rooming arrangement than Sherlock intended... The race through the nighttime streets. The collapse into giggling hysteria in the front hall of Baker Street. The return of the cane. The sense of two men becoming aware of how much fun they've just had together--and the sense of each becoming aware that the other is vulnerable. Fragile. The realization, unspoken, that each can offer the other more than just half the rent money, groceries and utilities.

But it's not a relationship based on verbal revelations, very much. Or on the kinds of background knowledge most people seek out. "Where were you born? Where did you go to school? Tell me about your first wife. What kind of girls do you date? Where do you like to hang out?" Both men leave each other's mysteries largely unstated. Now, Sherlock being Sherlock (and Mycroft being Mycroft), Sherlock may have an entire dossier on John by the end of their first week. Certainly Sherlock's taken every single clue John's ever dropped and added it to the big picture. Hell, at least half of Sherlock's delight in John may be that John, rather than sitting down and doing the life-spill
many people do, left much unsaid, leaving Sherlock free to play the game of deduction. But in any
case, they're both working with an odd level of "you are who you are here and now" as their norm.
They are neither of them pushing to see behind the curtain, to go backward in the life-story thing.

In an odd way, I think that's the first firm element of their friendship--and perhaps the most anti-
ficッシュ element. That here-and-now thing. That not-looking-behind-the-curtain thing. They are
fascinated by and committed to each other--but they don't do the normal things that the fascinated
and committed usually do. They don't crawl into each other's navels, or rip out the stuffing of each
other's pasts. They don't spend hours talking into the night. They have a friendship that verges on
muteness, and that begs for adventures as a canvas of expression. They aren't looking for the
intimacy of the word, or the bedroom--they're looking for the intimacy of sentex vests and laser
targeting and lives on the line and races through dark streets. In a horrible way I keep imagining
Sherlock in a slash fic standing up in mid-foreplay hollering "Booooring! Boring, John! Give me a
case!" Or John, at the first sign of physical tenderness, blowing his temper and asking Sherlock
what he thinks he's doing, anyway, because that's not what it's about!

It's not that they don't love or cherish each other. But it's a love and a cherishing that seems to be
animal, or even vegetable, in its refusal to be about sex or revelation or any romance but the game
being on.

Sherlock says it all in "The Empty Hearse. "You have missed this. Admit it. The thrill of the chase,
the blood pumping through your veins, just the two of us against the rest of the world ..." That is
the form of intimacy they both understand--the cameraderie that sings to them both. It needs no
sweet hours of murmured sharing, no foreplay, no sentimental rituals, no exchange of background
information. It endures their equal forms of curmudgeonly antisocial grouchiness...and, no, John's
NOT a saint, he's as grumpy, snarky, snide, and outspoken as Sherlock in many ways. The two
come together for cold, pragmatic reasons, some of which we don't know and may never know.
They stay together, though, because when they're together things are not boring. Things are not
boring because Sherlock actively seeks out trouble, like the sparks fly upward, and because when
he finds it he provides John with the perfect excuse to come along for the ride.

They're also together because two drama queens have found perfect audiences.

No matter what you think of Mary, one thing stands out: that sad though Sherlock may be to lose
John's constant companionship at Baker Street, Sherlock does not show any sign of finding Mary
herself a problem within his friendship to John. Instead he seems to find her an actual positive
addition. She is someone both men show off for. She's someone they both enjoy winning approval
from. In my opinion, after they weather the storm of the shooting, she returns to being someone
they both truly trust--though it becomes an informed trust, rather than a blind trust after that mess.
Mary is someone Sherlock doesn't seem to feel driven to fight for John's time and attention. Now,
part of that is because, like them, she loves that here-and-now adventure: rather than holding John
back from it, she's either urging him on or outright joining John and Sherlock in the adventure.
Instead of pulling John out of the team, she expands the team. She can play the same game.

Which, looking back at John's prior girlfriends, may be what was missing--not only for him, but for
Sherlock. John kept dating women who could not ever have truly joined the game with John and
Sherlock. Sarah tried, and she gave a good showing, but she was an unwilling and unhappy
participant. Jeanette was just...no. If Sherlock shouts "game's on" around Mary, though, there's a
fair chance she'll grab her things and join the show for fun--and if she can't she will be perfectly
happy to not only urge John to join, but she will contribute intelligently and with interest from the
sidelines. Moffat and Gatiss designed her as though she was to be a new team member, not as
though they were designing a new love interest. (Oh, come on, you KNOW they usually demand
different traits from the two positions...)
John and Sherlock are, in many ways, about love without understanding, loyalty without justification, commitment without confidence, affinity without clear communication. They are about being two growly bears together, accepting each other's surly grouches. They're about the restless hunger for danger. They're about mutual grandstanding--and about both men loving audiences in their own ways. (Come on, John's a blogger. What's a blogger but a man with a keyboard and an internet connection in search of adulation?)

They each know the other has weaknesses--and to some extent they each care about those weaknesses. But unlike many a codependent pairing, they don't brood and hover and wallow in those weaknesses. Indeed, they have a rather healthy determination to cope with the weaknesses, guard against them, and move on. Mycroft, now...Mycroft broods. He worries. He lingers tenderly over Sherlock and his boyhood. He is tangled in their codependency.

John isn't, nor is Sherlock tangled in codependency with him. Oddly, for all they both have boundary issues, they don't really have problems maintaining boundaries with each other *in terms of codependency*. Yeah, Sherlock will poke where he ought not--but not out of morbid, stalkery, codependent longing for John. And John barely scratches Sherlock's boundaries, happy for the most part to let his peculiar partner be peculiar, happy to be allowed to project his own ideals and fantasies onto Sherlock in the blog write-ups. If either trespasses, the other barks, snarls--and it's done.

They're remarkably good at boundaries, when you stop to think about it, and they're both very comfortable with the premise that the other guy gets to bark and snark and snap if those boundaries are crossed. They don't linger, hurt, over old offenses. They don't worry about whether the other guy understands their own internal workings. It's all just water under the bridge.

The fact that between the scripts and the performances this reads as passionate and intimate says a huge about about Freeman and Cumberbatch's performances, as they are acting out a relationship we read as deeply intimate while refusing to get tangled in many of the standard tropes of intimacy. Their intimacy is primal compatibility in the field. They're good partners....and, yet, we're made aware in a million ways that they could work together forever and never know about each other's families, or favorite novels, or anything else intimate and private unless it just happened to come up in a case.

One never knows how much Sherlock deduces--but one does know that Sherlock shows very little sign of lingering, lovingly, over what he deduces. Even in his sorrow over John being "lost" to marriage, he's missing a body in a chair--a presence in an active life--not brooding over poetry or gently sighing over some secret intimacy they've shared. It's that empty chair that haunts Sherlock. He's grown accustomed to John's face, like Henry Higgins becoming accustomed to a cheeky flower girl without ever becoming all that mentally or physically intimate with her. John has become part of Sherlock's comfort zones, and his loss leaves a vacuum.

I'm like everyone else: I want to fill that friendship with more--make them less cantankerous, more wordy, more given to shared revelations. I want them to be intimate in the ways I value, as a wordy, womanly, romantic sap. But they don't cooperate for me: I go to look at them seriously and soberly, to catch their voices and to understand their affinity, and they say only, "We are the hunt. We are two stones grinding against each other in a fast river. We are not this romance that you seek."

Oddly, I have felt I came closest to John and Sherlock's closeness in the two of my earlier Mystrade stories I have posted in "The Minor Fall, the Major Lift." John's pugnacious, curious, fiercely opinionated and righteous personality is there, pushing at Sherlock, demanding more than Sherlock just "accepting" what he sees and knows. Sherlock's there, all energy when he's got a goal.
in sight, but drifting off to his research and meditation when he sees no such thing. The unstated caring between Mycroft and Lestrade becomes a touchstone for John's feelings about the necessity and depth of his own unstated caring for Sherlock. It's not about sex, or even romance in so many ways, but about the very nature of having a comrade...someone who shares your life, even when he doesn't understand it. Someone who doesn't need to understand it all to share it in the first place. That's Mycroft and Lestrade in those stories, neither needing to "understand" everything to be utterly committed to each other--and it's John and Sherlock.

Sometimes I think we all see romance there not because it is, or because it isn't, but because we all see that utterly accepting not-understanding, that sharing without questions, and wish it WERE part of romance...and so we try to blend the two. Not that they can't blend--but they are separate things, in the end, and in the show what we have ultimately been shown so far is that commeradery has an intimacy, an indentity, and a romance all its own.
Romance and Love Stories.

Chapter Summary

Differences in genre and genre assumptions....in which I attempt to express clearly a difference that is vocabulary-challenged.

There are romances, and there are love stories.

No, that's not, so near as I can tell, a "common" distinction. It's also a rather hard-call in terms of the nomenclature I'm using. If I were going to be clear and fussy and ever-so etymological, and were to factor in historical usage and general modes in romance languages (yet another use of the word "romance") I would probably say that romance is an adventure first, and a love story only second...

I am, however, writing for what is largely an American and UK audience, and modern US and UK citizens tend to use the word "romance" increasingly restrictively to mean sexual love, and just as often, sexual love within very tight genre tropes and assumptions. Modern English tends to use the word "romance" to be a story specifically about boy-meets-girl (or boy-meets-boy, or whatever sexualized gender couple you want). Or, more typically, a young woman and a young man meet-cute, squabble intensely, and are then handed a situational problem that forces them to work together in spite of their personal squabbles. Depending on subgenre, the two battle on against each other and their situational problem with varying degrees of anguish and hand-wringer, behaving in very set-piece ways to establish for the reader their obsession with and worthiness of each other. This has a lot more to do with reader judgement of the strength of the bond and the worth of the individuals, and very little to do with plausible behaviors.

Sorry, I love romances. I read romances--but it's vital to step back and recognize that even superbly written romances are wildly implausible in terms of actual human behaviors. That squabble-squabble-kiss-kiss thing? Yeah, sorry, in real life most people squabble because they really, really do not like each other--and throwing them together is far more likely to lead to assault and battery than it is to tender embraces and twoo wuvv. The obsessive fixation--quite plausible for the first few weeks of association--becomes increasingly less plausible as the stories carry on--and when the actual trope is followed, and the couples become more and more obsessed, and less and less able to think of anything but each other, it becomes entirely ludicrous.

If people behaved like romance characters, they would never manage to hold a job, and would often be unable to cook a meal, drive to work, or carry on conversations with much of anyone because of their distraction and emotional turmoil. Which is a whole lot of fun--but like many things having to do with sexuality and human beings, it's a matter of handing readers the emotional equivalent of oversized silicone implants: a sexual cue exaggerated to the point of ridiculous and implausible hyperbole. It's not supposed to make sense--it's supposed to give the reader a bigger, brighter, better, flashier hit of sexual/romantic emotion on cue regardless of all reason. For the same reason sane and critical people look at a porn star with size triple G breasts and laugh at the unbelievable silliness of it, a sane and critical person can look at the plots and behaviors found in romance novels, and realize it's a caricature of reality--and often a very silly and implausible one.

Romances are almost always about young, sexy, nubile people who can (and do) break the rules of
their society (to varying degrees depending on the accepted norms of the readers with respect to fiction--modern norms are far more sexually explicit than those of forty years ago...). They are fixated on each other. They are expected not just to behave with love and loyalty toward each other--to prove their worthiness they're supposed to prove they're perfect--or are willing to suffer insane amounts of misery and put in outrageous amounts of effort to become perfect. The women are never supposed to seriously wonder if they want boy A or boy B--and any doubt they do express is quickly resolved by the deep and ongoing fixation with "the right character." And so on. It's all pretty much pointed at writing a short novel in which two people fixate powerfully, prove their utter dedication, eliminate each other's doubts--and in a modern romance, pretty much boink each other every chapter or two.

Then there are love stories.

Again, this isn't "common" usage, but I have to figure out some way to point out the difference.

Love stories may be hackneyed, cliched, etc--but they're usually not found with the genre romances. They'll make it into pop lit or just plain "literary fiction." Men may even admit to reading them. "The Bridges of Madison County," right? They're slower. The characters are less pointedly obsessed with each other and boinking--though they may be seriously concerned with both. Their plots are, well, plottier. Their resolutions are less sure. Their secondary characters are more likely to take on lives of their own, and sometimes even displace the lovers--or replace one or more of them. The nature of the relationships, too, are less clearly designed to help readers mainline massive hits of vicarious limerance and desire. The love may be quieter. It is almost certainly less stylized perfection. it's almost certain that it is judged largely in the context of more complex and non-romantic lives and problems.

Love stories may take generational novels to tell in full, with the resolution only coming when the lovers are old and grey and about to die. Or they may die, and their love may only play out in the lives of their children and grandchildren and friends and communities. Love stories are more uncertain about whether love's always a good thing, and passion a reliable gauge of affection--much less worth. In love stories the protagonist may marry the worst character--only to discover over years that this, too, can lead to a love story.

Love stories are about grace, more than sex. They're about odd and unexpected gifts of connection. They can defy sex, ignore romance tropes, refuse to deal with obsession, redeem matches that appear horrifying at first, play out over vast piles of words, and treat limerance and desire with enormous distrust.

Do you see the difference?

Do you see that romance, as I am using the term in this instance, valorizes desire and obsession and demands the characters prove worthy of their partners by being as devoid of objectionable traits that might interfere with the relationship as possible--or that if they are objectionable, they redeem themselves through their limerance and sexual bond? And love stories take cast suspicion on the power of the bond, and the redemptive value of love itself, and instead bring readers to love through doubt, and uncertainty, and imperfection, and mismatches, and time, and grace--lots and lots and lots of grace?

They're different genres. They have different expectations. They are handled different ways.

Perhaps the biggest difference is the distrust love stories bring to their handling of obsessive, limerance-filled, pow-right-between-the-eyes love. It's a deciever. It's likely to lead the characters into false relationships. It's misleading--and even when it's between two "true" lovers, those lovers will not come into the kingdom of their love until they've long since left the whirlwind passions of
their limerance, and stripped away the blinders that doom them to tunnel vision.

Romance protagonists look inward at each other, with their backs to the world—that's how they know it's true love.

Love story protagonists stand back to back, looking out, trusting their partnership as they look at a larger world.

Here's the gotcha. I think there's a real conflict between whether John and Sherlock are a romance, or a love story...and which you think they are--and want them to be--will determine a lot of what you want to see, expect to see, or hate to see in the show.

I think Season Three has suffered in large part because on some levels a lot of people expected a romance, wanted a romance, and were instead handed a love story.

A love story can accommodate a Mary, flaws and all. It can accept the struggle that leads to John and Sherlock having to rebuild their relationship and reaffirm it in a new, non-limerance form. A love story can lead to the parting on the tarmac between two adults who don't need or want to say all the words a pair of romance protagonists would require. A romance at a certain point won't abide the outward facing issues, or the imperfect bonds, or the uneasy truces, or the whole idea that you can love someone who marries someone else.

Season Three was actually not half so badly or implausibly plotted as many people argue. It makes sense within its own genres, which are action-adventure (verging on superhero tropes, as ACD's Sherlock always did verge on--indeed practically originate--superhero tropes) and love story. It only falls apart when your logic starts heading in at least one of two directions: absolute realism and romance. (And, yes, the two are contradictory, but that doesn't seem to stop people from invoking both in their assessments of the shows...)

I really do believe that. After months of thinking and reading and viewing and re-viewing, and going over other people's metas, and asking myself what the heck I'm seeing or not seeing, I've really reached the conclusion that Season Three makes no sense if your core understanding of Sherlock and John is "romance trope," and your assessment of Mary is some blend of realism AND romance tropes, and that Season Three is just fine if your core understanding of John and Sherlock is "love story tropes," and your assessment of Mary is of a supporting-to-central character in an action-adventure love story. NOT an action-adventure romance, an action-adventure love story.

The action-adventure aspect rules out having to have things like shooting people—even shooting the lead—make perfect sense so long as Sherlock Lives at the end. The love story—as opposed to the romance—allows the story to make room for Mary, for reduced limerance, for two people moving past the infatuated stage of relationship into the slower, quieter, less blinkered stages of love. Love that may even let other people into the magic circle.

I looked at Season Three and saw a well-told love story, in an action-adventure genre, with interesting characters behaving within the parameters I expected, and with well-structured plots in which to play out their love story. I saw a logical and understandable progression, from the shattering reunion to the passionate reclamation of love in a new pattern—a dual marriage that tied three people together. I saw those three people tested to extremes in the final story—only to come through tempered, wiser about each other, granting each other grace, growing in maturity and often non-verbal tenderness.

I know that other people didn't. I try to respect that. But I will admit, I think MGT did a helluva job writing the story I DID see. I'm sorry that they so badly failed people who were looking for a very different story...but I can't help feeling that somewhere along the line, I did catch the clues what
genre I was in, and other people missed, and made the wrong assumptions.

Romance is not a love story. They are not, in this day and age, the same genre. They don't play by the same rules--and IMO MGT wrote one hell of a good love story in season three--and a purely crappy romance. And that's fine, because that's what I expected and hoped for with all my heart--but, God, it's kicked the slats out of the people who wanted and expected a romance. It really has.
More thoughts about John.

Chapter Summary

As I have said--as I suspect I will always say--I find John among the most difficult characters in *Sherlock*. That doesn't stop me trying to get my mind around him, though. XD

John is such a deceptive beast. It's tricky trying to sort him out.

Is he good? Hard to say, in normal terms. I'm not one to despise soldiers--but he's not just a soldier, he's a danger/violence/risk addict, and if all appearances are true, his enlistment and participation in military activity can at best be represented as having found an appropriate outlet for his inner monster. His status as an officer looks very much like it accrued to his medical training, rather than any serious call to a leadership position: John's own innate tendency appears to be "follower" rather than "leader," and even within the role he's a follower drawn to charisma and excitement more than virtue and dedication, or he'd never have fallen for the Sherlock of Moffat and Gatiss and Thompson. He's not a skilled critical thinker, though he rather resents having that demonstrated too clearly--but it's true. It's why he's so reliably wrong about things--radically, sadly wrong. It's why he so often takes actions based not on all that much logic and good sense, or even intuitive brilliance, but on the drive of impulse and emotional response. He's loyal--but almost to a fault, preferring Sherlock in a rage of needy and rective behavior to, say, a Mycroft whose most likely to be operating on cold logic and principle. He's vain--yes, he is. It's a vanity that's easy to lose track of when displayed next to Sherlock's truly monumental vanity, but nonetheless John is a vain man. He's more than a little proud of his blog and its success. He's more than a little proud to be chosen as The Great Detective's One Friend. He's vain of the ways he's "better" at being human than Sherlock, too--Sherlock allows him to feel chuffed about his social skills, rather than forcing him to realize he's actually a rather isolated man from the looks of things: a few professional colleagues, a lot of dubious dates, a bad relationship with his sister...other than that he's alone in ways that suggest that the military, in its teamwork and structure, may have supplied John with a manageable social life that stood in for anything he might have successfully developed on his own. He's a vigilante, and appears perfectly, entirely comfortable with that, though he does appear to retain some reservations about what vigilante causes he might take up.

Well, then, is he a bad man? Well, that doesn't feel right, either, though so help me he is a cold-blooded killer. (Yes, he is--that's precisely what we're shown in SIP. He's not only a killer, but a killer of people who are not obvious physical threats. Jeff Hope's exactly the sort of target you don't really want vigilantes killing: psychologically astute and dangerous, he's still not the sort of person who should be shot by illicit gunmen from cover.) Still, if he's a killer he's also a truly dedicated healer, especially when he gets to play combat surgeon...though his overall dour distaste for common family practice leaves me quite sure i do not want to pick John as my personal physician. He too obviously finds ordinary everyday medicine practiced on ordinary, everyday boring people with bunions and hives and weight problems and cranky babies a tiresome and annoying burden. He may be called to combat practice--there's little indication he's called to family
practice, and indeed, he appears to dislike it more than he likes it. But, still, as Sherlock notes, he saves lives—he can do stuff, and he does so...and if it's the right stuff he even seems to get a rush out of it. The right stuff appearing to involve blood, warriors, and a chance to snarl at the officer class. Did I note before that John doesn't really seem to be a leader or officer by nature or affiliation? Yes, I did, but it stands repeating here: his heart and loyalties appear to be with the squaddies and the grunts. The brass, as near as one can determine, can for the most part go screw themselves. Is that a good thing? Sometimes. Sometimes it's not so good, but it does appear to define BBC John's sense of identity. (One wishes to suggest that in this John differs from ACD's Watson a bit. ACD's Watson clearly self-identified as an educated man, officer class, upper-middle-class in his sentiments and loyalties, attracted in part to Sherlock because ACD Sherlock was so intensely a man of science--a man of the same cultural heritage almost any serious medical professional in the 1800s belonged to heart and soul. Our Sherlock, for many reasons, is a man of inspiration and intuition far more than a man of science, and our John is a man whose loyalty is to Sherlock's brilliant passion and adventure rather than to his scientific technique carried to stratospheric heights.)

John on the whole appears to be against murder, unless he or Sherlock commit it. He's against rank and authority unless it serves his own goals rather directly, in which case he's for it, especially if it means he can pull rank and swagger just a bit. (My, but he did have fun at Baskerville, didn't he?) He appears to be leary of espionage and undercover work, unless he's invited to play too, in which case he's happy to dance along--though he's not very good at it.

He's a terrible liar, except to himself. We know he is in denial about his addiction to danger. We are told he's in denial about why he chooses his dearest associates, including Mary and Sherlock--and Sherlock's evaluation of him seems likely to be true on that point. We have reasons to at least wonder if he's in denial about his sexual range. We know he's in denial about Sherlock himself. Yes. We do know that. I mean, please.... "Best and wisest man I've ever known?" Sherlock? Hell, ACD's Sherlock didn't even qualify for that title, and BBC's Sherlock is, um.... Yeah. Well. Either John's spent his entire life among howling idiotic bastard madmen, or Sherlock's NOT the "best and wisest man" John's ever known. He just isn't. John says that out of love, but not out of honest observation and analysis. He's delusional about Sherlock. But, then, watching the two in action that was pretty obvious in any case.

Granted, it's a mutual madness. Sherlock returns it with much the same twitterpated departure from all standards of logic and reason. Both see elements in the other they find entrancing, and they mentally transform those excellencies into far broader virtues than they can realistically support. But it doesn't really change the fact that John is delusional about Sherlock, and in many instances he's delusional about himself.

What can one say for John that explains why, in spite of that, he's a delight? Some of it has to do with how Martin Freeman plays him: Freeman, who seems to love characters who are complexly flawed. Freeman seems to love John's conflicted, imperfect, outright suicidally lunatic self. He takes this flawed man, and balances his vanity and intelligence on a thin edge with his flaws and delusional stupidity. John's written and played to provide stunningly astute verbal knife-attacks on Sherlock and his flaws, while falling on his own sword though misunderstanding, misplaced trust, delusions, and mis-observations. He's comic, sarky, observant only to muddle up his own observations... He's curmudgeonly, exasperated, and, yet--he abides. He loves so greatly. He mourns so deeply. He rages so hotly.

Even someone like me, who finds John hard, can also "get" him. Not always as a unified character, where he can almost seem to defy any remotely rational understanding, but on a moment by moment basis? John's easy, then. We know why he's happy. We know why he's sad. We know
what it feels like to love as he loves. We know how much he wants to live in that wonderful, enchanted zone he believes Sherlock offers: adventure, rule-breaking, vigilante justice, cleverness, boyish camaraderie, soldierly "band of brothers" fraternal bonds.

In my most recent fic, I found myself writing Sherlock's post-adventure attitude and expression as a "post-coital" smirk. I have found myself thinking about that. In a sense, regardless of whatever else those two men choose sexually, their climaxes are tied to the adventure, not to sex. Oh, not necessarily climaxes of the sort that leave seminal messes in need of a damp tissue to clean up...No. But John can have sex with "three continents" worth of women--but his real personally jag, the rush, the orgasm, is the adventure. Sherlock may, to his dying day, consider sex (whether gay or straight) to be a questionable activity that eats into a man's time, objectivity, and intelligence...but he'll still indulge in the erotic thrill of the chase. When they're done and lean panting in a hallway in the dark, laughing like loons and gazing into each other's eyes, then, yeah--that's their REAL sex, a sexuality that has nothing to do with erections and reproductive activities. That's why a man who claims he's straight and a woman who insists she's a lesbian can both become infatuated with Sherlock, who at least attempts to live as a celibate (possibly with auto-erotic habits, going by his porn preferences). All three characters presented have intense pseudo-erotic responses to either intellect, adventure, or both: they all have a forum entirely outside ordinary sex and sexuality in which they can experience courtship, engagement, and climax.

I find myself a bit unsure what to say about those of us--the many of us--who find something non-sexual as rewarding, or more rewarding, than "real sex" could ever be. It's certainly a thrill that is entirely indifferent to gender, demanding a fit mind, a matching spirit, rather than a fit and matching body.

It may, in the end, be the most powerful reason I, at least, "accept" John and love him. Flaws and all, he knows the value of that magic moment when the brainstorm races through, and the adventure begins, even if his adventure involves quite a lot more guns and running and quite a lot fewer books than my own would. He still gets that there's something not-sexual that's still intoxicatingly orgasmic, and that it entirely bypasses the ordinary mundane limits of mere sex.

All of which I want to think about, as it's possible that pseudosex is much of the point of Sherlock--and the heart of the ongoing joke and confusion about John's and Sherlock's sexuality. Why Sherlock, who is at least a demi-celibate with normal porn habits, and John, who's three-continents Watson and Not Gay, can on the one hand be so obviously, orgasmically in love, and at the same time so obviously and comfortably indifferent to the entire issue. It's not about body orgasms, in which gender-preference still plays a part--it's about mind orgasms, in which gender is so completely irrelevant that it just drops out of the picture.

Anyway. That's it for this installment of "Tammany Broods About John."
How Does *Sherlock* Differ from ACD Canon?

Chapter Summary

A quick cruise over what makes BBC's *Sherlock* a very different creation than ACD's work, in spite of honest fanboy respect for the original.

I've commented before on Moffat and Co.'s respect for ACD canon: that they appear on the whole to be trying to play jazz with the characters and events, while retaining the underlying spirit of the material and the core worth and alignment of the key characters. Thus, while Mycroft may be far more developed in *Sherlock* than in ACD's work, and skinnier, and more intensely involved in ongoing fraternal competition, he remains as he has always been: The British Government, with hints of Secret Service (and, yes, I do read that into ACD Mycroft), but utterly loyal to Sherlock and vice versa, to a degree where Sherlock protects his brother even from Watson's uneducated eyes.

Now I'd like to take just a short time to consider how BBC's presentation differs from ACD's, and what that then forces to change, whether the fanboys want it to or not.

Let's start with a simple one: women. ACD's Holmes material had women in the classic role in British adventure writing of the period: women were there to be convenient victims, bringing out gallantry in Watson and occasionally even in the far less enamoured Sherlock. They were rarely, but occasionally opponents. They were a source of reliable red herrings and false assumptions that Sherlock could clear up. But at the start and end of the day, they were almost non-existent as people. Mrs. Hudson was a walk-on. Mary, who did better than many, died off stage and was barely mourned. Sherlock could--and did--live in a vast male-focal society geared to women being, in large part, housebound by necessity and by powerful tradition. Sherlock could treat women as a group as a phenomenon, but never risk getting involved. In a world that had many a respected life-long bachelor, he was unremarkable for his lack of attachment, and only slightly more remarkable for his idiotic philosophical beliefs that attachment would dumb him down--and that women were not really to be trusted.

BBC (Moffat, Gatiss, Thompson, Sue and Beryl Vertue, all the Sherlock team ensemble, etc...) know they can't run a modern Sherlock in that kind of world. It no longer exists. Sherlock could only be so isolated from women if he were not only gay, but the kind of gay man who lives within a gay enclave, or if he were monastic--neither of which works for the kind of Sherlock they want to present. So Sherlock HAD to have more women in his life, and moderns demand that those women be more complex and complete than any ACD Sherlock dealt with. Even in trying to isolate Sherlock--giving him Mrs. Hudson who was decisively too old (not necessarily implied by Victorian Mrs. Hudson), or Molly, who's decisively too automatically a "pleaser," with bad reflexes for dealing with Sherlock, or Irene, who's lesbian and far more a criminal than the original--even then, they pushed a bit too far into making Sherlock look a bit odd...and his women a bit odder. As a result, Sherlock's shifted over three seasons, becoming far more "female-friendly" than ACD's Sherlock ever did. Mrs. Hudson, Molly, Irene, Mary, and Janine have all been allowed to "get Sherlock's number," and understand him if anything far more clearly than he or his male associates do--and he's been allowed to simply love them, as ACD's Sherlock never did. ACD Sherlock came no closer than admiring Irene for beating him at his own game, and admiring Mary Morstan enough to want her to play detective with him and with John. But that's pretty much it.
In comparison Modern Sherlock loves and is loved well, by a wide range of very different women, all of whom seem to understand that he may be smart, but that in many ways he's a bear of very little brain indeed. A boy-child afraid to grow up. A genius who can't cope with his own feelings.

That's a huge window into vulnerability and tenderness that ACD's Sherlock was immune to. ACD showed us Sherlock largely through Watson's admiring eyes, without the added layers of women smiling and rolling their eyes and catching Sherlock being a bit of a chump. ACD didn't show the "adopted boy" hugs between Sherlock and Mrs. Hudson, or him raiding her fridge for mince pies. They didn't give us Mary, who knows when Sherlock is fibbing, or Janine, who knows "what kind of man he is," and would be friends with him regardless, or Molly, who decks him for wasting himself on drugs. Sherlock as written by ACD can remain an edifice largely un-breached by emotional tenderness and perceptive laughter.

In a similar vein, we have Mycroft--and, later, Mummy and Father. Our Sherlock has a setting other than John's awe and gratitude. Our Sherlock is integrated into a vast world that exceeds John Watson's own comfort zone, as well. The decision to include Mycroft as a full character has been genius, giving us two different useful frames for Sherlock: Sherlock the spy and Sherlock the baby brother. Each goes so much farther than ACD was able to go, and like the inclusion of women it gives us a more fully realized, and much more humanly falible, vulnerable figure.

Conversely, ACD Sherlock was a scientist and a logical deduction engine, where BBC Sherlock is far more an intuitive beast. Yeah, ok, we see Sherlock and his "experiments," most of which one suspects are not really that much more than ghoulish Bill Nye "attempt this in your own home" small-scale science. Yes, all right, some of it may be giving Sherlock vital information: but on the whole what Moffat and his team have done is realize that unless you want to do CSI, you can't do even dishonest forensics as drama--and even CSI had to lie massively to keep the entire world of forensics interesting. Real science--real forensic science--is no longer a matter of having fingerprint gear and a sharp eye. It's a matter for DNA-analysis (that takes forever to run) and literal thread-by-thread combing of crime scenes and chemical analyses a modern Sherlock almost certainly can't and would not perform at home. It's electron microscopes and specialized solvents and reconstructive software, and it's out of a "Sherlock's" realm. And it makes for some of the most boring TV drama in existence, unless you really are a scientist and/or get off on ponderous documentaries. (I do, but I don't confuse them with a dramatic story.) So BBC's team gave Sherlock the science background to understand, and the OCD to at least play with cigarette ash--but they let Sherlock solve the mysteries through insanely good intuition. Much of what he is allowed to do is recognize human patterns of motive, access, and resources. BBC team leaves what would once have been the realm ACD's Sherlock to Lestrade and Anderson and Donovan. That's only fair: to present the modern police as having any need of an amateur detective to show them "how it should be done" is laughable. ACD Sherlock, among many other influences, turned the ACD-era police into serious forensic analysts long since. They no longer need to be shown how to examine a crime scene, or educated in the value of fingerprinting.

But, again, in giving Sherlock intuitive skill over the original's steady stairway of "evidence + logic = solution" they've accentuated Sherlock's inner self. If nothing else, it forces the question of how a man that intuitive is so friggin' BAD at relationship. The answer, slowly, comes through in a tumble of vanity, prideful competition, lonely alienation, and most of all poor social reading skills: the motives and desires he can work out in the abstract in a mystery, fall into shadow and confuse him over and over in real, applied life. He's a tragedy in that he distances himself and distances himself trying to get a good look from outside his own fallibility zone: but no matter how far he runs, there he is, confusing himself and being confused by others. Somewhere he's made far too many wrong assumptions about himself, only to be unable or willing to give them up when they don't work. His bewildered misery when he's "losing" John to marriage, or when Janine walks away from him, is perfect: he didn't understand how much he wanted and needed them, because he
lies to himself about all that, much as he lies to himself about Mycroft and Mummy and Father's cherished place in his life. And then--poof. They're gone, and he's bereft, and unable to deal with it, because he'd have to admit to being bereft.

Our modern Sherlock, unlike ACD Sherlock, also lives in a coherent world in time: he's not presented in a series of completely free-standing episodes that could take place almost any when in his life. Sherlock--our Sherlock--lives in time, and each event does eventually tie into others. The team do a passable job of keeping that to a minimum, buffering Sherlock from consequences and "teachable moments" more than "real" people are usually able to manage--but their Sherlock is still more rooted in real life and in time than ACD's version. He's mortal, where ACD's version edged not so subtly towards demi-god status.

All together it ads up. Our Sherlock is not only younger at the start, but our BBC Sherlock is also more human, less logical, less well-armored, more vulnerable to human affections and human losses. Our Sherlock's tenderer. Our Sherlock could, possibly, resolve his life in ways different than those shown for ACD's character...or at least, more nuanced. If he ends up alone in Sussex, it will be a more thoughtful, and considered outcome than we're shown in ACD...the choice of a man who, perhaps, finally knows himself.
Why Mycroft? Why Lestrade? Why Mystrade?

Chapter Summary

A brief examination of an enduring obsession.

The two members of my favorite pairing were only hinted to be linked in any way at all in mid-season 2. They were only seen in contact in any real sense in the final episode of season 3. They're secondary characters of whom we've only been given fragmentary glimpses. One is presumed gay-but not proven to be so, just strongly hinted as such. The other is presumed straight with bi options--but not much proven ultimately in either direction. Neither is young or getting any younger. Both appear to exist in fairly "exotic/romantic/adventurous" jobs in ways that ultimately seem rather staid and controlled. Neither appears all that likely to be a real danger addict...not in the sense Sherlock and John are. I mean--they manage to make espionage and murder investigation and diplomatic brinkmanship and various forms of "fixing" seem almost as respectable as Mycroft's elegant three-piece suits and Lestrade's far more down-market but equally respectable sports jackets and "good" trousers. So why do I--and many others--find Mycroft and Lestrade not only belovable (Yes, I coined it, live with it!), but perfect for each other?

In part, I think it is because they are supporting characters, of a certain age, of a certain respectability, who still not only have a place in Sherlock's dangerous, thrill-packed milleux, but at the top of the ladder. Both are Sherlock's "bosses" in some sense, and presumably both have, in their day, survived some variant on the kinds of wild hijinks Sherlock and John love to dive into--and unlike Sherlock and John they've reached the same approximate conclusions that most of us would reach—that, really, if you can avoid chasing villains through dark streets and getting shot at, it's probably for the best. All right, Lestrade likes a bit of cloak and dagger chase sequences, and Mycroft appears to delight in layered espionage complexity—not to mention get a bit of a thrill rescuing baby brother. But they're both men who CAN live like Sherlock and John (and Mary) who appear to prefer not to if it can be managed.

There is a profound part of me that applauds that thought. They're Sherlock and John—but sane. Or at least somewhat saner.

Then there's the sweetness of both men, and their sarky defensive humor. Both of them are sore beset by Sherlock in particular: insulted, rebelled against, flouted, rejected, lied to, raged against, stolen from, tricked. Instead of taking the toxic brat out in a dark alley some night, both men take care of him, whether he wants to be taken care of or not—and they also appear to leave him as much liberty and independence as they think they can without essentially having signed his death warrant—or someone else's. They're trying to find some way to allow a wild animal to live outside a cage, even if he is still in a very carefully managed "no bars" zoo. And they both love him—their affection, which Sherlock appears to miss over and over again, is almost a physical weight, as soft and warm as the shock blanket around Sherlock's shoulders in SiP. Their only defense against their beloved charge, his erratic and amoral brilliance, his rebellion, his malicious baiting, is their own return sardonic snark—a snark one feels is never really unleashed. If Sherlock is a wild predator kept in a no-bar zoo, he's a young one—a mere cub—and Mycroft and Lestrade come across very much as adults of the species who will not kill the cub, but give it the occasional well-earned smack with claws carefully held back, and the full power of coiled muscles withheld.
Both, in that sense, are versions of the adult male counterpart of Earth Mother: Forest Father, maybe? Kernunos? Herne? Bagheera, who swears by the chain that freed him and watches over the little frog Mowgli? Baloo, who teaches the wisdom of the jungle? They are so tolerant, when you think about it, so willing to respond with dour, grumpy humor rather than malice or rage.

And they're both, beneath that curmudgeonly, sarky exterior, "glass-full" or at least "glass-half-full" optimist/realists, not pessimists. They may grumble and sneak and huff and groan: but ultimately both believe passionately that happy endings are possible, break-even endings at least fairly common, and horrible endings worth resisting with every fiber of their being. It's not just their jobs--though their jobs say worlds about the optimism hidden in the sark and the "realistic" gloom. You don't take jobs like both men hold if you don't believe there's any way to win. Instead both men think it's worth it to fight criminals, to fight terrorists, to fight international criminals, to try to save lives: they believe it so much they're willing to stand point-guard in the middle of hell to try to see that the happy endings happen and the lives are saved. We know that: We've seen Lestrade refuse to come unravelled because if he unravels people may die. We've seen Mycroft truly fall apart when his plan to save lives--hundreds of lives--is torn to shreds thanks to Sherlock's vanity and refusal to accept a warn-off. We know because we've been shown that, for all they're flawed and human and limited, they're honorable warriors in an ongoing war--a war that appears to offer them little fame, except perhaps in very select circles, and little personal glory. Mycroft may have inherited wealth, but ACD canon suggests he earns little, asks little, and lives modestly on the whole. Lestrade appears even more to live within the expectations of an educated professional from a working-class background. They're modest, admirable. Mycroft's apparently so clean he's not only survived competition, scrutiny, and investigation by MI6's own internal watchdogs, but is so "pure" CAM wasn't able to find enough dirt on him to use as a lever. And, yes--some of that is because there are things Magnussen might have tried using that Mycroft would have met with an icy "Publish and be damned," but, really--it's hard to lead a life that leaves a man like CAM nothing to work with but Baby Brother and Baby Brother's associates.

They are good and virtuous knights. Loving men. Kind men. Funny as hell, too--both with sizzling senses of humor. Both dedicated, both showing signs of putting family ahead of ego or hurt feelings. Both willing to forgive damages done them.

Both also shown, though, as lonely in many ways. Yes, Lestrade is the more social: he's out and about, he's got his pubs and his chums and his banter with his teammates. He's at John and Sherlock's doomed Christmas Party and at John's and Mary's wedding and reception. But over and over he's shown as alone: marriage failing or failed, work alliances uncertain--in part thanks to his support of Sherlock. Team members willing to turn on him if they think they can get Sherlock by doing so. No one with him at the reception. Hauled away from a recent holiday soon after his divorce to babysit Sherlock at Baskerville--and no sign it was really a happy holiday. His two most constant associates, when you think about it, are Sherlock--who treats him like a kitten treats a weary hound dog, with pounces and hisses and wild races around the furniture--and Mycroft, who appear to be as old an associate as Sherlock, and in some ways appears to be a closer associate: a senior partner--and, yet, whose connection with Lestrade is shadowed, mysterious, and so ambiguous it can be interpreted as cold or warm using the exact same seconds of show-time. Lestrade keeps other people from being alone: Sherlock, John, Anderson... None of them seem to respond in kind.

And then there's Mycroft, who's "not lonely" in ways that make even Sherlock roll his eyes. Mycroft who too clearly longs for Sherlock to be the Baby Brother who loves and plays with him again. Mycroft whose heart would break if he lost Sherlock--and whose heart appears to have broken before. Mycroft in his shadows and light.

And they're so perfectly placed for a romance as quiet and "background/supporting player" as they
are. They aren't Sherlock and John, who by both temperament and show placement would hog the stage and flop around in melodramatic angst, long after a quiet happy ending could have been secured. The leads of shows are never given the easy path of a happy match happily engaged in without too much rigamarole and hysteria. But two supporting players whose characters and personalities both suggest very private men with very private personal lives? Men who are "glass-full-or-at-least-half-full" sorts? Men who lay down their days trying to make happy endings happen, often in quiet, unsung ways? Men who take care of other people, but who have few appearing to take care of them? Men with the quiet calm to nurture each other without too much fuss?

There is no reason Mycroft and Lestrade have to be a match, and a million ways to write that as not happening. Hell, all you really need is for Mycroft to be attracted to twinks or Lestrade to be "not-gay" to end the story right there. It takes very little to close the door. But looking at the two quiet, funny, brave, loyal, intelligent Good Knights of Sherlock, it's awfully hard not to want them to get what might be the only "happy ending" the blended ACD/BBC canon *sherlock* seems to offer. Truly, John and Sherlock look unlikely. Sherlock and Molly, similarly. Mary's due to get killed off, or at least disappear. Irene? Really, Irene's an affair--or a one-night-stand out of gratitude and affection, but no overwhelming sexual need on Irene's side at least. Janine? Possible, but really only after Sherlock gives up London for Sussex. It's not a show holding out a lot of home for monogamous romantics among us, when you get right down to it, nor can it easily become so: there are genre conventions that exist for a reason, and the unmated status of the adventure hero/detective is common because it's effective and useful for the writers. But you can get away with matching supporting players who are of a certain age, a certain stability of character, a certain kindliness, a certain shrouded privacy.

And, so, I hope. Others hope. It seems like such a gentle, wonderful, do-able romance. Something that doesn't have to rock the boat or be the point of anything, something that never has to hog center stage. Something that could be resolved in the final episode with a single shot of two men smiling at each other, and brushing fingers--and the scene is gone, with everything understood.

Mark Gatiss has discussed the dream of being able to write a detective who comes home, grabs a beer, checks the mail, kisses his spouse, and talks about the day and the case, and having it simply be a gay couple, without it being ABOUT them being gay. No more remarkable than any other couple. John and Sherlock simply can't do that. There's too much baggage--Victorian baggage, fannish baggage, and BBC show canon would make it impossible for John and Sherlock to be anything but loud, dramatic, and difficult. Shows built around that transition from friends to lovers would be ABOUT the transition from friends to lovers, with a solid dose of how either man comes to terms with Teh Unbearable Gayness of Being. But a Mycroft and Lestrade? They could, at the very least, be lovely, gentle forerunners of such a detective show as Gatiss dreams: two seasoned spies who came in from the cold. A quiet, low-drama story of "coming in," rather than a melodrama about coming out.

Mainly, though: they seem so similar in grace, in calling, in honor, in dignity, in humor. They're very distinct men: you'd never mistake one for the other. But you can imagine the two at the Diogenes, happily silent, happily together, happily drinking a scotch and communicating in laughing glances and passed notes.
Considering Sherlock and Mycroft in light of personal experience.

I've said elsewhere that I see much of myself and my kid brother in Mycroft and Sherlock. I was reserved, shy, and truly introverted—people were hard work, solitude a blessing. I retreated from people, on the whole. My brother was a fierce, contrary, outspoken, jut-chinned extrovert, ravenous to be part of boy-packs, ravenous for gangs of buddies. We were, in truth, more different than Sherlock and Mycroft, but no less frustrated, competitive, and dismayed by each other. I was enough older, and a Girl, thus presumed by both parents to be by some natural obligation, nurturing and maternal, that I was regularly put in charge of my fierce little brother: my maddening little brother who knew how little power I had, and how far he could misbehave, and how strongly my parents disapproved of "tattling" (thus denying me the chance of begging for parental backup) He was the kind of kid who staged advanced performances of swearing in front of the most conservative Catholic parents of one of my few friends, knowing it would be humiliating to me. He grinned just like Sherlock pulling off a fast one when he did it.

It was a complex relationship.

But, like many little brothers, he longed--yearned--hungered for the activities I could take part in that he was denied. When you're children, four years is eternity, and the division between what a six-year-old can do successfully and what a ten-year-old can do is vast. I could ride a bike. My brother rode a trike: a solid, sturdy, welded little beast made to endure abuse far beyond what most toys today can take. It was a durable thing...but, still, a trike.

Near our house was a hill. Oh, yes--a big, tall hill, very much like many country roads at that time. It was poorly maintained macadam with a deep layer of built-up dust and gravel and grit, with unpatched holes and very little macadam there in the first place. It had been poured over a simple graded dirt base, and it had buckled in winter and melted and oozed and thinned in hot summers, and it was smooth and the traction was iffy, because there was always that layer of dust and grit over everything. But it was a tall, tall hill, and so steep even the big boys got off their bike and pushed their way up to the top before remounting. This was, of course, in the days when poor rural kids didn't have geared bikes, but massive kick-brake Schwins and similar lumps of metal. So, we older kids, for the thrill, would push our bikes to the top, then hurtle down, fast as we could, pumping the pedals as well as trusting gravity to haul our heavy rides down the slope. Well-some kids did it for the thrill. I did it because I loved my bike, and biking was one of the few things I really shared with the other local kids. It was my own single reliable ticket to "fitting in." The truth was I hated that hill, and hated coming down it, and always maintained a dubious compromise between going down fast as I could--and trying to hold back a bit, maintain a bit more control, not rush headlong down that steep slope on that treacherous surface. It scared me sick, but you could only brake so much, because all the other kids were there, around and behind you, and if you were too slow you'd cause an accident.

Still, I did it. My heart was in my throat, but I did it.

My brother wanted with all his heart and mind and soul to join us. We wouldn't let him. Well,
come on—we couldn't. It wasn't really safe for us on our big bikes, all able to maintain speed together. For little kids on trikes? It was beyond lethal, and even we kids knew it. This was a big-kid thing. I told my brother when he was older, when he had a bike, then he could do the hill, maybe. Even then I knew my parents would expect me to keep the little hellion alive, and I was pretty sure he would not go at it in a particularly high-life-expectancy manner. But while he was on the trike, there was just no way. None. Verbotten. All of us older kids insisted.

My brother was a Sherlock. He was a devious little bugger. And, oh, he was determined to join us. He knew he couldn't get away with pushing up to the top. We'd catch him. But he knew as we pushed our own way up, we weren't watching him--we were sweating and panting and grunting our heavy Schwinn to the top--so far up, by our standards. Higher than the top of the church steeple by my house. So while we weren't watching, he hid himself and his trike in the weeds by the verge, part way up. Then, when the herd of bikes came thundering down, he cranked that little trike hard as he could straight across the road, intending to turn and join us as we swept by.

But we could barely steer on the dusty, gritty, smooth-worn macadam. And he was five, maybe six, on a heavy, slow trike--and he had no prior experience gauging the speed or trying to join the flow. And as we came down, he looked up--and froze, right in my line of descent, like a jacklighted deer.

I still remember all the little things I tried to do to miss him without getting myself killed. Steering to avoid him--but having to soften the turn because of the slippery surface and the high speed. Angling to try to improve the turn just a bit. Braking hard-hard-hard, with no hope of it working because--momentum. Dust. No traction.

I remember the bike going over, and landing on the grit and dirt and gravel. I don't remember how my arm got caught in the piping that framed the back stand-platform, but it did. I do remember my brother, finally aware of what had happened, panicking and pedaling with all the power of his sturdy little adrenaline filled frame, dragging me at least a yard across the road before my shouts finally got through to him.

He went home in tears---so hysterical my mom literally failed to see that he was entirely undamaged and I was bleeding and bruised and my clothes ripped and blood running down my legs. I was the stoic. My brother was the howler monkey. By the time she finally realized he was fine, and I was injured, it was all a bit late and not all that dramatic, and she more or less sighed and dragged me off to get bandaged with a sense of annoyed let-down. Nor did she punish my brother, poor, wee, guilty baby, for causing the wreck or getting me hurt.

If I'd been just a little smarter, I'd have sobbed more, I think. But that's not easy when you're the reserved, shy, older stoic.

I look at Sherlock and I see my brother, hungering for Mycroft's thrilling, exciting, dangerous world--for the power and respect and authority it gives Mycroft to be able to function in that framework. I see Sherlock as having spent much of his life with a brother a full seven years older, not just four--a brother, not a mere sister who could be emotionally dismissed as "not really a competitor." A brother who, unlike my brother and I, shared many of the same skills and talents and interests as Sherlock. A brother who simply by existing was a constant invitation to duel, to someone of Sherlock's temperment. We've seen Sherlock: we know that hunger to win, to excell, to be the best, to dominate in his own fields and his own areas of authority.

I see Sherlock in a million ways over the years, finding that spot in the weeds to hide with his trike, having no real understanding of the wreck he can cause, determined to be a sly-puss and sneak into the pack in spite of all prohibitions. Because he's Sherlock--he CAN do it, and he'll show everyone.
I can see him being that way before Mycroft joined MI6--and I can see Mycroft becoming a James Bond/spy/analyst just hitting every jealous, competitive button Sherlock has.

And then I see Mycroft, doing something he clearly cares about far more than I ever cared about racing down that horrible hill--but something he also realizes the full danger of, the complexity, and Sherlock's inability to play the same game on quite the same level Mycroft plays. It's not mean to look at your little brother on the trike and know that maybe, someday, with the right equipment and the right training, he can go down the same hill--but not yet. Not on a trike. Not without the background. Not without practice. Not without knowing how all the other people on the hill will move...


And I see the moments when Mycroft, hurtling down at speed, looks ahead and sees his baby brother on the little red trike, pedaling for all he's worth right into the line of the stampede....

Mycroft's a better big brother than I was a big sister, I think. I was angrier at my brother than Mycroft allows himself. I blamed him more, and was not as willing to say, "Oh, if I'd only handled you better you would not have made this big mistake." I was far quicker to say to myself, "The idjit broke the rules, hid in the weeds, intentionally tricked us. That's on him, not me."

But still, I look at the two brothers and see how MUCH Sherlock does not ever really understand what he's triking out into--and I see Mycroft, terrified as the stampede thunders forward, trying to find an answer that saves baby brother's life, knowing that there's a good chance that in trying he's going to either go down--or lose Sherlock.

There you have it. Mycroft and Sherlock and the parable of the Very Tall Hill.
A Very Few Notes on a Partial Rewatching of "Scandal in Belgravia."

Chapter Summary

What it says on the tin.

Scandal, to my mind, remains the single best "Sherlock" episode yet offered. I say that as someone who watches the entire series for its quality, and who LIKED the third season and found it very well written indeed. But Scandal just keeps on delivering.

Funny? How can you not fall to pieces in scene after scene, from Moriarty just swanning off having gotten a phone call from Irene, leaving Our Heroes entirely undamaged after the most maddening cliffhanger ever, to John lummoxing around a field with his laptop showing Sherlock (who's back at the flat in a sheet) the crime scene Sherlock can't be bothered to investigate, and on and on and on. Scene after scene. Line after line. Priceless reactions, dialog that makes some of the very best screwball comedy of the early 20th century look flat. And so many bits that serve such complicated ends.

If I had to choose one, and only one best arc and one best line out of that arc, I'd probably pick Sherlock in the sheet at Buckingham Palace...and then struggle because almost every line or line-set there hands you something above and beyond just its overt meaning and comedy. "Are we here to see the Queen?" "It would appear so." John and Sherlock and Mycroft and Eric the Equerry each tossing out complicated little bits you remember years afterward. "You looked taller in your photograph." "I took the precaution of a good coat and a short friend." Which in and of itself says so MUCH about Sherlock--because you know he can think of the line because he also is aware of the strategy, and was conscious of putting it to good use in his secret effort to look cool. Or Mycroft: "May I just apologize for the state of my little brother?" Eric: "Full-time occupation, I imagine." That pair leaves one quite aware of just how frustrating it has to be to be Sherlock's elder sib. But I think, in the end, the very best of all is the tiny little cluster of lines before and during Mycroft putting his foot down.

"Get off my sheet!"

"Or what?"

"Or I'll just walk away!"

"I'll let you."

Brilliant. Just brilliant. Such a perfect expression of Sherlock and Mycroft. You know it's been like this forever, with Sherlock trying to use extravagant, dramatic grandstanding to corner the more sober and easily embarrassed Mycroft--and Mycroft winning anyway, because in the end Sherlock checkmates himself through his own melodrama. Mycroft will let Sherlock walk out of his sheet. He won't be buffaloded. He knows, in the end, that Sherlock will gain nothing but further embarrassment for himself by walking out of his clothes. And if you watch the two men's faces, you know Sherlock knows--and Mycroft knows he knows. John may step in then--but Mycroft's already won. Sherlock WILL end up dressed.

All of the series is present in Scandal. So many answers are given. Is Sherlock attracted to women?
Enough so to fall to pieces when Irene suggests "Brains are the new sexy." That's not an asexual response. Then there's the scene between Irene and John, with Sherlock listening in and coming to pieces going back--loved madly by two people, but desired by neither...and Sherlock shaken by the intensity of his own reactions to both.

Molly's victory, forcing Sherlock to finally see her as a human being he has hurt deeply. Lestrade's stunned reaction to his wife's infidelity. Mycroft and Sherlock at the morgue. "Danger Night."

Really, the trick is finding even one scene in Scandal that's less than useful, powerful, and moving...and repeatedly, also funny as hell.

This is a big hearted show, but it's not unwilling to set you to howling precisely at the same time it sets your heart to aching. Layer after layer of love. The episode ABOUT Sherlock and love...no easy answers. No cut and dried outcomes. They left so many ambiguities only partially answered. But, oh, my--the bits of answers we get are so rich. It's like dense spice cake with fancy dried fruit soaked in rum: rich, rich, rich. Dense. Moist. Intoxicating.
I just saw the deleted scene, not having known of it previously. Now, it doesn't surprise me that there is such a scene, nor even that I can see why it was left out. I am a bit surprised Moffat was willing to push that hard—and I'm curious whether in Moffat & Co's. minds the scene remains canon, as if it is it does interesting things to our understanding of HLV.

If you've not seen it, and don't mind being creeped out to the max by CAM, you can find it here; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNpCm1y1xEk

Ok. Did you watch it? Are you still reading? If not--run away. Spoiler time. If yes, and you want to sit with me while I mull it over....

Spoiler
Spoiler
Spoiler
Spoiler
Spoiler
Spoiler
Spoiler.

That ought to be enough.

Holy moly, Batman. That one's about as explicit as you ever expect to see on tv, and the trouble is, it shifts a gazillion little elements of Vows. On the one hand, we have confirmation of at least some of Sherlock's deduction: he was right about Mary leaving when she'd intended to kill CAM, and about CAM's modus operandi being to keep the info from the police. That strengthens the argument that Mary was protecting John and Sherlock from being arrested as accomplices to murder, which then structurally strengthens the irony of Sherlock's final choice to murder Magnussen anyway--though while still protecting John in the sense that John is witnessed being not-immediately involved in Sherlock's action. It also clarifies that CAM feels he's found Sherlock's lever in Mary...or at least John by way of Mary.

What it complicates like crazy is motivation, and underlying presumptions of character. Magnussen's right there on the blatant edge of implied sexual abuse. He pretty much makes it clear he's going to abuse Sherlock in future, if only in a continued not-intercourse fetishistic way. He implies Sherlock's gender/sexuality is suspect. (A woman's hands...) Even taking Sherlock's drugged and desperate condition into account, he appears to hit Sherlock's buttons hard.

There's a line in there I can't quite swear I am hearing correctly. Magnussen says he hasn't reported Mary to the police, then says either, "That sort of information is too valuable," or "That sort of information is too maleable." I actually think it's the second, especially in light of his earlier
comments that he's in news--and does not care about truth, but of what he can make of truth. Either way, we're left with the knowledge that nothing Magnussen says in that room is anything but subjective, manipulative, and intended to terrify.

Which then leads to the garden scene between Sherlock and Mycroft, and "why" Sherlock hates Magnussen so much. Sherlock's line is that Magnussen attacks people who are different and preys on their secrets. That cracks the hospital deleted scene wide open: is Sherlock's vulnerability that he's merely different, and Magnussen can twist that however he wishes? That he fails to conform to gender expectations (without being presumed gay or straight or ace or anything else--just non-conforming), and again, CAM can twist that in any direction he likes? Is Sherlock's fear based on homophobic revulsion--or homophilic defensiveness?

And, in the end, is he shooting CAM to defend Mary, or John, or (obliquely) Janine, or Mycroft...... Or himself?

That scene in the hospital makes it quite clear that Sherlock's got overwhelming personal reasons to fear a man who intends to abuse him sensually, if not outright sexually. But he's also got Mary and John involved...

And he's got a gay brother. Who's also just been handed to CAM. Indeed, it cranks up the chances Mycroft, as THE intended target all along, may well be in for sexual abuse--abuse he would suffer for Sherlock.

It's just an amazing thing. I'm not surprised they decided to cut it: it's too easily gripped and obsessed over, and it's too easy for many viewers to grab whatever interpretation they want most, and cling to it. It's certainly slash fodder, and kink-slash fodder of the highest level. But I almost think it's a shame they didn't keep it, as it really does complicate the hell out of things.

Addendum: As a fic writer, one of the things I find disturbing about Magnussen--and by extension about that scene--is the helplessness of the victim to resist the "meaning" Magnussen imposes. As much as we argue meta, it's obvious and inescapable that fiction is maleable. Sherlock is what we make of him. He and his fellows are the action figures we take off the screen and use to tell our stories. Yes, that's disturbing and meta, and at the same time it's wonderful: fiction exists for this. But it's also, in a season that dealt over and over with the elements of fannish interpretation, of reality through the eyes of the creative manipulator, it's also unsettling. I keep thinking of Cumberbatch and Freeman's attempts to push back against the pressure to BE Sherlock and John, and to ACT Johnlock when they themselves do not seem to believe they're telling a Johnlock story, and wonder how often they end up feeling a little as though they and their characters are permanently caught up with a community of CAMs who refuse to listen to their own understanding of what they are and what they're doing. Fans and fan writers can be simply wonderful most of the time. We can also be a bit creepy and CAMish, indifferent to what the original artists thought they were saying and doing provided we can make it mean something else we like better.
Sherlock, Mycroft, and Myers-Briggs

Chapter Summary

What it says on the tin. This grows out of a discussion with DonnesCafe triggered by her own work, *A Study on Family*. (Which is very good, and which doesn't entirely connect with this sub-discussion.) Anyway, she said something that referenced Meyers-Briggs, and I ended up putting together my own assessment.

I am NOT a trained shrink, I know no more about Meyers-Briggs than you'd expect of someone with a background in Religious Studies/Mythological Studies with side interests in anthro and psych that feed into that training, and I personally find M-B a difficult system to use, in part because it encourages binary understanding of what are actually closer to spectrum traits. Conditional, modified, situation-sensitive spectrum traits, at that. However it is an occasionally useful framing tool. So, I played with it. Feel free to pitch in and chat about it.

**Sherlock:**

**Extrovert/Introvert**

An extrovert who believed himself to be an introvert and who tends to interpret his own behaviors through that lens, though with increasing awareness that they do not fit.

Believes he’s I, is actually E

**Sensing/Intuitive**

Sherlock, in the end, loves his leg-work. He loves his experiments. He needs to see, touch, taste, smell, hear to solve his cases. He can’t let go of that….it’s part of how he reasons in the first place, though he also needs a John (or, yes, a skull) to help him clarify and to jog ideas loose. He still absolutely needs those clues and sensual details. So I’m going to say he leans S. This is one of those odd instances, though, where he finds the actual answers through the element of intuition, but can’t activate his intuition without sensing first.

This is one of those cases where you really have to stick to the fact that most of us are never “pure” Meyers-Briggs anything. We are blends, each with slightly different formulas of the basic elements. Sherlock needs to be sensing to be intuitive…but his actual answers seem to spring from the intuitive element having a sudden brilliant climax.

So, S (with powerful elements of I)

**Thinking/Feeling**

Both Sherlock and Mycroft prefer to process their world through thought, rather than feeling. Sherlock, though, appears to be by character truly a rather powerful feeling/dramatic personality. One is less sure what to say about Mycroft—except in noting that Thinking personalities often feel profoundly, but process those feeling in a rational frame of reference, rather than a dramatic/poetic frame of reference. Mycroft, in that, is definitely T while Sherlock is F
Judging/Perception

This is really where Sherlock and Mycroft are in sync. Both prefer to handle things through the judging function. Both want the distance, control, and framework of reason to provide some protection and mastery over the storms of intuition and feeling. The differences in how successful this is have to do with the degree to which their own natural inclinations rebel against the goal.

So I would place both Mycroft and Sherlock as being authentically J—and extremely J, at that. They both REALLY want to process the world rationally, and bend over backward to try to either do so, or to at least delude themselves into thinking they are doing so.

Mycroft

Introvert/Extrovert

Introvert. Period. Hands down. Everything suggests that he was, is, and always will be introverted. He has developed good coping mechanisms that allow him to function as a civil servant—but even there he appears to control his exposure very carefully and to work in as much solitude as he can manage, with very few close trusted associates and people to do “leg work.”

Introvert, with no reservations.

Sensing/Intuition

This is perhaps an odd call—but I’d put Mycroft as intuitive not sensing. His very lack of interest in leg-work, his tendency to work through research and computer screens, suggests someone relying on imagination, empathy, and gut response rather than direct sensory data gathering. He doesn’t need to see it, feel it, touch it, smell it to understand it. The process of sensate learning doesn’t matter to him—he can do it in his head just as well.

Now, this again requires a bit of a note: Just as Thinking people often feel profoundly while processing through rational structures, people who intuit rather than sense are often quite sensually alert people—in some cases the preference for intuitive routes of processing stems from a desire to cut down the racket caused by sensual awareness. The step back into the abstract/intuited layer provides a buffer from a chaotic maelstrom of sensual impressions.

(Query: has anyone done studies on Introverts, intuitives, and thinkers as being hyper-reactive to physical and emotional input? It seems to me at least possible that INTJ types may be as they are to avoid the mental and emotional equivalent of being shouted at by everything in the room—too much emotional and sensory overload….)

Anyway, I put Mycroft as naturally I, but as having trained hard to master S skills. Like Sherlock he can deduce—and he does it even better than Sherlock does. But he prefers to work inside his head, rather than outside with the corpse under his hands.

Thinking/Feeling

I’d place Mycroft as thinking, though blessed/cursed with very strong feelings indeed. But he doesn’t know what to do with the feelings, and they muddle him up badly. One suspects he’s actually veered so deeply into thinking that he isn’t always aware of feeling until it breaks out and
floods him.

So: T

**Judging/Perception**

By choice Mycroft’s judging rather than perceiving.

So:

Sherlock: By nature I’d place him as ESFJ. Extroverted, Sensing (sense-based reasoning/data processing), Feeling (processes through emotional/poetic/dramatic mode), but Judging. He appears to believe himself to be INTJ. There is some truth in respect to the intuitive and thinking elements, in that he’s trained himself in these areas and is able to use them to provide a framework for dealing with his sense-based and feeling-based responses to the world, and his powerful commitment to judging provides a context with which to make it all work. For all he’s got powerful romantic/artistic inclinations, his gut empathic alignment is with analysis rather than with creative passion. His biggest problems stem out of his failure to realize he’s not an introvert, that he does depend deeply on his own intuitive capacity even if it’s a minor aspect compared to his sensual perceptions, and his complete failure to cope with his own drama queen feeling nature.

Mycroft: By nature I’d place him as INTJ, but with very, very strong training and dependence on the framework that goes with Sensing (perception/analysis). He’s got a powerful feeling nature, but he’s divorced himself from it—as have many thinking sorts.

Here’s the thing: I find Meyers-Briggs tricky, as we all ARE a blend, and sometimes the really interesting thing is what triggers different aspects of the opposing pairs. Sherlock’s sensing—he needs that sensual leg-work, grounded-in-the-physical-world aspect to function at all. I don’t think he CAN think without the data-flow of his senses. He’s also thinking—he needs the framework of logic and rigor to do what he does. But the actual AH-HA! that makes him great has to do with tipping into intuition and feeling modes. He needs both sides of each duality to actually accomplish what he accomplishes.
More Myers-Briggs--because you asked.

Chapter Summary

And I am so sweeeeet. XD

I want to say one thing: these five characters are less overtly distinct in MB than Sherlock and Mycroft, whose I/E and J elements are exaggerated and colorful for a variety of reasons--and intriguingly camouflaged by a lot of stuff. I think you learn a bit less through the MB on Greg, John, Mrs. Hudson, Molly and Mary. Their most distinguishing character elements will not ever show on an MB.

That's slightly off for Greg and Mary, in that their "layers" make a difference in terms of what you see and what you really get. And it was still interesting trying to decide how to place them. But I also think they all have a bit more balance in their personalities, and that it is easier to fight over where to place them--they're on the fence to a greater degree.

Anyway, have fun.

**Greg Lestrade:**

**Introvert/Extrovert**

I’d place Greg as a true extrovert, but in a very specific and qualified sense. He appears to really like being around people---likes pubs, likes being on a team, seems to take energy from the buzz and stir. Within that, though, he does NOT appear to feel driven to interact. Oddly, I can see him being very nearly as happy in the Diogenes on a busy day as he is at a pub. Having the people around him in the first place would scratch that itch without having to interact further.

Huh. I can see that being what went wrong with his marriage, too, on top of any professional/orientation/fertility/faithfulness/libido/money sorts of things one might want to kick into the soup. He presents as a classic extrovert—but proceeds to then seem to live almost as privately and internally as Mycroft. He doesn’t need to spew himself all over the way Sherlock does. If someone married him really hoping for a jovial, noisy lad’s lad—which he can look like, and I suspect might have VERY MUCH looked like in courtship mode—his private, quiet, low-key, no-interaction-needed side might have really set a spouse’s teeth on edge.

Anyway. E, with qualifiers.

**Sensing/Intuition**

Intuition, with solid training at objective/physical evidence collection. But he wants to work through the abstract elements and the internal layering not one bit less than Sherock and Mycroft….and he’s actually less driven by the sensing element of the here and now than Sherlock or John. (Huh—yes. John’s sensing….)

So, we give Greg the N
Thinking/Feeling

This is a hard one. I’d be inclined to put Greg very close to balanced between these, and able to swing back and forth almost at will, choosing the mode he operates in to fit the circumstances. But if I absolutely had to make a call? Thinking. There’s a layer of controlled, almost cold-blooded reason suggested by the way he’s been slowly built as Mycroft’s hidden henchman. Add that to the kind of control and discipline needed to command a team, play Met politics, cope with Sherlock—all in that background of being able to also play in Mycroft’s sandbox? He likes to present as more feeling than thinking, but I suspect the core element is thinking.

So give Greg a T with a strong, nearly balancing backup of F. That means he can flip very easily between ENT and ENF.

Judging/Perceiving

There are different ways of seeing this, and I like the one Wiki offers—that this one has to do with whether you consciously choose to present and work through intuition and thinking (Judging) or through sensing and feeling (perceiving). Do you choose to be seen as more a Spock, or more a Kirk? Objective or subjective? Mind or heart? Greg chooses to present as Perceiving. It’s a very nice distinction, because it says a lot about who he chooses to be and how he chooses to use his own gifts and character traits. He’s got the right elements to play a Spock if he wanted—or a very social Mycroft.

So we give Greg ENTP and ENFP.

In terms of how he deludes himself—I’d actually put him as one of the less self-deluded characters in the show. He strikes me as being rather solidly grounded, and not inclined to lie to himself much. To the degree he does, I think he focuses more on expecting the best out of things: he’s an optimist, sometimes beyond reason.

John:

Introvert/Extrovert:

I think John’s in the middle on this one—as Greg’s in the middle on thinking/feeling. I might even shift him slightly to the introvert side, but with sufficient social skills to have dealt pretty well with things like med school and army life. I think it’s important to recognize his introvert side, though, especially as he can appear very extroverted held against Mycroft and against the person Sherlock believes himself to be.

John’s not a clearly and obviously social man. He likes to date—but rather clearly likes that as much for sex as for social interaction. He’s got a few friends—but it’s rather obvious that Sherlock’s almost as new an experience for him as he is for Sherlock. Sherlock’s observation that John’s “friends” for the most part resent and dislike him seems quite possible. He’s sarcastic, cynical, ironic, bristly, not really all that flexible on first attempt… He puts up with Sherlock because Sherlock swept away all objections—Sherlock was a perfect storm of exceptions to all John’s rules: in what I believe to be a non-sexual sense, Sherlock was a Manic Pixie Dream Boy, forcing John out of the ever-narrower rut of his own introversion into a wider, wilder, and more
exciting world of intellectual and emotional engagement.

Anyway, to me John leads moderately introverted, with better overall social skills than Sherlock but not a huge amount of charisma or warmth outside the influence of his Manic Pixie Dream Detective. So give the man an I for introversion, but don’t forget that he’s more at ease with people in some ways than either Holmes.

**Sensing/Intuition**

Sensing, if you have to call one. It’s part of what blinds John over and over. He sees the world, experiences it, takes it as he finds it—and seldom asks himself if what he thought he saw was more complicated than it looked. What he sees, as he first interprets it, is real—otherwise he might have questioned Sherlock’s death in the years after the jump. I mean, Sherlock as good as told him in the phone conversation in RF that it was all an illusion—a magic trick. And he knows Sherlock and Mycroft’s cleverness and resources. What John’s senses tell him, though, is what John finds real. He will lose at Three-Card Monty every last time, because he thinks he knows what he sees, and doesn’t have any real feel for how the senses can be deceivers.

Give the man an S and move on.

**Thinking/Feeling**

Feeling. Again, hands down, no questions. This is the other reason he’s so easily fooled—but it’s also the part that makes him love writing his blog and telling his stories. It’s the other reason he will always fall for Three-Card Monty. He’s like a little kid entranced by the doves flying out of the magician’s hat, blown away entirely by the marvelous, counter-intuitive rope of scarves pulled out of his sleeve. He will believe you can saw a woman in half. He will clap for Tinkerbell because in his heart he yearns for her to live and be real.

At John’s wedding, outside the door of Sholto’s room, Sherlock turns to Mary and says, “He’s a drama queen, too, you know,” and she smiles and agrees. If there is one place that ties Sherlock and John together, it’s that all the feelings Sherlock tries to deny, and disciplines with his skill for analytical thought, are answered by John’s feeling core—and made endurable by his gruff, repressed army doctor exterior, with all that emotion hidden behind sark and cynical smart-ass.

It’s one of the ways the two men are a lot like boys together: apart they’re both too fettered by their own repressive traits. Together they’re in harmony as two madboy drama queens in the most marvelous Peter Pan adventures.

So, John’s an F.

**Judging/Perceiving**

How does John choose to present himself? What quadrant does he try to live in? He chooses to try to pass himself off as Judging, though not extreme judging. A lot of that is a combo of male norms, professional standard, and military bearing. But as with Greg in terms of thinking/feeling, I think John flip-flops a lot, and does so with some control and will. Sherlock in particular becomes his excuse to flip over to perceiving: he can trust Sherlock to hold down the fort on that, and it frees him up to actually enjoy living inside his senses and his emotions.

So I’d give John **ISFJ and ISFP**, and toss in a minor note regarding his center-of-the-line introversion/extroversion elements. I still think he’s more introvert than extrovert: I am not sure a real extrovert could stand living with Sherlock’s terrifying combo of misunderstood extroversion and his professional and personal need to also live like a hermit sometimes.
John’s delusions to me have less to do with him misunderstanding his own MB types as with understanding his own normalcy. He WANTS to believe he’s normal, average, that he fits in, that he’s the Charlie Brown his wooly jumpers sometimes seem to suggest—a cool, smart, professional, disciplined “just this guy,” but still, “just this guy.” What throws him are the things that force him to admit to himself that regardless of MB, he’s not “normal.” He doesn’t like admitting to himself all the ways he displays his MB characteristics—but hides his distinguishing likes, needs, fears, failings….

Mrs. Hudson:

**Introvert/Extrovert**

Extrovert, pure and simple. No question. She lights up with people around her—you can be sure she’d sink into a decline without her friends and her tenants. Give the woman an E

**Sensing/Intuition**

Sensing. She seems direct, grounded, and not all that interested in abstracts. She has “intuition,” but it’s feeling-based, not a matter of spending time insider her own skull all that much. So this one’s an S.

**Thinking/Feeling**

I’m going to go out on a limb here, and suggest she’s actually thinking. She’s sly like a fox, that one, and I think the “cleverness” elements are always at work. That said, she’s closer to the border line than many and she’s not managed to cut herself off from her own feelings, nor do I think she has ANY desire to do so. She’s wise in her feelings, and completely at ease in her own skin about them.

But I think that like Greg, she’s more clever and a bit colder than she likes to let people think. The woman who can play a mess of angry CIA agents and stuff a cell phone into her cleavage while being subjected to their thug act is an alert vixen—as is the woman who ran a drug cartel and got away scot-free, no matter how she now protests her innocence. She’s got plenty of street savvy—including the savvy to know people underestimate apparent air-heads, and to encourage them to do so. So I am giving her a T as her primary, and a back-up F that she never loses sight of.

**Judging/Perceiving**

Perceiving. She chooses to present as sensing and feeling: that’s the core identity she likes to claim as her own.

So let’s make Mrs. Hudson an **ESTP with a backup of ESFP**.

Molly Hooper

**Introvert/Extrovert**

Introvert. Not just shy, which is a separate thing—she really is an introvert, though her shyness exaggerate that. I think she does like parties and going to the pub and dancing. I also think if she didn’t have her nice quiet morgue surrounded by dead people who don’t talk back she’d quickly collapse in exhaustion.
It is important to recognize that some of Molly’s strongest traits—shyness, determination, loyalty, romanticism to the point of near delusion—are not going to show up on her MB chart very clearly, or would easily lead people to mis-place her on the charts. If you confuse shyness with introversion, for example, you could push her far closer to Mycroft’s level of reserve, but it would be a false call. Instead she’s a centrist, drawing on people AND on solitude, but better at getting the solitude.

She *might* be an extrovert who’s bad at it, like Sherlock, but I don’t entirely think so. She would like to be—and I think a lot of what attracts her to Sherlock is actually his extroversion. He’s so bold, and dashing, and out there and he connects even when he’s being a hellion. Molly’s not. She’s shy and she sits on the I/E fence. Indeed, the more I think about it, the more I’m tempted to make her outright split.

So we will give her both **I and E**, and comment that this balance is camouflaged by her shyness and her own uncertain social skills. Shy geek-girl’s inner party animal is easy to miss.

**Sensing/Intuition**

She’s not given to abstracts. She doesn’t tend to a lot of self-examination. She doesn’t appear to brood for meanings much. She’s not as decisively an S as I see John as being, but she’s not really an N, either. I’m going to go with S. It suits her profession, it suits her failure to notice obvious things (like Tom being a dead ringer for Sherlock….) So, yeah. I’d make Molly an intelligent mid-range S.

**Thinking/Feeling**

She’s not a sly fox like Lestrade and Mrs. Hudson. She’s not really fond of abstract thought. I think…

Oddly, I think I would say she’s powerfully feeling, but not at all good at dealing with it. Like Sherlock and his extroversion—hungrers for people but is bad at them—she’s swept by feelings she doesn’t really seem to know how to manage. She’d like to control them with abstract reason and self-discipline, but she fails. If she were thinking, I suspect she could have walked away from Sherlock long since: she’s smart enough to know he’s abusive and a bit crazy and a lot f*cked up. She’s “women who love too much.” Like John, the power of a story can sweep her away…in her case the story is too often, “And if I am a very good girl, someday Sherlock will look up and see me, and know I am the woman who loves him best, and he will sweep me up and we will kiss and heaven will descend to earth.”

So I’m-a gon’ give the girl an F.

**Judging/Perceiving**

Perceiving. She chooses to present and live within the “womanly” realm of earthy sensitivity and feelings. She doesn’t insist on being seen for her very real intelligence or discipline, and she honestly doesn’t usually seem to be attracted to abstracts or philosophy. She and John are an interesting pair of characters—both introverted, but not severely, both sensing and feeling, with John swinging toward Judging largely in response to cultural male norms and Molly just as strongly swinging toward Perceiving because that not only matches her inner character, but matches the type of female person her romantic streak suggests to her. So, yeah, I make her out to be **ISFP**.

Again, with Molly I REALLY want to point out that a lot of her most outstanding traits don’t
show in Meyer-Briggs…or even run contrary to what the MB type would lead you to expect. Her courage, loyalty, resilience, and resourcefulness are not obvious looking at MB. You’d need a very different personality chart to plot out those really characteristic attributes. MB won’t do it for you.

Mary:

**Introvert/Extrovert**

I’m going to go with extrovert, but like Lestrade, with a strong element of introversion. But Mary seems to honestly *like* people, in all their kooky, goofy, peculiar splendor. I suspect if she knows Mycroft she thinks he’s adorable. Dangerous, brilliant, and adorable—almost as cute as Sherlock. She adores John, all crusty and grumpy and f*cked up and drama queen-ish, and self-delusional and she still just loves him to pieces. She loves Sherlock. Like Greg, I think she’s good at espionage (and taking a new identity) in part because she’s got a combination of good social skills and real pleasure in dealing with people—making her also a good nurse/receptionist for someone like John. She can compensate for his dour demeanor.

Like Greg, one suspects she’s got a strong internal life, too, though. She can be alone, and she doesn’t need to put herself out there. Where one suspects Sherlock had a terrible time not drawing attention to himself when undercover, because *extroverted show-off*, one doubts Mary or Greg struggle with the same need to be at the heart of people’s awareness, feeding off the contact high. I suspect Mary could happily sit with Greg in a pub and the two of them quietly people watching and laughing their asses off.

So, I’m giving Mary an E.

**Sensing/Intuition**

Mary’s intuitive. I think far more of her world is inside her skull than is outside. When she plans, she appears to plan in the abstract. She doesn’t just plan—she plots. When it goes wrong, she comes up with answers in a flash, even if those answers include shooting Sherlock as the “best option” she can think up that will save John from being a murder suspect and keep her secrets safe until she can talk things through with Sherlock. She doesn’t seem to have much of Sherlock and John’s love of the graphic, physical, here-and-now world of the hunt, either. She’s dangerous and fit to run in their pack—but she doesn’t have their attraction or enjoyment of action. Really, she seems HAPPY to be a nurse, reverting to assassin only to answer a powerful and commanding need.

So, let’s give Mary an N.

**Thinking/Feeling**

I’d actually make her almost Mycroft’s twin in this: thinking almost to the point of cutting off her own feelings—until she found John. Just as one can imagine Mycroft doing almost anything for Sherlock, Mary would do almost anything for John. But the rest of the time her core self is thinking, planning, considering, observing, living in the abstract a lot.

**Judging/Perceiving**

Judging. She’s got too much cool, too much “masculine” reserve and logic, and she does not want or try to be the “feminine” warm, earthy, feeling, sensual perceiving sort. It’s yet another reason she fits in with both John and Sherlock: she fits the “no sentiment” façade that defines both men’s
comfort zones. She doesn’t demand they give up their feelings, but she doesn’t need or want them to swan around demonstrating them, either.

Mary gets a J.

So Mary’s ENTJ… which is what Sherlock presents as when he’s in denial of his feeling element. She and he are a good fit in a lot of ways, and she’s not likely to try to demand he “play” himself too far outside his own comfort zones—while being quite capable of skewering him if he lies to himself about those zones when he drifts into delusional self-comfort.
Chapter Summary

Quick and irked prod at beloved tropes that are not MY beloved tropes. (so there, pout-pout-pout....)

Ok. Let's clear the decks a bit.

I hate Cathy and Heathcliff, and only like Jane and Mr. Rochester when the whole wife-in-the-attic thing is no longer a norm.

I thought Romeo and Juliet were morons, not romantic. I find the comic Beatrice and Benedick more romantic than Hero and Claudio, who are frankly both juvenile morons: one seldom sees it noted that Bea and Ben can be tricked into loving only where it's quite clear they already love, while Claudio is even more easily tricked into hating what he claimed to hold dearest.

I prefer Sense and Sensibility to Pride and Prejudice. Guess what? I'm on the side of "Sense."

I actually thought Jo March was well rid of Teddy, and was just as happy to see him married off to Amy, and Professor Baer come along.

This gets at the heart of what I find uncomfortable in many common fic tropes: the supposition that anguish, dysfunction, obsession, irrationality, mutual unkindness, veering passions, are all somehow "romantic." It also gets at the core of why I adore Sherlock and John as friends, and dislike the notion of them as lovers.

Sherlock and John, when portrayed as lovers, almost beg to be Heathcliff and Cathy. For multiple reasons their already intense mutual fascination and obsession moves from a fixation with some natural limits, to one with no natural limits. By ruling out romantic-sexual involvement a wedge is rammed into the door separating the two from the rest of the world, ensuring it can never close entirely: so long as either one wants to look *outside* the relationship for romance/sex, the door can't close easily. Further, as long as either or both is interested in friendships, love relationships, marriage, etc. outside the mutual circle of affection between the two, both are forced to grow and develop in relation to those other relationships. Without that outside need, it's far too easy to imagine both men spinning out of control, eternally trapped in their obsessive/compulsive Cathy/Heathcliff dance of mutual obsession.

One of the things I actually do like about Wuthering Heights is that at least Bronte presents Cathy and Heathcliff as being involved in a destructive relationship, that can't be happily fulfilled, but that also tears down any other relationships that might allow the two obsessed lovers to redeem themselves from the little two-person hell they have created together.

I look at Sherlock and John, and try to imagine what they'd do to each other if each was trying desperately to make the other the core and center of life: the focus and the raison d'etre. They are passionate men, impulsive men, often cruel, often inclined to violence. Both are, in their own ways, intensely greedy and demanding. Both are capable of huge anger if their needs are not met, even when those needs are delusional.
If you find that kind of two-person obsessive relationship "romantic," then, yes: I will concede that for that particular value of the word "romance," Johnlock is a very romantic idea. Together they are well suited to thrash their way painfully through layer after layer of love and loss and hope and terror and fear and so on: they are a *dramatic* couple.

If you find "drama" the last thing you want to inherently find in a romantic couple, but instead would want to see it in external elements the couple must best together, Sherlock and John look less romantic.

Consider, as an example, the great romantic movie, "The African Queen." At first glance it's a movie about two people who are "dramatic." Spinster missionary meets alcoholic small-freight river captain. He's lax, she's stern, he's a boozier, she's a Methodist tea-totaller, he's willing to go along to get along, she's one to follow a star, and always aim high. But when you get to know them, neither is actually melodramatic, and together they actually damp each other's melodramatic dysfunctions. Rosie helps get Charlie off the booze, helps provide clear limits and clear goals. Charlie is able to bring Rosie out of pure head space and pure idealism, and force her to compassionate connection with the world. Together they work better, laugh better, relax better, function better--and as a result of working better, they become a force to be reckoned with. The force that, ultimately, brings down the mighty Konigen Luisa. Back to back they face external demons, having mutually helped each other defeat their internal demons.

Sherlock and John, when faced with a constant flood of external demons, are as effective. But where Rose and Charlie defeat their inner demons, John and Sherlock tend to actually exaggerate each other's demons when life fails to keep them busy. They confuse each other, annoy each other, hurt each other...and are both far too permissive with each other when it comes to mutual abuses. Neither is good at simply drawing a line and saying, "this is my limit, beyond which I will not allow you to go."

It's part of what makes them so alluring from the angst/H/C version of romance. That no-limits thing. One can imagine them filling a stage, an apartment, and two lives with the drama of their mutual love and need and hurt and grief. Once started they would not easily stop.

But one of the things I adore is seeing them in a relationship in which nature has already imposed a limit: each for a range of reasons is NOT going to fall into that particular sexual/romantic abyss with the other. Each will, in the end, look outside for romance and sex and for additional friendships, in spite of their own inclination to OCD friendship. Their natures force them away from the one relationship that might usurp everything else.

And as a result, their natures also force each of them to grown *in direct response to the other's additional relationships.*

Part of what I loved about writing Advent IV was writing a John and a Sherlock, each at the point of reaffirming their friendship and its absolute commitment, at exactly the time when each could choose to slip away into other relationships. Their love and their OCD is strong enough to keep them together, while their other ties force them to go beyond that--and as a result, each operates in a much, much bigger social and emotional world, and both have to learn how to be friends when it's NOT easy, and it's NOT all OCD tunnel-vision and when each has to learn how to support and encourage the other's relationships. Sherlock has to learn to actually value John's marriage and his child. John has to accept Mycroft and Janine and understand that each in different ways is important to Sherlock--and he has to enjoy that for Sherlock.

To me, they're bigger men because they are not lovers.
This is not true of all men, or all friendships. There's a reason I love writing Mycroft/Lestrade: I feel like *those particular* two men grow more as a result of a lover-relationship. I think they're Rose and Charlie, not Cathy and Heathcliff. It's something that's true about how I feel in respect to Sherlock, and John, and in respect to the kinds of relationships they seem to suggest to so many fan writers: something angsty and Wuthering and passionately obsessive.

Anyway.

I'm obviously at war with some of my culture. I mean, it's quite clear that for many people the Cathy/Heathcliff dynamic is THE preeminent mode of True Romance, and the more sensible, solid, Rose/Charlie is less appealing. But what can I say? I am as I said I am: I love my sensible lovers, who may not woo peacably, but who do woo under a laughing star, and who stomp calmly along the challenges of life, finding constructive answers to their problems, and spending their energy fighting external demons, instead of internal ones.

But that's why no matter how hard I try--and I have tried--I have a terrible time getting anywhere writing Johnlock. It just keeps turning to Cathy/Heathcliff to me, and OMG, did I ever hate *Wuthering Heights*!!!!!! XD
Entirely Irrelevant Question.

Chapter Summary

Yes. Really. Just me asking a question, wondering if anyone's got response beyond "It's an appealing of obviously canonically difficult narrative assumption."

Ok, we as fan writers, taken as a *group*, love writing Greg and Sherlock as meeting when Sherlock is all of the following:

A teenager--often a rather young teenager.
A street kid, living rough.
A complete and unrestrained street junkie.
Present at one of Lestrade's cases.

We like writing that it's because of Lestrade's mentoring that Sherlock goes clean to the degree he is when we "meet" them, often with a not so hidden suggestion that he's actually quite clean and living the life of a committed recovering addict at the time of "Study in Pink."

We like writing that Lestrade even takes Sherlock-the-street-junkie into his home, and sees him through withdrawal and recovery.

That he won't let Sherlock work a case unless he's straight.

I do recognize the narrative appeal: it's the classic "screwed up kid finds loving mentor who turns his life around" story, that goes back forever. What I don't get is that as near as I can tell it's in direct conflict with what we're shown from the start.

Lestrade's about 44 at the time of show-start (currently going on 51, as I recall). Cumberbatch is 13 years younger than he, and he's supposed to be 7 years younger than Mycroft. Lestrade comments that he's known Sherlock 5 years at the time of SiP. So, 44-5=39, and 39-13=26. Sherlock's not a "kid" by any stretch of the imagination at the time Lestrade gives for first meeting. Even taking age difference into account, a 39-year-old is not likely to really regard a 26-year-old as a "kid" in the usual sense. Immature as hell? Yes. But persistent immaturity in a man old enough to know better does NOT generally elicit fond and supportive behavior from professional cops.

So right there the narrative assumptions seem to be shot.

Sherlock living as a street person? One can imagine him doing so "for a case," and as an
undercover operative--but honestly, it's much harder to believe Sherlock fell through the cracks that way and meant it--or that if he did fall that hard, and that young, with drugs AND with the problems that frequently feed into long-term homelessness, it's hard to believe he then recovered and regained his life and his position to the degree he did. There's usually too much else feeding into the breakdown to make it something you can just walk away from--much less dip back into at will. So...again, it seems odd that Sherlock ever have been a true, no-other-options street person, either too mentally unstable or too bitterly stubborn to come in from the cold to Mummy and Father and Mycroft. It isn't quite as impossible as "Greg meets Sherlock when Sherlock's a kid." That first is just plain math. But it remains really odd.

Greg is the one who turned Sherlock around? He won't let Sherlock work a case unless he's straight and clean?

No. We know that literally can't be true just by the way Greg uses the "drugs raid" in SiP. That's a power play that is downright based on Lestrade's high level of certainty that Sherlock's almost sure to be holding at the time of the raid. That entire maneuver would have been a disaster if Sherlock had been in any position to call Lestrade's bluff. If he was clean, if there was nothing in the house, he could have joined with John and John's bluster, and basically said, "Search the place--more fool you." The entire sequence is built to make it quite clear that Sherlock not only can't afford to have the place searched, but that every single person in that room knows it but John...and John is trying to escalate a confrontation Sherlock can't win.

That means Greg knows Sherlock is an active drug user. It suggests that unless Sherlock is not simply radically disruptive, but unmistakably flying when he is disruptive, Lestrade's not likely to do anything beyond, perhaps, badger him privately or let Mycroft know. It certainly means that Greg is not demonstrating the kind of relationship that's deeply invested in acting as a mentor and keeping a user clean: even the most dispassionate mentor has more reaction to finding the user has gone off the wagon than Greg's displaying, and even a harsh mentor is unlikely to use the knowledge that a user is holding as a high voltage cattle prod to regain stolen evidence. So Greg as loving mentor easing Sherlock off the sauce seems right out.

We know that Greg cares about Sherlock. We know that he does act as a role model and social mentor to a limited degree (Many Happy Returns, among other things). We know he's fond of Sherlock, and that Sherlock is fond of him. But I don't see anything there that suggests the level of paternalism, mentorship of the severely dysfunctional junkie, or profound Younger/Elder intimacy and friendship that seems to be just short of outright fanon.

So--am I missing something in canon that supports the fanon version of Greg and Sherlock? I'm serious--I miss stuff. That's fine. And heaven knows, AU is always fair play in fic. I just--I keep trying to figure out if there's something canonical supporting a set of suppositions that, to me, look canonically impossible in the extreme.

Logically it seems like Greg has to have met a Sherlock who was at least in his mid-twenties, it's profoundly unlikely Sherlock would have just materialized at one of Greg's case sites, and if Sherlock was using, it seems likely to have been one of those things Greg knew, but also treated as something to ignore or use to control Sherlock, not as something to rescue him from...something he is still using against Sherlock at the time of SiP. That's not a paternal/mentor role, really--it's closer to a rough and rocky professional partnership, from where I'm standing: two men who met and relate as adults, and are friends or not-friends in an adult way, not a father/son or even real Big
Brother/Little Brother way.

Or am I nuts?
Chapter Summary

This is head canon time—not even REALLY deduction. There's not enough evidence, really. But it's deductive sort of thinking rather than just wholesale "making it up." (Grin) See what you think....

I’m going to say in advance this is more head canon than deduction itself. We know too little for there to be a chain of evidence. This is more a mystic grasping for form...an invention out of sighs and shadows. But—there are the two deducting Holmes brothers, there is longstanding fanon of a third (Sherrinford is perhaps the most common name given) who is again, in fanon, supposed to be even smarter than Mycroft and Sherlock, and now there’s brilliant mathematician Mummy and sweet, and not exactly so non-observant Father. And Sherlock and Mycroft definitely compete in terms of their deductive ability and overall smarts. So...

Where do we start with these deductive brothers?

Where did deduction come from?

Let’s start with the obvious. Mummy appears to be smart, but not deductive. Or she may, perhaps, be playing dumb around her sons, not letting them know she knows she drives them completely wild. But frankly she acts like any rather overbearing but not very observant Mum. The observant one appears to be Father—who notes that the Watsons are not seeming to do too well, who knows his wife honestly worries about her younger son, who is the “sane one.” Mummy is a brilliant mathematician, appears to be an extrovert and an alpha female, is, according to her husband, a bit of a flake—but hot. But not one of these things suggests she’s deductive in the real-world observation sense both Mycroft and Sherlock demonstrate. Indeed, mathematicians are generally considered among the least “grounded” of the math/science fields. Even when they are observant, they are not known for being practical in application.

The original Mycroft was written quite a bit this way: his lack of fondness for legwork, his complete disinterest in getting down and dirty proving his deductions, his limited practicality when faced with real life problems all suggested a mind of a rather abstract theoretical turn—though his role as the final call on all practical matters of the British Government suggests something slightly different: someone highly practical on scales large enough to offer statistical outcomes, but rather less so in the highly individual scale of one-on-one human interactions. Someone who knows that one in one hundred people will develop scalding brimwort in the next year, and can even narrow it down to a high risk population, but who can’t tell you who’s developing it now, or what they will do once they’ve got it.

BBC Mycroft appears a little more practical than that—at least his position and his role suggests he’s quite capable of that level of practical application when its demanded of him. He *can* go do field work in Serbia to rescue Sherlock, and is trusted by MI6 in that role—a high risk role regardless of who he is. He’s definitely doing some real-world applied planning and execution. Rather than being incapable or particularly poor at it, he appears to truly dislike fieldwork. I’ve used “agoraphobia and shyness” before, but I consider it to still be a very good guess: someone who honestly and deeply dislikes being caught out in public, in crowds, having to socialize even
minimally with strangers. A retiring man who CAN function in public and do so well—but who experiences it as a real sacrifice…

So—Mycroft’s not a pure abstract thinker, though his retiring nature and dislike of public arenas suggests he does prefer his deduction with a bit of distance.

That suggests that what Mycroft AND Sherlock do is not just a matter of Mummy’s bouncy, brilliant, rather outgoing and alpha personality and brilliance, but a modified version of her brilliance. She’s got the logic chops: the pure abstract capacity to sort out intricate, abstruse tangles of interwoven influences. She’s not just a mathematician, but a physicist—and not just a physicist, but a physicist working in chaos. That’s one of a number of things suggested by her published book. “Dynamics of Combustion” would have to be thermodynamics, and the thermodynamics of a chaotic non-linear system. High level stuff, and very cutting edge if she left her field when Mycroft was born. Lots of turbulence, lots of complex vectors, etc.

But the boys also have what Mummy appears not to have—and Father appears to have: people-watching skills. The ability to comprehend the evidence of human details and human behaviors. Again—Mummy’s the one who makes tea for Mary all the while swearing if she ever learns who shot Sherlock she’s going to go all monster-y. He’s the one who comes out of the sitting room in a fret after just minutes with the Watsons, knowing they are not happy and worrying over it. He appears to be the quiet, observant watcher…and the “sane one,” which often means the one who has a good grasp of how the world actually works.

So—we know the boys saw few if any other children until Sherlock was old enough to recall the attempt to integrate Mycroft and him—one strongly suspects no younger than roughly kindergarten age: late 4 to 5. That would mean Mycroft would have been eleven to twelve before he was exposed to many people…and most of the people he met before that would have been adults.

Where did “deduction” start? With Mummy teaching her older son logic and mathematical principles? With father helping a reserved and shy child observe first the adults around him, so he could integrate in a society in which he had no role but “seen but not heard” observer, and later trying to help a lost and confused older boy find his place among children who were nearly alien to him?

One thing people often confuse is “intelligence” with “early development.” The two are not the same—indeed, in some ways the two are counter-indicated. Humans are capable of the degree of intellectual development we demonstrate as a species in part because we have obscenely long infancies and childhoods, developing neurologically into our late, late teens. Instead of being born as “cooked” as we’re going to be, or developing in a matter of days, weeks, months, or at most years, we develop over decades. We are born with brains nearly too large for safe delivery (the reason human women’s “pains are multiplied” in comparison with other species’), and proceed to grow still larger brains for months after birth, and then proceed to complicate the brains we have for years and years after that.

The “early bloomer” or the “prodigy” does not reliably represent genius—just one element of development—and, given the actual time arc of human mental development, it’s seldom a leap of more than a year or so, sometimes highlighted by earlier exposure to a skill set than the “average” child would experience. Mozart, for example, was born into a musical family and exposed to the skills of the musician from birth on…

Geniuses, if anything, are commonly known for being a bit on the slow side, in a variety of areas. Socially? Oh, yes. But they can also take a goodly while to sort out other aspects of abstract thinking. You don’t have to be a prodigy to be a genius, nor a genius to be a prodigy.
Most children, including geniuses, can’t think well in certain ways until they’re neurologically developed in that area. It’s like not being able to railroad before railroading time. Childhood development studies suggest there’s not much to be gained and a lot of harm to be done trying to make a child perform abstract logic before the neurological network exists to support that.

One of the things Benedict Cumberbatch and Moffat and Gatiss have all suggested is that what Sherlock is does not fall into the realm of “super power.” He’s a normal man—if, perhaps, a naturally pretty intelligent one. He’s not actually Brainac 5 or MegaMind or even Spock-the-Vulcan. He’s a human person who’s trained, and trained hard, to be a deductive whiz.

Mycroft, while different in personality, seems to be similar in inate intelligence. Perhaps further out on the natural Bell Curve—a more extreme example of normal human “genius.” But, in the end, both boys are still normal human stock, differing more through their training and discipline than through the natural blessings of a Genius Fairy who bonked them over the bean in their cradles and made them supernaturally brilliant.

That would suggest that their training would have started with rather simple, basic things at fairly early ages. Mother teaching them basic logic. Father teaching them quiet observation and deductive reasoning about human intentions and motivations. “Try to understand what the grownups want, Mikey—you’ll get less hassle if you understand what they think they’re trying to do.”

Mycroft is the oldest, appears to be the shyest and most reserved, and he was the longest in isolation from the world. It seems likely he was the first one to be “taught” deduction—quite possibly a unique evolution of the combined skills of Mummy and Father. He would have been learning on his own entirely until he was seven, when Sherlock was born. Even when Sherlock was born, Mycroft would have had to start out teaching Sherlock only the simplest things: paying attention. Thinking things through *before* deciding where the hidden toy had gone. Simple games that, to an older child, seem almost like games you’d play with a pet puppy—and we know the Holmes family had a dog. Mycroft could well have seen Sherlock’s early years as being spent with a remarkably slow pup: human children grow much further than puppies do, but they do it much more slowly, after all. A puppy will be learning complex tricks while a human child is still counting his toes and gnawing his fist in the playpen. A Mycroft teaching both can hardly have missed the difference in learning speed…

Before we move on, there’s the issue of the importance both men place on their intelligence. Both see their intelligence as both defining them and justifying their existence. It’s what they are *for,* or, as Sherlock growls at Mrs. Hudson when she can’t get him drugs on demand, “Then what good are you?”

Thinking is what Sherlock and Mycroft are “good for,” and they both seem to feel that profoundly. Even conceding both men admit to other standards of worth, including other standards that may even apply to them, their core value in their own eyes is their intelligence and deductive competence. Somewhere along the line both are quite clearly clinging rather desperately to that one floating spar of self-worth in a sea of insecurity. If they are not brilliant, they don’t know what they’re good for, or why they’d be desired in any sense….and both, to some degree, seem to show similar insecurity and hesitation when reminded forcibly that not all the world gives Sweet Fanny Adams how smart they are.

It matters to Mycroft—matters quite dreadfully even as a grown man—that he IS the “smart one.” That is his identity. In a social universe that already seems quite small—a personal world that appears to largely consist of family—his entire sense of self seems to be predicated on being smarter than Sherlock—smarter than anyone in sight. That suggests that somehow, somewhere, he got the idea he was absolutely not valued for any of his other potential attributes, virtues, charms,
or even peculiarities. That, in a sense, would also seem to account for the level of over-
achievement he seems to embody. I mean—come on. He’s “The British Government?” He’s so
brilliant and so focused and so expansive in his intelligence and his dedication that he’s the final
call on a vast range of government concerns around the world and at home? We are not talking
about ordinary “ambition,” we’re talking about a desperate battle to prove himself to himself. Lord
knows he’s not advertising…

It’s tempting to blame his parents for this: somehow they screwed up. They probably did in some
ways—but the older I have become, the more aware I’ve become that parenting is not a tidy,
logical, linear project in which obvious laws of “garbage in, garbage out” pertain. In the words of
one of the opening songs of the classic musical “The Fantasticks” “plant a carrot, get a carrot, not a
Brussels Sprout” but when it comes to progeny---it’s hodgepodge. Children are capable of
drawing false conclusions out of the air, the soil, the very stuff of dreams, and then clinging to
those false conclusions like bulldogs, or like ciclids, whose jaws lock. It’s possible that Mummy
and Father did nothing exceptionally, horribly, catastrophically wrong. Oh, I’m not sure their
isolation of their boys sounds great—but let’s be honest. For much of history there was a fair
chance that a child in a small family at the edge of a civilized territory would grow up isolated
from many, or even any other children besides other family members. If that were a pure
developmental disaster it would have become a lot more obvious than it ever did.

So Mycroft may have simply misinterpreted something in his parent’s attitude, or their peer’s
attitudes, or in what he understood them to want from him, or how they seemed to define him. He
may have been brilliant, but little kids “deduce” some terribly wrong things. Somewhere it seems
almost certain, though, that Mycroft concluded he was not valued except for his intelligence.
Worse, at some point he seems to have come to see himself as valued only to the degree he was
“the smart one.” If he wasn’t smarter than Sherlock—he wasn’t valued at all.

There are so many damned, dumb ways that can happen. Sherlock was the baby—that alone can
make an older child feel like sloppy seconds after having always been “the only.” Sherlock appears
to have been born an extrovert—and from the looks of it one hell of a competitive cuckoo chick
from birth, ready to push for his own attention from the very start. If he was a “loud” personality
where Mycroft was a stoic, that, too, could have left Mycroft feeling helpless against a new
competitor.

If Sherlock was exceptionally cute, or pretty, or socially outgoing, or if either parent felt an
exceptional bond with the new baby, it could easily leave a seven-year-old who already thought his
primary “worth” was intelligence feeling that he had to protect himself in that one territory…and
left him also divided, being a “good big brother” and passing on his knowledge and skills, and at
the same time resenting any sign that Baby Brother might be gaining on him.

In any case, we end up with a situation in which it looks like Mycroft at some point came to
consider his primary value—and perhaps the primary *HUMAN* value—to be intelligence,
especially as expressed by his own deductive skills. He and his parents probably all three added to
Sherlock’s own skill set, and to HIS perception of intelligence and deduction as the gold standard
of human worth…. And Sherlock shows every sign of being innately competitive. He’s a show-off,
he’s ambitious in some very real ways (The only “consulting detective”—he INVENTED IT.) His
relationship with Mycroft is blatantly competitive, and blatantly both hurt and resentful that
Mycroft nearly always wins. As much as Mycroft needs, desperately, to hang on to his one primary
identifying attribute, “The Smart One,” Sherlock needs just as desperately to knock him off that
pedestal. It’s not clear if Sherlock really sees how much Mycroft needs to hang on to that status—but it’s quite clear that Sherlock needs to deprive his brother of that superior standing. It looks like
a dead heat between whether it’s driven by his own ego’s desire to be “smartest,” and his
resentment that anyone—and particularly Mycroft—hold that status instead of him.
If even a bit of that dynamic was in place by the time Sherlock was five or so, and you then throw the two boys into the deep end of the social pool, where they flounder and almost drown…well. It could go so many ways, but from the looks of it with those two “smart” became on the one hand a shared thing between the brothers—what differentiated them from the hairless apes they were coping with—and at the same time more and more an area of competition. That Mycroft appears to have been better at social adaptation in the long run—at least in the sense of learning to avoid being a constant magnet for rage and attack—Sherlock may have come to feel his lack of equal intelligence (rather than his more aggressive personality and extroverted interactions) were the basis for his greater difficulty.

It’s hard to say. But it does seem to me that what we are looking at is two boys who were technically bright—but not to the point of being superhuman. Whose deductive skills appear to be an amalgam of both parent’s reasoning and observational styles. That the skills were originally developed by Mycroft, but passed on to Sherlock by Mycroft and probably both Holmes parents. That Mycroft in particular seems to have been afflicted with a belief that his own worth lay in his intelligence—and that he passed much of that attitude as well as his deductive skill down to Sherlock. That their isolation and insecurity were both highlighted by their late introduction to age peers.

Does that all make reasonable sense as head-canon?
Gatiss' Mumbai Interview

Chapter Summary

In which I am unsurprised...and try to explain why, above and beyond what I've been saying all along.

Aparently Mark Gatiss' firm, and fairly total shut-down of speculation regarding Johnlock has fans upset and surprised and searching for some kind of out. Me, I'm the one thinking, "Yeah, OK, I thought it was interesting that both Freeman and Cumberbatch have recently starting being much more forceful and decisive about the not-gayness of what they're portraying. Looks like I was right."

To me, it looks very much like the official approach of the PTB has shifted from soft-sell and ambiguity to trying to lay the ghost of Johnlock-ambiguity past. Further, to ME it looks like an attempt to correct something that veered far more strongly in the direction of fans assuming/expecting/demanding/theorizing Johnlock as a necessity or a certainty. I can see a lot of reasons for that after this past season and the fan reaction...just as I can see reasons they chose ambiguity to start with. It raised interesting and worthwhile textual questions, it was a lovely way of preserving the fanon of a gay Sherlock for those Old Fans who loved it or needed it (much as Gatiss himself appears to love Gay Sherlock in "The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes" and it allowed them to show powerful intimacy while, in their opinion, calling the crass assumption that it HAD to be sexual into question. All of these are valid motives for starting out playing games with sexual ambiguity.

What I don't think they reckoned on was the power of a particular genre of romance to wildly overwhelm their own message in the hearts and minds of a substantial fraction of their viewership. There are a large number of fans in all fandoms who are in love with the angsty, bishie, star-crossed-gay-love, love-conquers-sexuality bathetic plot line and character arc.

Now, I have to be careful here, because as you pretty much know at this point, I'm the fan who throws the book across the room and starts swearing when I find myself in that particular type of plot line. It's not that I can't see it when it's there--if anything I can spot it pretty quickly and run-run-run, screaming and ripping my eyeballs out. It's that I have a hard time talking fairly about how a love of that trope/genre alters how people saw and responded to "Sherlock."

If you love that trope, I have to admit it would have been easy to convince yourself that, in a show of shadows and feints and hidden plot twists and deductive clues, that all that loaded ambiguity was either "proof" that Johnlock was in the cards, or equally "proof" that the writers were only gaybaiting the audience. Because of the affinity and the shift in focus, the interpretation of all the show and all the intentions of the writers got warped to conform to a central gravitational pull of "Johnlock." It's like the line about "if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail." If you are attracted at all to a Johnlock sort of relationship--lord knows, it's easy to start seeing all that affection and ambiguity and Mrs. Hudson shipping the boys and all that as intended as a clue to be read in favor of your desired ship, rather than being just as possibly (and I would argue FAR more probably) evidence that the ship is never going to sail. This past season forced that into question for many fans--Mary forced it into question. John and Sherlock themselves forced it into question. The canon-derived arcs that suggest that John Watson and Sherlock Holmes were life-long friends
whose private lives came together and diverged multiple times during their lives forced the question.

Once, when my ex and I were still together, I started singing something. My ex, who was as much a music nut as I--moreso I would say, actually, and a more disciplined and rational musician, into the bargain--wanted to know what it was. I was completely bewildered at his question--it was something he'd introduced me to that we both liked a lot. I said so. He insisted it could not be, and sang something quite different. In the end we had to dig up the album and play it.

We were both right, in a sense. I actually had the stronger melodic line. But he had a vital harmonizing line that fell more clearly into his own hearing ranges. (Yes, people can have their own idiosyncratic hearing ranges. His had suffered some damage along certain frequencies, which altered HOW he heard things a bit more than usual...) The entire piece of music would not have worked with one of the parts being missing...we were both right.

But I was more right: I had identified the primary melodic line that formed the logical spine. His line was harmonic and on occasion contrasting. It served as a melodic commentary, but not as the musical thesis.

I think that's some of what happened with the most convinced, determined Johnlockers. Their own love and their own understanding of the piece, skewed by their own reaction to Johnlock, got in the way of recognizing that the ambiguous elements and the Johnlock-ish details were part of a harmonizing thread that provided counterpoint and commentary, but NOT relationship thesis.

Now, here's the thing. My own sense, picked up from my own time in fandom, and my reading of the various artists providing interviews, is that the Johnlocker's had started feeling like a problem for the creators. I think Gatiss and Moffat might have been able to sally forth regardless. But Cumberbatch and particularly Freeman were seeming more and more as though they felt the pressure to treat Johnlock fans' version of the show as THE version. I'm not going to say they were or are right to feel that way, and I can't even swear they do. But that's my current read on their responses over the past year. More and more Freeman and Cumberbatch appeared to be on the defensive, first politely, and then with more edge, culminating in the last few rounds that brought Cumberbatch under some fire.

Here's the thing: I *PREFER* when a show's actors and writers/show runners can happily say, "Great! It's so cool you have this alternate take on our show! Go for it!" But that comfort, to me, seems almost entirely dependent on the fans equally saying, "Oh, it's so cool you have your own original take on the show from which we can diverge!! Go for it!"

Here in the peanut gallery, watching how other fans were writing about Johnlock, about people who did not agree with Johnlock, about any element of the show that threatened Johnlock, about the inevitability of Johnlock, left me feeling unsure that fannish respect for the creator's need not to be dictated to was fully there. Whether it was meta written by people who seemed to think that if they could show a pattern in a meta, it had to be a "true" pattern, or attacks on Mary that seemed (and sometimes quite openly were) attempts to justify eliminating a competitor for John's love, or, worse, public savaging of Amanda Abbingdon basically because she PLAYED a competitor for John's love... it was getting a bit strange to watch. Similarly there were stronger and stronger efforts to argue that Johnlock was morally necessary, and that if the PTB failed to provide it, it was through some moral failing on their part: homophobia, fan hatred, gaybaiting, etc.

It is impossible not to realize that not all--or even the majority--of fans of Johnlock were stepping outside the lines of respect for the creators and other fans. It was equally clear that some were--and that the overall level of PASSION for Johnlock was reaching problematic proportions.
There are people even now arguing that the creators COULD write Johnlock even if that's not what any of them intended. I have trouble with that. Now, I have trouble from a very biased position. I don't see a likely Johnlock resolution that does not put us in anguished late-life acceptance of gay identity territory with two men each radically likely to be distressed and intensely resistant and traumatized by the shift. I find that story a) getting a bit old these days as opposed to in my fresh young years thirty years back, b) exactly the kind of romance trope I don't like in the first place, and c) the biggest of all: I find it inconsistent with the show as written, performed, and directed to date. I've argued all along that Johnlock did not appear to me to be the "true" key pattern of portraiture being offered. I find the straight-John and celibate-but-mainly-straight Sherlock pattern that Moffat himself expressed from the start to be far more consistent with the overt and covert patterns I saw on screen, and the ambiguous, Johnlock-y stuff to be commentary, harmonic elements, thematic questions about the "appearance" of intimate male friendship in a society that sexualizes almost all forms of adult affection.

Still, even taking that bias on my part into account--if the writers, showrunners, directors, and performers HAVE been playing a character set closer to MY perceived arc than the Johnlocker's arc, it's not just a matter of easy conversion for them to switch over in the face of pressure from fans. I've written, I've directed, I've acted, I've helped develop (amateur) series. Even if you're not a really gonzo over-the-edge Method actor, you build your character and your relationship to the text and the themes and the arcs and the relationship with all the other performers based on a lot of key understandings of what you're doing. There are two SUPERB actors, and three good to brilliant writers who have spent something like eight years now believing they were writing about two men who loved each other completely, deeply, and profoundly, but not sexually, and not perfectly. They've been telling a story of how two straight men live a relationship that will dominate their lives without dominating it sexually. Even the ongoing wry amusement that they are *mistaken* for gay is part of that central thematic core. To try to change, and to change in ways that demands development that would radically push both characters out of their established norms, requires the writers and actors and directors and crew to break faith with the very core of what they've been doing so far--and it demands they surrender THEIR story to satisfy their fans.

Almost all of us in fan writing have had to struggle with a reader who wanted a different story from us than we were telling. Almost all of us have had to step away, sometimes with great pain, from a story we were being told by another writer than simply went where we could not--step away rather than shout "NO. NOT THIS STORY! TELL ME ANOTHER STORY!" It's hard. It can be horribly hard, especially when the story divergences involve personal senses of morals, of values, of possibilities, of damage, of degradation of a character....

As fans we grant each other the right to our own stories. We owe the original creators even more--if only because they have invested so much more, and it's tangled through so many more levels of professional and personal obligation and commitment.

It is possible that all the group--Gatiss and Moffat and Cumberbatch and Freeman and everyone--could have just kept silent and kept on as they wish to keep on. But the more militant fans had already trampled over fairly direct statements on their parts over the years, rationalizing it away or declaring statements that ran counter to their preference "lies" or at the very least intentionally misleading. The more juvenile and malicious had already been abusive toward Amanda Abbingdon. They've been abusive toward Moffat, in particular. I can't say I think it is surprising with the character Mary to stay another season (give or take) and Cumberbatch having just announced his marriage in the same time frame as playing and passionately defending a gay icon--well. I think it's not surprising that for many reasons this is the moment that the *Sherlock* crew got a bit more assertive about denying Johnlock as a goal. Better to lay down some lines, in the hopes of getting fandom to leave the creators free to do their thing, while fans do the fannish thing.
Anyway. I'm not surprised that Gatiss is getting very open about the fact that he and Moffat and company have no intention of going toward Johnlock. I'm not surprised that all the major people involved are offering a bit of push-back. I just hope, rather intensely, that both sides of the issue will realize that, in the end, nothing has changed--the fans have fandom and fic. The creators have their own vision in the show. We don't have to battle each other, or control each others visions.
Why Does Discussing Johnlock and Canon Matter?

Chapter Summary

In which I try to talk about why, in the setting of fandom and fanfic, where we all can and should be free to write our own stories and cherish our own head canon, it still matters to be able to approach factions, tjlc, and Johnlock fics and meta as dissenters.

An attempt to discuss the need for counterpoints in a world of passionate points.

This is fandom. More, it's fanfic territory...transformative lit and creative meta. In the fiction, anything can be written, as we use the original source material to say any of the million things we want to say, from pure, happy vanilla porny fantasies to various flavors of kink to gender bender to crossover to all variants of AU and complete revised setting or character mapping. It is here we all take up the right to use the source material to explore boundaries, imagine possibilities, from the most conforming and intentionally "authentic" to the wildest variants.

So why do I even care about whether Johnlock is divergent from canon? Why do I find it worth reviewing and analysing and discussing?

Well, it started with just two issues: the first was the sense of disconnect when you are presented with an argument in public that strikes you as just plain logically wrong. "Sherlock's older than Mycroft, and I can prove it." If you're at all given to academic-style close reading of text, you are faced with the fact that that's just not an objectively "true" thing to say within the context of canon. There are ways to argue it, I suspect--but they're not compelling as truth, though fascinating as examples of how text can be twisted to satisfy the needs of an exterior party. Cynically speaking, it's a look into the kind of mindset that spin-doctors public personas and political figures to make them appear to behave in ways foreign to their beliefs, actions, or intentions. It's Magnussen territory: cutting loose from fact and cleaving instead to what can be implied or projected.

So there's that--when you run into head canons and more particularly meta that seem to cut the ties with canon as you understand it, there's a gut desire to step in and point out that the arguments are not very good. But that's become problematic in fandom, where critting someone's head canon or meta has more and more seemed to be seen as hostile, immoral, and contrary to the dogma that "it's all good." That all metas and head canons are created equal.

Which brought me to the second gut reason I originally reacted. The meta and commentary I was running into was increasingly insisting that I not only was expected to politely ignore bad reasoning and sloppy weighting and assessment of evidence, but that I was actually morally obliged to support the conclusion reached, not on the basis that it was "true," but on the basis that it was Morally Correct in some sense. Those who did not agree with Johnlock were being presented as in some sense morally deficient. First for contesting the thesis of Johnlock as a valid interpretation of what "Sherlock" was supposed to be canonically: it was, as I suggested above, "wrong" to point out the flaws in the chain of argument. But, further, it was wrong because in contesting the premise the person objecting was apparently shown to be homophobic, cis-normative, prudish, or in some other way a sinner against the doctrines of tolerance and good will. It was *immoral* to object.

That pushed any number of buttons: it suggested that the only acceptable moral head canon was
Johnlock, and the only appropriate response to Johnlock meta and head canon was to embrace it...or be proved a moral lout. But—that's not how discussion works. That's not how the freedom of fandom and fan writing have worked, either. It's not how tolerance works, or liberty. It's definitely not how precise and informative discussion works. It's the rule set of the puritan tyrant, who insists that liberty only accrues to those who agree with morality, and that morality is constructed only in the form of a given orthodoxy outside of which everyone should stand respectfully silent. If that's the new shape of "freedom" in fandom and fanfic, then it's not freedom.

So there was that. As analysis it seemed sloppy to me--worthy of discussion. But discussion seemed more and more discouraged--and in light of the framing of Johnlock as both real and morally imperative and untouchable, discussion seemed to be radical. It's very hard as a deductive nutter not to respond rather like Sherlock would respond to that formulation--a sort of "bugger that for a game of soldiers" annoyance at the notion that analytical response was verbotten.

Then there were the ways the tjlc thing seemed to be woven into attacks against Moffat, and rudeness to the various creators. That unsettled me. It wasn't just fans being rude to fans; it looked like fandom exporting its faction wars into real life and trying to force the creators to conform to the fannish head canon. As I've said elsewhere, I've been a rebel fan writer and a letter campaign warrior in my time. I can sympathize with an effort to get the PTB of a show to listen--but this was extending in ways that to me crossed the lines of ethical behavior and respect toward the creators, just as it seemed to be crossing similar lines of ethics and respect within fandom.

On top of that the insistence on Johnlock--and in parallel and sometimes associated passion, the insistence on Evil Mary--created a cold environment for discussion of the implications of the show and the characters if Johnlock was not "real." So much of the energy of fan discussion was drawn into the obsessive focus on Johnlock itself. Even those brave enough to attempt counter argument against Johnlock were being drawn more and more into examing the canon specifically in light of that relationship.

What does THAT matter?

Because if the discussion constantly hinges on Johnlock: Yes or No?, then all canon turns into evidence ONLY for that discussion. Now--here's the catch. If Johnlock is not, was not, and never will be canon, and will instead only be a respected and loved fannish head canon, then having to repeatedly focus discussions on Johnlock means that discussions of the possible "real" meaning is always being derailed by discussions of an unreal meaning.

Here's an example.

One of the sequences heavily examined in light of Johnlock is the Scandal sequence from the Christmas Party to the CIA capturing and holding Mrs. Hudson, with particular attention to the morgue, the moping afterward, and the conversation between John and Irene in the power station.

If the primary point of those discussions is to prove or disprove Johnlock, then the energy is NOT going into discussions of what those sequences mean if they are not and never were and never could be Johnlock. Instead of asking what Sherlock felt and thought, and what logic was in play outside the entire issue of where John fits in as a love interest, we keep coming back to weighing John versus Irene, and Sherlock straight, ace, and bi...

That camouflages some excitingly interesting elements of the script, performances, and plot structure, if only by making various points secondary, tertiary, or not important enough to be ranked at all.

So--I have not run into ANY meta that ask whether Sherlock really believed the corpse on the slab...
It seems so very unlikely that he did. This is the man who may have seen her with question marks all over his brain—but still, he SAW her. As Sherlock. He saw her clearly enough to estimate her measurements precisely and accurately. And there's no question that Sherlock would ever have failed to understand that the mutilation of the body's face suggested someone trying to hide her identity.

Who would want to hide her identity? Most of her enemies one would suspect would not care, so long as their own identities were hidden. The primary person to benefit from hiding the body's ID would be Irene, who was threatened and in danger, and who was served by being thought dead.

Do we believe Sherlock walked up to a corpse with a mutilated face and failed to wonder if it was really Irene—or a body double she herself wanted seen to be her?

Especially when she'd sent him the phone, alerting him to her danger, but also proving she knew what was going on and was planning for it? And also suggesting that any plan she had in place made it WORTH entrusting her primary protection to someone else? Giving away her phone makes little sense if she's being hunted, unless in some way it's part of a plan to reduce her danger. So—she's got her information, and no one killing her will gain added safety. They can't take her phone, can't prove she hasn't copied the info, can't know who she's given the phone to: that's insurance. She should not have been killed in that scenario. She'd have made him into the secret keeper who has the info as a security move. She'd made him her accomplice in that scenario.

So—he'd already be suspecting that even though Mycroft might "find her dead," there would be a chance her death was faked, to still further protect her: separate taking her from gaining control of the information, and then eliminate the apparent chances of taking her. Voila—just what occurs. She's safe.

Do we believe Sherlock didn't see something that obvious? Do we believe that, already attracted by Irene and flattered at her attention and trust, he would not be inclined to "protect" her from Mycroft, standing at his shoulder looking at the corpse himself? If he said the corpse was not Irene, Mycroft would have been off in hot pursuit, even knowing Sherlock had the phone--too much chance Irene had duped the information. It was one thing to ignore her when he knew where she was--but if he thought she'd flown the coop he'd have had to then track her down.

Would Sherlock let Mycroft know?

Would Sherlock know himself?

Again--this is the man who saw and observed, even if he didn't fully understand. And bodies are as different as faces, really, though more subtle. Nipples alone come in so many variations. It's not enough to have a similar build--there's breast shape as well as size, there's nipple form and color and size and structure. There are moles and freckles. Even ruling public hair out, assuming she shaved, there would be the shape of her pubic mound. There would be the turn of her wrists, and the shape of her hands. The line of her shoulders.

Even accepting that people get stupid when faced with nudity, this is Sherlock. Who, again, estimated her measurements perfectly.

Do we really believe he was able, in one look, to assure himself it was Irene--and be so dramatically wrong?

And if he knew, what do we make of the arcs that follow? What do they say about what he does
feel for Irene--and what he does not? If he knows she lives, what does he think is going on? Is there evidence for or against the idea that he does know? In that information, is there information about the crypto-sexual game the two are playing out, with logic and power and feints and ploys?

The debate about Johnlock vs Ireneelock obscures the questions that arise if Johnlock's a fan thing, but not a canon thing...and as a result we end up spending more time and energy talking about fan head canon and fanon than we do about canon--it blocks the canon debates we could be having in favor of something that the PTB assure us just is not in play. And it drags people who'd really prefer to focus on canon debate into fanon debate over and over again, in spite of having good reason to believe the tjlc stuff is just plain not on the docket. From that point of view the assertive or even aggressive persistence of Johnlock as a topic ends up feeling very much similar to trying to discuss evolution in a group that contains a small but assertive group of militant and outspoken fundamental literalists who believe that evolution contradicts the greater truth of scripture. It distracts from discussing evolution, and draws people over and over into a more distant discussion of what constitutes science and what constitutes religion, and where the boundaries should be drawn.

That makes a difference within fandom. It alters the ability of fans to hold canon discussions without being drawn into wars over a preferred interpretation, and even when the war is avoided, it ensures that the focus on canon suffers some level of constant depletion and equally constant emotional trigger-ish problems.

Finally, there is a level of personal uneasiness with the nature of the kinds of plot that seem natural to Johnlock, what their moral implications are, and what they say about the very "tolerance" issues that seem to be on the line with the tjlc stuff.

In the dreams of many gays (including Gatiss, who's on record as supporting a particular kind of ideal goal for gay-inclusive fiction) the preferred outcome is for being gay to stop *being* the story. The dream is to have being gay be no more remarkable, no more melodrama fodder, than any other sexual or romantic alignment. Within that framing, a narrative that pivots on two characters struggling with their orientation and their unspoken, unspeakable attraction to each other, and which shows them as being incapable of sorting that out over a period of years, and having these issues specifically in the context of unadmitted, unstated, and/or unaccepted homosexual/bisexual/queer orientation, is just plain non-optimal. Instead of being a secondary issue of the romance, the relationship, the character developments and arcs, the queer-status of the characters BECOMES the story, and does so in a way that treats queer identity as intensely problematic. Worse, it ends up portraying the characters and their relationship to their queer identities as MORE dysfunctional than the subculture that surrounds them, not less.

Stop and think about that. Sherlock and John exist in a social world of metrosexual, urban, modern, liberal weirdos with very little problem with homosexuality. From Angelo to Mrs. Hudson, there's no overt homophobia. John's got a lesbian sister. Sherlock's got a gay brother. Irene's a lesbian. Moriarty is--probably at least bi, in a very nutty way. The hoteliers are gay. No one's fainting over this. I mean, Mrs. Turner next door has "married ones." Yes, in the real world homophobia lives on, and there are issues. But for the most part in John and Sherlock's world, their little universe, being gay does not matter all that much. To then write Sherlock and John as denying their sexuality, as "passing," as lying to each other, as being attracted but incapable of saying or admitting it, of going for years longing and yearning but being incapable of resolving it easily and on their own--all of which is at this point almost required by strict canon--is to suggest that John and Sherlock are the single most screwed up, dysfunctional sexually neurotic people in their entire bloody circle--and also suggests that their story is of unhappy, poorly adjusted, psychically scarred gays whose entire story is ABOUT their sexuality. That's the opposite of the ideal of orientation no longer being the driving engine or the intended point of the story. It's a form of writing queerness
as the drama of the abnormal, rather than no-drama ordinary relationships.

Is the no-drama ideal challenged by reality? Yes. In reality the war is not yet won. But on the other hand, in much of the urban west, it's won enough that the anguished coming-to-terms-with-being-GAY narrative is a bit fusty and dated and not all that current. It feels more plausible in a setting of sixties cultural change, like Brokeback Mountain, or Victorian/Edwardian Maurice territory, or Evelyn Waugh Brideshead Revisited turf. Played in a modern urban liberal setting, and specifically in the setting suggested by Sherlock, it's somewhere between quaint and bigotted, if only in the forced premise that being queer is so severely non-optimal for these two men and their ability to function calmly and sensibly.

Here's the thing--on the one hand there's the pressure to demand Johnlock be real because of longing for tolerance and gay representation--but at this point, to portray the two characters as realistically gay, they also have to be shown as realistically bad about it in dated, melodramatic ways that hint at queerness as non-adaptive and dysfunctional, at least for the two men in question, which is almost directly NOT what one dreams of as an ideal tolerant, liberated, gay-is-not-inately-a-drama ideals. That puts a lot of us in an odd spot. We'd love to see canon show more gays, and show them as sane, stable, sensible, capable people in their communities and the world at large. On that ground John and Sherlock are tempting. But character and canon consistency suggest that their story would have to be handled as exactly the kind of angsty drama that ideally would be avoided.

It's fine within fandom as fancic. Or at least, it's appropriate and worthy of support and good manners. It may still set back up--but, dammit, I really do believe--BELIEVE--that fancic and fandom are a place for all the visions, and all the dreams, and all the different evocations of story and of love. But it keeps feeling like that's not enough--it's supposed to be canon, I'm supposed to believe it WILL be canon, it's supposed to be accepted as liberal and tolerant when I find it failing the test.

I have friends whose position is basically, "Hell, it's fandom, they're all crazy anyway. Walk away from the snake pit, or go in and play but don't pick up the slithery little buggers." But that's immoral in its own right.

But all these things--all the elements I discussed above--have an impact on fandom. And fandom, for better or worse, has an impact on the real world. Fandom is big enough to be increasingly affecting how people understand analysis. It's big enough to force the attention of canon creators and producers. It's big enough to intrude on the public and private lives of the actors and writers. Inside its own boundaries, fan factions can and do alter the very nature of discussion and debate, in some cases warping the very ability to see clearly past the factional concerns. Factions alter what can be talked about. Factions even affect how one thinks about tolerance and acceptance.

These things matter. I truly believe that.

I don't believe tjlc or Johnlock are the evil red-haired-stepchild of fandom and fancic. I think they should exist. But I also think there has to be a push-back, and a space for counterpoint, and for resistance.

I think what I'm saying is that I often disagree with Johnlock and tjlc meta and reasoning, but would defend to the death its right to exist and be expressed--as meta, fic, and personal affection. But, conversely, I will defend to the death the right and the necessity of resistance to much of what Johnlock and tjlc has brought with it--within fiction, meta, within fandom, and in the world at large.

When this started, it was at first just a reaction to what seemed to me to be really questionable meta and associated attitudes. I LIKE meta, and I like thinking about canon and implications, and here
were people who obviously also liked it--but were coming up with stuff I thought was dead wrong, and counter indicated by canon and by direct statement of the creators. I could not make it make sense, and I did what a meta addict does--I came over here to mutter and poke and try to work out why it just did not work for me. Over time, as the intensity of the anger and frustration of the pattern of factions challenging canon spread wider and wider, I found myself caring just on the grounds of my belief that you have to push back--not to exile or eliminate such movements/factions, but because "freedom" demands out disenting voices or the dialog stagnates and becomes narrow and blinkered.

So.

I hope that makes some sense. I hope that those of you who adore Johnlock understand that I truly, honestly am not attempting conversion or exile of your preferred OTP or associated fics. But--I can disagree with the overall patterns and tropes and analysis and meta and factionalism without in any way disagreeing with the place of diversity and freedom within fandom and fic.

It's all good--and being able to discuss it all is better. If that makes sense, and God, I hope it does.
Mycroft, Sherlock, and Authority

Chapter Summary

I am in the mood to ponder and play meta. Fiat lux! Let's see if we can shed a little light.

When I was thirteen, my mother had to go into the hospital for exploratory surgery. I'm not going to give you the details—it came out well, but it was serious, it took a couple weeks of this and that before she was back, and we were all scared, and with good reason.

Meanwhile someone had to play mother.

I was, as I said, thirteen, and had been the "babysitter" for a few years already. (suffice it to say standards have changed....)

My brother was nine, and a flippin' handful.

My sister was four.

You can already tell me who got to "play mother." You can also guess how much actual authority I was able to wield, given a father who tended to see all younger brothers as himself—an only boy from a strongly matriarchal family with a rambunctious, outgoing red-headed sister who lived up to her hair color. Da never did quite figure out that he'd married a quiet and submissive fifties wife and had a stoic, shy introvert for his first daughter...and my brother got my Aunt's rambunction. And my brother, like Sherlock, was an emotional whirlwind AND willing to "fake" tears and lie outright.

I recall the frustrated despair of trying to keep things running when my brother's response to ordinary, everyday chores was to scream, "You can't make me—you're not my mother."

I had extensive responsibility, and no authority. Or none my brother would respect.

One of the outstanding aspects of Sherlock and Mycroft's relationship is Sherlock's refusal to accept any aspect of Mycroft's authority insofar as it might possibly apply to him. That's not just a familial issue—given their ages, and the modern family structure, and the survival of their parents, Mycroft's fraternal authority is at least somewhat subject to challenge (though given Sherlock's "issues," such as drugs, and the sense that Mycroft's been burdened with trying to cope with Sherlock in both private and public modes, Mycroft can't be ruled out as having some legitimate claim even then.) But it goes further—Sherlock, while announcing quite effectively that Mycroft is "The British Government," refuses to act as Mycroft is permitted any authority in that role, insofar as it intersects with what Sherlock wants to do. On the one hand Sherlock resists being given cases, bored though he may be. On the other hand, he refuses to be called off cases, or told that there are limits he must not exceed.

One of the reasons I so often write Mycroft as having at some point been made "Mother's Helper" and overseer of Sherlock, is because my own experience is that the fierce, irrational rejection of authority is tied to such scenarios: to a child with too much responsibility and too little authority trying to maintain some kind of control over a child too young to be trusted on his own—and too old
to be willing to cede autonomy to a resented sibling. A child who knows he can get away with it, too. That's poor Mycroft's eternal problem: he isn't willing to do the things he could do to force Sherlock--he might not even be allowed to (tempting though putting a hit out on Baby Brother must occasionally seem....). But he needs to maintain control, if only because Baby Brother is dead set on trying to occupy overlapping territory--and Baby Brother can't be trusted to stop, or realize what he's wading into, and Baby Brother won't take advice.

It's not that Sherlock and Mycroft never work together...but as near as I can determine, their times of cooperation depend on a) Sherlock realizing he needs help/backup, and b) Sherlock having some kind of bargaining power, as we see in "Hounds." Sherlock wants to initiate, set terms, apply pressure, come out feeling like he "won."

The counterpoint, though, is that Mycroft appears to need to believe he's senior in age, senior in rank/authority, and senior in being "the smart one." That Big Brother role is precious to him.

I sympathise. The past decade has been hellish for me, at a time when my kid sister prospered...prospered so completely that there were times I felt all my Big Sister cred was gone. Even when I made progress, I felt like all the dynamics of nine years difference were blown to hell.

Given our ages, it was probably good for me. And to her credit, she tried hard not to rub it in. It still stung....and made it very easy for me to sympathise with Mycroft, who has very little in his life to wrap around himself, faced with a beloved brother who is absolutely determined to strip away all Mycroft's rank, earned and otherwise.

Sherlock doesn't want to endure the humiliation of having Big Brother shadow over him so completely. (wry grin) Having recently been too shadowed over, my heart goes out to him--though I also think he's unwilling to put in the hard, patient labor to build the rank and authority he'd need to take on Mycroft toe-to-toe. But he can't seem to accept that in his professional role, Mycroft's authority is not something to which Sherlock can rationally respond with "You're not my Mummy, you can't make me." Nor can Sherlock seem to accept that Mycroft's limits and boundaries are not irrational and arbitrary--imposed merely to pester Sherlock.

As a result, rather like my kid brother and the tale of the Tall Hill, Sherlock crosses unwisely into the exact areas he'd been warned away from, because those are the areas he MUST rebel...and in rebelling, he creates the very problems that ensure Mycroft will keep trying to control him and set limits.

And Mycroft will never, never be free in Sherlock's mind, of the status of "interfering big brother who has no right." It doesn't matter that Mummy's in hospital and Mycroft does have a right--Sherlock can't accept it. He truly, totally can't.
The Comic Heart

Chapter Summary

The necessary role of comedy in Sherlock.

I've said it before. I'll say it again. This time I'm going to say it at some length: Sherlock works because its engines run on comedy, written by experienced professional comedic writers and, in the case of Gatiss, a comedian in his own right, and is played throughout by experienced comedians.

Stop and think about that.

Benedict Cumberbatch may have been best known in film for smart, geegy roles even before Sherlock--but if he had a real claim to excellence it might actually best be his role as Martin in Cabin Pressure. Not to say he played no other comedy, but Cabin Pressure, a radio/audio comedy, demanded the understanding and timing that vocal comedy forces on an actor. You can't count on slapstick, or "business," or your funny, funny face. You've got to understand the script very well, and understand the meaning of each word and line--and sell it with nothing but sound and silence. Cumberbatch has excelled as Martin, amongst a powerful cast of comedians, with a writer/creator who, like Gatiss, shares the performance. He's been taught by the best--and held his own with the best. Cumberbatch may be currently "best known" for adventure and "serious" drama--but his training includes powerful comedic chops.

Martin Freeman? The Office? Fargo? Yeah. Martin's a skilled little devil in comic roles, and was arguably best known for them prior to Sherlock.

Una Stubbs? Yeah, right--all the way back to "Till Death Do Us Part." A reigning queen of comedy, though again, like so many solid British performers, she's capable as a dramatic player, too.

Loo Brealey? Hell, she doesn't just perform comedy, she's written it.

Graves? So much of his material has been dramedy, or bitter-sweet comic roles. Finding a Rupert Graves role that's JUST non-comic is the challenge. He's played lovable-but-funny or maddening-but-funny all the way back to Maurice, and the doofy brother in "Room with a View."

Scott? Pulver? Akram?

Basically you can count on the show's actors to be capable comedians. And then there's the writing team.

Moffat and Gatiss. And, yes, Thompson, but--Moffat and Gatiss. Who cut their teeth, earned their names, forged their careers out of comedy. They write like comedians.

That matters.

Why?

Because comedians sell audiences on flawed, horrible, lovable monsters as leading roles.
I have, over the extent of this big monster meta, repeatedly found myself marveling that the Sherlock and John the viewers love are not, strictly speaking, the Sherlock and John we are logically shown. The Sherlock and John we are logically shown are both screwed up. Yes. Even John. Maybe even especially John, who from the very first is a remorseless sniper, gleeful vigilante, impassioned but largely incapable detective, and when you really think about it, exactly the sort of person your best friends would probably rather you didn't date. Straight, but not easily close to "normal" women. Closer to his buddy than his girlfriend--until he gets a girlfriend who's a crazy vigilante in her own right. Does not seem to hold a steady job in spite of being a doctor. Tries to make his living as a blogger of romanticised versions of his best friend's demi-legal adventures. Has real problems with delusional understanding of himself and his best friend.

And Sherlock--who may not be a sociopath, but who's definitely a reckless, irresponsible, socially toxic brat. I mean--really. Look. Closely. How far is Sherlock from Basil Fawlty? Really. No, no excuses. Stop and look at him, standing there, rude and reckless and self-centered and incapable of being nice to anyone on a reliable basis, even John...

Basil? Is that you?

Would Sherlock in a different era have been John Cleese's role for the asking?

The cast is structured like a comedy, with the most outrageous characters at the heart, and the nice, normal, sane people at the periphery. The more stable and sensible and responsible the role--the more the character actively resists the comic misrule of Sherlock and John--the more the character is presented as "the enemy." Or at least the loyal opposition. Lestrade's beloved--but still "the parent." Mycroft's very close to being offered as the sacrificial goody-two-shoes. Molly's right on the edge of being as much comic butt as beloved ally.

It's the Mrs. Hudson's of the world, who from the very start whisper of accepting the atypical as typical (Mrs. Turner next door has married ones!) and whose own background is hinted to be a bit sordid from the start, who fits into Sherlock's inner circle. It's Mary, the assassin, who's invited in to be John's True Love.

Mysteries are not so very different in structure from comedies, too: they are both waiting for the clue, the foreshadow, the sleight of hand, the misleading red herring--and then the glorious reveal. They both depend on a busy, entertaining surface to keep the audience from too quickly catching on to the resolutions.

What's more, Moffat and Gatiss (and, yes, Thompson) write the stories to draw laughter, just when a drama might have drawn tears. They replace the sob with a quip. They refuse the moment of sentiment--or they turn it into a drunken game of twenty questions on Stag Night.

If there is one way that many fans seem to go astray in their understanding of the show's logic, it is in failing to see how powerfully Sherlock conforms to the rules of comic presentation and comic emotion.

And that's a complicated mistake to make. You see, both comedy and drama/melodrama depend on deep, powerful feelings. Strong emotional ties. Profound love and hate. Stunning levels of vulnerability. They depend on the same engines and fuel--and it's pure rocket fuel and the engines are jet engines. But drama tends to seek the resolution in sentiment...comedy refuses the resolution in sentiment through laughter. Drama makes of even its flawed heroes "good people." Comedy repeatedly reminds the viewer that the beloved hero has feet of clay and is good only when the wind is west by southwest. Drama makes a Sherlock into a shining icon. Comedy turns him into Basil Fawlty.
Here's the thing--somehow, and I am not sure how, Moffat and Gatiss are managing to write and produce comedy, but to do so while tossing one more veil over it that allows them to pretend that it's not comedy, but drama. Light drama--but drama. Structurally, though, they're still depending on the complex laws of timing, presentation, conflict, contrast--all the little hooks and plays that make a Basil Fawlty both lovable and horrible...both the monstrous Other--and the beloved, vulnerable us.
Friends and Colleagues...

Chapter Summary

Sherlock and Mycroft--attachment styles, and comparative information implied.

At the start of the series we are introduced to Sherlock: a man with no apparent "friends," and colleagues who, for the most part, either detest him (Sally, Anderson) or like him with rather large reservations (Lestrade). He's got a landlady he loves, though, and who loves him dearly: that's already clear at the start of the show. Granted, she owes him one for her husband's timely demise, but she's still seemed to step into doting, tolerant, maternal friendship with the socially clueless gowk.

Which gives us a hint about Sherlock right away: taken objectively, as most colleagues would, he's a maddening, offensive prat. Objectively there is very little reason to tolerate him. Looked at through personal bias, he can, however, be loved. He's got a personality only a mother-surgeon or a best friend could love. Sherlock may have few friends, or even none he or Mycroft would count at the start of SiP, but friendship is the most likely chance he's got for human contact.

Compare that with Mycroft. We're not shown any friends for Mycroft, at show-start or later. But we are shown someone who of necessity has powerful collegiate relationships. He's got a loyal--and charmingly intelligent and humorous--assistant. He's got a position as the British Government. He's trusted, relied on, referred to.

Only in my fondest fantasies do people give you the kind of power, networking, or connection Mycroft owns if you're socially incompetent. Limited, yes--you can be limited, and you can have a real need to cautiously match your social contacts to your social skills. But to be a Mycroft Holmes, you've got to have some ability to work with and bond with a rather large team of colleagues. To be a Mycroft Holmes suggests a lot of things about him that, taken in concert with what we've seen, suggests that Mycroft is reasonably competent at the sorts of social interaction of the workplace and the more superficial levels of the political social scene...as a minimum. We know he's got an acid wit--but we also know he's got to have some sense when to apply it, and to whom, and how far to hold his temper. We know from watching that he's got a degree of empathy Sherlock struggles with: he knows, as Sherlock does not, that John was abused in the Reichenbach Falls plan--whether he considered it necessary or not--and he knows, as Sherlock does not, that any recovery between Sherlock and John will have to take anger and resentment and lingering pain into account.

We know that Sherlock can fake social skills for limited periods of time...but that he's also got real blind spots when he fails to realize some things are not-good, or fails to understand the feelings and motives of other people. Sherlock's not just too lazy to conform, he's got some level of actual handicap in empathic and intuitive social interactions.

Mycroft appears less crippled in understanding, and in superficial skills. He knows how to read people socially and emotionally to a degree Sherlock seldom achieves. He's got a bit of empathy and intuitive connection Sherlock struggles to match. And, yet, he has no friends....

What's the difference?
The answer has to be seen as complex...but my first suggestion has to do with intimacy and visibility. Mycroft has skills that actually allow him to avoid either, or to at least choose very carefully when to experience either. His social skills allow him to avoid attention he does not want, avoid connections he can't endure, and avoid intimacy that he finds too unsettling.

Sherlock, we know, is a show-off. He actually likes attention and praise. He's vain. He's not remotely interested in invisibility. Further, in spite of his apparent lack of friends at show-start, it's hard to believe fully in his lack thereof. He's the man who has the Irregulars network of homeless and street people--a man with a faithful following among some of the wariest, least trusting demographic in the world, if only because every hand is against them. He's the man who, even in BBC "Sherlock" reality, has contacts everywhere. Friendly contacts. Yes, people who owe him debts of one sort or another--but you don't get an Angelo, or a guy who gives you a deal on fish and chips for putting in shelves, if you're not capable of charismatic warmth. Nor, if you think about it logically, can it be said that Sherlock's got much "boundary" in terms of his personal life. Heck, at the very least, allowing John to blog (or the original Dr. John Watson of ACD canon to write) suggests a man with no fierce need to preserve his privacy.

Mycroft, though, in both ACD and BBC Sherlock, has reserve. He has boundaries. He has secrets, and keeps other people's secrets. He lives behind a veil...a veil that, in part, is created by the very social skills that might as easily gain him true friends.

It's an odd and fascinating contrast between the two brothers...and one that both ACD canon and BBC canon complicate through John and Sherlock's own delusions about Sherlock's true nature. Sherlock *thinks* he's reserved and set apart, like Mycroft. Or he did think so. Similarly he fails to see that Mycroft's actually not simply socially more skilled--but emotionally more aware and vulnerable.

Yes, vulnerable. One of the big differences between the brothers is that Sherlock, on the whole, appears to have the hide of a rhinocerous. I won't say he's totally indifferent to his "outcast state," and it's possible to hurt his feelings...however, on the whole it would appear that for the most part Sherlock does not give Jack Sh*t if he's accepted, so long as the people he does care about remain "his." Hell, he doesn't even generally mind John being peeved, or Lestrade. He's largely invulnerable.

Mycroft's vulnerable. Indeed, one of the things we're shown repeatedly is that Mycroft's got chinks in his armor. He worries about Sherlock--constantly. For all his acid, he loves his brother. He is a good son to his parents. He *cares* that he and Sherlock are hurting John in TRF, even if it in no way makes him think they should change their plans. He's hurt when Sherlock insists he enjoyed seeing Sherlock flogged in The Empty Hearse. With far, far less screentime than Sherlock, we've been shown repeatedly that Mycroft cares about things and about emotional issues in ways that make him wide open to pain and emotional turmoil. The Iceman's a muddled, emotional wreck compared to Sherlock, who wastes little if any time on regrets, remorse, guilt, shame, or longing. Indeed, finding a Mycroft appearance that doesn't include some sign of Mycroft's soft underbelly is close to impossible.

A man that sensitive is easy to hurt. Those who are easily hurt tend to be cautious in their actions.

It's odd and sad. Mycroft has the very attributes one tends to think of as socially desirable: he's empathic, aware, observant, socially adept and polished, he appears to have some mastery of diplomacy and tact, he keeps secrets even if he is a nosy parker spy. Even with Sherlock his intrusiveness is quite carefully limited and held in check. Yet all of that taken together has made him a colleague to many, and a friend to few, if any. Then there's Sherlock, who appears to be a walking sandwich board for social toxicity--rude, invasive, emotionally tone-deaf much of the
time, with no sane boundaries, unreliable empathy--if that. Quite capable of cold, detached cutting of ties. Frustratingly indifferent to the objections and protests of injured and offended associates. And, yet--he is the one with FRIENDS. Colleagues on the whole are colleagues under some degree of protest--even Lestrade and Molly, who both love him. But his friends are real, and actually quite extensive. In ACD canon, they're even more extensive than in BBC Sherlock, though ACD John often fails to recognize this. Indeed, ACD John often startles me by his ability to paint a picture of a man with a universe of social contacts and loyal friends, while insisting Sherlock is nothing if not a hermit.

It's rather like John insisting that Sherlock has no fondness for nature--while Sherlock's own testimony and ultimate life-choices suggest the exact opposite: that Sherlock in ACD canon loved the country and nature, and loved retreating to Sussex, and had very mixed feelings about London and about city life. But, then, ACD's John was always a bit blind about Sherlock.

In any case, in BBC Sherlock, we've got one brother who's got friends, because mere colleagues would never stand for him, and another who's got colleagues, because he's too vulnerable to endure friends.
Mycroft and Mary

Chapter Summary

Just speculation--a way to get my brain in gear.

One of the common tropes used in some fanfic and meta regarding Mary--often regarding Mary negatively--is the question of whether Mycroft knows about her, and what he knows. There's an assumption that protective Mycroft would never put up with Mary if he did know about her. That's presented moderately just when she's a former CIA operative trying to begin a new civilian life under a new name--of course, in many of these arguments there's an assumption that she's nothing so innocent, but instead a truly criminal rogue hit-woman of sadistic and vindictive tendencies who's either wormed her way into John's affections as a parasite, with every intention of preying on him then destroying him, or worse, that she's all of the above PLUS an agent of Moriarty, or of Moran, etc., etc., blah-blah-blah, "What Magnussen said only worse--much worse!" Of course Big Brother Mycroft would NEVER let such a woman batten on John! Much less allow it to continue after Baby Brother's Return! Mycroft must not know about her!

Or Mycroft knows, but she's so dangerous and powerful, or allied with people so dangerous and powerful, that he can't tell!

It gets worse after Mary shoots Sherlock. In spite of the rather clear intent of canon for Sherlock's own interpretation of her actions to be "true," and for Mary to be forgivable within the frame of reference of her two male friends, there are plenty of viewers and fans who are just unable to swallow Sherlock's analysis, or to forgive Mary or trust her--and quite a few of them seem to feel Mycroft never would either. Sherlock would be reckless with his life, but Mycroft? No! Mycroft would Defend His Brother and Destroy Mary--unless, again, he either did not know, or was being coerced.

So. Did Mycroft know about Mary? If he did, would he "defend" John, and then Sherlock? Would he side with Sherlock's analysis--or the fannish argument that Mary can be nothing but dangerous and untrustworthy?

The first question is whether Mycroft even knows about Mary. That, to me, is a no-brainer. Mycroft is not only The British Government, he also moonlights as The Secret Service AND as the CIA (presumably on some kind of cooperative loan deal...). He has been so for at least a few years. Mary was, at one point, a CIA assassin. The CIA does not have all that many of those, mainly because most of the CIA's work is not wet-work. Really, you only need so many full-time professional killers on staff when you're not committing mass genocide one long-distance covert head-shot at a time. Mary will have been fairly prominently on record--and for a number of reasons, Mycroft's cross-agency experience being only one, the British will have her pretty prominently on record, too. The odds of Mycroft not having access to all her information, from dental records and fingerprints to DNA samples to life-history seems pragmatically and logically impossible if Mycroft is Mycroft as he is purported to be.

But she was attempting to rebuild her life under a new identity! She was incognito!

Mmmm. And had she never been brought prominently to Mycroft's attention you could get away with a plot in which he never knew she had entered his country and begun again. It's a bit of a
stretch, but she's good at her job just as he's good at his, and he can't be everywhere worrying about everything at once. All you need is for her to make it into the country unnoticed by Mycroft's operatives and she's arguably able to start over, so long as she stays under his radar. But she does not stay under his radar, in so very many ways. When we first meet her she is working for John Watson, and dating him--and he is planning to propose to her.

Now, that's already moved the bar for "Mycroft did not know she was there." A former CIA agent hit-woman is already likely to know what much of the world does not--that Mild Mannered Mr. Holmes of Whitehall is a lot more than he seems. Such an agent would be unlikely to willingly gain employment with the mourning best friend of Mr. Holmes' late brother. It's coming too close to the eagle-eyed genius. Even if and Evil Mary assumed Mycroft would not watch over John after Sherlock's presumed death, she'd be an idiot to get work with John. She'd be an idiot to get work with John even if she was aiming for John, or Mycroft, or for a Sherlock she actually knew had survived. It's just too bloody grandstand. It's like marching down the street buck-naked with a sign that says, "NOTICE ME, MR. BRITISH GOVERNMENT!" Mary, evil or otherwise, would know she could draw unwelcome attention, even if Mycroft was not already keeping John under surveillance.

But we know Mycroft WAS keeping John under surveillance. We know because it's pretty well demonstrated. Mycroft's kept him under watch, taken pictures, ensured he was watched over... Mycroft has kept John so much under surveillance that he knows where John is eating on the night Sherlock returns...and he knows Sherlock will not be well received at that dinner. While it is not stated outright as such, it is strongly implied that Mycroft knows exactly what John will be doing that night: proposing to Mary Morstan.

There is no sign Mycroft particularly disapproves of this, either.

We want to consider both points, as we continue along.

Now--here's the obvious. If John is under surveillance to the point of Mycroft having photos and knowing about the restaurant date and the upcoming engagement, then by extension any new people entering John's social sphere from the time of Sherlock's "death" on will also be under Mycroft's surveillance. While passing contacts like kiosk vendors and bus drivers may not be evaluated by Mycroft's team, a new employee or a regular patient probably would be--and a girlfriend absolutely would be. Ergo, Mary HAS been investigated by Mycroft's people. That's just d'oh. It's so obvious that if Moftiss ever try to claim Mycroft had no idea, that's the point to hit them upside the head with the Salmon of Enlightenment and suggest that their continuity and internal logic are rapidly descending to the level of Arthur Conan Doyle's, whose reputation is justifiably in the pits. Logically Mary has to have been vetted.

Was she vetted and the team missed her real background?

Nggggg. Once Sherlock actually bothered to look, he found her ID was a micrometer thick and poorly developed. Her history goes back five years. Her name and ID are stolen from a dead child's. This is easily established by a badly injured man who does not have direct access to MI6, MI5, the Secret Service, and the CIA's records. Further, these are classic red-flag warnings of an identity switch.

So, if Mary was vetted and passed, the team vetting her was either criminally incompetent or criminally dishonest--and Mycroft has to have missed that they were either incompetent or crooked. He has to have missed it for months....

It's possible. Terribly complex, but possible. But Occam's Razor would suggest it is just easier to assume Mycroft knew who Mary was, and actually approved her presence in John's life. This is in
keeping with the fact that, on the whole, he appears to approve John's plan to get engaged to her. After all, he's made no effort to stop John's courtship in spite of knowing that Baby Brother is alive. He's made no effort to inform Sherlock. He makes no effort to send Sherlock to disrupt the vital evening--and actually makes a wry if resigned effort to keep Baby Brother away. No--on the whole it looks like Mycroft is content with John being in love with and proposing to Mary. It would appear he feels that way even if he proves to have known Mary was, well--what she was.

Would Mycroft Holmes have allowed Mary such intimate and often unsurveillable contact with John if Mary was every wicked, nasty thing Magnussen implied, and worse? After all, there would be so many times Mary and John would be out of even Mycroft's sight. And Baby Brother was indeed alive, virtually fated to come into contact with John and Mary again, if only for long enough to realize their roads had parted. Would Mycroft willingly allow that kind of dangerous tangle to develop if he could just as easily send the wicked thing on her way at the time she applies for work, or when she starts dating John?

It seems pretty unlikely.

What if she has something to force him to let her have her wicked way? Information that can coerce Mycroft? A threat that will terrify him into compliance?

IMO there is currently only one character in canon of whom one might make that argument, and it's not Mary. There's canonical grounds for suspecting similar problems in some reference to Magnussen. Mary? Not so much.

So, up to the point of the end of Empty Hearse it looks logically likely that Mycroft knew who Mary was, and was perfectly content to have her working for, shagging, and even marrying John--and eventually coming in contact with Sherlock. It's not guaranteed, but it satisfies Occam's Razor in allowing Mycroft to be exactly as Mycroft has been shown to be, and allows the surveillance he did on John to properly include background checks on Mary, and it allows Mycroft's people to be reasonably competent and loyal. It requires no heroic measures to explain how Mary failed to show up on Mycroft's radar: we just accept that she did show up on his radar, and he was fine with that.

It's fun for me to extrapolate further, and suggest that Mary might even have been sent under Mycroft's orders to at least fill the work position with John, thereby getting an off-the-record agent of Mycroft's in to strengthen his protection of his Baby Brother's friend. But that is NOT canonically supported or un-supported. It would logically fit, and there's nothing much to suggest it did not happen--but equally, there is not much to suggest it did.

Does Mary know Mycroft?

That's an interesting question, and one that, to me, has only one bit of possible evidence: Mycroft's excuse to Sherlock regarding why he will not be attending John and Mary's "night do." He argues that they will be "delighted not to have me hanging around." He does so in spite of Sherlock attempting to suggest otherwise.

All the other complexities of this scene aside, that's a very peculiar statement. Even the socially inept or awkward know how to slink into the sidelines of a public party well enough to be pretty much ignored by the hosts. Even if John and Mary were not thrilled to invite Sherlock's brother, it would take rather a lot of oomph for them to be "delighted" to have him not there. One is delighted when people one really does not like fail to show.

Now, there's the obvious: John and Mycroft have never got on all that well. And since Sherlock's return it will have become screamingly obvious to John that Mycroft was neck-deep in conning him about Sherlock's death--complicit in ways even less easily forgiven than Sherlock's
involvement. John forgives Sherlock only with great effort, and a lot of rather patchy repair work. One suspects he makes no such effort to forgive Mycroft. If nothing else Mycroft is such a superb scapegoat for a man like John. So, yes, John may be delighted at Mycroft's absence, and that may explain his comment entirely.

But it does leave open the possibility that Mary, too, will be delighted for Mycroft's absence, which his phrasing coupled with Sherlock's would suggest. If Sherlock is arguing that both John and Mary would be pleased to see Big Brother, Mycroft is arguing neither would--that both would much rather not see him at all.

So, if Mary would not want to see Mycroft, then why? It's not suggested that Brother Mike has been hanging out with Sherlock and his little gang since the return. She won't have got tired of him that way.

She almost has to know him previously. Perhaps even in ways of which Sherlock and John are not aware. Like as a result of Mycroft's surveillance work (I can see him kidnapping her to a warehouse for a few words about her employment with John) or even as his employee, assigned to watch over John. None of that would be something she'd really enjoy having to emotionally juggle at her wedding, and all of it would be on the list of things she would just as soon not have John know. Not because she's an evil, manipulative thing, but because if you're starting life over under a new name, and trying to become Just Plain Mary from now on, the last thing you need is The British Government showing up at the wedding feast packed full of your old secrets, and CAM dropping you suggestive "wedding telegraphs" implying the same.

So--there's at least a logical possibility that Mycroft and Mary know each other, and that Mycroft understands quite well why Mary would not really enjoy his presence at her wedding "night do."

What about Mary shooting Sherlock? Does Mycroft know? What would he do if he did know?

That one's an interesting one. If nothing else, it so often sets off arguments about Mycroft that I think are specious.

"Mycroft would never let anyone hurt Sherlock."

We know that's not true. There's very little sign that Mycroft has a permanent hit-squad taking out blokes who harm Baby Brother. He cares about Sherlock--but he's not half so obsessively protective as fan wank makes him out to be. He certainly shows no sign of sending someone out to kill Irene, or the Serbian thug who flogged Sherlock. And while he teams with Sherlock to deal with Moriarty, that appears to be in part through shared necessity: Mycroft needs Moriarty dealt with for straightforward secret service reasons. While Mycroft may "kidnap" people to vet them when they enter Sherlock's life (something we actually know ONLY of John, the very unexpected and sudden new roommate) even then he appears to have at least some interest in ensuring he's got eyes in place to keep an eye on Sherlock.

Nor is is surveillance of Sherlock clearly a matter of protectiveness or a desire to meddle. Sherlock's been proven too obviously a bit too much of a problem for the government (lower case) for the British Government to ignore. Again, Sherlock and John are on an official watch list, with a formal surveillance rating. That honestly does not suggest domestic concern from an overprotective big brother, it suggests actual official concern. Even if Mycroft had balls the size of granite foundation stones, he'd be very unlikely to abuse his power surveilling Sherlock using government employees and government resources unless Sherlock and his associates were actual, realio-trulio "Persons of Interest." It's just too obvious and stupid a career error for Mycroft to make if Sherlock were not from the beginning an official concern.
"Mycroft would never willingly put Sherlock at risk."

Um--

Mycroft not only lets Sherlock go scrambling around hip-deep in his own preferred risks, he willingly helps him into greater risk. He and Sherlock together decide to use Sherlock as Moriarty-bait, and in doing so they quite cheerfully sacrifice Sherlock's reputation AND safety. Then they turn around and send Sherlock solo to fight Moriarty's network.

Mycroft is complicit in this plan. He willingly takes part in sending his brother into the battle.

Mycroft puts up with Sherlock being a reckless, headstrong, self-destructive idiot as a consulting detective, too. The only ways he chooses to interfere are to try to provide Sherlock with other cases, to vet John when he arrives, and to bring in Lestrade as backup during Baskerville Hounds. He's quite sanguine about his brother living a high-risk life chasing around after criminals, murderers, assassins, and so on, and he's willing to help him do so on a solo mission of great danger and great scope.

The one thing--the ONLY thing so far--that can bring Mycroft into an instant protective frenzy is Sherlock's use of drugs. Nothing else is sufficient to draw him out of his own private haunts to involve Sherlock's friend John. Nothing else is enough to trigger Mycroft invading Baker Street, complete with Anderson and Wife, to search the premises. Even the "wanted to be a pirate" scene over Irene's apparent death looks more and more like something arranged between the brothers. One honestly doubts Mycroft thinks Irene dead. One suspects more that he and Sherlock continue to hope that someday John will prove to be a competent liar and a potential ally in espionage. John keeps failing those tests....

So. Mycroft willingly allows Sherlock to take terrible, terrible risks, provided they're not the sort of purely self-indulgent, self-destructive risk drug-abuse might constitute. He is protective, but for a very restrictive level of protection. He loves his brother--no question there--and he cares if he's hurt--also no question. The thing is, he's not so freakin' codependent he needs to feel all Sherlock's pains vicariously, nor does he appear to need to control most of Sherlock's choices. The areas they butt heads have to do with Mycroft's work, Sherlock's work, and the problem posed by the fact that Mycroft would like the two to work together more, and Sherlock is frantically unwilling to do so, if only because it keeps him eternally under Mycroft's control and in Mycroft's shadow. But that's a very different thing than obsessive protectiveness, or the kind of love that would shield Sherlock from Mary.

I think what Mycroft would do about Mary would depend on things other than just "Did she shoot my brother?"

First, I honestly think that if Mycroft agrees with Sherlock's deduction, he'd also agree with Sherlock's instant assessment that Mary's trustworthy, at least so long as neither of them ask her to betray John or risk losing John. Mycroft is not such a sentimentalist that he'd see killing Mary as a necessary response, especially when Sherlock got himself into the situation all on his own, and did so by ignoring Mycroft's insistence that he leave Magnussen alone. Mycroft deals well enough with his brother's risk taking, and he seems most likely in that case to shrug and consider Sherlock lucky it was not worse.

If Mycroft disagreed with Sherlock, and thought Mary wanted Baby Brother dead? I think he'd still tend to stand to one side and see how Sherlock worked it out, while at the same time rechecking his background information on Mary, and perhaps twisting her arm a bit off stage. But kill her? Over reaction! Again, much though fan wank does not want to admit it, Mycroft is quite good at allowing his brother to live a dangerous life among dangerous people. He even encourages it
sometimes. What he's bad at is the possibility that Sherlock will waste everything he is on addiction and eventual overdose.

To me the real odd point of Season 3 was not Mary, or Mycroft's reactions to Mary. It was Mycroft and Magnussen. Magnussen is the one person it seems possible had leverage over Mycroft...the ability to force him to stay silent in the face of great evil. And that, oddly enough, does have implications for the entire Mary&Mycroft stuff.

People seem not to notice that while we are given reasons why Mycroft does not pursue Magnussen in the discussion in the garden, we are never told why Mycroft is willing to actively PROTECT Magnussen to the point of blowing a gasket and telling Sherlock the nasty man is under Mycroft's protection. That's actually a big difference. There is a lot of airspace between a laissez faire, hands-off approach to criminals too petty for your division to bother with--and active protection of a criminal. Mycroft argues the laissez faire argument while actually pursuing the goal of protection for Magnussen. Or at least claiming to.

Which leaves interesting holes in the situation all over the place, not least including the fact that at the time Mycroft is trying to talk Sherlock out of pursuing Magnussen, Sherlock's best friend's wife is preparing for a hit on Magnussen.

Which brings us back to the question: What does Mycroft know about Mary? What does Mary know about Mycroft?

Here's the honest truth: a lot of the pet theories and meta regarding Mary and Mycroft are a bit silly, and depend on ignoring canon or radically misrepresenting canon--or at least misrepresenting what canon logically implies. It's really hard to come up with a plausible scenario where Mary's unknown to Mycroft entirely. It's really hard to come up with a scenario where Mary's got enough nous to beat Mycroft at his own game of clever analysis of the situation followed by genius application of leverage and limited resources. Magnussen? Maybe. Mary's a lot harder to justify without undoing Mycroft's very nature and resources. But there's still plenty of reason to think that there IS something there between John's wife and Sherlock's brother that is not yet revealed, and one can't help but hope it is interesting..
The Nature of Sherlock Holmes and John Watson's Friendship (deals minimally with slash issues)

Chapter Summary

An attempt to consider both ACD canon and BBC canon to try to say some sensible things about friendship, with a particular eye to liminality and limerance.

Unicorns--they are wonderful beasts. As Terry Pratchett has commented, they are not so much about virginity as about a particular time of life, fleeting and ephemeral, common to all women, and lost by all women in time--if not to sexual maturity, then to maturity itself. Unicorns speak to us symbolically of standing at the threshold of life and experience, at the doorway to our own maturity, in the fresh, green time when we think we know everything--and know nearly nothing at all. Unicorns are about all our sense of our own particular pristine specialness. They're about every hope we ever had for our future--to be worshipped by magical beasts and to take wild things so they lay their heads willingly in our laps. Unicorns are wonder.

Unicorns belong to such a fleet and fading period of our lives--and at the same time, like all the Great Beasts, they are eternal.

One of the single most beautiful, crushing, perceptive sequences I ever read occurs in the Last Unicorn, by Peter S. Beagle. Molly Grue, formerly a bandit's camp follower and common law wife, sees for the first time a unicorn--the last unicorn, white and pristine and beautiful as the dawn--and she cries out in her grief that her unicorn should come only then...too late. As Schmendrick the Magician, the somewhat hero of the tale, points out in his own jealous resentment that the unicorn accepts Molly, Molly is in no sense fit to encounter a unicorn, much less be accepted by one. She is an aging, weary trollop, no better than she should be. Her unicorn days are gone.

Her grief always cut into me. I think even as young things, we know what it is to have seen wonder when we are too old to grasp it. Molly's grief speaks of the loss of Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy. It speaks of lost chances. Hopes that died before they had a chance to live. Molly cries the same way I cry when I am fool enough to watch the American stop-action "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer," and the little doe sings, "There's Always Tomorrow." A day comes in all our lives when we know, with absolute certainty, that tomorrow may come--but the day will arrive when tomorrow comes without us. Time is a river that rushes on, leaving us behind, with all our hopes and ephemeral dreams.

Which brings me to the odd, tetchy truth of Molly and her Unicorn. Molly is too old. Her dreams are soiled and patched and worn to near-transparency. Her ego's battered and scarred. She has no illusions anymore--she knows she is no perfect liminal virgin. EXCEPT...

The unicorn accepts Molly, as much as she accepts anyone but the Prince, and she only accepts the Prince because she herself is eventually forced into liminal, luminous Unicorn time as a Virgin Princess. The thing is--to an eternal unicorn, a middle-aged trull is no less magical, ephemeral, liminal, and filled with hope than a sixteen-year-old virgin. Molly can cry at the sight of a unicorn--and the unicorn can see a virgin in the image of Molly.

I just wrote a story a few days ago about Sherlock and John, with Lestrade trying to help Sherlock
transition from his longing for the brilliant, "virgin-liminal," limerance-drenched relationship the BBC Sherlock first gives us on introducing The Great Detective and His Boswell. An enchanted, obsessive, boundary-shattering bond that turns two separate men into one pair of best friends--best friends forever. Like Molly grieving that she has passed the time of unicorns, Sherlock is struggling with the sense that the magical friendship is lost and gone with the aftermath of the Exile and with John's marriage. His grief is tangled in the jealousy he's always demonstrated that is common to many such magical friendships: to be the center and sole gravitation of his BFF's life. This in spite of the fact that we know, having watched the show, that Sherlock is the picture of the careless, heedless friend/lover, able to put John on the shelf and forget him at the siren call of any puzzle or problem Sherlock finds more ammenable to a single mind--his own.

I've been interested in the reactions--so many recognized that KIND of friendship. A few recognized the grief of losing that immaculate, magical unicorn connection. I think several also got what Lestrade tries to explain to Sherlock: that the friendship literally can't survive as it is first experienced and treasured. The sense of being two souls made one, the drunken connection, the complete obsessive bonding, the feeling of being entwined on a level that can't be resisted or described--it's part illusion, and part naturally ephemeral, and between the two it is lost to change.

It is illusion because, as Lestrade points out, it depends on two people actually being two people, with every difference and division you might expect. Boundary-less friendship is only imagined, because to be friends you must be separate enough to actually HAVE real boundaries. There must be a Sherlock, and there must be a John, and in being different they are divided from the start, just as they are also connected at the start. The perfect ur-friendship of Eden only happens after the rib has been taken from Adam's flank and woman made in her own distinct version of God's image. It will always require separation to permit the stunning special shivers that come from achieving passing moments of connection.

It is ephemeral because two different people must change. They have to grow. They have to live real lives, and those lives can't be carbon-copies of each other. To attempt it is sick. If you've ever dealt with boundary-less, co-dependent couples you KNOW that the dream friendship Sherlock is mourning turns into something horrible and ill when people work too hard to make it real. Growth--and by extension, maturity--deny the illusion of the perfect, obsessive folie-a-deux friendship. Logically, the great friendships--the ones that endure life-times--have to grow beyond the fixated, clinging, no-one-but-us-two friendship, or risk crippling the people involved.

Just as logically, if the two taking part really are different, then regardless of desire, they will differentiate, develop lives of their own, find delights that can't be shared, friends that can't enter the charmed circle of Just-Us-Two, work that bores the beloved silly. Two different people will be drawn apart, over and over again, as they live real lives.

That's tragic in some ways, just like looking at a little girl in her First Communion Dress is tragic: you know that her beautiful purity is fleeting, that life and death wait for her beyond the moment when she kneels in her pristine white dress to take the wafer and the wine for the first time in her life. The moment of innocent perfection is dying even as it comes into being. But if you don't come to terms with both that perfect beauty and its inevitable change, and final loss, you are crippled in loving her for the entire arc of her being. She has to be beautiful and beloved beyond the first moment being accepted as an adult in the faith.

So--here's the question. Do either BBC or ACD suggest that Sherlock and John's friendship is the perfect, mutually obsessed, unwavering friendship I allow Sherlock and Lestrade to mourn? Is new-found, limerance-laced adoration the norm of the friendship in those two canons--or is it just the haunting first statement of a richer, darker theme, less unicorn-enchanted and pure?
Me, I'm going to argue that neither ACD nor BCC are showing us the pair in a perpetual state of perfect folie-a-deux friendship. Both canons offer a first encounter that entrances John Watson. Both show the pair over lifetimes of change and variation, true as friends but far from constantly in the dream of boundary-less attraction. Both show the two men as very distinctly different, and as living lives more separate and distinct than I think many of the readers, viewers, and even John sometimes wishes.

In ACD one is less sure of Sherlock ever wishing for the perfect, constant friendship that closes all others out. One of the most disturbing things people seem to miss about ACD Sherlock in relationship to John is how completely he lives his life without ever fully bringing John in with him. From first to last, Sherlock always has his projects on his own, his missions John never knows about, his allies he produces at a drop of a hat whom John has never known previously. Sherlock goes years at a time, more than once, off on projects of his own that John does not even know about. He lives a complicated, full life that John sees only in scraps and snatches. He is a lone wild thing in the lone wild woods, and much of his life is lived with no reference to John Watson at all. Nor are we ever given any convincing sign that he wishes it otherwise, beyond perhaps a passing sulk that John's up and married and left him to fend for himself. But it's not a particularly pervasive sulk, and it is offset by the constant fact that Sherlock in ACD has a life lived largely outside John's knowledge, if only so that John can be perpetually surprised by some new revelation of Sherlock's scope and complexity.

Similarly, though, John lives a life beyond Sherlock's in ACD. He has both medicine and service as a soldier, and he returns to both repeatedly in canon. He marries--and better players of the Great Game than I have lost track of his marriages, thanks to ADC's depressing lack of continuity. John returns to service at one point. He often appears to lose track of Sherlock on the whole, only to be contacted again for a mission after years apart.

Sherlock retires away from John. John marries, and remains apart from Sherlock in their later days--at least as near as one can determine from a chronologically challenged canon.

One can take ACD canon as a sign that the two men were terribly unloving, betraying the unicorn friendship of that first bond. Or one can argue that the friendship endures in a more adult state, for a lifetime, surviving all the changes, all the separations, all the boundaries. From first to last, in spite of all divisions, they remain both separate and a perfect pair. BFFs forever--and in a way that is far more reflective of what we must all struggle with in real life than would be an eternal folie-a-deux.

BBC, to my mind, shows a similar "real" friendship of two different people having to build something that survies beyond the first mad, obsessed fascination, and that demands maturity and thought of both characters. Episode after episode we are shown the two being hit upside the head with the ways the other does not conform to any sort of boundary-less state. Sherlock could not and would not ever let the real John Watson into all his thoughts and all his secrets--and yet, over time, he learns to consciously allow him in--to hold on and not lose his grip on his friend. John similarly can't follow where Sherlock goes, and would not want to give up his own life and his own world-view even for an eternity of the relationship they start with--John chasing the will-o-the-wisp Sherlock in ensorcelled fascination and awe, and Sherlock encouraging it for love of John's cries of "amazing!"

Here's where, to me, it all starts getting a bit complex, though--with BBC, and with people's reaction to my own story. It's not just Sherlock and John who fell in love with their mad friendship. The readers and viewers did, too, and the readers and viewers are then dragged along as that relationship changes. Depending on who they are, and what they long for, they may cry like Molly when the friendship seems to pass its unicorn days: when the weary realities of marriages and
conflicts and misunderstandings and betrayals pile up, and the perfect union appears tattered and weakened.

Here's the thing: to me it's like the paradox of Molly--too old for a unicorn, and yet clearly beloved of a unicorn. Much of the story of "The Last Unicorn" has to do with the fact that eternal, immortal, perfect things can't love, and that to love they must be just a bit besmirched--and so must we to be loved. Molly is past her unicorn days, and thus a thousand times more beautiful when posed with a unicorn. And by being posed with a unicorn--by juxtaposing age and degredation and weariness and sin and loss and the first hints of death--she makes the unicorn shine more brightly. Unicorns are more truly unicorns when they are not tied to unchanging virgins, but to changing mortal women crammed with flaws and the burden of days.

I look at it this way. To me, there are two immortal sequences of children's literature regarding the intensity of love--real mortal love, and the love of children for their playthings. One comes at the end of the second Pooh book, when Christopher Robin makes the transition to school, and the reader knows that Pooh and Piglet and Kanga and Roo and the whole lot of them are going to pass into the depths and eventually be lost in memory and dream. But at the same time, as the author writes, there will always be a boy and his bear, together in the Hundred Acre Wood. I cry and cry at that one: that is the perfect, flawless, unchanging dream of friendship, and it survives in the heart of old boys and girls, if they remember how to love at all. You can't love without in some way always loving with mad, boundaryless, unlimited obsession.

But there's another perfect bit in The Velveteen Rabbit, in which the Skin-Horse explains what it is to be loved into reality. To be loved real. You lose your fur and your whiskers are rubbed off and you're marked and worn and often become quite ugly. But once you are real--once you've grown inside a living, changing adult love, you're real and loved forever--not a boy and his bear in perfect pickled childhood, but an old wise thing loved by other old wise things, and you've faced changed and grown more real because of it. And that perfect love partakes of that, too--it may hold the memory of the perfect first friendship at its heart, like Christopher Robin and Pooh dancing in the Hundred Acre Wood, but it is greater than that friendship, and has faced harder trials.

To me, to mourn the "loss" of the first friendship misses a lot of what ACD and BBC both offer: a bigger, more complicated, more 3-D friendship. It's not as intoxicating perhaps. It certainly demands both men work harder to preserve and expand their ties. But it's also closer to being a celebration of a REAL adult friendship between real and completely distinct men. ACD and BBC Sherlock both offer us the first drunken infatuation, but they also both carry us through far more challenging, unhappy, complicated relationships, and show far more probable forms of connection over real lives.

It's easy to be in love with infatuation: it's new, and obsessive, and sexy, and all limerancy and liminal, and it makes you feel like you did when you were a little kid and you thought anything was possible. It is harder to be in love with the hard love of middle-age, and the tender love of old age, and the love of people who forget to write each other for years as they follow their own lives--but if love and friendship survives all that, it's one hell of a magical unicorn love, isn't it?

Which I think is why I don't find my story--or BBC Sherlock--sad or about loss. I am delighted to see Sherlock and John force to move out of the drunken, giddy infatuation to more and more adult love. It gives me hope that love isn't just Hundred Acre Wood love, but that it's also Skin-Horse love, where you lose your ears and your paint is scrubbed off, and you're handed down to three generations of children--but you've been loved into reality, and you'll never lose the magic again.

Does that make sense, in terms of the various canons? I do hope it does.
Question

Chapter Summary

I ask a question about Doctor Who meta....

A valued reader, n_a, wrote me asking if I was all fight or just busy. This was my response:

Hi! I am indeed busy with RW activities. Trying desperately to motivate myself to edit and revise a manuscript. Trying to write another. Starting work with a new editing service. Trying to get spun up for the holidays. Add in that my current fan occupation us more focused on Doctor Who while the new episodes are airing, and that I have been trying to respect the Sherlockian limits of this meta and you get some silence. But I AM here, and thank you for your concern. And you have motivated me to ask my readers on this meta whether I should include Whovian meta or start a new meta on one of the Who pages. LOL I am going to cut and paste this letter and see what people think!

So, what would you all prefer? I can easily stay silent. I can move over a thread, along with any Whovians among you. Or I can stay here, as much of my Whovian thought at least relates to much of my Sherlockian thought, with Moffat snd Gatiss serving as a bridge between when more is needed than linked media concerns.

Anyone even interested?
At Last!!!!!!! New Sherlock!!!!!!!!! Abominable Bride!!!!!!!!!
Eeeeeeeeeee!!!!!!!!!

Chapter Summary

Do NOT read this until you've seen the show UNLESS you're like me and actually appreciate spoilers. It's just cram-jam full of them. NO effort has been made to hide details, nor will effort be made in any later addendums or in comments. This is NOT a spoiler-free zone.

Got that? NOT A SPOILER-FREE ZONE!

If you do not understand that I will even throw in a few extra shouts below to make sure you've had a chance to see the flares and the red lights and the orange cop-tape and the traffic cones and the paramedic team and all the stuff you need to warn you before you plow head-first into a spoiler pile-up.

Consider yourself warned at maximum decibles.

I liked it.

That said?

Spoilers

Spoilers

OMG, please take my word for it, spoilers to the max.

And still more spoilers.


Jeez, I hope that's enough for all you lovely, strange, marvelous aliens who actually try to avoid spoilers.

Ready or not, here it comes:

Ok, let’s start with the obvious: 99.999 times out of a hundred, “It was all a dream” is a bad, bad
way to conclude a story. Bad-writer! Bad! Shame.

This is because 99.999 time out of one hundred the “dream” trope is used to fake out the audience with a story that seems shocking, stunning, entirely important—and the dream aspect is used to cancel it out and hit the reset button. Nothing matters. Much of the time it’s even questionable whether the character who dreamed a dream (sorry, someone please cut the Les Mis soundtrack in my brain…)

Ahem. Yeah. Much of the time one is left fairly sure the dreamer won’t remember the dream any longer that most of us remember most of our own dreams. At best this sort of script is no more than a chipper peek into the more Jungian depths of a character’s secret “wish I may, wish I might” fantasy life. The rest of the time it seems like it’s not even that: it’s a writer’s answer to all the really interesting ideas that the higher levels of management won’t let them write “for keepsies.”

“The Abominable Bride” is the .001th example, in my opinion. Why?

First, because as concluded and framed, the dream itself will indeed “matter” in future episodes. What Sherlock experiences, what he works out, the logic that lets him announce he knows what Moriarty will do next will make a difference. So will the personal twists we’re shown within the frame of the dream: the Jungian stuff is meaningful in terms of character development, rather than just being splash pages on the imaginary tabloids.

Just as important, though, is that the dream allows us to see the emotional and relational conflicts of Sherlock’s mind, set astride the real world contrasting and coordinating truths…and what is set up in that respect is INTERESTING. It’s not empty—it’s meaningful and suggests powerful repercussions.

So, we have a drug-induced dream. The dream on the one hand has just outlined in blazing technicolor what has been suggested and hinted at previously, but never made so explicit: Sherlock’s got a serious, ongoing problem with drugs that must, ultimately, worry everyone who loves him to death. Until this episode the writers chose to allow Sherlock to do as many serious addicts and users do: manage his image. He’s bright, he’s skilled, he knows enough about his drugs to play right on the edge of losing control—and losing face. But until now the show has offered viewers exit loopholes in which to imagine Sherlock is not arse-deep in physical and emotional dependency coupled with questionable choices. “Bride” changes that, and does so with a gut-level roundhouse.

Because it technically picks up where “Last Vow” left off, we know why Sherlock would choose to fly himself higher than his little private jet. It’s not that we can’t understand. He’s killed a man, he’s being exiled to his probable death, Mycroft’s gambling he’s got six months, maybe. He’s losing John, and Mary, and Molly, and Lestrade—his world is being stripped away from him. It’s not exactly surprising that he arms himself for his leave-taking by dumping a chemical cesspool in his bloodstream. But it doesn’t have to be surprising to be revelatory.

The drugs, too, and the modern frame, justify all the otherwise too cute, too aware comments and actions within the Victorian era dream. This is not a Victorian Sherlock. Not really. This is a modern Sherlock using a Victorian fantasy-self to explore a mess of things he needs to think about, among which Moriarty is in many ways the least important: a puzzle, but not a personal crisis. Or…

Ok. Maybe a personal crisis, too. But a personal crisis whose reappearance is a conundrum but not an actual extension of a living battle between two living men. Moriarty is in many ways now simply Dark Sherlock—everything Sherlock fears about himself, dreads, worries will master him in the end. Most of all Moriarty has become Sherlock’s realization of just how vulnerable his own
boredom has made him—under the influence of that angry, peevish “Moriarty spirit” he could do anything, conceive anything, say anything…

There is an outer-world Moriarty, too—but he or she or they are another challenge entirely, logically and criminally following in the footsteps of the Master, but independent in their threat. The Moriarty is dead—long live the Moriarty.

So, if Moriarty’s “return” provides less oomph than one might have thought (or hoped, depending on your personal spin), what was the real kicker of the dream?

All the little things that are Sherlock struggling with his Real World elements. Mycroft, fat as a whale, reduced to pig-like gorging—and the contrast of the slim, disciplined, almost rigid real brother one knows would never grab an entire plum pudding as finger-food. Fist food? In any case—Sherlock’s inner self is waging a war against his big brother in a desperate, over-the-top way that STILL can’t overcome big brother, who quietly, elegantly still flows behind the scenes, protecting his brother and his brother’s friend, calling Mary Watson into the service of England…

And if that point alone does not bear real-world fruit I am going to eat my hat. Many of us have suspected Mary would turn out to be in Mycroft’s hire for some time. AT this point I feel as though only a fool would bet against it—not if Sherlock’s subconscious is running it as a trope in the background.

And the theme of the women—that’s actually quite elegant, as Sherlock, who’s always been so very bad with women, gets nailed again and again for the fundamental dishonesty of his public face compared with his admiration for brilliant, capable women, strong women, loving women… From the very start we have Mrs. Hudson bemoaning her fate as a non-speaking Victorian stock character. She and Mary and Molly and all the women of the narrative come by, one at a time, up to and including Watson’s cheeky housemaid, each finding a way to let us know that Sherlock SEES women more than he admits, and understands the insult of Victorian misogyny and patriarchal dominance. His dream John probes and probes at the obvious lie: that Sherlock can’t really not-love when he has Irene on his watch-chain.

And Sherlock’s angry, almost tragic, “I made me….” Yes; he drew false conclusions and compounded his errors and cut himself off from an entire category of human he needed…and left himself with the crippled, half-blind world of boys only.

Lestrade…Two versions of dream Lestrade…Good old duffer, perfect side-kick, adorable and fuzzy and funny…

And the Lestrade who stands in the grave with Sherlock, but who is really, clearly Mycroft’s peer and team-member, both men determined on the one hand to try to help Sherlock do what Sherlock thinks he must—but equally ready to step in when enough is enough and it’s time to come out of the grave.

I find myself fascinated by the implied triad there: Mycroft, Lestrade, and Mary. They all have roles to play in Sherlock’s often rather juvenile world—but they are also the adults hovering as guardian angels protecting John and Sherlock from their own worst selves. No matter how Sherlock may demonize Mycroft, try to imagine Mary as a pouting wife, or imagine Lestrade as a good old duffer, his own mind betrays him and shows us that he ALSO sees them as loving, caring adults trying desperately to protect and save him.

And John—Dream John and real John….

Dream John is so much more determined to poke into Sherlock’s vulnerable, tender vitals. What
“our” John would never ask, the dream John refuses not to ask. And, yet, the dream John underlines so much more powerfully that in Sherlock’s mind they live in a VERY Victorian “boys only” friendship, in which neither entirely knows how to include anyone else. And in the dream, it becomes clear that in an odd way Sherlock sees the women around him more clearly than John does: John actually SEES them in the roles society has assigned them. Sherlock sees how they fail to fit those roles...how they surpass those roles. Indeed, by the end one has a sneaking suspicion that part of the trouble is that he’s a little in awe of the strange, beautiful, alien wonders who surround him but always bewilder him a bit…and who wield so much power over him and the world around them.

But back to John. What about Real John, for the first time truly confronted with the degree of abuse Sherlock indulges in—a revelation so far beyond the mere unveiling of “Vow.” John sitting in the jet with “the list” in his hands, looking actually stricken helpless, dumbfounded, grieving.

Mycro—OMG, Mycroft…

I almost dare not comment on Mycroft, because we all know I love the dear.

It still seems so possible that Moriarty’s return is actually Mycroft’s doing…a desperate ploy to give himself the cover he needs to save Baby Brother from Eastern Europe, and to draw Baby Brother from his drugs and despair with the only hook and line Mycroft knows he can depend on: a mystery, a challenge, a chance to show off.

And of course, he’s Mycroft: he blames himself for Sherlock’s regression into abuse. This is all his own fault.

I look at the gamble between the brothers over whether Mycroft will live more than two years, and I see the Exile reversed, and the “six months in Eastern Europe” reversed. I see Sherlock trying to tell himself that his brother gambles with his life—so he will gamble with Mycroft’s—

And at the same time I find myself wondering if Sherlock doesn’t watch Mycroft’s physical status with the same eagle eye Mycroft reserves for Sherlock’s chemical and emotional well-being. I am still tempted after all this time to suspect Mycroft has literal heart problems…or did at one time.

By the end of this episode we’re set up for entire tumbling dominos of change. Sherlock’s on the scent—but he’s also in the pit of his drug abuse. He’s got to rebuild his relationship with John—with a John who now really does know the kind of risks Sherlock takes. He’s been set up for a proper character arc of coming to terms with the women in his life. He and Mycroft are now lined up for wonderful, horrible, conflicted love-frustration dances… Mary’s got to find her place. Molly and Janine—they’re in there.

The dream didn’t make this “a dream episode.” There was no reset button. The original killings happened, and Sherlock solved them in his dream—and came away with meaningful certainty about Moriarty’s death. The relationship elements, the revelations, the character reveals that happened on Sherlock’s side in the dream, and on his associates’ side in the Real World, all demand eventual narrative consequences.

So. Anyway. How would I summarize the “work” this episode accomplished?

1. Absolutely no more evasion about Sherlock’s drug problem. Sherlock’s image management has been stripped away, leaving a lonely, hungry, desperate man who does not know how to stop destroying himself, because it’s still the only way he knows to avoid destroying himself a different way.
2. A necessary shift in the relationship between John and Sherlock: John now holds the big
guns. Sherlock knows how much he needs him—and fears his precise, prying, alert, storyteller eyes. John, conversely, has finally been given what he needs to understand that Sherlock’s as helpless as he is amazing, and as fucked up as he is perceptive and in “control.”

3. Women: This episode laid the groundwork for the women of Sherlock to rise up and demand the respect and honor they are owed. I really hope to see where that goes with all the women of the show, from Mrs. Hudson and Molly and Irene to new-comers Mary and Janine.

4. Sherlock and Mycroft—trapped and loving and desperate, each facing crises beyond their natural scope or talents, and both hurting. Both NEEDED a brother. Aieeee.

5. Lestrade—set to be the anchor for a huge amount of stuff, because he’s been brought into the whole episode as someone EVERYONE can trust and love. He’s well-placed to help weave this poor, damaged family together.

6. Moriarty: Moriarty is dead. Long live Moriarty. Pray God if Mycroft has had anything to do with keeping some fraction of Moriarty alive, that he will survive it…

7. Mycroft has definitely been up to something. Given what we know, it’s almost certainly something that falls under the heading “means well.” But it does seem like Mycroft, begging John to take care of Sherlock, may have been too crafty for his own good.

All of that falls under the heading of “real consequences.” The dream is not a fake-out, or a reset button—or, as a reset button, it carried us forward instead of backward in time and development. Like a trip in the Tardis it moved themes and tropes and memes forward quickly and efficiently, while giving us—and everyone in the show—a sudden clear vision of Sherlock’s heart and soul. Even Sherlock sees himself a bit more clearly, now.

So, yeah. I loved the episode. It was not fluff. It was not wasted time. It was not a classic no-use dream episode. It was story-telling inside story-telling, which is another thing entirely.
Urrrgh. Addendum. Ranting a little Rant.

Chapter Summary

In which I kvetch about floods of critics and editors who apparently can't sort structure worth beans. Rant ensues.

Really. It's a rant. I get frustrated sometimes....

So as I work on an editing assignment I take these little breaks, to keep fresh and get past juvenile writing by inexperienced analysts.

Or at least that's the theory. It is never a good idea to read reviews on Moffat or Gatiss the night of a new release. It keeps proving to me over and over again that the primary people hired to write critic of movies etc. can't track structure with the aid of a bloodhound and a seeing-eye dog together. The current whinge is over a confused, erratic plot in which the time jumps and the reveals don't make much sense.

So. For the sake of my temper, more than anything:

The story starts with an immediately rather suspicious "Victorian" Sherlock returning home, brooding that there is a case he must solve--one already under way (Moriarty) which can best be solved by referring to a prior case, for which he will have to go "deep into himself." Which should have people's "mind palace" alarms ringing already. He's already sinking into the setting of an old, old case from that period: the Emilia Riccoletti suicide-murder ghost story case.

That first few seconds already tells us from the inception that Victorian Sherlock's world is not true or Victorian: the meta jokes, Mrs. Hudson's insistence on treating her role as something she can criticise, Sherlock's own announcement of the case already in media res...Everything should point to the Victorian World being something more meta than a straight story. Certainly Sherlock verbally setting a stage and inviting in the OLD case that will illuminate the NEW case, followed immediately after by Lestrade's entrance should alert us that this is a narrative gambit in some sense. WE have crossed out of realism into something closer to stream of consciousness. Or the best of old, old fashioned story telling, when no one makes you wait out the motivations of the genie before you are allowed to get on the magic carpet. Sherlock wants his old case, that will lead to the solution of the current conundrum--and hey, presto, Lestrade is here, and lays it out...a ghost story. A bravura epic of lethal ghostly women too strong for their men: Gothic horror.

The death of Emilia Riccoletti is already a dead give-away as a parallel to Moriarty killing himself. Failing to see that--and to see that the "old, old case": that will illuminate the current case--is just... I mean...
How can you miss that this is Sherlock drawing on old knowledge to try to understand a new puzzle? The puzzle of how Moriarty survived shooting himself in the mouth and blowing the back of his head off? How? How does this in any way fail to announce itself at klaxon levels as a parallel case that can then be used to approach the "modern" case?

"But it's in a Victorian setting."

No. It's not. Its in a wonky setting where all the characters feel free to sass the entire idea of their narrative roles and tweek the nose of writers everywhere. It's in a Victorian England that does not act like Victorian England. It may not be immediately obvious that this is a play being staged in Sherlock's mind palace, but it SHOULD be immediately apparent that it's not "real" Victorian drama, and that there are two levels of puzzle solving going on from the very first second: Moriarty's death and Emilia Riccoletti's death. Solve the Old, Old one, and you can solve the new one...the one we ALREADY KNOW SHERLOCK HAS TO SOLVE BECAUSE WE PRETTY MUCH ALL WATCHED "HIS LAST VOW."

We KNOW Sherlock in "our" time has to solve the question of Moriarty's apparent survival. We are handed the same stinkin' question in a strange and hokey pseudo-Victorian London, and we do NOT say "Ah-ha! This will be a case of parallel narratives from two differing times worked in one mind in one time"? For the love of God, Montressor, why does it not even seem to have occurred to most of these "critics"? Who HAVE watched "Vow," because their critiques say so!

At the very least, when we run into Obese Mycroft--who is simply obvious as a Sherlockian grotesque of his brother--how can anyone miss that this is going on in Sherlock's mind? That there are no time jumps, or Victorian Worlds, only the story Sherlock is telling himself as he tries to solve a puzzle?

The only thing missing here is a formal statement of the framing premise. No one steps forward in the first ten lines and says, "And thus, faced with the apparent survival of Moriarty, Sherlock Holmes, the Great Detective, didst sink into the depths and drama of his Mind Palace to pursue the question."

Okay good. Okay FINE. No one labeled it. It's a common enough sort of premise: puzzle solver goes off into secondary narrative to work out a parallel to the primary puzzle. Not rocket science. Not even high-fallutin' structure. Just a short-cut taking us directly to the point where secondary and primary are already merging.

"But the writer is supposed to tell us what the frame is going in."

Not when it's Sherlock. Sherlock is about figuring out the puzzles on your own...and waiting and gathering info while you do. Different genre from a lot of other stuff. Sherlock makes you work for it, and it doesn't hand you the road map.

"But--two time lines--Whovian story taking place in two eras."

No. One time, actually, and by mid-narrative the writers will have sat you down and shown you what timeline it all works in: it's a story of Modern Sherlock having a modern drug-addled quest for a modern solution to an old case that reflects on a modern problem.

There is no time travel.

There is no Victorian Sherlock.

There is no Victorian anyone. Only chess pieces Sherlock moves around in his mind palace as he
tries to solve the puzzle of Emilia Riccoletti, and through her, solve the puzzle of Moriarty.

One timeline. Only one.

It doesn't even jump around. Sherlock's consciousness does--but the timeline is straight and does not deviate.

The old case, however, also awakens Sherlock's own issues from the previous season: the women in his life and his own difficulty knowing how to address them, love them, work with them. Mary and Molly and Janine, for the most part: all women he loves and admires and does not know how to connect with. The Emilia Riccoletti case in its Victorian setting trips off his own issues about the women...reminds him of suffragism of the era, and the complexity of women's lives. Soon we have two major threads going on: the first is a classic patriarchal Gothic Woman Ghost mystery: existential angst over the killer bride. It's how Sherlock himself and John also seem to regularly see the world.

But going on within that is a secondary theme: that women are more than the Gothic Ghost story sees them: more than the Victorian era sees them. More than Sherlock and John often see them.

Is this seen through not only a "male gaze," but the male gaze of a man who is incompetent with women?

Yes. Of course. D'oh. It's women seen through Sherlock's inept eyes, in Sherlock's Mind Palace, as he struggles emotionally with the complications of Mary, wh's peer to himself and Mycroft--a spy of skill and ability. As he struggles with Molly, who cares about him and his drug issues and whose disapproval hurts. As he struggles with memories of Janine, who he used, abused, and yet still thinks of with what appears to be admiration and even longing. Of Mrs. Hudson who's nobody's foolish Old Lady.

The case he turned to to clarify his understanding of Moriarty is now forcing him to reexamine his understanding of women, and of himself, too--not necessarily in ways an umpteenth generation feminist theorist might approve of, but it's a start for our boy...and he does quite well by them considering that much of what we see of the women has to do with Sherlock's sense of them, not with who they really are. These are Mind Palace Women, built of male gaze and frantic attempts to reach beyond that limit.

He can't let go of the Riccoletti case, because he's sure it solves the Moriarty case. But as long as he holds on to the Riccoletti case, the more he's being forced to ask himself about his own feelings about The Women.

Meanwhile we get the jump to Sherlock coming around, and his friends and family realizing just how badly stoned he is. The labeling sequence thus happens in the middle of the narrative, not the beginning, but that really should not be a problem because you've already been told that this is Sherlock going "deep" to solve a new case using an old, old case...

The sequence of coming around simply confirms what you should have half-suspected already.

From this point on none of the switches should ever look random: they're all shifts as a drugged, desperate, shamed Sherlock tries desperately to at least resolve the Riccoletti case--and thus the Moriarty case--and save some face. Because almost everyone he most cares about is now witness to just how badly fucked up he is. Which was part of the subtext from the beginning on, but more easily missed because Sherlock was imagining himself as his own clever, witty, awesome self.

AT this point all we do is swing back and forth a couple of times between two sets of concerns:
John and Mary and Mycroft coming to grips with how screwed p Sherlock is, and Sherlock trying to wrest victory out of defeat by solving the puzzle and being able to walk out of that jet with his head high—very high, and probably not healthy, but at least his pride will be somewhat soothed.

I can only find one honestly distracting thing in this structure: the failure to provide that little frame saying Sherlock's dropping into his mind-palace to solve the Moriarty case. And really, you should not need that.

Everything else plays out logically, in terms of the dramatic lines and the motivating elements and the perceived chronology. It's MUCH easier structurally than the entire tangle of Mary shooting Sherlock and Sherlock dropping down into his Mind Palace.

So why do so many people seem to find it complicated or even unreasonably disorganized?

(whine...) That's not entirely a fake or rhetorical question. It's an ongoing problem in my life trying to figure out why so many things that seem relatively linear and logical to me seem to muddle the hell out of so many other people. It's not rocket science. It's MUCH easier than recursive loops in a computer program. It requires no mathematical algorithm to get the right results. Every step makes sense, and makes sense right where it is.

Name of the Rose is harder. Tracking Aragorn through the Paths of the Dead is harder. To Say Nothing of the Dog is MUCH harder.

This just lacks one label...and you can wait that out.

I don't get it. I really do not get it.

What do they teach people these days?
Because I have had just enough time to start to purr and simmer and feel happy. So, right up there with raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens...

A few of my favorite things.

I love the relationship between Mary and Sherlock. From his comment on her "impish" sense of humor to his ferocious insistence that no matter how doped he is, he's well enough "For Mary--always for Mary." I love the way Mary and Sherlock are each other's go-to when John is difficult. I love that for John that tenderness between his wife and his friend seems to make his marriage better, and easier. Yes, it may all be in Sherlock's head, but I love that this is how he sees them...how he loves them, including Mary still.

I love that, in Sherlock's mind, his brother and Lestrade are a team--the kind of team that holds complicated discussions about whether Little Brother is fit and what they need to do about it in exchanged glances with never a word needing to be said. I loved that little half-way dream of digging up the grave, because there are like three times when everything hangs on Lestrade and Mycroft holding one of those silent debates. I love that no matter how Sherlock goofs his brother and Lestrade up in the depths of his Victorian fantasy, in the halfway dream they are themselves--both beautiful older men. John is right--they're neither of them good disciplinarians with Sherlock. But they are loving Elder Brothers who don't know quite what to do--and who know that Sherlock abuses their softness, and don't know how to stop.

I love a lot of the little tells that Sherlock's not only in his Mind Palace, but drugged. I love the point where Sherlock jumps directly to Mycroft's dark, dark rooms, with the light filtering down, and I love that he looks up and the picture of the water fall is there, and that it runs.

I love that no matter how furious he is--and he's FURIOUS--he still makes the list for Mycroft. I know he's angry when Mycroft tries to force the promise not to use any more because he knows if he promises Mycroft that, he'll keep that promise too.

I love that his Victorian Sherlock looks quite a bit like Mycroft in his black gloves and Crombie.

I love that Janine is in his story, proud and strong and firm as stone, and that he's suffering remembering what he did to her--that he's another man who's wronged women. I love his stutter as he says "I've wronged," then changes it to "we," to include John and avoid being too honest about his own repentance. I love that all this is going on in his mind.

I love that as he spins out his answer, carrying it in some ways further and further from anything that has to be known, the direction he goes is to the women in his life. He writes them a terribly camp, terribly silly, but also grandious victory, and he writes it so he can then concede he has wronged them. It suggests he's been brooding on the entire subject for awhile: at least since Molly's slaps and Janine's time with him.

I love that it's not clear what aspects of Moriarty are Moriarty's own still and always, which are things Sherlock knows he shares in common with the man, and which are things he merely fears he
could become. Another reviewer got the right basic gist--Moriarty has indeed become Dark
Sherlock. But MOriarty is not specifically the respository of exactly and precisely Sherlock's own
fears. She tagged him as gay--and thus Sherlock's afraid of his own gay nature. I look and I think:
that could be right. Or it could just be that Moriarty was always gay--and retains that attribute
because he would not be Moriarty without it. Or it could be that Sherlock does not know what he
is, and that alone frightens him. Or it could be all of them.

I love that as Moriarty taunts him with the whole gun, tip of tongue thing, Sherlock falters--it's the
first time we've been allowed to see first hand since the rooftop just how profoundly Moriarty's
suicide hit him. Cumberbatch's voice shakes, as he says, "You're dead," and the inflection leaves it
unclear if he's horrified, haunted, or grieving. Or all of them.

I love that it's layered enough it's going to take me some time to pick it all apart. It's so good to
have a, complicated bit of fun to disassemble.

All the jokes. All the hints and clues. All the ladies, slowly spinning in Sherlock's mind.

Think about it--he left drugged. He apparently drugged himself more on hearing about Moriarty.
But what his mind worked on most--more than on John or Moriarty or Mycroft, or any of that, was
women...So much of it was about women, from the very start. Molly whom he doesn't even see as
female because he's blinded himself. Mary. Mrs. Hudson. The Brides--all the Brides. I keep
thinking of it--it's a Christmas story: his mind is still back at the Christmas party he ruined for
Mummy and Father and Mycroft and Mary. He's brooding about women--all his women.

I love the wavery feeling of where John is staying--and I love that Sherlock's the one who insists
on pointing out that John's the one who moved out on Mary.

I love his line about Mary, that goes something like this: "She concluded she knew the answer so
she put herself right in the line of danger. Wonderful choice of a wife, that." And you can hear he
means it...he's complimenting John on being clever enough to have found a superb, danger-loving
sort of a wife. So much better than some of the other sorts.

I love him talking to the empty chair...

I love that in his own fantasy, he does KNOW he's hurting Lestrade. He can't bring himself to stop,
but he does know he's hurting his friend.

I really just delighted in the episode.
Two Big, Blobby, Incomplete Bride Metas

Chapter Summary

What it says on the tin. I’ve got two different partial metas going on, as I try to figure out how to say the (many) things I continue to want to say about the episode. Which I continue to love, flaws and all.

I make no pretense that these are even as mad-cap coherent as much of my stuff. I considered not posting them, but some of what’s in them ties in with some of people’s comments, and some of it I am afraid I will forget as work starts to pick up now that the holidays are over. Some of it may spark ideas in some of you-all. Some of the details may tickle you or thrill you. So I decided to throw perfectionism to the wind and just put them up. But they ARE big, and blobby and incomplete. So—do with them what you can, and we can keep chatting as the year wears on.

First Big Blobby Incomplete Thing. (Thing One)

When an event occurs, a person’s response will not be limited to the event as it happens—the response will depend in part on all that has led the person to that day, that minute in time, that event. A story, likewise, is not just its third-act climax and the direct elements that tie together to create it. It is a culmination of a million assembled details that happen both on the stage and off, a million official and unofficial Chekhov’s Guns flowing to a trigger point. A story is about what happened before and how “now” forces “then” to a climax.

To understand a story, you must understand its background. To understand a story in a series, you must often understand the series itself. Only a true anthology-style show offers true free-standing narrative. The minute you develop long-arc series, the game changes.

“The Abominable Bride” is an excellent example of this.

Let’s start, then, at the official episode’s official beginning—which starts at the official series’ official beginning: the montage summary of the three seasons that have already transpired, followed by the reprise “setting up” the coming pseudo-Victorian pieces. Already Moffat and Gatiss are announcing that, on some level, this episode will be about what has already happened. They tell us that it is necessary to view the episode in the framing context of what has gone before. They also manage to tell us, clearly, that in spite of the appearance of a period change, we’re still in the same reality, not ACD’s reality, but in the lineage of our Sherlock and our John—it is their past that colors and shapes the narrative, not Doyle’s writing so much as what Moffat and Gatiss have already wrought in their own spin-off of Doyle’s creation.

I am struggling—I am not sure this was the most felicitous framing, especially the second portion, which makes it far too tempting for those familiar with Doyle’s works to leap to the assumption that we’re in Doyle’s world—that “our” characters are just back in their original time and frame. The use of Doyle’s classic introduction in Dr. John Watson’s words makes that easier to believe. As the new introduction spins by, there’s no Molly—but there’s also no bulldog of Watson’s. The
first encounter is stripped to the bone, lacking the depth and complexity of either Doyle’s or Watson’s work. It is a literary thumbnail sketch—a doodle. A snatch of pastiche.

It is acceptable if interpreted as Sherlock’s own mind reaching for a metaphor to frame his impending deep-Mind-Palace dive. Sherlock’s Mind-Palace is built of metaphors, allusions, mnemonic aides, conceits and triggers, all intended to create a hold-all for memory and a stage for deduction. We can accept this as Sherlock finding his “medium” for this particular form of research.

But I think, as a writer and director, that it is just a bit too unclear that it’s not a translation in truth, but only a translation in metaphor. Moffat and Gatiss both WANT the tie to the old Doyle work, and they want to reprise the older shows because that line of drama is what fuels what they are ACTUALLY doing. But their solution is imperfect. Not criminally so—once you know what’s going on you can backtrack as a viewer and supply the little tiny ah-ha needed to realize that the shift to Victorian is Sherlock’s own shift to a “fiction.” But you do have to backtrack…

And, yet, some of what they are doing is better for not knowing for sure what’s going on. It’s good to find out later that this is Sherlock in a hybrid drug-dream and Mind-Palace dive. The story itself would be weaker if we were told from the start too clearly to take it all as metaphor.

At the moment I can’t imagine a better solution, so I will settle for saying, “It is a flawed beginning but a meaningful and useful one in spite of its flaws.” I can wish it were better, but am on the whole glad it was not worse, and grateful that it was as good as it was. It did set us up for the necessary assumptions to meditate on later—a good set-up for a three-pipe episode.

We then cut to Sherlock taking the original quicky sketch: this is now, believe it or not, Sherlock beginning a Sherlock fanfic based on a blend of ACD’s original material and Moffat and Gatiss’ interpretation. From the very beginning, with the street vendor peddling ACD’s story “The Blue Carbunkle” with John taking due credit as the author, we are getting meta vibes. Sherlock’s fanfiction will reference both authorial worlds. He’s an author roughing in the bare bones of a narrative based on both.

We get to 221B, and the meta-levels rise still further. Dismembered country squires can’t be predicted—and snotty Holmesian tenants can’t be bothered to send mere landladies the kind of telegraph Holmes would fling out to Watson in a cold second. IE: Sherlock is already writing HIMSELF as the kind of inconsiderate bastard who can’t be bothered to “phone home” and let Mrs. Hudson know he’s incoming.

It helps if you are fluent enough in Victorian culture and technology, and fluent in Holmesian behaviors even in ACD reality, to know that the telegraph was in many ways the equivalent of our current phones. Not quite as fast or direct, but Holmes used the telegraph all the time in ACD to send word quickly—he used the telegraph almost as we use our mobiles and our text messages, and they were staggeringly fast. So was the London mail of the time, with multiple deliveries per day. A man could send a letter to his wife in the morning asking if they might perhaps have beef stew for dinner, have confirmation by lunch, and let his wife know he’d be home early, and there would be a near-certainty of all these notes being delivered quickly enough to be useful.

By the late 19th century, there were between six and twelve mail deliveries per day in London, permitting correspondents to exchange multiple letters within a single day. (Wikipedia, Royal Mail, Subheading: Uniform penny postage.)

It’s a cute line. It is also meaningful in terms of themes of the narrative. It’s consistent and
meaningful, in fact, in light of the next major sequence: Watson’s encounter with Mrs. Hudson… and her response. In meta-territory the imagined Mrs. Hudson takes her “creator” to task for giving her to few lines and reducing her to nothing but a narrative function: a job description who, once having fulfilled her purpose, can fade back into the assumed background. Sherlock even sympathizes: he is a “real” Sherlock who is often reduced to a fictional—and highly stylized—pop-culture hero in Watson’s works.

Watson is a story teller, and fails to see what all the bother is about. In social justice warrior terms, he’s as a writer is privileged to reduce his fellows to literary tropes and utility, and he sees nothing in the least bit wrong about that. He owes the story its logic and needs, and they supersede the silly histrionics of women (and friends) who would like to be left with the illusion that they themselves are the heroes of their own narratives. The game matters, all else is mere transport. (grin) By now we should be wondering that all of sudden the characters, far from behaving like the messier characters of the “real” show, are engaged in meta-battles over what is real and what is narrative and how you can respect the needs and rights of each. I do think this is a superb example of Moffat and Gatiss setting us up for the ultimate reveal of the “author” of this fiction without giving away the game too soon. It should, ideally, be at least setting the viewer on alert that this narrative is behaving with suspicious meta and fourth-wall peculiarity.

The “discovery” of Mary should set everything on wailing alert, though. This is NOT ACD’s Mary. It is, however, also not quite Moffat and Gatiss’ Mary. And the scene underway has too many hinted elements of the huge bundled set of issues raised and played out during season 3. Mary is there as a client. She’s been “abandoned” by her husband, who’s choosing Sherlock over her. Sherlock actually makes it quite clear inside the narrative that he disapproves of Watson’s neglect of his wife—and admires his wife highly.

I want to stop here and make a strong point. When last we saw Sherlock, he was almost certainly only a week away from shooting Magnusen. It’s not even Epiphany. His last encounter with Mary left little if any room for Watson to announce that they had at last reconciled. Even if we imagine that somewhere in the narrative of “Vows” the two were able to bring Sherlock up to date on that, he’d have had little if any chance to have internalized it. Emotionally he’s still embedded in the months after his shooting, with John angry with Mary. If we remember that, his unveiling of Watson’s wife, and his affection for her as he “unwraps her” for John, becomes a direct statement of something that’s bothering the “real” Sherlock—his subconscious self seeps into his slightly more conscious process of setting a scene in a created fantasy, and colors it thematically. Right there in that first scene we have questions of how men treat women, how Sherlock feels about women—even an odd hint of Sherlock himself thinking of and wanting “family,” as Archie’s presence in his story seems odd if it’s not a quiet wish for such a “son.”

So—even as he sets the stage for his own “work” the stage is revealing him and developing themes and concerns that are about him.

I won’t say all that much about the re-visioning of 221B, but would like to note one instance of change. In modern 221B we have the print of a skull. In the Victorian-era fantasy Sherlock has dressed the stage differently, and has chosen a different, in-period print.

Now, here’s the thing—replacing a modern print with a Victorian print on the theme of skulls is easy-peasy. Indeed, it would be simpler to find a past example than a modern one. No matter how goth and ghosty the modern world can be, it’s got nothing on the Victorians for adulation of death. Finding a Victorian-available print of a skull or print of a painting of a skull would be about has hard as finding farm salmon at a fish shop. However, what Sherlock (or the set dressers) have chosen is a very specific sub-category of a subcategory of Victorian death and skull related art. It’s a) an optical illusion print, b) of a beautiful woman at her vanity. The title, not all that surprisingly,
is “All is Vanity.” It’s a little sermon in an image.

Optical illusion prints of that era involving “beautiful” and “innocent: things that turn into skulls when you twitch your eyes right were commonplace of the era, and they were actually intended as mini-sermons: visual portraits of everlasting truth. Mandalas, or icons, if you wish. The intended theme is exactly what Moriarty argues in his first “visit” to Sherlock’s apartment: we are dust. From dust we came—to dust we will return. All that glowy-stuff decorating our shadow-framed sunbeams? Dead human skin. The Victorian prints say “Youth passes; beauty fades; wealth is lost to death; lovers are parted.”

Or to be more Mycroftian: “All lives end. All hearts are broken.”

Within the narrative of the story, though, Sherlock has not only chosen the sermon, he’s chosen a print that links that sermon to a beautiful woman admiring her beauty. Love object and death are linked explicitly. Love and death merge.

Don’t look at me that way. *I* certainly didn’t sneak onto that set and hang that print with none of the real set crew noticing. Someone chose that as the perfect era-consistent swap-out with Sherlock’s skull painting…and it fits with the script.

So, leaking from Sherlock’s subconscious as he writes his own story, are concerns for his two friends, affection and fear for Mary, who is being neglected and blamed by beloved friend John, concerns with death… All of this is entirely in keeping with the “real world” timeframe Moffat and Gatiss later reveal.

Now—back to the introit. John and Mary bicker, with John furious at being held accountable for abandoning Mary, and Mary frustrated to the max—and with good reason. John demonstrates his capacity to lie to her—and to himself, declaring the murder of a country squire with a “matter of international intrigue.” When called on it, he argues “matters were pressing.” She indicates all she wants is to be allowed to play along with them. John overrides her entirely (once again stressing the feminist amongst moron men theme); she points out that what he does requires no great skills, tempers are flaring…and through it all Sherlock is desperately, passionately playing his composition for their wedding. As John and Mary rip their marriage apart, Sherlock is trying to celebrate it.

He loves John. He loves Mary. He loves John-and-Mary. He loves their marriage. He does indeed live his own life vicariously through John and Mary’s union. Two people he adores are tearing themselves apart—and tearing apart “his family,” and “his marriage to both of them.”

When no peace is seen to be forthcoming, he breaks—and completes his set-up, running to the mystery for lack of any idea how to resolve the personal issues at hand.

Again, a quick detour. This summarizes and restates more clearly than ever the elements set in place in season 3. Regardless of what many fans would prefer, it’s inescapable at this point that Sherlock loves Mary, trusts her, and holds no rancor or distaste for the woman who shot him. He loves her—just as she is. In his mind-palace, at least, she is a good wife. The right wife. A treasure. We also can conjecture that as suggested but often argued against, he really was trying to save John and Mary’s marriage all along in “His Last Vow,” and not just for John’s sake.

Now, to the statement that begins the “mystery” arc.

Sherlock: Enough! The stage is set; the curtain rises; we are ready to begin.

Mary: Begin what?
Sherlock: Sometimes to solve a case, we must first solve another.

John: Oh, you have a case, then? A new one?

Sherlock: An old one; very old. I shall have to go deep.

John: Deep? Into what?

Sherlock: Myself…

(Moffat and Gatiss. “The Abominable Bride,” 10.2 minutes)

This is a moment to stop and study. It’s the first time “modern” Sherlock speaks in his own voice. Modern Sherlock, setting the stage, knows he is ready to set his story into motion—a story he will use to go deep, to a “very old” case, and that this case will take him into himself.

If he were NOT Modern Sherlock speaking, he would not know about the Riccoletti case, nor would he think of it as old. This is THE moment when viewers should begin to whiff the scent of story within a story, and the notion of Modern Sherlock telling the tale.

As a passing point, there are only two stories in ACD’s canon that are in Sherlock’s voice, with Sherlock as the narrator. In spite of the voice-over in the historical montage set-up of Victorian Sherlock, John is not the actual narrator of this piece. Sherlock functions as an omniscient narrator fictionalizing himself. Occasionally the narrating modern Sherlock comes into view, and gives himself away, which is fine. (grin) it works for his purposes and it can always be fixed in the final edit. The effect is both meta and self-referential.

So, a quick review: by now we know that story-telling, meta, and self-referential loops are in play. Feminism, men’s relationships with women, and women’s isolation from full action and humanity are themes in play…as is Sherlock’s standing in regards to women. We know that death, too, is a theme in play. We know Sherlock has a new case—we also know he’s going to use an old case as the key to unlock a new case. While we don’t yet have the full framing, we know that the materials being covered and the way they’re being covered are in keeping with the difficulties and themes presented in the prior season—that for this story, the past really is the preface, pouring context into all levels of the narrative. We don’t yet know how—for example, we still do not have enough data to be sure of what the surrounding frame is. It proves to be modern Sherlock creating a modern mind palace to examine and old case to determine the modern question of how Moriarty can be back—isn’t he dead? The thing is, even if we guess this—and by now many of the viewers DID appear to guess, or at least suspect, it’s not yet proven purely based on script. There’s still wiggle room.

But not damned much. I am sorry, but that explicit comment about having to dive deep into himself should be the final piece to set you up for this as a psychological adventure as much as it is a “real mystery.”

All this is set up in the first ten minutes. Ten-ish. That includes the lovely title and credit sequence that ran between the set-up montage and the first long sequence.

I honestly think those first ten minutes make it or break it for people. If they are properly wary, willing to go where the story takes them but not too committed to answers now, not answers later, there is a good chance the viewer will ultimately like the story. If the reader commits too strongly to the Victorian setting, taking the entire purpose of the story to be something along the lines of “Ben and Martin do Jeremy Brett!” they will be annoyed and confused when it keeps proving otherwise—and proving otherwise using the old and hoary “it was a dream” premise. Deprived of
the point they thought they would receive by a dream that, for THEM, destroys the entire point of the narrative, they react much as anyone does to a bad dream-reset. Similarly, if the viewer too quickly hates-hates-hates the stupid history game, perturbed by all the “out of character” elements the premise forces on the characters and on the world, the dream element may well only make it worse.

That kind of leaves the viewers who withhold too much judgement as Moffat and Gatiss “happy” audience. They’re the ones who can slam back and forth gathering data, picking details, rather pleased at the odd juxtapositions because they make the “mystery” of what this episode is about so much more fun. There are times I really do think a lot about the fact that both Moffat and Gatiss conceived this as their own little art project—a bijoux gem to suit themselves and a small audience who would enjoy the intricate, clever game of ornate, intricate crafting. They were not expecting a thundering herd to go mad for them—or to assume so quickly that they “knew” what the series was supposed to be. Moffat has recently said that at some point he wants to go back to doing small things. I can’t blame him. He knew when he set out to do “Doctor Who” that his tenure would be large and noisy and filled with contentious fans and far too much promotional work and far too much management of audience expectations. He did NOT know that Sherlock was going to be even worse. Sherlock was to be the fun thing he was doing for himself at virtually the same time he was doing Doctor Who for a million people. A delicate jeweled bit of clockwork frivolity to work on with his buddy Mark.

It’s not that he complains—but you have to admit it’s complicated his life no end that Sherlock is ever MORE popular than Doctor Who.

Anyway—that covers the build-up. What comes next is Lestrade’s summation of the New Old Case. Or the Old New Case. The case that is to parallel the puzzle of Moriarty. It’s simple, it’s classic, the expository handling is just pure gold. All the hallmark bits of creative, imaginative staging and filming can be seen.

Lestrade-in-Victoria-Land fascinates me. Visually the only person more altered is Molly, and she’s in a disguise. Lestrade, though—Lestrade’s not only turned an odd, “pretty” blonde, he’s given both a manner and a set of mutton-chop sideburns that belong fully 30 years further back in the Victorian era. He’s Dickensian, rather than anything Doyle would have written. Sherlock savages him, too—far more than we see in Real Sherlock Land.

Indeed, Sherlock is nastier, wittier, and more grandiose than his real self. I find myself thinking of his later line, to Mary in the jet, that he reads Watson’s blog of their first meeting because he’s so much more clever when John writes him. Now he’s writing himself, and reveling in his bitchy, sarky, witty version…

But he also knows he’s hurting Lestrade. Oh—in-scene Sherlock has no clue and does not care. Narrator/author Sherlock, though, does: his Lestrade is clearly hurt, over and over, as Sherlock uses him as a verbal punching bag.

I have to go back and study all the ways Sherlock the Narrator tells a different story than Sherlock the Character thinks. For example, Sherlock the character is not worried about Mary being left out. Sherlock the writer, though, is worried. He shows scenes of Mary’s disgruntlement after Sherlock the character has left the room. Likewise later he will show John, alone, afraid and dragged into something yet again outside his understanding and control…racing to Sherlock only to end up criticized and insulted.

Sherlock the character proceeds without a clue. Sherlock the writer knows…
The only thing worse than reading critics is reading comments sections (my lovely friends here excepted…). Aiee, the complaints. I won’t bother with the pure Moffat/Gatiss slurs, or the agony from people who wanted the show to contain no surprises that exceeded the limited and narrow-focus of the adds. But some of the BS just needs a comment or two.

Jumbled and confusing; only if you go in already determined that it should land in Albuquerque, only to find you’ve dug your Bugs Bunny way into something a bit more complicated. Having been to both, I will say in advance that if you can make the wrong turn at Albuquerque, I think in general you’re more likely to have a good time.

“Self-indulgent.” Eh—IMO one of the show’s charms has always been that it’s self-indulgent in a particular way. Moffat and Gatiss expected the series to be a modest, limited one-shot hit that satisfied their pleasure as story-tellers more than a beef-three-veg audience. Those of us who truly liked it as that seem to still like it—it’s what we thought. Those who underneath thought the flashy stuff was intriguing decoration for a solid beef-three-veg mystery seem to be the ones who are becoming worn out and exasperated with the show continuing to do what Moffat and Gatiss wanted to do: play story-teller games, dance around the ways they can bend the narrative delivery system, update “Sherlock” in a properly po-mo style that takes Doyle’s leaden, stolid (if also beloved) stories and flips them around on their axes. It started out self-indulgent, it continues to be self-indulgent, and if you’re fond of chocolate-rum truffles it remains a treat.

“Does not advance the plot.” Along with that, “Never actually solved the mystery.” Along with that, “Mystery had no bearing on real life.” No, Virginia, none of these statements are true. The framing question left at the end of last season was “How is it that Moriarty is alive? Wasn’t he dead?” Moffat and Gatiss have both been persistent in their position that Moriarty is dead. He shot himself in the mouth and blew out the back of his head, right in front of Sherlock, who—no matter how traumatized—is not going to be fooled by a clever sleight of hand. Moriarty is dead—and trying to bring him back physically would be truly bad writing, even if the hook of a fake “live” Moriarty is useful.

But it’s only useful as a hook, not as an actual truth. Good writers, having used it as a hook, then need it to be dismissed fairly soon—ideally before fans build an entire mental season in their minds based on the return of the once-dead Moriarty.

Getting rid of Moriarty as a revenant walking-dead zombie was one of the big things that had to be cleared away. It made a good cliff-hanger, but a bad future plot generator. Using the special to get rid of that expectation was wise. By accomplishing that alone, Abominable Bride furthered the plot substantially. It did so by having Sherlock actually solve the mystery in parallel—and he does it not once, but twice. First, dismissively, when Lestrade moans that the mystery of the Abominable Bride just keeps growing and is not solved, and Sherlock snaps that it’s already solved—that copy-cat killers are using the first killing as a template for further deaths, covering their own murders with the “Emilia Riccoletti” trademarks. Once the idea is out there you can’t kill it. But he himself does not make the emotional link between the AB copy-catting and the possibility of a Moriarty copy-cat: Moriarty himself is too vivid and personal for him to easily see the comparison. So he has to solve it a second time, in overblown, Victorian Goth histrionic overdrive—desanctified churches and silly hats and gongs all hiding the one obvious truth: that if Moriarty lives, it’s because other people have taken up his role…a conspiracy of other people at some level. So, no: we can’t say “Sherlock didn’t really solve the case.” He solved both cases—or at least, provided one logically possible if dramatically purple-prose solution to the Victorian case and a second far
more plebian version involving the same principle—and at the same time resolved the outer case as being, like the inner case, one where dead-is-dead and other people take over from those who went before. It’s solved, resolved, and done with. And, as I said above, it’s important in a furthering-the-plot way to get that dealt with. We did not need to spend our first episode of season 4 coping with that idiotic hook. I vastly prefer this way of veering than I do Moffat and Gatiss’ prior ways of running away from their own cliff-hangers. Clever though it is once to have Moriarty’s phone ring and him just walk away, or to have Sherlock come back and essentially say, “It doesn’t matter how I got off the roof: it was a trick, and it could only be a trick, deal with it,” it remains an unpleasant way to start a season. This was much better as a free-standing ep outside the coming arc, with a story and a point of its own. We were given an entire episode to work our way through the cliff-hanger and see in detail what the real answer properly should be. In any writing, when your brilliant detective stands less than two feet away from someone who puts a pistol in his mouth and blows the back of his head off, there really should be no way a few years later to come back and say, “Sherlock was fooled.” Sometimes death needs to be death.

Which brings us to the accusation that the mystery had no bearing on “real life.” The classic flaw of a “it was all a dream” plot is that most of them do not have bearing on the real world. This mystery did: it resolved the outstanding cliffhanger from last year. Further, all the rest of the episode set up the questions for the coming seasons. We know with near certainty that Moriarty is now a “them.” Or a newly ascended and crowned heir to the Moriarty-an throne. We have a new enemy to deal with—an enemy we have reason to believe may play in the complicated waters of conspiracy and subterfuge, just as the “suffragette” women of Sherlock’s overblown solution to Emilia Riccoletti are a complicated conspiracy.

All of that is massive, massive work done in terms of furthering the plot. It’s all work we won’t have to deal with when the next show starts, and thank God for it. Logic had many of us already a bit annoyed at the red herring possibility of Moriarty back from the grave. THAT would have been “self-indulgent.” It is so good to have that ruled out before the next season begins.

The plot was also furthered by the elegant choice to make this an “inception” type plot, in which we dive into Sherlock’s mind. That one decision let them on the one hand clarify all sorts of minor house-keeping while sweeping in the ultimate statement of Sherlock as, yes, a seriously problematic user/abuser of drugs. What minor stuff got cleared away?

We now have no legitimate reason left to think Sherlock mistrusts or is gaming Mary. He loves her. He is actually on her side in the John/Mary dispute that was set off by her having a hidden spy persona. His sympathy lies with her and his approval is hers for the asking. He LIKES her as a clever, bold, dangerous spy. She’s a brilliant choice of wife, in his opinion. Where before viewers could assure themselves that their Sherlock agreed with them that Mary was unforgivable, and was just pretending, this pretty much sweeps that theory away.

We eliminate the lingering question of whether Mycroft loves his brother, or merely games him. Even for a good game, I can’t see Mycroft going through the dives and doss-houses, or forcing the rule of the List on Sherlock, if he does not honestly, profoundly love his brother….whatever other elements may be in play that Mycroft can’t tell, he does care about Sherlock.

And we learn some of what makes Sherlock “run.” Or “tick” if you prefer a bomb-based metaphor. I think you need to step back to see it, though.

Moriarty has become the embodiment of Sherlock’s fears. He was not that, before his death, though: he was Sherlock’s strange, repellent-attractive equal, but he was not truly the depth of his fears. Even with the hint at Baskerville that he could become so, he’s still just a rival, a competitor, a fellow-genius.
Moriarty does two things to become the inner personification of all Sherlock’s fear—to be chained in a round padded room in the pits of Sherlock’s mind palace. To show up for Sherlock’s death.

Moriarty beat Sherlock—and he did so by DYING. The only thing more terrifying would be a Moriarty who could be killed—and come back. And come back. And come back: the ultimate unbeatable monster. Which is exactly what the cliff-hanger last season suggested. Moriarty, the dreaded, horrifying Moriarty of the strait-jacket and the padded room in the depths of the Mind Palace has come back.

That’s the big curly-bracket frame for this story. Sherlock, on a plane to nowhere, drugged out of his mind, gets word that Moriarty apparently lives. In living, he’s saving Sherlock’s life—and threatening his sanity. Sherlock, again ALREADY DRUGGED, takes more and goes diving, because he’s too desperate to resolve the question to wait even the five to twenty-five minutes it’s likely to take to get the plane turned around, get clearance to land, and taxi in.

For Sherlock, Moriarty back from the dead is a gothic horror…the kind of horror you have to face. It will kill you, or you will kill it, but you can’t run, you can only face it. Moriarty has become the undying enemy, the undead monster, death itself come to pay a visit.

Moriarty in Sherlock’s mind palace is actually, in a terrible way, Sherlock’s ally. He has no patience with Sherlock’s gothic game. He is now Sherlock’s PTSD God of Death and Vulnerability, and he’s ready to get on with that role. The entire first visit of Moriarty to Victorian 221B is a battering, brutal statement of death. He is dead, he is death, he is become death. He eats dead skin, he reminds Sherlock that we are all dust, that you can’t keep anything pure and undefiled by the remains of the dead. He is the eternal premonition of our own lack of eternal life. We shall all die. (Mycroft, in the background, murmurs “All lives end….” Sherlock, furious in a jet seat and drugged off his gourd argues that on the one hand, using drugs need not be death, and on the other hand that not-using will not grant eternal life.)

Sherlock, like quite a lot of thrill-seekers, is at the same time terrified of death…and terrified of living.

And Sherlock does have PTSD. Judging by his reactions, he may well have spent the last three or more years with PTSD. The shock, the horror of Moriarty blowing himself away mere inches from Sherlock, and in doing so winning and forcing Sherlock into retreat, has made Moriarty forever the trigger-touch-stone-haunt who owns Sherlock’s fears, weaknesses, mortality. We the living all have a terrifying twin who will someday take over for us—a twin who is we the dying. We the dead. Moriarty is the face of that for Sherlock now.

That’s plot progress. HUGE plot progress.

So is the material brought in by the secondary plot—the narrative of the women. If Moriarty is death, in a real sense the women are life—a life Sherlock is afraid to grasp. As frightening and gothic in their own way as Moriarty the undead.

John becomes Sherlock’s example, but also his disappointment: he’s a worse husband that Mary deserves, in Sherlock’s eyes. He joins Sherlock and millions of other men who fail to treat women with respect and dignity.

This is a story from Sherlock’s mind, framed in Victorian Gothic terms and tropes. The secret societies, the not-KKK hoods. Sorry, just because there is a KKK link does not mean there is no other reasonable link to pointy hats. Those pointy hats also make the women witches, and Spanish inquisitors, and martyrs of the Spanish inquisition forced to wear the hoods as penance…and, most of all purple robes with pointy hats are even now the uniform of the penitents—the nazarenos of...
Holy Week….

The women of Sherlock’s fantasy are not dressed as KKK monsters, but as repentant sinners performing a rite of penance in a desanctified church—a nice jumble of confused references befitting a Victorian Gothic with a secret society….but hardly a finger pointed to compare the women to the KKK alone. Only to the vast tradition from which the KKK also drew inspiration.

We learn through this that Sherlock actually does feel remorse—as the penitents do—and makes confession—as a penitent—as he recalls his own sins (remembering Molly’s slaps, and his seduction of Janine…) He has hurt “his” women. He is as guilty as he has seen John of being: both betraying the women Sherlock admires and loves.

How the HELL is this not furthering the plot? How the hell is it seen as mere mischief-making and indifference to the supposed viewers’ preference for an easy-access romp? It may be self-indulgence, but it is the self-indulgence of authors who like to write a piano piece for four hands on occasion, even if it is true that some of their audience can’t follow all the weaving harmonies. Some will just enjoy the pretty music, and some will truly light up—as I do—to find someone, anyone, writing at a challenging level.
Chapter Summary

This is one big discussion of Bride seen in the context of Season 9 of Doctor Who, and in light of Moffat (and Gatiss, but mainly Moffat) with a little extra bit having to do with Mycroft, Moriarty, and things to come.

The pilot of the plane, in the “first awakening,” is the same woman who plays Lady Carmichael. I have no way to be sure if she’s the real captain, or if Sherlock has just glossed her in as yet another comment upon how limited the world was, and how much more free it is now for women. But to me it’s one of the unmistakable indicators of layered dreaming still in effect. A woman who, in Sherlock’s fictional past, would have been limited to a domestic role—or a subversive role—or in Lady Carmichael’s case, both—in Sherlock’s “own” time flies a sweet little government jet. Presumably trained in the armed forces.

I keep thinking about this episode. I do not want to get into major wars about Moffat and misogyny and feminism. All I will say is that 1) I do not think Moffat is in any way justifiably a misogynist or an anti-feminist, but 2) I think he is a man of his era, and shares many of the natural and culture blind spots that go with those two factors. As a man, he can NEVER do more than imagine what it is to be a woman—and always through the filter of a man’s mind and a man’s experience. As a man of his time, he shares the conditioning and assumption of millions upon millions of otherwise inoffensive, well-intentioned men who still regularly get things wrong. He can’t step out of his culture or his skin, no matter how he tries. The best he will ever do in all his life is come up with a compassionate and empathic approximate of what a woman feels like in her own limiting skin.

The counterpoint, of course, is that those of us born female and raised in our time are exactly as limited in reverse. It’s time we stopped attaching moral blame to systemic blindness, and instead attached moral appreciation to those who, however imperfectly, struggle to see beyond the blind spots and stretch their hearts to bridge their own limits.

Which brings me back to Moffat, and the past season of Doctor Who, and The Abominable Bride.

People have noted, with varied levels of compassion, that Moffat gave a huge portion of season 9 of Doctor Who to women—in multiple roles. They ruled the season as actors, and held place of honor as writers and directors. It was a season dedicated to giving women scope, be it ever so imperfect. Moffat may not have gotten it right in one or another person’s viewpoint, but by God, he didn’t play “token female” games. It was tits-to-the-tripwire female dominated drama, terminating in the Doctor first crashing as Clara died—and went on to become a deathless Doctor in her own right, immediately followed by the Doctor at last giving River the marriage he owed her: a real relationship based on real love, however imperfect. Moffat spent at least one season in an ongoing examination of women in his own art and his own métier.

And then, to cap it off, he gave us “Bride,” in which Sherlock essentially makes the same internal cultural dive. Deep-deep. It’s not the fall that kills you…

One of the most important things to me is that Moffat KNOWS that no matter how deep he and
Sherlock dive, no matter how either cares and attempt precision, it’s always filtered through their own sense of narrative and drama, and their own sense of their male role as the star. It’s not an ACCIDENT that at Sherlock’s grandiose, over-wrought, high-gothic pinnacle, with secret societies and brides everywhere and silly-ass costumes beloved of the Victorian era but ridiculous in modern eyes, with gongs and chanting in desecrated churches at midnight, with all the good and bad inheritances of the Victorian beliefs about women flying around the room, who should stalk out but Moriarty and just plain rip Sherlock to shreds for concocting anything so damned silly. Moffat knows—in the end to women, men’s dramas about them are reduced as often as not to idiotic dumb shows in which the men again and again try to nip to the head of the line and turn even our feminism into their chance to head the parade and man’ splain us to ourselves.

And, yet, what else can a man do? Man is man. He lives in a male body, sees through a man’s eyes, was raised in a culture that taught him quite a lot of bullshit. Man, like woman, sees himself as the star, and the other gender as the complementary (and complimentary) subordinate.

All you can do is keep trying to learn, and understand, and stretch, and care, and as silly as it gets, you can choose to support the people who deserve your support. Work to lose the battles you should lose, because your ‘side” is wrong. You can’t do much more but once more launch yourself into Reichenbach Falls, make a fool of yourself, risk death—but keep trying.

Moffat and Gatiss are writing a very Victorian detective—and in regards to women in particular, they’re trying to rationalize two cultures that have split wide open along the tension-line of gender roles. To be true to Old Sherlock, New Sherlock has to at least start out utterly clueless and inept about women. To be true to Old Sherlock, New Sherlock has to at the same time hold them in chivalric honor while fearing them. To be true to Old Sherlock, New Sherlock has to be capable of learning—for a Sherlock who can’t learn is no Sherlock at all. This dynamic started generating complex ripples in the show from the very start, because the moment you let Mrs. Hudson be a modern woman, and accept against your own better judgement the new character of Molly, you’re up to your ass in issues—about women, sex, gender roles, and Sherlock, who must start out just plain bad with women. An exaggerated caricature of the caricature a lot of fans present as “the real Moffat.”

Sherlock, who has come a step at a time along a path from the kind of permanent little boy who can live inside an all-male Best Buddies fantasy to a man who’s just beginning to realize how strong and marvelous and unique the women in his life are—and how much he both loves them and fears them.

Sherlock, in TAB, dreams layered dreams. He dreams of women shackled by Victorian norms, and of women shackled as powerfully by dramatic and narrative conventions. He dreams of a writer-John who can see no wrong in telling a woman that, in his writing, she is nothing more than a narrative function—never seeing the dismissive patronization of that attitude. He dreams of a woman who can fly the skies—or a woman who is forced into subversion and murder because she can’t. He can write a grand drama in his head intended to justify and redeem women—only to have Moriarty himself point out that it’s still Sherlock’s self-aggrandizing fantasy about Sherlock. Sherlock can jump off as many cliffs as he likes, but no matter where he is, he’s still limited by being Sherlock.

But he’s a Sherlock struggling, for perhaps the first time, with being forced out of his little peacocking world in which he’s the hero—and everyone else is either his supporting player or his enemy, or, in the case of women, no one at all: a narrative function. He sees Mary as his brother’s ally; he sees John as having limits—both flaws and fair points where he can’t follow Sherlock into hell. He sees, and sees, and sees, and struggles to fit it all into a comforting and comfortable high gothic narrative.
And he fails. In the end, he fails. Yes, he solves the puzzle he set out to solve. Yes, he survives ODing. Yes, he knows what comes next, now. But he fails—his little bubble of Victorian victory is burst by Moriarty, who mocks his little drama of virtuous commitment to melodramatic, campy pseudo-radical feminism. He fails to protect his self-image in front of Mary and John. He fails to fool himself—he knows, now, that he’s a junkie out of control, a man still in debt to his brother, a man who’s been more than a bit not-good to truly wonderful women in his life.

The pilot flying Sherlock’s jet—away from England and back—is in his dreams a woman. She is a woman who, in his Victorian fantasy, is the power behind the secret society of brides. She is the heart of his narrative.

I look at that and I don’t see Moffat and Gatiss as writing a misogynistic diatribe against women, but a sometimes tin-earred male attempt to understand how they themselves so often fuck up with women…not out of malice, but out of systemic blindness they can’t simply escape.

That’s one of the things being ignored in the current craze to “check your privilege” and “own your systemic bigotries.” The killing element of systemic problems, built into the system, is that no one person can solve them, or even begin to understand them: they’re too big, too invisible, too mutable. A person with privilege in one area lacks privilege in another, and even the big-time winners have a hard time seeing that they are still in better shape than those who lose the privilege lotteries.

I like seeing Moffat and Gatiss write about Sherlock and the Doctor and women: the shows, by their very nature, draw on old, hoary, gendered archetypes. They are systemically male in POV. And, yet, as a result, the world shown in them is an *accurate* picture of how honorable men are still blind, and how, when you’re male, all women are seen in relationship to you, seldom the other way around.

So we end Season 9 of Doctor Who with the Doctor sees Clara and River not as people in relationship with him—but himself as a person in relationship to them. He is cut free from seeing Clara as his own, because in making him forget her, she’s able to claim her story as her own—not about him at all. Instead he’s about her—his love, his grief, his mourning. And, in the same way, he discovers River—a brave River who loves him in spite of her doubts and his neglect: someone who is greater than him. Braver than him. More worthy of his love than he is of hers.

She becomes the star of HIS world. Only then can he stop defending himself and instead give himself.

And Sherlock? We don’t know yet. But we know he’s learned that woman are a larger and mysterious body of people with dignity and integrity that is not HIS. With dramas that are not ABOUT him—which instead he must serve, rather than usurp.

That’s no small thing.

And, while we’re on the topic of Bride, more thing.

Sherlock survives his little drug binge. He once again goes storming off, viciously letting Mycroft know that he’s rubbish if he doesn’t get Sherlock a pardon he does not really deserve. Sherlock and John and Mary all end up out by the car, and we have the lovely discussion of Moriarity being really dead—after all, you really can’t blow out your brains right in front of Sherlock-fucking-Holmes, mere feet away from the Great Detective, and manage to turn it into a fake-out. Not without discrediting Holmes entirely. But, still, “he’s back—and I know what he’s going to do

And, while we’re on the topic of Bride, more thing.
next.”

How many of you noted that Sherlock’s gaze shot back to the jet—Where Mycroft is alone with his thoughts and the fragments of the list. How many of you noted that the very last shot of the show before the Victorian end pastiche, is of the car seen through the windows of the jet, from Mycroft’s POV? And how many of you have asked how it could happen that Moriarty’s body was never recovered? Unless, of course, the man in charge of Project Lazarus disappeared him, the better to protect Sherlock’s hostages to fortune, and the better to confuse and discombobulate Sherlock’s adversaries during the time of the Exile and the Hunt?

There is only one way Moriarty could “come back from the dead,” and at least part of that way lies in Mycroft’s actions, at the time of Reichenbach Fall, and in times since.

Anyway. That’s it for now. Laters, lovies!
Very first response to Season 4: The Six Thatchers. Rudimentary thoughts going in to the set-up.

My first question--is Mary really dead?

Does that seem idiotically Sherlock-complex to you? Me, too, and yet--

By the face-off with Norbury in the aquarium, the number of people who did NOT know about the upcoming conflict might be fewer than the number who did. Lady Smallwood was alerted, Mycroft was alerted, John was alerted and was only delayed by Mary's argument that Rosie needed attending to--and that this was her gig. Lestrade shows up--with two fellows who almost have to be MI5/MI6 grunts, because you do not let the MET go dragging off people like Mrs. Norbury. She's too dangerous and she knows far, far too much. So that was Mycroft and Greg leading agency forces, not NSY forces. Mary was long past prepared. She and John had time--time to have entire discussions we were not permitted to see. And Sherlock insisted on taking them back to his own stomping grounds, his turf--where he would be least likely to imagine himself to be the gamed victim.

Do I think Mary expected to get shot?

I think I find it unlikely she did not have a Kevlar vest under her shirt.

I find it...dubious...that John Watson would so cleverly hold Sherlock at bay, preventing him from touching or examining Mary's corpse.

I find it...serendipitous that the single man least known for successfully playing a role, especially a role to Sherlock, has used Mary's death as grounds for avoiding Sherlock entirely.

Of course, part of the trouble is I've planned Mary's "death" and escape more than once. To me the very fact that Sherlock tracked her down once (with John's help, yay!) suggests that if she intended to disappear a second time, she'd be particularly careful to shut Sherlock out. And God knows, in terms of dramatic justice, it's time John got to deceive Sherlock for "his own good" for a change. And--even Molly's in on it, from the looks of it.

Can't you see it? Mary and Mycroft and Lady Smallwood and John all determining that if Mary were to live and the chain of issues connected to her and to Sherlock ever be resolved, Mary has to "die," and Sherlock believe it?

I can even imagine Norbury being in on it...part of "their" plot, not Sherlock's. And then Mary gives Sherlock his marching orders "posthumously."

Do I think it's true? That Mary's still alive? That she'll be back?

Well, in a sense she's already back, of course. She gave Sherlock a job, and he'll be tracking her, and thinking of her, and loving her, for a long time to come.
I think that's one thing I already love about this episode, though: Sherlock comes away as loving Mary...in a sense loving her far more desperately and helplessly than the far more realistic, plausible John, who has in some sense "sinned." Though I am waiting to learn if his little Scots text-fantasy proves to be yet another spy.

Things I noticed and want to think about: Mycroft apparently owes Sherlock a finite number of favors. That did not feel faked--it felt like Sherlock slammed into a hard limit there. Mycroft may always love baby-brother, but baby-brother is very close to running out of get-out-of-jail-free cards from Big Brother.

Not at all surprised that Mycroft and the government have diddled the footage of the shooting, making it look like Magnussen was shot by someone else. Quite surprised that Mycroft can be reduced to squabbling quite THAT overtly with baby brother in front of his peers. Embarrassing, that.

Greg and Mycroft: whether they are ever a "couple," they are now clearly a team. What we saw first in Sherlock's grave-digging dream sequence in "Bride" has been repeated in the aquarium: that quick, flickering exchange of glances between Lestrade and Mycroft as they evaluate Sherlock's condition. They work together, when it comes to Sherlock, and it's not cold, or superficial, or new: that silent communication, that reflexive checking in with each other suggests a partnership of some standing.

I need to view it again, and of course I need to see the other two eps. This is definitely headed somewhere.

One thing we know--Mary may or may not really be dead, but she is absolutely not off stage yet. She's got arias left to sing....

Chapter Summary

I continue to mull over the first episode. Really, I expect the next two eps to layer this beyond belief. But it's so good to have new obsessively selected details to consider.

Mary is not buried. She's at least theoretically cremated...unless that Aquarium-to-flames-with-coffin thing followed by John moping around the cemetery thing is intended to mean something else. Which seems unlikely.

Cremation bugs me, as it remains the best way to ensure no one can go in afterward and prove it was her.

On the other hand--if she's not dead--then I am not sure what happened in the final stages of the Aquarium face-off. It would have to be a very layered plot for her to be alive.

(Minor bitch--I understand why, for dramatic purposes, they had the bullet approach, and Mary slam Sherlock and take it the way she did. But I know how fast real bullets go, and the illusion in this case does not work for me--they have her realize and move far too late. To work she'd have to move almost reflexively at the first tension in Vivian Norbury's arm--intervene before the trigger's even pulled. By the time she's shown to move, it would be far too late... (sigh--that's one of those little details I currently chalk up as an artifact of visual story-telling, but which could turn into a plot point if they wanted it to....))

Something complicated is going on with John and the Scottish Flirt, and I am almost certain John himself does not know what he's involved in. Part of it IS romance, even if he never shagged the woman or thought of doing so consciously. I love that whole plot: to me it feels entirely in character for John. He fell in love with Mary as the best of three worlds--she satisfied his entirely subconscious need for danger and daring-do while also satisfying his obsessive desire for a "normal life" AND his ego-preferences for female socio-erotic bonds. She flattered his ego on all levels, letting him simultaneously be a dangerous spy-boy, a normal suburban domestic family man, and Not-Gay Watson who's always turned to women for sexual ego-boo. With Sherlock gone her three-in-one nature was too enticing to pass up. But it was irresistible in large part BECAUSE Sherlock was gone: the daring-do spy-boy factor had always before saved John from the one thing he loved to play at, but never actually attempt: married life.

I am not arguing John's not straight...though it's certainly one way one could go with that. The thing is, John, to me, seems like many men do. He does not really want to be a happily married man, he only wants to believe he does. What he really wants to be is James Bond--wild and dangerous and clever and irresistible to women, and always moving on to the next dangerous, beautiful Bond Woman. He wants romantic courtship. He wants new, fresh admiring eyes to take him in and want him. (And to make it all worse, he's such a doof in so many ways, that honestly, they usually fail to fulfill his fantasy. John's women have not tended to be all that enamored of him. They are reluctant players in his courtships; they dump him rather than the other way around. Mary's *unique* in adoring him completely and utterly...and depressing and ego-damaging in almost certainly seeing through his many pretenses and lies to himself...She is completely in love with him for exactly who he is, which is a bitter pill, as he wants a woman who's completely in love with him for his many fantasy selves...)
Mary is asking Sherlock to "save John Watson." As fans and fanficcers it's easy to turn that into "He's going to mourn for me forever if you do not save him...Sherlock Holmes, go love John Watson into health and hope again!" I doubt that's what Mary's asking, though. I also doubt she failed to catch John's "affair," too...and I think that's where the "save John" comes in. Not because Scottish Flirt is a rival for John's heart in the normal sense, but because Scottish Flirt is getting John involved in something dangerous and deadly in Mycroft's World. Somehow, some way, Scottish Flirt is drawing John into The Great Game...

IMO Mary intended to deal with that herself. Sherlock pointed it out to John brutally and honestly: she's a professional agent. She's got skills. She was not likely to be fooled by his idiotic texting games, his little bus encounters. Either the first flush of Rosie's presence or the entire mess with Ajay/Norbury got in the way, posing more immediate and pressing problems.

Here's the thing--Gatiss made it very clear the core emotional problem for John...Sherlock and Mary have mutually replaced him with each other in both key relationships. Mary is Sherlock's peer in detectin' an' spyn'. Sherlock has never pretended John's all that bright--but now he's up against someone who IS that bright. Bright enough to give Sherlock a sense of intellectual companionship in the same way that Moriarty offered it, but this time she's on roughly the same side. They are similarly sooty fallen angels working for the approximate good...and Sherlock ADORES her. And in her own way she adores Sherlock. It's a jealousy and resentment that's been there for John since literally the night of Sherlock's return, when he tries to bitch about Sherlock to Mary, expecting her agreement and sympathy, only to have her say how much she LIKES Sherlock.

Mary's "supposed" to be on his side, there as an answer to his emotional needs, supportive of his husbandly ego. Instead--well, John says it outright in "His Last Vow." "The two of you should have married each other." Worse, it's another case of Plodding John Watson seeing only the image of Plodding Mary Morstan--a diamond in his eyes, but "ordinary." Then Sherlock comes in and sees more clearly, brings out more facets, and suddenly she's not Plodding John's Plodding Match--she's Sherlock's sparkling, brilliant, eccentric, very undomesticated peer. Sherlock's match, not Plodding John's. Meanwhile we now find out that Sherlock's replaced her beloved "family" of A.G.R.A. Again, her peers. Her trusted comrades--so much a part of her that she can think of their unity as "her" name.

I suspect John's never been sure if he's more jealous of her, or Sherlock, given their mutual admiration society, and Mary's betrayal of all things ordinary and unexciting.

Then along comes Scottish Flirt...offering romance, courtship, keeping secrets from Sherlock and Mary, whose lies and roles have left John on the outside. And if she comes with a lovely not-yet-revealed subtext of espionage and spies and daring-do and cloak-and-dagger? Moriarty is not yet undone...nor do I think Mary was simply substituted for him. I think that now we have two "dead" characters urging our heroes into action....and I strongly suspect Moriarty's puppet-mastering John through Scottish Flirt. He's been given a fantasy: the chance to save someone, or something, while beating both Mary and Sherlock at their own game...a dream complete with Bond Girl, and feeling sexy, and being told Only He Can Save England...

At least, that is where I would be inclined to take it, given what we've seen before, and what Gatiss and Moffat gave us this time out.

I keep being unable to decide if Mary lives or dies for real. I would guess, though, that if she lived, we will not be told this season. There's little point in managing to "die" if you come back right away, and better still, ACD's canon so muddles up John's marriage(s) and time-lines that having Mary come back as a "new" old wife years from now would fit perfectly. New identity, years after
John's dead wife has been accepted as his DEAD wife...and, yet, still mysteriously called "Mary" if I recall one of the old Baker Street Irregular concerns regarding John's marital and romantic escapades.

I know some people are frustrated that Mary was "fridged." IMO that's off-base. First, I have no sense that Mary will be allowed to simply be a token loss used only to confirm John and Sherlock's primary relationship: her death is happening for its own very real reasons, her choices are made for motives we can understand (whether she survived or died, either way, her choices make character sense...). Her death is not cheap, trivial, or obviously stripped of her own agency. Her death will have consequences beyond merely separating and then reuniting John and Sherlock. So in that sense she's not "fridged." Neither is she simply disposable to the point of being irrelevant, which was ACD's way of handling it. "Ooops, sorry to hear about your wife dying. Now--on to the case."
To me it looks like a very good way of handling a necessary grappling with ACD canon. Mary was doomed in original canon, and failing to at least temporarily kill her would fall further outside canon-compliance than Moffat and Gatiss usually choose. They TRY to stick to a recognizable ACD pattern on the whole, and that demands Mary at least appear to die. Her possible return is justified by ACD's terrible, terrible continuity issues: he really could not manage to present a stable sense of much of anything outside the immediate matter of Holmes, Watson, and the immediate mystery to hand, and as a result left such a checkered mess of matters relating to John, love, and marriage that once you've accounted for one marriage to Mary Morstan, and one death--presumably Mary's--you can do pretty much anything you like and spin it any way you choose. But you do need the marriage, and by extension you pretty much need the death. I think they've made a decent job of both, and have then proceeded to make it WORTH something, rather than worth nothing (which was ACD's flaw) or worth nothing of any importance outside the two bonded men (which is the great sin of the crime of fridging...). Mary's death is going to provide a lot more for our delectation than mere "Oh, it split the boys then brought them back together."

Did John love Mary? Really? It's an interesting question in light of everything we know about him, her, and Sherlock. Here's my take--yes, he did, but more in theory than in practice, and more in fantasy than in fact. The real Mary adored him--but the real Mary also threatened him in far too many ways. Hell, she was even better at domesticity than he was. Here she was, this genius black-ops whiz, and yet, when she gets out, she shows every sign of really, really wanting to live the life of simple Mary Watson. John's dying of boredom, bad at being Married With Children, gasping for adventure, bitterly jealous that both Sherlock and Mary are good at it--and he's only fit to jog the baby. John wants to think he desires the life of a suburban husband and father...but what he really wants to be is Sherlock Holmes or Rosamund-the-Spy. And, yet...

She understands him--in ways even Sherlock can't match. She adores him. She gives away the very life he'd kill for to be married to him and have his baby. And if he could ever be honest with himself, her lies make perfect sense in light of her choice to BE his wife, and to protect him and Rosie and her chosen life with every bone in her body. She wanted to be Mary Morstan, and then Mary Watson, and to do that she had to deny Rosamund-the-Spy, and hide her, and only let her out to defend her new life and her new loves. John ultimately knows that her lies are more honest than his--that she knew what she wanted, found it, defended it, and would do anything to preserve it, while he lied to himself about what he wanted, married for the wrong reasons, landed himself in the wrong life, and has been eating himself up with resentment and jealousy ever since.

How do you feel about someone that close to you--and that threatening? I think he adored Mary...and hated her guts. I think he blamed her to avoid blaming himself and learning things he did not want to know about himself.

The sad thing is, I think she and Sherlock really did love each other without any of that complicated mess of conflicting crap that John brings into it. It's almost a pity it wasn't romantic
love, rather than pure delighted friendship and mutual understanding. John's blustering aside, if they'd added in sexual desire and romance, they'd have been far happier than I think she and John were.

Anyway.

I want to know what the 13th means to Mycroft...and why it makes him call Sherrinford. I am amused that Sherrinford is someone with a receptionist. I am...intrigued by the relationship between Lady Smallwood and Mycroft: for all his doubts and all her frustration, that interrogation scene lacked resentment or hatred or real distrust. In the end her comment on how long they'd known each other weighed far more than his Sherlock-fostered doubts of her actions. They are old associates, and they do trust each other at rock bottom. Hell--Mycroft showed signs of having to WORK to give Sherlock's suspicions any credence at all.

I am bothered by Sherlock seeing Ella. Not because she's a shrink, though honestly, that's a bit of a stretch even now. What bugs me is that she'd take Sherlock, or that Sherlock would approach her. It's bordering on malpractice to take the friend of a client who's struggling with issues primary to the client himself. That remains true even if John no longer sees Ella himself. It's nice in terms of dramatic compactness, but it feels creepy in terms of professional integrity on her part, or real commitment to the psychiatric process on his part.

Next episode is based on "The Dying Detective" which would bring in Culverton Smith. I am not sure he will make it out of that episode. For all he's been set up as a big deal, the original story is pretty much a one-off that ends in Smith's death. It would be interesting if they used Smith to lampshade a season that actually only used him once...and that kind of in passing. What intrigues me is that the original story is yet ANOTHER of ACD's rounds of Sherlock abusing the hell out of John by lying to him, letting him believe Sherlock's dying, manipulating him for the effect of his emotional response. It's ugly--one of my least favored stories in multiple ways. Culverton is vile--and Sherlock not a lot better. I am not sure where they are going with it--but given the emotional resonance of TST, I can't help but fear it keeps the same basic plot point of Sherlock using/abusing a John who's outside the loop. Worse, if John's really been contaminated/coopted by Scottish Flirt, that may be a necessity.

And that's tonight's ponderings.

Oh! D'oh! I forgot...

The bit about Lestrade going out with whossername, the Interpol-ish woman who's after the Borgia Pearl... Everyone's reading it as Lestrade, good old Lestrade, chatting up the pretty lady in hopes of pulling, and Sherlock telling him she's not Miss Right. Why? We know through multiple bits that the Borgia Pearl case is real, and Mycroft's agitating over it. MYCROFT cares that the case be solved. So...how serendipitous is it that Lestrade shows up at Sherlock's door smack-dab on the dot of when Pretty Interpol Woman shows up, to commiserate with her over the difficulty of collaborating with Sherlock Holmes? Such a perfect intro line: I consult with th' bastard, you consult with th' bastard, I'm a copper, you're a copper, I'm a boy, you're a girl, let's go out for lunch. How better for Mycroft to get SOMEONE to nose into that case, when Sherlock's being difficult? Only...

"She's not the one." Whatever else is true, Sherlock does not think Interpol-ish is the person Lestrade's been set out to identify.

For once I think neither Sherlock nor Greg gives damn-all about Interpol-ish as a romantic subject: I think it's all about the Borgia Pearl.
Minor trivia point: First scene, in conference with Lady Smallwood, Sir Edwin, Mycroft, Sherlock, and Vivian Norbury (attending secretary). Mycroft states that the material is classified above Top Secret (not hard in most systems I've heard of, which all seem to START at Top Secret), and that it's only to be known by the four present in the room, code-named "Antarctic, Langdale, Porlock, and Love." Now, first and obvious--Mycroft fails to count Vivian Norbury as even being present in the room, in spite of having just told her not to take minutes on it. The four names appear to refer to himself, Sherlock, Sir Edwin, and Lady Smallwood.

Lady Smallwood is later proven to be "Love."

That leaves three. Antarctica *could* refer to Mycroft--the Iceman. But I'm making a bid for him being Langdale: it's an in-joke for Holmes folks. A massive dealer in gossip who publishes a social column, spends almost all his time in the front window of a Bond Street Club...not unlike Mycroft, the massive secret-bearer who spends much of his time in the front window of the Diogenes, and who over the history of Holmes productions has been suggested to be as isolated as Sherlock; he's also suggested to be the benign coin-reverse of Magnussen--hugely aware of all the skinny on all the world. Given they have Mycroft confess outright to being Wikipedia, thus accounting for a modern publication one can very crudely compare to a gossipy, know-all-tell-all version of a social column, I like the idea that Mycroft isn't "Antarctica." That would leave Sherlock and Sir Edward as "Porlock" and "Antarctica." I like the idea of Sherlock as Porlock--it's not only got the rhyme going, it's got the drug association and the disruptive association...a "person from Porlock" notoriously interrupted Samuel Taylor Coleridge on an opium-induced poetic bender in the midst of writing "Kubla Khan." Having dealt with said person, Coleridge was never able to get back to the initial inspiration, and the poem remained incomplete. It feels Sherlockian. That would leave Antarctica as Sir Edwin, seeming a nice counterbalance to Mycroft the Arctic Iceman.

Of course, I don't have any real clue who any of them are, beyond Love/Smallwood/Amo ("I love," in Latin). If anyone else has clever ideas that would help deduce Langdale, Porlock, and Antarctica, by all means, chime in--it's an open game until the PTB joss it on us....
Bulletin Board for Ideas as I Note Them.

Chapter Summary

What it says on the tin: I can't keep adding addenda to the last chapter, but if I warn you right here on the package that I am going to keep posting new notions here, you know where to check in to find what keeps falling on my brain as the week wears on.

E(xx) misses John. (Miss me?/Moriarty?) She's a vampire, not a night owl. (Undead Moriarty?) Her number is 07700 900 552. Double-o seven reference in there? Any other notions?

Stella--the name of the Interpol-ish woman who's after the Borgia Pearl...the Black Pearl. Pirates of the Caribbean reference? Pirate ship, pirate booty? And really, to what extent was Lestrade hitting on her--and to what extent was he using hitting on her to cover for investigating her? Gotta admit, I'd accept a lunch date from those half-bashful, muddled brown eyes and that awkward grin if I were her. Yeah, sure, lunch-date, whatever you like, sweetie...

Moffat and Gatiss have always said they cast Rupert Graves because he was completely convincing at the hero of another show--you could believe in his Lestrade as capable, competent Greg Lestrade of NSY/MET. Or as Greg Lestrade, secret operative for MI5/6? Here's the thing--he would not be "the star" even if he was finally touted as such and allowed to run with it. But he would rise to the top of the heap of fictional undercover operatives--so convincing that years after the show starts, most people never question his Good Old Greg persona, and even those of us who do are hard-put to work out what's real and what's role: does Good Old Greg hit on Stella because she's bright, beautiful, in his own line of work, and shares his burden of working with Sherlock? Or...does Secret Agent Greg use all that to justify direct investigation of the woman who's supposed to be finding the Black Pearl, and who has not done so yet? Where does Good Old Greg stop, and Secret Agent Greg start? And, yet... There it is, from the earliest days of talking about the show--there are Moffat and Gatiss announcing that they cast Rupert Graves because he was a convincing hero in his own right--a convincing leading man.

A truly horrible great idea has occurred to me. I think it is possible to twist TST in such a way as to write a season in which Everything Is Mycroft's Fault. In which he, not Norbury, was the ultimate source of the order to betray AGRA...even if either Norbury OR Lady Smallwood gave the actual call...all part of his long-term goal to stop using freelancers. Or to appear to--what, after all, is Sherlock but a freelancer? In which he assigns Mary, whom he knows to be Rosamund, to watch over John, and is delighted they hit it off, hoping John will pull away from Sherlock on marrying, sending Sherlock back to big brother. In which, when instead Sherlock is drawn deeper into Mary's mess, he arranges for her death, or apparent death, to finally separate the three. In which Lestrade is in the loop, and is indeed "The Lying Detective." In which Scottish Flirt is a counter group's player (Moriarty? Another nation?), and she is who John calls on the way to the Aquarium, not Mycroft and Lestrade. In which some of his distaste for Mary is the result of information...true or not...about her through Scottish Flirt. In which ultimately a rift will be forced...between Sherlock and Mycroft.

There is definitely more going on between Mycroft and Lady Smallwood and Norbury than we got this time out. I just do not know who is doing what to whom.
One preview points out that "The Lying Detective" includes a Culverton Smith who seems as fixated on Mycroft as on Sherlock. That, to me, is both good and bad news. I worry for Mycroft--I love the character. But I also think Mycroft was, is, and always will be the key element that makes this version of Sherlock Holmes work. Moffat himself said it at one point, I think soon after "Scandal." Mycroft is the engine that drives this Sherlock--the love, the envy, the competition, the mutual support...

And the source of narrative. I've said it before, I'll say it again: Mycroft's World, that James Bond territory of hidden heroes and villains, of secrets and top secrets and higher than top secrets, of veiled initiatives and occult information, is the frame that makes our Sherlock work. It's been true from the start, when Mycroft called John Watson to a near-invisible war and asked Sherlock to choose sides--to choose to share sides. It's been true since Jeff Hope suggested Moriarty was a "them." Since the "real" Moriarty killed General Shan--an international criminal, not just some local urban ethnic gang. Season after season Mycroft's World has beckoned...and Mycroft has, as often as not, been far more the target than Sherlock. He's a mighty power--and a major target.

I keep waiting to learn that the Blind Banker was Mycroft and Lestrade free for more reasons than that it was entrusted to Thompson. There's some not-quite-hidden pattern between those two men and Sherlock. Just as I think it "right" that last season gave us a Lestrade quite busy in his own right--even if not aways with Sherlock--I find it right that this season, after the shock and awe of last season and of Bride, that Lestrade's been called back to hover at Sherlock's side, feeding him cases again, and keeping a close eye on Baby Brother. John--and especially John-and-Mary--proved inadequate to keep Sherlock on target and in line. Back comes the minder to ensure Sherlock stays straight...or at least to keep an eye on him.

In any case, year by year and season by season we learn more of Mycroft. There is no season that is not part of a single line of development taking us into that world, and showing us that man. Powerful. Ethical within certain "Agency-esque" limits. Concerned for lives and fortunes of other humans, even if he does them badly. Blessed with allies, if not friends, from Anthea to Lady Smallwood to Sir Edwin to Lestrade.

ACD set it up: those first appearances when we find that Sherlock will lie to John to protect his brother. His first explanation of Mycroft is largely blather, to hide the power Mycroft wields. (Or else, of course, his second explanation, stories later, is retro-fitting as ACD discovers he's got a more useful plot if Mycroft is Mighty than if he is not...) We learn that the two brothers compete--and love and support each other without question. That they are lonely, and isolated, but that they are together in that trait. That the elder is not only smarter--but more set apart. Yet, at the same time, the elder is better adapted, able to work among the competing tribes of Whitehall where Sherlock functions only as Bohemian junkie, alone but for his street tribes and motley collections of informants and clients.

Culverton Smith, like Moriarty and Irene and Magnussen, is aiming at Mycroft...and Baby Brother appears to be finally, for once, possibly clearly focused on defending his one dear life-time ally, rather than asking to be defended.

I am hoping that the "I love you" we've been teased with proves to be meaningful, and is not just John. I am hoping the Mycroft we're shown in the trailer--a messier, more desperate Mycroft to my eye--is finally dear to his brother, after so many years of his brother being dear to him.

And I am, as always, hoping he survives the season. I'm guessing he is. Or that any death proves to
be the commonplace Sherlock death-by-convenience. But in any case, it's looking increasingly like a great year for Mycroft and Lestrade fans.

I have to admit, there are times I do not really understand fannish response to certain things. The combined anger over John appearing to mess around with Scottish Flirt combined with the "Oh, Poor John, he's hurt again!" combined with the "Oh, poor Sherlock, how can John do this to the poor behbeh" leaves me completely muddled.

John's not comfortable with domestic life, in spite of his belief he's intended to be a "normal family man." That was pretty much preordained from John's very first interviews with Ella and Mycroft: he may well be damaged by war, but he is not going to ever adapt and settle into civilian life the way Ella expects. He's NOT domestic. It's not just that he wages war with self-checkout Tesco scanners. It's not just that given a choice between Mrs. Hudson's cuppa and a chance to see a murder site with Sherlock, he'd pick the murder site in a dead second. It's not just that his actual success record with women is pitiful, with Mary his only real victory. He's not domestic, and his preferred social bonds appear to be heteronormative male friendships with the possibility of unstated and unacted on heteroerotic bonds added in. He's a guy's guy. He's feeling left out of both his own marriage, his own fatherhood, and his friendship and warrior bond with Sherlock. Of course he'd flirt with Scottish Flirt, even if there were nothing more to that relationship--and while its true nature is not yet revealed, there is absolutely something more there. Suggesting John would not flirt is like suggesting Sherlock would not say one thing too many: there may be occasions when good intentions and discipline paid off, but there would be plenty of others when it would not. Not when John's ego is fragile and a woman appears to think he's intriguing and attractive. Both ACD and BBC have shown us a John who'd flirt, because flirting is how men and women are friendly, EVEN IF THEY DO NOTHING ABOUT IT. That's how John functions. Getting distressed over John and Scottish Flirt says more about what the viewer would LIKE a hero to behave like than it says about what's really in character for John, who is a flawed hero at best.

"Poor John, he's hurt again!" Well... yeah. For a certain value of hurt that includes that John's not really any better at marriage than he thinks Mary is. Her reflexive reaction to trouble is to try to handle it on her own, keeping her beloved friends safe and far from the danger zone. His reflexive response is that people are supposed to consult with him, whether it's outside his area of expertise and competence or not. Given his history with both Mary and Sherlock, I understand--Sherlock in particular is a manipulative little bastard who keeps John safe while tying him in knots. But in spite of that, there's a difference between "losing" Sherlock and "losing" Mary. Mary, among other things, did not as shown plan out her apparent death, or even leave him out of the final loop. He knew what was going down, where, and was only behind on his own choice--and there are suggestions he was himself the manipulator in this instance. Sherlock took him for a total ride, lied all the way, and forced John to serve as "suicide note/witness/demi-participant" in the little drama Sherlock devised. Big difference, and that's even assuming you really think Mary's dead...which I am not as convinced of, nor that John's ignorant of it. He not only is a doctor, he was right up in there, hands on, in a way that Sherlock's death did not allow. If Mary's alive Doctor John knows and is colluding, and is not "poor John" in any normal meaning of the phrase. He may be sad, if she's really dead. Hell, he may be sad even if she just has to go away into witness protection, hidden from the world. But it's just not at all the same thing as Sherlock's death, and it has no currently obvious elements of betrayal.

As for "poor Sherlock"? I mean--OK, I am entirely understanding John if that's a real response, not a dramatic way to get Sherlock out of the line of action John's involved in. If it's John's real emotional response, I'm quite fine with it, not because Sherlock once upon a time, at a wedding, swore a vow, but because he used that vow and his own conviction of his competence to convince
Mary, against her own best instincts, to trust him to protect her. He promised both of them repeatedly that he could and would—that he would keep them safe. He pushed—hard. He turned it into a major point of trust...and then he failed utterly. He screwed up the one thing he'd made a major stink about...and even if John did not know going in that Sherlock topped it off by (apparently) over-goading Norbury, it's a critical failure. Some things you must not promise, much less turn into a key issue of your relationship and trust, if you can't be 100% sure of succeeding, barring true and obvious acts of God. You definitely must not promise when your own flaws are going to turn around and make your failure pretty much inevitable. I once promised someone I admired a particular form of restraint—that went right out the window when a mutual associate goaded me. I proceeded to screw up exactly the way I had assured my friend I would not, in an act of temper. I've never quite been able to forgive myself for the dual mistake, in promising what I could not deliver and in then allowing temper to ensure I broke my promise. That's what Sherlock has done, and given the apparent lethal nature of the event--and the fact that even if it's faked, it's perfectly logical--John's got a right to rage. He and Mary made a life-or-death choice on Sherlock's assurances, that Mary in particular would not have made otherwise—and only did under extreme pressure from Sherlock and John. She "died" as a result. Of course John's beyond forgiveness right now. "He meant well" does not cover being lethally stupid and incapable of self-honesty enough to understand one's own limits. Sherlock failed the unforgivable stupidity test. How that will be gotten past is going to depend a lot on what really happened in this episode...what John was really doing, what Mary was really doing (and if she really died), what Mycroft and Lady Smallwood and Norbury were really doing...and it's going to depend on John's ability to accept his own failure to admit to himself that Sherlock really is as flawed, and often childish, as John and Lestrade were laughing he was earlier in the ep. John put his and Mary's and Rosie's safety in the hands of a man making a promise John himself knows he is not fit to make or keep. How John handles that will cover whether he can forgive, and how he can forgive, framed by the hidden material we have not yet seen.

Ok, here is a side point I do not think anyone else has brought up yet. Mycroft's last instructions to John were his plea that he take care of Sherlock, at the end of Abominable Bride. Mary and her mysterious backstory, which John is still adapting to, may be part of what he feels he's helping protect Sherlock from—even if he and Mycroft do not see Mary as a traitor to Sherlock, she's a portal into danger. The entire Scottish Flirt thing, and the "so many lies" thing, may be John acting in tandem with Other Powers, including possibly Mycroft, to attempt to come to grips with Mary's threat. Given the way John tries to admit what's going on to Mary, I'm inclined to think his betrayal is not purely romantic—I think it has to include some level of playing the same kinds of games that Mary herself plays—secret agent lies. Spy vs Spy lies. "I'm surveiling you while you're surveiling someone else" lies. He's not perfect, unquestioning, uncomplaining—he's imperfect and giving her back as good as he feels he's suffered, making her the person out of the loop and trying to have the one-up on her. If it proves to be "for love of Sherlock" he'd feel all the more justified AND guilty.
One day till the next installment and I am going mildly mad with worries for Mycroft this season.

We've got the cast and the PTB both unsure whether the show continues from here--it's not ruled out, but it's the "end of an era." It takes a pretty big change to close the narrative down, and they've promised us it won't be John and Sherlock parting ways forever. Given Mycroft and his Secret Agent world have provided THE unstated background for the entire series up until now, and given that Mycroft's supposed to be under fire from Culverton Smith, and given we've built out Mycroft's world a lot, and...

Ok. Collection of little frets.

Abominable Bride: Mycroft promises to always be there for Sherlock, as he always has before--only to ask John to take care of him, as though passing on a duty. And that would parallel the quandry set up in the last ep, in which Sherlock could not keep the promise of eternal protection he offered.

In TST Mycroft states quite decisively that Sherlock is running out of favors he can call in. Given what we've seen of Mycroft that's hard to imagine. Mycroft (the secret agent, even if a largely hidden and non-operative kind of agent) then points out that agents like Mary (and him?) do not retire, but are retired by others. Lethally. Then, later, when Mycroft is interrogating Lady Smallwood, she says, almost out of nowhere, "How many more times?" It's really not clear what she's questioning--how many times she has to deny his accusations? Or how many times does he expect to be allowed to overstep his own bounds for Sherlock?

Entirely aside, I keep *liking* the relationship between Mycroft and Lady Smallwood, from the little we see. They do not fully trust each other, because that's so very not the name of the games they play. But within that, they DO trust each other not to be certain kinds of evil, and they appear to like and admire each other. Certainly they've come into situations that could have been high conflict over and over again, and have shown no sign of mutual malice or competition. They even appear to be content having fluctuating power over each other--Mycroft can cut off Lady Smallwood's access. Lady Smallwood can not only put Sherlock to death (or prison) but is the one who must approve the final choices the department makes where Sherlock is involved.

And, of course, now I keep smiling silently to myself that "Love" and Mycroft have known each other for years.

I worry at the pure difference between Sherlock's and Mycroft's "not on my watch." Mycroft knows his limits: his "not on my watch" has to do with intentionally reducing the amount of chaos he has to fend off. Sherlock does not know his limits--does not even accept he has any--and his "not on my watch" is an attempt to claim he can defend Mary against all comers forever: he's biting off more chaos than anyone can reasonably chew. But--I worry, because within the phrase "not on my watch" both are discussing a time when the watch will no longer be theirs. Sherlock assumes it's as long as he may live. Mycroft, one feels, has a far more narrow notion--that he may not live, and if
by chance he does live—if he is not "retired" by others in the lethal sense—the torch will still pass, and the "watch" will be handed over to the next generation.

In the visuals of "The Lying Detective," Mycroft looks more worried, more vulnerable, more coming-undone than usual. Under pressure. I worry for him for that.

I worry for reasons of irony. The reviewers and fans are just beginning to see how riddled with Secret Agent this Sherlock is—and are whinging about it—just when I can see the possibility of that arc closing.

Sherlock, after John and he reunited after Mary's death in ACD canon, are suggested to have been apart 3 years or more—having years to catch up on. Sherlock will go missing for great chunks of time in ACD canon, several times under cover, including into the US. By the end, it looks like Sherlock may spend much of his professional life (as opposed to his farm and bees time) as an undercover operative, alone, without John. I do not know if that means Mycroft becomes more and more his center of being, or if Mycroft, seen less and less, is gone because he died, or moved up the ladder still further, or what.

I do know, to my comfort, that very few people writing Holmes pastiche professionally, seem to imagine Mycroft dying much before Sherlock. He seems to hit some chord in all our hearts, no matter what version is imagined, that begs that he remain, always "the British Government," always the brother Holmes lies to defend and protect, always the one man Sherlock will admit is better at The Work than he is, if he would only be less lazy and more interested in leg work. It is almost as hard to imagine Holmes without his brother, as it is to imagine Holmes without John.

One of the things I like about the teaser for "Lying Detective" is the "I love you" snip, which shows us both a dour, skeptical John and a weary, slightly undone Mycroft in the background. Part of me wants that "I love you" to be both sincere, and addressed to both of them: a clear, necessary statement that he loves both friend and brother, and loves them in a very similar degree and context. Both have, in all honesty, earned that statement of affection, and Sherlock's overdue showing the courage to admit the obvious.
Lying Detective.

Chapter Summary

First immediate reactions—fresh off seeing the ep. Like—under three minutes since it concluded. This is really raw stream of consciousness...

I hope they let Mary continue to have a place—in John's mind, and in Sherlock's. I LIKE her as part of the underpinning of their lives.

I am so freakin' glad that John really did cheat, within the limits of what was shown. Yes, there's "more to it," but I'd have disliked enormously having it all turn out to be a game, leaving John pristine. This is GOOD theater: a humanly flawed John. The link between Sherlock and Irene tied to the link between John and and Mary—and John and Euros. Love that she's the wind. Perfect. Love the connection between Mycroft and Lady Smallwood...though of course, as Mystrade-Central I do hope it's a friendship, leaving room for a romance with Lestrade. But if one must have a straight or bi Mycroft--Lady Smallwood is an admirable alternative. And I am so glad to see my gut feeling about that relationship from previous episodes to be true: a kindness for each other, if not yet more.

Sherrinford—is that the codename for Euros, or is it something else? Really dying to know.

Was not shaken from the path on Euros/Faith actually visiting Sherlock. But, then, I was unwilling to allow them to have yet another major plot point be fully delusional.

I am so happy to find Sherlock occasionally texts Irene back. I am SO happy to see how they mended the friendship of John and Sherlock, in the raw moment of shame and loss and mourning and shared vulnerability. I loved John's lecture on how *fleeting* your chance at love can be. I loved Sherlock finally being at a point where he can hear it.

I am a bit irked that the trailer for this ep seems to have actually included some critical material from next ep.

So...Mrs. Hudson is "not a civilian." Don't I want to know more about THAT?

I do think Mycroft is a bit of a moron not to have put most of the links together on what's wrong with Sherlock. But he's been closing him off from emotional possibility for so long...

I like what they did with Mycroft this time out...the character was not just exposed, he GREW. Always a good thing.

Poor Greg. The Holmeses just plain took him over the rapids this time out. He's going to be the one who NEEDS a drink once the paperwork is out of the way.

I want to pat myself on the back for repeated rounds of pointing out that if you are going to have a secret brother, you might as well have a secret sister. While Sian Brooke is not Emma Thompson, she's not chopped liver either.

I am glad Mary appears to be really dead, given the way they are handling it. It really is always better to avoid letting too many people come back from the dead.
I like that it looks like Sian Brooke is tied to Moriarty. (We've got a Brooke again!)

Is the Sherrinford Mycroft is going to call also Euros--or is he/she someone who keeps watch over Euros?

I will need to think longer--and I will have to watch again. But I am quite pleased with this ep. I THINK all the internal links are tight, make sufficient sense, and lead where Mofftis need them to go. I love the emotional notes chimed.

And, really, I don't think it can be said enough: I adore BAMF!Mrs. Hudson. Not to mention the logic: widow of a drug dealer, rental property in central London. Of course she's got money enough for a ritzy car.

And OMG...Sherlock in the trunk!

She must have been a hell of a mob wife. Lethal. Just glorious.

And that is all for tonight. My fingers are cold and I want hot tea and a cookie.

Addenda: (Of course there are addenda. This is me. This is Sherlock. This is men hooked on Sherlock. There MUST be addenda...)

Brainstorm: the person being tracked on computer back in "His Last Vow," code named "Ugly Duckling," could be Euros. It would explain poor Mycroft's inability to leave--one sibling's gone missing, and another's being tracked but could disappear at any moment. So--send Lestrade out looking for the missing one and keep a riveted eye on the other one.

I do not think it possible to overstate that I'm just as glad Mary is really dead. There really are limits, and while I can find ways to get away with it, I prefer they not.

Culverton Smith contacted Euros. This in combo with the "Miss Me" on the note taken in the meeting in this episode strengthens the sense that Euros is replacing and may have always been "a member of" Moriarty. I can even see her as the source of the original fascination--Jeff Hope says at the very beginning that there are fans, and that he's got patrons. The implication was always there that there were many Moriarty members, not just the one we've seen. If Euros is the beginning of the obsession then less and less of Sherlock is arbitrary...both in the sense that the existing fascination makes the plots more logical and less tenuous, and in the sense that the writers have been indulging in an intensely unified narrative from the start. There are people who will call that self-indulgent navel-gazing, but as self-indulgent navel-gazing is pretty much what this show always promise, it's a bit late in the day to whinge about it.

Mofftis have always made it clear this was intended as a special, personal, bijou project--a little gem to satisfy themselves. They've said from the start that they saw it as their own little pet project that would never be a wild break-out winner, but might do well enough to let them keep playing for awhile. The intricacy now unfolding, to me, is exactly in keeping with what those who have always said. Having Euros show up is perfect tying back to the very first story, the very first hint of Mycroft, the ongoing fixation with Sherlock--and beyond Sherlock, with Mycroft.

I am really, really curious where they are going with the family issues. Sherlock does not remember what happened to Euros, barring snips and pieces, which may or may not be coherent and accurate. Mycroft, though, is seven years older, and appears to be fully aware. Whether that is because he was twelve, not five when whatever happened went down, or whether it's just a the
oldest he kept being brought in to help Mummy and Father do damage control, is anyone's guess.

I really do want to know who Sherrinford is. Obviously Lady Smallwood knows of his/her existence. (The purely over-the-top part of me is waiting for Rupert Graves to leap out shouting "Ta-da! Sherrinford Holmes, at your service!")

More on Lying Detective

Chapter Summary

What it says on tin...

I love the early sequence of Sherlock the druggie. It's better than a lot of what I have seen of those both bright and high--the staggering intersection of competence and incompetence, of tracking and losing track entirely.

I am glad Shezz uses Billy as his spotter. I am worried he uses Billy as his spotter. I am terrified he can scare away Billy as his spotter.

If I had to choose one thing about that whole sequence, it's that it gives such a brilliant picture of why Irene's dead right when she calls Sherlock "damaged," and not by his drugs exactly, though no doubt they have not helped much, if at all. This gave us Sherlock struggling with personal pains. I simply love the line about suicidal tendencies not ruling out the right to chips, and his firsthand testimony to that truth. (wry grin) Been there, done that, could have spoken the line myself. Indeed, the entire monologue on suicide, and how your life is not your own, because you are not the one who will be forced to cope with your death. That speech is soaked with all the anger and longing of someone who'd like to just stop--end it--and who can't, because he does understand people will be ripped to bits if he does. It's unclear to what degree this is new understanding brought to him by Mary's decision to save his life, and to what degree it's knowledge he's suffered for years of knowing Mummy, Father, and Mycroft--and having witnessed John's agony over Sherlock's apparent death. In a sense it does not matter--we are shown Sherlock at a point where, if he could die simply and painlessly he might--but he can't, because he's *worth* something to people he loves, and he can't let his last gift to them be destruction of what they cherish. Add that to his face-off with Culverton Smith and you've got a properly worthwhile chunk of character growth--one that fully matches and even surpasses John's agonized grappling with the loss of a wife he loved, but did not manage to love in the way he wanted, with the integrity he felt she was owed.

In a funny way, this is the show in which John and Sherlock, for me, both became good men, not just selfish, clever boys. John wasn't allowed the luxury of just blaming Sherlock for Mary's death, nor was he allowed to either wallow in guilt or deny the justice of that guilt--he has to face it and keep moving. Sherlock finally, finally had to take responsibility for how he hurts the people who love him most...and face his own complicated feelings about mortality and relationship, including telling the truth about who he is to people who matter.

I love that he volunteers that even he sometimes texts "the woman." That his longing trumps his notion of good sense and logic. He *gives* that to John, freely, because John needs every bit of absolution he can get, and more, because John needs every emotional anchor he can be given to the world he now lives in. For Sherlock that's as stunning an advance as Mycroft's wary, wry, but longing consideration of Lady Smallwood's invitation to have a drink with her. I have always liked her, and I've always liked her interactions with Mycroft. I like that this time, whatever else is going on, she seems very aware that Mycroft's moving in the kind of pain and emotional territory where one may need a friend--and she's got the spine to make that offer, be he ever so clueless and off-putting. I am glad he's got a goldfish of her caliber, even if he is unaware he has been be-fished.
I wonder if the situation in Eastern Europe was supposed to attend to, and Ugly Duckling, and Euros are all one and the same. "The East Wind."

I wonder what happened with Redbeard. I wonder what the intrigue with pirates was. I wonder if, God help us, two little children playing pirates on a beach did not do more damage than at least one understood or intended. I wonder if that's not why Euros appears to have been excised from the family tree. I wonder how old Mycroft was when it all happened--what he experienced and what Sherlock experienced will be quite different, but I find it difficult to imagine he was any less scarred at the very foundation by anything that traumatic.

"It's never twins." It's also, of course, never evil twins--except when it is. Are Euros and Sherlock non-identical twins?

What is Euros' natural hair color? She's been disguised repeatedly when we've seen her. Is she blonde? Mycroft's apparent chestnut or his more likely pre-dye dark red/auburn? What complex interplay occurred between the elder brother and his younger sibs, before, during, and after the crisis? To what extent did it put them in line for the relationship we've seen between them from the start: Mycroft worried, poised between fear of and fear for his baby brother, Sherlock insanely co-dependent on Mycroft while refusing to give him so much as a moment's joy of the relationship.

Observation, and please, note it: the one woman able to instantly ping John's screwed up danger-attraction radar and pull him outside his relationship with Mary is...

Sherlock Holmes crazy, fucked-up sister.

Of course. What else? Who else could so combine the elements that would appear to John Watson? Who could come close to trumping his assassin wife? It's obvious. And, as he admits in the key meltdown scene, he still wants more with her. Even now. Even in mourning. Even wracked with guilt. The girl on the bus attracts him like crazy.

I think Mary was a better choice, for what it's worth. But, then, I always liked Mary.

I do like the clearly implied recognition that the one thing standing in the way of Johnlockers' dreams is that John's sexual orientation makes Mary and crazy Euros more attractive to him as a lover than Sherlock...but that if Sherlock were a woman, he'd probably win the race.

I must say, I find Euros and Mary more convincing fixations for John than I ever found the string of early dates, even Sarah who was such a surprisingly good sport about the whole Blind Banker mess.

And I think that may be it for the moment. You know me. Ideas keep percolating through...

Of course it's not it. More percolation transpires.

Is the show ending? I do no think so--though it may. My sense is that this coming episode puts them at a point where you would close a historical biographical work called "John and Sherlock: The Formative Years." It looks like it may work through the entire set of primary arcs put in play in the first season: Sherlock's drugs (yes/no? How bad? Why?), Mycroft's worry, John's passion for danger, who's Moriarty?, and so on and so forth: the central issues that we started with are wrapped up. Me? I think that's followed by a planned and possible fifth season that would then twist that shit around like a Rubic's Cube and show you an all new set of questions blossoming naturally out of the old questions, and moving into entirely new emotional territory (John and Sherlock: Middle
Age and the Glory Years). Moffat and Gatiss are now quite thoroughly proven to have been playing intricate, long-term arcs from the very start--why should we then doubt that in a piece they always said they would LOVE to extend into Sherlock and John's old age, they should fail to take into account the necessary changes in beat and trope as the relationship moves from the less familiar early patterns of the relationship to the more established rounds of two older, wiser men? And when Moffat and Gatiss first started talking about this season, way back during season 2 I think, they talked about it as a two-season punch: season 4 AND season five being a major fun-ride for the characters and a dive down into darkness and back. That's the talk of two men who look, to me, like men seeing a proper hero-voyage to bring their characters and their show to a new point, one that will allow them all to move on to a different Sherlock and John, facing different struggles, different life-issues, different needs. Providing themselves with something that, much like Doctor Who, can renew itself and change in a way that feels appropriate and natural. Now, here's the thing--most series depend on stability, in which no matter what really happens, the reset button is pushed perpetually. Eventually the effort to balance these two drives--something novel and meaningful to watch every week, but it never "changes" the show--kills the thing. If you can't change, you can't keep on. If they've planned this to allow for a shift to a different age and era, I will be so damned admiring.

But that would also be a good reason to consider why Mofftis and the cast have uncertainty whether the show will come again--whether that goal-post shifting fifth season will occur. They've provided a point where the show CAN just stop without leaving audiences unsatisfied. They will have provided some damned good answers to old questions, and carried Sherlock and John through some good emotional arcs. Will they look at audience reaction to this past season and decide whether that reaction justifies attempting to bring us back for even more change? Will they wait ten years for hunger to trump audience desire for stable, constant, unchanging series modes? Will they shrug and give up until and unless the clamor is so loud that it pushes aside the growing real cynicism and taking-for-granted that goes with an older show with too-known show runners?

The whole "Moffat can't write and Gatiss is worse" tropes are stupid, old, and predictable. Familiar breeds contempt, and envy magnifies it. The more I read much of the commentary the more I roll my eyes and mutter that until you can do better your critiques should balance perceptive negatives with deep respect. But that can't change the fact that Moffat, Gatiss, and the show have now been in the public eye for a long, long time, and the reviewers and more critical audiences have developed sensitivities to elements of the writing. Some are just plain stupid, some are trite, and many miss the point--but some are valid call-outs on recurring patterns shown. Authors have known, recognizable narratives that are personal to them. If those narratives hit your own sore spots, it can be lethal--and I get the feeling that a small but very vocal group of viewers are hypersensitive about the narrative tropes native to two white men, one gay, one straight, both dealing with the world from very, very white male points of view. That's causing a level and acidity of critique that's getting in the way of those two white men telling their own proper, limited stories: too many people are ready and past ready for them to start writing like someone else, anyone else. That is not good for a show even when the quality remains high, because it becomes less and less easy to get a fair judgement.

Times change. Sometime it's time to step away at least for a few extra years. But we shall see.

And more. Of course.

Love and the consulting detective. IMO at this point they've provided a sufficiently rigorous proof that within canon Johnlock is not happening. Within most human parameters it looks to me like not even a likely case of bitterly suppressed desire. This most recent ep, to me, is in some senses about how both men are attracted to women, regardless of who else they love or how central that love may be. John loved Mary--he really did. He desired Mary. More to the point, he desired the woman
on the bus so much that he was able to slip outside his commitment to her. His native attraction appears to reliably, constantly, compellingly be toward women. The little head appears to be primarily drawn to females. Add in the larger head, and you get women who are also bright, funny, and dangerous. In none of the instances do you get sexual attraction to Sherlock. He loves Sherlock, and hates him, and gets angry with him, and longs to be him, and is desperately grateful he's not him...but his little head does not seem to get involved in the formula to a sufficient degree to alter the primary placement on the Kinsey scale, where he's down there in the zero to one range. It's not about love, affection, personal charisma, it's about who you want to boink, and John's little head seems firmly oriented toward boinking women. That the women who most attract him are much like Sherlock seems to be associated with his overall attraction to bright and deadly and ever so shiny regardless of the other aspects of the relationship. One suspects he'd like owning the sort of dog who might well bite him and the neighbors in preference to a comfy spaniel, too. Something tetchy and incompletely trained in the line of doberman or rottweiler: in the immortal words of a British comic writer, I think Doug Adams, black dogs with ginger eyebrows...

(Of course he's recommending Sherlock hook up with Irene. She's the scary mad one. Who else would he himself pick of Sherlock's options?)

(Aside to my British readers: can any of you help out with the term "harvester" as used in the episode. As in Sherlock and Irene having a harvester in High Weycomb and getting together for nights of passion? I am assuming that's either a hotel chain or slang for the kind of lower-class hotel or hostel that might serve itinerant harvesters, but...I have not been able to get Google to cough up a helpful definition, and in America the sentence makes very little sense of the word. So...help?)

Anyway, meanwhile, back to Sherlock, whose attraction triggers seem similarly female. Irene attracts him. Molly may attract him. Janine appears to attract him. One suspects that Mary attracted him, though not so very intensely he'd have felt he was cheating on his best friend: he and she had a sufficient understanding of their own chosen relationship that it landed firmly in friendly and sibling-ish (a more functional sibling relationship than Sherlock appears to otherwise have...)

Which brings me to an interesting point in what they're doing. Irene--if they ever married, IMO they would marry old, past middle-age, when kids and such were off the table, when the wilder elements of youth are beginning to mellow. But one is stuck forever with an Irene whose primary orientation is lesbian. Yeah, she's got this one lunatic erotic response to genius Sherlock who's saved her life...but even with birthday calls and rare cases of Sherlock texting her back, there's not a lot of sense that either of them are so in love as to be drawn to the full-contact sport of marriage. She's lesbian...in the end that matters. In the end he's the rare blip on the radar that fails to fit her norms. But one almost has to imagine a marriage of convenience for her to make a marriage rational at all--and it would not be that for him. I think--I hope--he's smarter than to marry someone who will often wish he were not attracted to her.

Then there's Molly...and at this point Molly has ever reason to know better. Even if Sherlock changed--and he is changing, one HAS to take that into account--she's lived through too much of him at his very worst. She may love him always, but I am not sure at this point I would believe her wanting to get hooked with him. Further, I still think it would be an unhealthy link for both of them.

And there is Janine...in her little cottage in Sussex, with the hives. Whom Sherlock regretted hurting--but also looked like he regretted losing.
This recent episode, to me, looks quite a bit like it paved the way for him finally indulging himself with Irene and learning WHY John says there's more to be experienced in High Weycomb than capturing criminals, has a round with Molly, in which he learns what her long observation has taught her about the consulting detective--and at last takes his try with Janine, thus justifying the cottage. But--who knows.

It just feels more plausible after Mary's life, death, friendship with Sherlock--and the emotional resolution of her loss between him and John. And with her voice now a part of his Mind Palace no less than John's.

Just in passing: the actress playing Lady Smallwood, Lindsay Duncan, was born in 1950; Mark Gatiss in 1966. While sixteen years difference between their ages does not rule romance/sex out, it does push it to the edge a bit. That sixteen years would be considered remarkable even between an older man and a younger woman, which is the more common direction of age difference. Between an older woman and a younger man it's a reach. Not impossible--she's bright, beautiful, she's aged well. But the more I think of it, the more I think he may have found a FRIEND. God knows, the man they've shown us really does need a friend. Maybe even someone to hold him the way Sherlock held John this time out--someone to brave the tears of a man who has little idea how to cry.
More Questions in response to Lying Detective and the trailer for The Final Problem

Chapter Summary

A bit predictive. Sort of. Or more to the point, trying to figure out where this leaves us.

IMO the biggest question of all: Is the woman who claims to be Euros really Euros? I mean, it makes sense to ask, I should think. Right now we only know she takes roles to play mind games. What better mind game than to assume the role of Euros?

Why? Well...I'd start at what I have read may be the core episode referenced in the story--the Three Garridebs. The whole game of finding Garridebs turns out to be a pretext to get one real Garrideb out of his own house so that thieves can get in. In other words the whole point of finding three people with odd shared names has only the most superficial connection to the odd names, which are a useful McGuffin for a con artist and thief, no more.

So--what if Euros exists, but is right and tight and safe wherever Mycroft stashed her, and our apparent Euros is playing Sherlock, in particular, to force out one of the two remaining "real Garridebs" or oddly names Holmeses. Or to force out the real Euros. What if she's one more layer of illusion and deceit?

Who is being forced out? Sherlock is the least likely from here--he's been wandering around playing bait since forever. If you wanted his attention you didn't need to play Euros and screw with people's heads to accomplish that. Mycroft? God knows he's the British Government--and he's reclusive, cautious, and not all that easily drawn into range. But...again, he's not as reclusive as all that. Euros? If she exists, if she's alive, and she's hidden somewhere safe, then maybe. Leave Mycroft scared enough for her continued safety or trick Sherlock into once more acting without first consulting (or listening when he does consult) and you might manage to lead a criminal mind directly to Euros in her safe house.

Next week looks very heavy on the Mycroft material, and he's NOT looking good. I am back to worrying. There is one little snip in the midst of the trailer, a scene in shadows, of Mycroft, stripped to waistcoat and rumpled shirt, looking weary and battered as hell, stepping forward into the room, where an umbrella handle already awaits him. There are so many unnerving bits and pieces in the previews. I worry, more for Mycroft than for anyone.

There are sequences that are likely bits of Mind Palace, and bits that are less easy to decide about. Then there's the lovely ending in flames and Butch-and-Sundance grand finale melodrama--the final shared leap.

In any case, I think I want to end where I started: how sure are we that Euros is really Euros, not someone assuming the role of Euros to get a reaction she desires--just as she played the girl on the bus and the counselor and Smith's daughter, Faith?

And, because I love Mycroft so much, a final observation: he's quoted saying that Sherlock as a person is a structure based on Sherlock's own memories of Euros, suggesting that the burden of her life, or death, or damage, or loss, was somehow uniquely Sherlock's. But in a very odd way,
Mycroft is the more obviously damaged, with Sherlock wavering between becoming something and rebelling against what he's becoming. Mycroft isn't rebelling--or is only just beginning to. What if Mycroft who is even more completely the damaged individual based on his own more complete memories of Euros?

God. I hope he survives these stories. No matter what else, they've made him such a lovable, sad, lonely figure. In constant, lonely watch over Sherlock. Forever trying to pretend an indifference he does not feel. Forever trying to pretend he's not lonely, not starving for some kind of human tie. Honorable within the limits of his calling. Vulnerable as hell. Mary and Sherlock and John have lived--Mycroft, one keeps feeling, has barely survived, and has done what little he can to comfort himself without "being a trouble" to anyone else. It feels so damned wrong if he ends up killed when he's just beginning to tiptoe out of his hidden shadows.
Oh. Um--Guesswork. Potential Spoilers.

Chapter Summary

I do not usually consider my guesses worthy of spoilers. Sometimes. Occasionally. I usually end up feeling like a complete and utter idiot. But, still, when something just feels golden, it seems mean to not apply a spoiler on it, even if the odds are you're wrong, because if you're right you may just ruin a show for the sorts of people who hate to be spoiled.

I am seldom one of them. But I admit there are a few brilliant gotcha novels and movies that would be less brilliant if you went in knowing what the trick answer is. I have a dear friend who protected me from knowing the endings of both "The Talented Mr. Ripley" and "The Beautiful Mind," to my great appreciation. So I'm going to risk looking like a vain and conceited ass on the off chance I am right about this.

We have always wondered why Mummy seems to see Mycroft as drek while she cherishes Sherlock. Why Father does not appear to have tried harder to defend his elder son. Why Sherlock is so glib in seeing Mycroft as his "archenemy," and as wanting to harm him, and enjoying seeing him hurt.

I've postulated crib death, and an elder child suborned into the service of the younger child in response to the loss. But what if the elder child was actually, if unintentionally, responsible for the loss? Or for a near loss?

We have a lot of fire in the upcoming story. And we have a Mycroft old enough to be trusted with the younger child/children, but young enough that, no matter how smart he is, is also too young to carry that kind of burden if anything goes wrong...and too young to reliably judge what CAN go wrong. Kids love dangerous games--they terrify their parents. They light fires. They go out on black ice. They swing on old, rotting ropes from failing rafters. They play pirates and try to add to the authenticity. Little brothers (sisters?) want to do what the big kids do, and take terrible risks. (wry grin) They ride tricycles out in front of the oncoming big-bike downhill stampede, because they want to be like big sister. They go racing out into blizzards to beat up the big kids, forcing their elder sister to follow in nothing but a nylon nightie and no shoes or socks, because if baby brother gets hurt, it's big sister's fault. They break the arm of their younger sister--who is left in the care of the elder sister because mum and dad are going out, and think the injury is just a sprain...and big sisters have to remain behind and figure out what is to be done, because it's big sister's responsibility now.

I am drawing from my own life as a big sister, of course. I dragged my kid brother out of bogs, kept him from lighting the universe on fire, tried (to my regret) to teach him proper dissection procedure for pithing and dissecting a frog when he and his buddies demanded I show them how it was done. Sherlock himself could not have been more hellish and evil and morbid than that flock of little boys. I was blamed for cruelty to frogs and making a mess and encouraging my brother in bad behavior. And I was lucky--nothing truly horrible ever happened on my watch. No siblings expired in the filming of my childhood. None were in hospital for a mistaken judgement. None were months on pain killers from a house fire I might have avoided, developing an addiction while recovering from burns.
All it takes is one serious accident when the older kid is supposedly "in charge." That and the right kind of family: a mother who expects too much competence. A father who may himself be grieving and at a loss. A brother with the inherent baby-brother inclinations to sibling rivalry and a whole new set of reasons to fear and hate older brother, because who know what got tangled up in the memories of a child?

What if one child dies, and another is injured? What if there's real question where blame should fall? With baby brother who set the fire in secret? With middle daughter who tried to put it out herself, rather than call "the archenemy" big brother? The big brother who was sidetracked by who knows what before he realized there was a tragedy under way?

Here's the thing: I do not know whether there even was a "real" Euros, male or female. All you really need is two brothers, one young enough, hurt enough, drugged enough, and later pampered enough to bury the real truth of a complicated accident, and turn big brother into the killer who wanted him dead...who perhaps "enjoyed" the pain of later therapy. Who tried to restrict drugs over the years. And so on. Add in a big brother far too willing to accept far too much responsibility, and you get Sherlock, Mycroft, Mummy and Father. You get the family house being quite obviously not the family estate--Mummy and Father do not live in the place Mycroft retreats to. If they lost a child, or came close enough to have bad memories/real concerns about safety, I can see them moving their children to a new home: the only home Sherlock might personally remember, but not the "home" Mycroft, seven years older, and probably around twelve or older at the time of an accident would regard as HIS home. I can see Mummy never able to stop blaming Mycroft for "getting her baby/babies hurt." I can see Mycroft caught, never able to fully agree that it's his fault, but never able to stop blaming himself, either.

I do not know if there is a "real" Euros. I am not sure it matters--in a sense she's just a McGuffin to lead into a very real, painful story about two brothers who love each other....but have been set at odds through history that occurred when they were both too young to handle any of it very well, and whose parents didn't manage to turn the tide.

Make "Sherrinford" Mycroft's own shrink. You can be an agent and still have a shrink. And given the background checks done on agents, there's no way his own people do not have some idea of what happened. Whatever it was, it would have been something that left Mycroft with a clear slate in the eyes of MI6: an accident with no serious question that Mycroft was himself psychotic. But it remains something that's known at Lady Smallwood's level: what it is going on between Sherlock and Mycroft, why Mycroft cares so very much, why it's best that Mycroft makes a point of seeing his own shrink when things get tense between him and Sherlock. It makes the scene in Mycroft's kitchen and the notes in his notebook the other night easy and obvious: the thirteenth becomes a reminder to make, break, or change an appointment with Sherrinford. Sherrinford at 2:00 becomes an appointment time. Neither is suspect, they're ordinary things for Mycroft to do when Sherlock's in such deep water: when baby brother is sick, big brother needs his psychiatrist.

Having there be a real Euros adds interest, and tying her to Moriarty in some way allows the whole thing to be tied together in one huge knot going back to the start, while leaving a reasonable set of questions how to then get everyone headed forward again, making room for a fifth season and more should they wish.

Anyway. That's my brainstorm, triggered by my own guesses and some comments by JessieBlackwood.

Thanks.
Chapter Summary

What it says on the tin.

Sherrinford can be all kinds of people. That said, some seem more appropriate than others. For example, whatever Sherrinford is, he goes openly by that name in at least some circles: Mycroft on the phone asks for him (her?) by name, Lady Smallwood similarly speaks of him openly, and Mycroft leaves the name in his notebook--presumably secure, but not perfect. My guess, then, is at the very least it's an undercover identity--it's who the person is to some circle of society. That may not be all Sherrinford's identity, but it is part of his or her face to the public.

So:

Sherrinford could be Mycroft's older, smarter brother.

Sherrinford could be Mycroft's shrink.

Sherrinford could be Mycroft's long-distance spouse, whom he calls on the 13th, or on anniversaries (13th), or has rendezvous with in a Harvester in High Weycomb.

Sherrinford could be a superior in the intelligence services: Irene and Lady Smallwood and Mycroft all seem to believe there are such.

It is unlikely, though not impossible, that Sherrinford is a Bond Villain...the baddy. Given Mycroft and Lady Smallwood's attitudes, that seems off, though--this is someone they know about, talk about openly, whom Lady S. expects Mycroft to consult/contact. Her attitude, though, makes me suspect he's someone more benign--mentor, spouse, shrink, doctor.

I continue to worry about the mentions over the entire series of Mycroft having trouble with a broken heart. Is Sherrinford Mycroft's heart specialist? Is Mycroft living on borrowed time? That would explain suggesting to Sherlock that he's running out of favors he can ask for.

Mofftiss have declared that the keyword for "The Final Problem" is Sherrinford. People are currently treating that as actually being Euros...but the Powers that Be are not sloppy that way, IMO. If they say that the keyword is Sherrinford, they do not mean their own entirely new creation, Euros. Not if there's a real Sherrinford in play. So, while Euros may be the exciting, sexy McGuffin, I continue to suspect she's only a path to the meat of the story: someone trying to lure someone more crucial out. Someone trying to winkle some truth out of the shell. The big question is if we learn more, or are left with more questions when this is done. We know they originally planned two seasons--four and five--as part of one huge, dark, scary arc. There are existing interviews on the subject making it clear that it started out as a two-season outline. While it's possible to decide to condense--to determine your material will be better cropped back than stretched out--it's not like them to be wrong by an entire season's worth of outline. I'm more inclined to think that this season provides a moment of transition, and when and where that goes is going to depend a lot on audience response and audience curiosity.
A question--really. Help? Also a few minor visual observations.

Chapter Summary

I am not good at getting freeze-frames....

Has anyone managed to get a freeze-frame on the skywriting Sherlock "sees" during his breakdown over "keep your hands off your life, it doesn't belong to you"?

I have reviewed the first exchange between Mycroft and Lady S. Mycroft is trying to hide first-person contact with Sherrinford: he's deflecting, trying to phrase things as though he gets updates from other people, knows the security status of Sherrinford. But her phrasing suggests that Sherrinford is a person, and that it's a matter of importance to learn if Mycroft is contacting him/her on a first-person basis. She asks in response to Mycroft so loosing his own control as to mention Sherrinford to John--and to sound just that little bit broken-hearted when he blocks himself. So she's worrying about Mycroft's emotional engagement with Sherrinford, and how it's being played out with Sherlock.

I love SF/F. I itch for Sherrinford or the "real" Euros to prove to be an attempt at android life: two little robots growing up with two little boys, in which the robots affected Mycroft and Sherlock's lives as much as Sherlock and Mycroft affected the androids.

Euros as the shrink has the most beautiful wind/storm cloud wall paper. The room is silver-grey-white. Her clothes are similarly air-cloud colors.
A few more points realized and being processed...

This, for me, is a "d'oh, you missed it, you moron" point:

The central element of the Culverton Smith narrative other than his own crime(s), deals with his "opt-in ignorance plan." The drug. The drug removes what recently happened to you, messing with your ability to make permanent memories. The effect can extend farther than the period associated with that during which the user gets the drip directly. So, you forget what you saw/experience...and there's damage to the memory around that.

That alone explains Sherlock's profound confusion over Faith's presence. At some point he was given a dose of the drug. Here is what I suspect--he wasn't given the drug to make him forget her arrival, but to forget further memories/instructions/hypnosis layered on over that. We know something had to happen: we know "Faith" was real. Preponderance of the evidence always did suggest she was real. You can watch the various surveillance vids from Mycroft's people, and know she was real: she only appears in bits and pieces, but she's there: a form slipping out from under Speedy's canopy, a silhouette walking with Sherlock--then disappearing.

This is not impossible to set up. There is tech that makes a figure "disappear" to surveillance even now, if it's the right tech. Combine a tech "cloaking device" and enough knowledge to physically avoid cameras, and Faith can walk with Sherlock and never be seen reliably enough to be identified as even being "with" him.

So she's setting up several things--she wants to visit while seeming to be not-there, enough-so to bring out the annoyed non-delusional response from Sherlock's associates. Then at some point she's going to want to relocate the memories of her presence in ways that, to Sherlock himself, force the conclusion that she was not there--that he was fantasizing it all. That's the sort of thing that depends on a second visit, a dose of something like the Baskerville drug that makes people very suggestible, and a hypnosis/false memory implantation. Then, when the hypnotic command has been set in place, another zap with the Culverton amnesia drug, and voila: Sherlock "remembers and relives" his encounter with Faith, but that reliving gets muddled into what's really happening as he mentally experiences the day. So--talking to himself, remembering, and scaring the b'jabbers out of Billy and Mrs Hudson. Thanks to all the drugs and more he's scarfed down or been jabbed with, Sherlock can't work out what bits are real, what are imported, what his mind has edited or forgotten, and what's been reinforced but moved in time.

Hmmm. He claims to have been "off his tits" for about three weeks: a lot happened three weeks before, including deducing John's therapist and her location and planting the listening device in John's cane. Would the "off his tits" experience begin then because that's when Euros first began meddling with Sherlock's memories?

Is he too used to a lacy, damaged memory already, with self-deletion and past traumas and things forgotten/suppressed?
Euros appears to have got both the piece of paper and the forget-me-drug from a mutual associate of Smith's. The note itself appears to be written about three years ago--Reichenbach time, or conversely "Sherlock's gone a-hunting" time.

I really do think that one could have a combo of the suggestability drug and the forget-me-drug as part of one plot that has heavy-duty hints at least as far back as "Hound."

There is really no question that Euros kills John. That can be a dream/distraught memory, blank, false memory, trick, or more. It can also be John or Sherlock dreaming vividly. Or a set-up on Euros' part to scare John and Sherlock to death. Mainly its symmetry: the show starts with the audience staring into the barrel of a gun as it fires, and leaves with the same image.
Not one or the other, but both.

Chapter Summary

A possible approach to the riddle of Sherlock's view of Mycroft

So--no matter how he trusts him or relies on him, Sherlock holds a sound and unswerving conviction that Mycroft hates him, wants him dead, enjoys his pain...

Our own ongoing knowledge of Mycroft suggests otherwise...that Mycroft is loyal, faithful, resolute, and loves his baby brother.

I tend to assume Sherlock's wrong--and that he's acting out quite dreadfully. In many ways the past three-plus seasons only reinforce that, especially as we've seen how Sherlock descends into emotional irrationality while Mycroft soldiers on, looking more and more shattered by the episode.

But I can find a way to make it true, if Mycroft was the one who had a severe psychotic break in his early teens. Again, given the right dynamic, I can see Mummy never again trusting her elder son, depending on how that break played out. If Sherlock never knew the entire backstory on a break and a later cherished recovery, one CAN get to a Sherlock who may feel completely opposed things about his brother--love and terror, trust and profound conviction big brother wants to hurt him.

I won't say I believe that one. Something is wrong there, and I do not even have a clue where Mycroft would fit in. But it would be a way to reconcile the two different ideas of Mycroft.
More about "both" and endings.

All right. I've been thinking more about the issue of "endings."

It's possible. It may be necessary. But if it is not necessary--if they haven't lost Martin Freeman or Benedict Cumberbatch, if the Beeb still needs them (which it does, what with them losing one of their other limited "great shows" as The Great British Bake-Off jumps to a new channel...), if none of them have (God forbid) been given medical death sentences--then I am not convinced. I think this is another glorious, grand, "cliffhanger ending" approach to audience-goadings. I think it was probably inspired by the way Cumberbatch's comments were construed by the press and fandom, and by "our" utter refusal to stop reporting it as a done-deal (just as far too many idiots kept reporting Hiddleston as a done-deal), and by the fact that they had not named the last ep of the season, and by the fact that they really are hitting a major dramatic arc-shift. Who could resist? Certainly not Mofftiss...too much fun distracting everyone with endings when they can instead lampshade a completely different direction of movement.

First, there's the hidden four minutes that apparently were held back from the BFI advance screening. Yes, you can hide something powerful and delicate and meaningful in four minutes, but if you're truly ending, or even mothballing your beloved global classic show, you use the last 15 minutes solid for goodbyes...not just out of ego, but for audience sanity. Moffat and Gatiss both know better than to do a vast and glorious Bond-style pastiche with fire and explosion and chases and high-tension, only to hide four puny minutes of material saying, "Th-th-that's all, folks!" and scampering off to a Merry Melodies fanfare. No--what four minutes are REALLY good for are moments when you lie-lie-lie with a camera, showing something that appears to be true, appalling, stunning, game-changing... You throw your core character off a roof, and you do it in a way that has millions of fans trying to figure out who to blame (Mycroft Betrayed Sherlock!) or how it was done, or at the very least how they are getting out of it--and if they are getting out of it. That's what four minutes are good for. Much better than "goodbye."

Then there's the fact that too much is still in play to wrap up in one episode. We still honestly do not know who Mary was, or why her team was betrayed, or for whom, or what part Culbertson Smith played in setting up Sherlock three years ago, or why Mycroft was willing--desperate--to protect Magnussen, or why Mycroft has been targeted all along, or why Mycroft is coming apart this season as everything descends, or why Lady Smallwood is gently pulling on Mycroft's leash. We do not know for sure that Norbury was NOT part of the official British spy community or that Lady Smallwood and Mycroft were truly not aware of her. We do not know how a man who knew perfectly well who A.G.R.A. were failed to flag Mary as one of them, warn his brother, etc.--I mean, come on, we KNOW now that Mycroft knew who that team was. Do we believe, honestly, he had no idea of their faces? Who they really were? Four people who honestly were top-flight block-ops for hire? We know the mummies and daddies and baby brothers of rogue terrorists. I do not believe Mary could have been completely hidden from Mycroft and his teams. And of course, yes, they could still bring back Moriarty, or a clone of Moriarty.

We have the previews of Mycroft on the beach, with Moriarty approaching. That could be flashback...it could be a lot of things. But I have a hard time believing it's current that it is a minor point sandwiched in the episode among the bombs and chases. That's story-changer material, that's "Oooh, Mycroft's betraying Sherlock" material, that's "the brohers are playing an even longer game than we thought" material.

And in the meantime from the sounds of it the story is already packed to the breaking point with family revelations, emotional land-mines, and more emotional recovery from the past season.
As I said, I can see ways they can turn this into an ending, if they need to. I just fail entirely to believe that this is where they would end it by choice, especially not if instead they can swing us once more into frantic, frenzied twittering and theories about the amazing damned cliff-hanger they once more pulled out of their arses....
Instant Reax, The Last Problem

Chapter Summary

Again, what it says on the tin. Literally just turned off the end music and rushed here--so, very raw, chaotic reactions.

I want to kick Mummy and Father, but particularly Mummy. Sherlock the grownup? At least Sherlock can now bring himself to say Mycroft was doing his best. But for God's sake, Mummy, at some time quite young your oldest son got handed the question of what to do with a homicidal maniac daughter you already thought was dead...and all you can do is blast him for not telling you?

I do try to sympathize with the elder Holmeses, but for God's sake. This is a kid who murdered your younger son's friend and burned the old house down, and they knew that, even if Sherlock forgot...

That alone makes me want another series or two, just to find out why she is so damned dismissive of someone who works so HARD to be a good person....

And, no. I am not currently forgiving her for finally taking Mycroft's hand...

Jeezus....

Beyond that: Utterly ridiculous but glorious episode. I mean, truly, even without stepping back and putting on my analyst's cap, it's a stupid story in terms of logic or plausibility. Even a good Vulcan mind takes longer to corrupt people's mental files than what was shown. I mean--pure BS. Pure, unadulterated BS. But it led to an emotionally exciting presentation of what I think we can take as the poetic/epic version of whatever the hell went on between the three sibs.

Five years--in show time, lets' see: we've got two years or so in the first season and a half, two years of Sherlock being away hunting Moriarty's network, and about one year to get to the present--roughly. Further confirmed by Greg's evaluation that he's known Sherlock about ten years now--the originally stated five, plus five more. That puts the Christmas that Mycroft introduced Eurus to Moriarty as the first year--I'm guessing during the Blind Banker arc, when we do not see Mycroft or Greg. So, yes--years of pre-planning went into this, or very good retrofit.

Damn, I feel for Mycroft...especially given the man we've been shown: loves his family, loves his brother, believes in family connection, feels guilt and remorse, and he's trying to be both the warden AND the only family Eurus can have now. Trying to balance antagonistic distrust and the desire to give her such love and relationship as she is capable of. Sheeee-it. Gives her a Strad, because she was the one who played and who taught Sherlock.

Is she one year older than Sherlock or one year younger? I can make the words parse either way. In some ways it makes more sense if she is the elder, but it's more terrifying if she is the younger, and still ahead of Sherlock, pushing his buttons...

John and Sherlock were repeatedly bitchy to Mycroft this ep, and I'm caught between sharing and understanding their anger at imperfect Mycroft leaving them in ignorance while he tries to protect them--and the world--from Eurus alone...and greater sympathy for Mycroft, because what the hell
else was he supposed to do. Personally I am cold--I'd have had her killed and prayed it never came out--while trusting her record as justifying to all why it had to be done. Not that Mummy and Father and Sherlock would ever forgive him, but one suspects Mycroft has long since given up much hope of that.

I liked Sherlock's tantrum over the coffin, and what Esus put him and Molly through. But I am brutal: I like it because it was about the underlying disconnect--he does love her, but not the way she wants. She loves him, and he values it--but can't give her what she longs for. And both of them knew exactly why it was horrible--it's not going the way she dreams, and they both know it. He loves her. He just isn't in love with her, and she is in love with him--and unable to protect herself. I think the coffin tantrum may be the sweetest, most gloriously human and vulnerable we've seen Sherlock, even beyond his things with John and Mary and, yes, Mycroft.

I am irked at people who say, "How can super-genius Sherlock fail to recognize his sister?" I mean, d'oh. A) He doesn't think he has a sister. B) it's been something like 35 years since he saw her. She was barely kindergarten age. Maybe first grade? Maybe... C) His lack of remembering is tied to a passionately sensitive trauma he's completely rewritten--and then built an entire personality to protect.

Look, I am just normal, but I would not recognize anyone--ANYONE--roughly my own age whom I had not seen since early childhood, unless I had been given photos, video, regular family visits, and similar. Hell, I am quite sure there are high school and college associates I knew and even adored whom I would not recognize after all these years. Granted, facial recognition is not one of my stronger skills in any case, but it's not normal for people to recognize the adult morph of people they only knew as little kids without some continuity there to keep things stable. Throw in all the other reasons Sherlock not only does not know her, but has a vested ego-imperative NOT to know her? Yeah, right. I'm sorry, he is not going to know who she is. His entire psyche is geared toward not knowing who she is.

The whole thing with the little girl on the airplane? Nope-nope-nope. But it was a useful storytelling device. You got to see different elements of all three men: strengths, weaknesses, virtues, sins. John's angry and centered in his soldier mind-set. Mycroft is, if anything, too desperate to save lives, not take them. John will never *really* like Mycroft, I suspect--not even now. Mycroft will never *really* like John. But this show did to a good job of forcing both mean to come to emotional terms with the place the other has in Sherlock's life, and to allow them to witness that the other offers massively worthy things.

I love that, yes, Mycroft's umbrella is a sword umbrella. AND a gun!

Oh--I do not recognize the movie Mycroft is watching. Movie fans? Got a name for me?

I can't for the life of me figure out what place Mycroft lives. It's NOT a small London flat, such as the original keeps on Pall Mall, opposite the Diogenes. It just is not. What they are showing is closer to a manor house, very much like Musgrave...but not Musgrave, which appears to have never been repaired after the fire. So...yet another family estate just outside London? Does Mycroft have both the family estate and an in-town flat?

We Mystrade lovers can take heart, can't we? Apparently Greg is the one you tell to make sure Mycroft is taken care of emotionally. And that exchange felt SO much like a private love-note of the non-romantic kind between the two men.

Yes. Greg is not just a copper. Period.

Ok, let's see. Musgrave is not far from Sherrinford, which is off the coast of Scotland. Moffat and
GAtiss just so want Mycroft to be a northerner, don't they?

Is the story done?

Hmmm. My gut instinct is to say that it can be done, but that they rounded it off perfectly in the sense of "end of volume one, preparation for volume two." There are a zillion things left to play with. I could take what they ended up with and spin it so fast. But it allows them to lay down some of the issues they started with, and given how long they've been playing them, it's got to be time for that. Time to pick up some new long-arcs to play with. It lets them jump to the next logical phase of portraying these two characters and their associates. Long ago when the show started, Moffat and Gatiss both talked about how everyone "knows" the older visions of Sherlock and John--that it's the younger versions no one knew. Well, they've done that, and run it about as far as anyone can. Now, if they want to continue, it's time to segue into older men, established in their lives, established in their friendship. That's a different story--and one I can hope Moffat and Gatiss themselves are now old enough to address.

But if they want a break, or a hiatus, or a chance to rethink the property--they've bought time. Time to let Martin and Ben get on with their careers, time to rethink the next steps, time to plan for a man with a kid, and for a new line of arcs. So--

If this IS the end, it's the end. I am betting it's not--all the main players still love the series, BBC NEEDS the series, and the audience is still there. But this gives them time to decide for themselves what's there to be done, and it gives them time to write it and schedule it in the meantime. So--it can go either way. I will hope it continues. But I can accept where they left it. You don't have to tell all the secrets.

As a Mystrade lover, and a lover of Mycroft, I mostly loved this ep, while feeling terribly sorry for Mycroft. He's carried a horrible burden, and even been key in setting off events he never would have wanted. But-- In the end he and Sherlock were clear, and obviously loving each other. And the show left me a "Yes, there is Mystrade" implication so big you can swim a blue whale through it.

Water. Always water.... Nicely done. I think they can be proud of that....

I am pretty sure that when you watch all the episodes enough times, it all integrates, to a fairly reasonable level of integration. For example, I really want to play "Hound" against this last one--among other things, OF COURSE Sherlock was near breakdown over hallucinating a Giant Hound. Too close to his own neurosis. And...of course Mycroft sent Lestrade out to be with Sherlock then. He'd be terrified Sherlock would have a break over it all...
I really am angry for Mycroft.

Chapter Summary

What it says on the tin.

I find I honestly am beyond furious with Mummy, Father, and Uncle Rudy--between them Mycroft is, in essence, a life-long survivor of abuse.

A bright kid--tests out as remarkable. Apparently solitary--and again, that sounds like Mummy and Father's doing. From the looks of it, he would appear to have always been a pretty good kid--no one has suggested otherwise, in a way that implies wrongdoing. But--he's got a mother who at some point started telling him his seven-year-younger junkie out of control brother is the grownup, compared to him? Was she calling him "idiot boy" all along? Holding him up to impossible standards and then berating him when he could not manage to meet her expectations?

And Father, I am damned pissed with you. Bad enough Mummy's an abusive bitch, but apparently you don't see anything but Mycroft's "failure" either. It's like both parents EXPECT Mycroft to have succeeded in seeing things through the eyes of his adult parents...and not in any other way, or with any other priority stack.

Hell. I'm even angry with Moffat, who suggests in an interview that, because of his friendships and connections, Sherlock is stronger and "smarter" than Mycroft, who he seems to think failed in this episode. Only Mycroft did not fail--he succeeded in a different sort of test. Yes--Sherlock's a leg man. A field agent. He's got better skills in terms of being able to navigate the social world--largely because it's usually better, in the long run, to be a wild and charismatic bastard than a quiet, shy bastard. But--

All three men failed the same tests, in different ways. None could commit the kind of murder that offing the Governor would require. None could find a way out of the scene with Molly. None foresaw Eurus being so fucked up as to kill the two innocent brothers, rather than the guilty one--or that she'd then kill the guilty one.

Sherlock and John have a soldier setting that Mycroft does not. But Mycroft has a "step up to the plate and sacrifice yourself for the team" setting that comes far less gracefully to Sherlock and John. He wants to be kind, and is willing to slice himself to bleeding to accomplish that.

They are both, in their own ways, monumentally strong men. But Mycroft is a strong man who chooses, over and over again, to save lives...and who reflexively saves as many as possible. John and Sherlock can see that they could save one little girl, and possibly a plane full of sleeping (or dead) passengers. (Yes, shades of "Scandal in Belgravia"), but Mycroft can see sacrificing the little girl and the plane, if that's what it takes to save London, or Belfast, or Washington D.C. And he is reflexive about that, without being heartless about a single life, either. He can't kill the Governor, though the Governor has betrayed him--and all Britain. He can't kill the Governor. He cares about the single life, but he's automatically geared to protect as many as possible, to think the consequences through.

He's a good man who shows almost no expectation of love or approval, but who is determined to
do the right thing anyway.

And, God, I am so bleeding for that chubby little boy growing up so very alone, facing such very real fears, with no one there helping--and it looks like his mother and his uncle both clearly abusive.

Who DOES that? What the bloody hell is wrong with them? When did Mummy decide her eldest was worth so little?
Some more comments

Chapter Summary

Yadda-yadda-yadda Moffiss, Yadda-yadda-yadda Sherlock. And so on.

Here's the thing: If Moffat and Gatiss did originally intend for this to be two seasons--four and five--then they squashed it together tightly, and (I suspect) to the detriment of Eurus and what they hoped to do with her. But I also find myself thinking that if they did, it's because reality was forcing their hand.

1. The obvious--it's getting harder and harder to schedule B. Cumberbatch and M. Freeman, even though both men (and all the team) claim to still love the show and want to do it. A two-season arc of episodes thus probably takes between four and (shudder) seven years to film. All this with a baby in the middle of the story, and a couple trying to steady down, and at the last minute the couple's actors splitting up in real life.

2. The last two times out Sherlock and John have both looked markedly unlike their youthful selves as shown in the first episodes. Trying to stretch that out over a potential sevenish year of scheduling difficulties leaves you with actors currently hitting the physical turning point that Grave was just beginning to hit when the show began--that point at which you can no longer play the youthful ingenu no matter how heavily you slap on the makeup and soften the lighting. On top of that, even with the Mary narratives drawing Sherlock and John into more age appropriate change and growth, their own relationship needed/still needs to enter a different phase. You can't really get away with the same blissful innocence they first experienced together. John knows now that Sherlock's only semi-trustworthy. Sherlock knows now that John's got moral failings you could sail an aircraft carrier through without scraping the sides. They needed some arc--any arc--to allow them to close the original dynamic conclusively, so that they can now think about how to give birth to a new relationship with its own questions and challenges. They needed that soon...time and tide wait for no man, and John and Sherlock needed a door into a new headspace. This allowed it, and again, did so in less than OMG-how-many-years(?).

3. You have to make your shifts soon enough, or your show dies. It's like the line about the sharks--you have to keep moving. If you stand still too long, you die as a show. And they love their show. I think they probably felt that if they loved their show, they had to get this dealt with in such a way that they could end--or go on--but feel like the show still "lived" and their hearts could bask in that warm, animate life-spark.

All of which to me is why if you're Moffiss you decide it's time to condense that two-season breakdown and find a way to cram it into one season.

It was not, IMO, a perfect answer. But perfect is something that never happens in real life. They got done what they needed to get done, and gave us all a good ride in the process. We can end here--and if they come back, they can do it on new terms. That's about the best outcome you can do when you're leads no longer look like young men, but increasingly like prime-of-life silverback gorillas, or herd stallions--too old to be young anymore, while too young to be old.
John's Anger

Chapter Summary

This is a ramble--the focus is John's behavior in The Final Problem, but that leads to exploration of a wider range of issues.

Did anyone beside me flinch at John's speech at the end of the "scare Mycroft Clown" scene?

It hit me in a place that is already forever sensitive: the bit where someone hurts you hard, then takes the time to tell you they wanted it that way, planned it that way, meant to hurt you. The little, vicious gloat meant to finish you.

I have always found John to be far less fuzzy and lovable than many other viewers, but I have to say this episode left me wondering a bit if, in response to a less dickish Sherlock, John's going to be picking up the burden. I have to hope not. Sherlock was a dick largely by accident and complete insensitivity. He had just that little bit of Eurus disconnect that kept him from seeing that something was cruel until just too late. Even planned out cruelties were not, however, performed out of malice, or done with glee. Sherlock would not need to say what John said after the Clown Scene, because Sherlock would not need to gloat, or rub it in: that was never what it was about, except very, very rarely with Mycroft, where it was the result of years of mutual disconnects and misunderstandings. John's actions, though, do not get that umbrella. John knows--and has always known--when he's being a vicious prick.

He can be a prick to Sherlock, and much of the time it's fine, because Sherlock in full spate a) begs for it, and b) is seldom going to get it, and c) tends to just roar over it on his way to wherever he's going. At worst--on rare occasions--he realizes he's been slashed in such a way as to hurt. But generally John can be vicious in the calm certainty that vicious is often what it takes to get Sherlock to even register "a little not-good."

From Hound on we've seen a growing body of "John is angry" material.

At first it was easy to accept, and even, perhaps approve. Sherlock was a dick in Hound, and deserved it when John decided to end the friendship, as Sherlock insisted it was one-sided. And much as I was angry with John for his verbal attack on Mycroft in the end-phases TRF, I could understand. He's never been a character who "gets" Mycroft, and his pain and confusion were already rising--and he thought he'd deduced the obvious, in part because he seems unable to recognize that Mycroft, for better or worse, loves his brother. Mycroft took it on the chin, and accepted blame because that's part of what he and Sherlock had planned for--a cover story to help muddy the waters of their own plot.

But we see John's anger grow, and hulk out through all season 3 and 4. Yes--he's been the focal point of far too much pain. I get that. But...

Ok, for me, perhaps the key moment is the "Intervention Scene" Sherlock holds in 221B after he's brought Mary and John together in Leinster Gardens. The one where John throws the chair and asks why everything is always his fault.

That, to me, is still a statement out of the blue. I keep going over the series, looking for one time
when John is blamed for anything of any note. Oh, Sherlock regularly tells him he's wrong about things, and hassles him over minor crap like whether there is milk in the house. But Sherlock, by his very nature, is looking for criminals to blame, not his flatmate. God knows Greg and the police team don't blame John for things. Mycroft doesn't hold John accountable even after it becomes clear that John's not what he entirely hoped for as Sherlock's companion. Mary's shown no tendency to blame John for anything. If anything even then she quite clearly adores him just as he is...or at least as she imagines him. The source of that allocation of blame isn't clearly external...

One is forced to suspect that it's internal--that John blames himself for everything--and that he deals with that by trying to redirect the anger onto other people. Which may, come to think of it, be part of what he likes about hanging out with a consulting detective who identifies wrong-doers and gets them nailed for their wrong-doing. By teaming with Sherlock, John is given a calling that allows him to blame other people all the time.

But his interactions with Mycroft are edgy. Even the scene in TRF was edgy, at least for those of us who already guessed that Mycroft, far from simply betraying Sherlock, was instead part of his most valued and necessary support team.

Granted, John and Mycroft did not get off on the right foot. Mycroft was a posturing, supercilious, interfering cipher and bully. John was a smart-arse, short-tempered, posturing soldier with no damned patience with the brass. John is a doctor and an army man. Mycroft is an analyst and an espionage agent and administrator. Both serve their nation...but from such different points of view one suspect that John, at least, finds it impossible to believe Mycroft is anything but waste meat. From that first meeting John's unimpressed. But--he's also intrigued. He'd like to play secret agent for Mycroft, and attempts it in The Great Game, only to fail in multiple ways.

Maybe that's when it changes. Or maybe it's when Mycroft keeps calling on him to take care of Sherlock in "danger night" mode. Or maybe...

Maybe it's when he finds he himself has been wrong, and Mycroft right, in recognizing how flawed and potentially dangerous Sherlock really is. When having defended Sherlock so passionately in TRF, he finds he was the dupe, and Mycroft the ally-of-the-day for Sherlock. Maybe when he found Sherlock had lived--and Mycroft helped, and even defined it all. When he found that Mycroft kept him in the dark the entire two years.

We had hints, still not clarified, that Mycroft did not think he'd be welcome at John and Mary's wedding. How much was that not wanting to deal with the former AGRA agent, and how much was not wanting to deal with John Watson's resentment?

But still. The Clown Scene. That's when I found myself just a little ill--and wondering if John was a terrible influence on Sherlock far more than he's a good one.

What John essentially tells Mycroft is that he, personally, manipulated Sherlock to torment his brother. That he, personally, has convinced Sherlock that Mycroft can only be dealt with as an enemy to attack and hurt. He makes it clear that he, personally, is looking forward to seeing Mycroft reduced to a "client," and is sufficiently nasty about it that Mycroft has to know John and Sherlock already intend it to be as humiliating and dismissive as possible. John makes sure--dead sure--to let Mycroft know that Sherlock is now JOHN'S bitch, not Mycroft's. John too clearly sees this as a telling victory in a rivalry of bitter depth. He wants to hurt Mycroft, he wants to humiliate Mycroft, he wants to take Mycroft's brother away from him...and he wants to rub it in. He wants that villain-gloat, that moment of wallowing in his victory and watching the hurt in Mycroft's eyes.

And then, the next morning, he wants more.
So, too, does Mrs. Hudson.

Do none of the people have a clue that Mycroft, for all his issues, really has worked and sacrificed for Sherlock?

Yes. I know they all have a lot of anger over the sudden appearance of Eurus, and they are right--Mycroft holds the keys and told the lies. But the assumption that this is instantly, necessarily blame-worthy bugs me, and the desire to torment...

Ok, maybe this explains how horrified I am. Mary's speech, at the end, about there always being a place for the rejected, the outsider, the lost, the helpless, etc. Yadda-yadda. On the whole I can go with that. Sherlock may be a complete tosser to some of his clients, but never in the desire to torment them. Sherlock does not revel in hurting them--he IS a place for the frightened and helpless to go. He's not cruel.

Only John has previously been cruel, when they interview anyone. John was cruel when Mary was put in the seat. Now he's infected Sherlock and Mrs. Hudson--they're not using the client seat as a presentation stage. They are intentionally using it as a humiliation, a shaming device...

I can forgive Sherlock, because Sherlock's dealing with a real, personal fear of betrayal. It turns out he was not betrayed in the sense he thought, and that Mycroft was not the betrayer, just someone doing his best with an impossible situation.

But John? John needs someone to blame. For the girl on the bus. For Mary's death. For everything the past five years have done to him. And John's not Sherlock. John's not the nice man people think he is. He's not as good as Mary (or Sherlock) have believed. He wants to do some damage. He wants to see Mycroft bleed.

And, by the end, has he exorcised that longing?

No. Dammit. "What goes around comes around." By now he knows that, no: Mycroft did not do wrong to lock Eurus up. He did right--and failed only in underestimating her brilliance. She belonged in that cell, because she was unsafe at any speed. Nor was Mycroft the one to blame for her presence: Uncle Rudy and Eurus herself were the ones to blame. Mycroft merely continued the most successful plan of action he knew of. But John has to treat Mycroft, locked up alone and unaware of his brother's survival, as getting his just deserts. Karma--he earned it. Screw him.

I can't swear they have Greg cut off as much because of that as because there are people who need him. But I like to think he leaves because it's more constructive to help a junior officer than to deck John Watson.

It's a nice dream, anyway.

The good thing--the important thing--is that Sherlock then undoes the worst part of the first scene. In the Clown scene, Sherlock has given himself over to John's anger, and is as malicious as John--as willing to blame Mycroft. In the scene with Greg, he refuses. Instead he recognizes his brother is as human, and traumatized, and in need as he himself has ever been, and he acts from that knowledge, instead of from anger and the need to cast blame.

But that does not change the fact that, even after everything, John Watson is one mean sonofabitch where Mycroft is concerned.

But, then, maybe for John the secret, hidden answer, is that he has to blame other people, because otherwise he will blame himself to death.
More on John's Anger, brief, with question

Chapter Summary

An idea has come to me.

It occurs to me that if there's another arc, it has to be the healing of John Watson.

The previous arcs for the entire four seasons was really the humanizing of Sherlock Holmes, moving him from crazy-boy of the early stories to, at last, the man who sends Greg to look after Mycroft, and who plays with babies in Baker Street. John in large part does that for Sherlock--he, and through him, Mary and Rosie, and all the rest of the world John helps Sherlock see differently. And, yes, Mycroft in his own ways helped with that, but he is limited in terms of humanizing anyone. He himself is so cocooned and afraid of pain...he needs Lady Smallwood and Greg to himanize him.

But the humanizing of Sherlock has come at a profound and credible cost to John, who's become increasingly de-humanized. John when we met him wasn't mean in the way he's become. He wasn't fucked up in the way he's become. He wasn't addicted to destruction to the degree he's become.

If you look at it carefully, Sherlock's motion into light has been balanced by John's growing path into darkness. "The soldier who never came back from the war" has perpetuated war, and has been placed in situations where it's only going to get worse.

He's the guy who goes to a crack house to ease his addiction--but his addiction isn't drugs, it's violence. He's the guy who thinks he wants a domestic, normal wife--and marries a black-ops assassin who's trying to find her own peace. He tags around with Sherlock because he's hooked on danger. This is the man whose reaction to Mary's death includes sending Rosie away because he can't cope--by which we find he means drinking at a minimum, and more likely being angry and drunk enough together to not trust himself with his child. This is the man who, as others have pointed out (Hey, RavenMorganLeigh!) that kicking a sick man in the stomach and ribs is not just a little-not-good...it's bad. I mean, really--kicking anyone in the ribs and stomach is bad, and far too likely to lead to death. John's out of control, and his place with Sherlock is both life-line and mainlining his drug of choice.

So, here's a question...

What if, instead of the next season, Mofftiss are contemplating a full-length, longer than 90 minutes single real movie-house movie, that would be about the re-humanizing of John? To balance the healing.

It's not like the John they've given us does not have a perfect right to his rage, and a fair need for healing. The many hits he's taken, before and after the pilot, are brutal. Alcoholic sister. In fanon he also had an alcoholic father. He's got PTDS from the war, and then every evil, painful thing that has happened to him in the series. I'd say he's got at least as much legitimate claim to a bit of crazy as Sherlock and Mycroft, and so far the show has not been healing him, it's been putting on more and more pressure, until John's oozing anger everywhere, and even Mary's ideas about him are not enough to keep him in aspirational, hopeful mode. He's losing the fight.
So--maybe a feature, theatrical release? And THEN maybe a new, reset series again?

Or, of course, a season 5 dealing with how you heal John enough that we no longer want to smack him.
Huh. I thought I'd written more about the panto-like elements of Sherlock. Turns out I have not, according to a search...

Gotta fix that, especially in light of TFP...

The British have a form of theatrical production called a "pantomime," or "panto." Mycroft, bless him, uses the term to disparage the prank played on him at the start of The Final Problem. Moffat and Gatiss are regularly accused of slipping into panto, as though it's some tawdry sin for which they should do penance. I really can't agree. They do go panto, regularly--in both Sherlock and Doctor Who. The thing is, they do it appropriately, in full knowledge of the natures of the two series and the necessary and authentic role of panto and comedy in those contexts. Today I'm going to stick to Sherlock...

Sherlock--the original, authentic, first canonical ACD Sherlock Holmes, both characters and stories, reeks of panto and superhero silliness. Some of it's a Victorian legacy: the Victorian world was in many ways a sort of screaming low-brow expression of music-hall sensibilities trying to break into a more sober, pompous higher culture. So we had Science (with the yellow peril!) We had Politics (with flashy opera singers no better than they should be!) We had brilliance juxtaposed with action hero, and the British Government in an exclusive men's club vying with his bohemian druggie brother. We have dialog in the original series that makes Sherlock and John of our modern Sherlock look like they're having a slow comedic day sometimes--smart-arsing each other, quipping, bantering, indulging in sudden outbreaks of moral monologuing only to turn around and discuss racing, or singlestick fighting, or the dubious trustworthyness of women. There is a reason ACD Holmes could go straight to a very campy Victorian stage--it WAS campy and panto-like, with heavy-handed plots, goofy central actors, events colliding with events, and plenty of moments for an actor to either ham it up or chew the scenery. It's in the original genetics of Sherlock Holmes--laughter and the ludicrous mere gasps away from serious, scientific, logical deduction--and serioseus, scientific, logical deduction pushed beyond the point of credibility to outrageous lunacy.

I mean...really. Do we trust Sherlock when he deduces everything about a man from a mud splash on his trouser cuff, a shmootz on his hat brim, and a missing weskit button? I think not. Sherlock's brilliance is at least three parts chutzpah and bravado to one thin, skimmed part real science or logic. If he were not the hero, with the writer on his side, he'd be wrong a lot more often.

From there we turn to BBC Sherlock--Moffat and Gatiss' (and Thompson's) Sherlock.

As realistic and poignant as Watson's backstory may be, it quickly steps into the old, familiar Sherlockian surreal. The panto Sherlock. The 'nothin' up my sleeve" Sherlock who tells your past by the state of your mobile phone. Who leads you on a nighttime parkour race through London. Who flogs corpses, insults innocent student pathologists. (Molly is currently listed as a Specialist Registrar in pathology on the BBC site, which suggests that she was finishing her doctor's training at the beginning of the show, and is currently finishing up her specialization: Specialist Registrars are currently still in training, rather than having completed training, at least according to my
Googling.) (Which would at least explain the ongoing uncertainty regarding her professional authority and her personal confidence....) Once you introduce Sherlock and Watson and throw Una Stubbs at them, you're in the land of comic actors and regular bouts of panto comic sensibility.

I know I've pointed out, over and over again, that it MATTERS that Moffat and Gatiss work so hard to hire people who have comic chops. Why they are quite careful to assure audiences that the funny is not leaving the show. Sherlock was, is, and remains a story about a comic-book caliber hero who has been juxtaposed over a modern, far more ordinary world, providing us with plots and mysteries that are idiotic, backgrounds that verge on Bond, and cliches turned on their heads.

Here, to me, is the key problem. Our culture--modern British demi-hipster and ABSOLUTELY American demi-hipster/genre fan--do not know how to cope with panto sensibilities, much less with intentional baroque comedy layered over damn fine serious writing. One or the other--maybe. Shows that are both? No. And the more prestigious and admired the BBC Sherlock has become, the more it has run into hysterical critics and viewers who are confounded by that comic panto element. They are being *silly*! Quel horreur! They are over the top! They are goofy, inplausible, and yet--just when you're ready to scream, a scene falls into focus and it's...

Goddamn. It's character development. It's moving. It's art. And it's set into the most complex and elegant tracery of logical and dramatic structure, with element commenting on element, and logic extending back years.

If the panto element were not there--if it were sober and truly navel-diving and as pompous as its reviewers, it would be far more suitable, after all.

Also far less fun.

Here's the thing: Sherlock, old or new, has always been panto. It's always been goony, clownish, over-the-top, campy, superheroish, rife with espionage and foreign affairs and melodramatic problems and often purely contradictory outcomes of tenderness or laughter or grace resolving otherwise dire seeming plots. Sherlock is by its nature one foot in serious mystery, the other in wild adventure--and the fence of Panto snagging the heroes by the crotch of their trousers and leaving them raggedy-arsed and laughing by the end.

That's the nature of the beast, and as strange it can be when we ourselves forget it's always a bit silly, we damage our own expectations when we go too serious--when we forget the comic actors chosen to remind us of the laughter, over and over throughout the series. Moffatt and Gatiss love Sherlock as much for it's outre, gothic silliness as for its serious nature, and they play it that way. Anything else is someone else's Sherlock.
Do You Want to Build a Snowman, or, Game On!

Chapter Summary

Now that I've had some time to think and play, I'm beginning to put together some ideas about this season, its finale, and how that relates to arcs played out over the entire BBC canon. Not definitive--never definitive--but I see a few things worth writing about.

Between the pilot of Sherlock and the ultimate first episode of Sherlock, many things change. In the final version Sherlock's more abrasive but also a bit more adult, seeming eccentric and adventurous and Byronic more than he seems juvenile and vulnerable. The plot's more complex, and the relationships much more complex. Sherlock's far more openly a junkie, with no ambiguity to keep viewers arguing for almost three full seasons, with many holding out even through His Last Vow against the notion that their Sherlock, their modern Sherlock, was a user in any serious way. In all the little, emotional differences it's easy to overlook one difference that has proven crucial: the absence of Mycroft from the first script.

Yes, ok, you saw it coming. I do have my Mycroft thing. But part of why I have my Mycroft thing is because Mycroft's presence has been a vital element of modern BBC Sherlock--his involvement from the start has altered the formula of traditional Sherlock Holmes interpretations, and has done so in ways that impact both plot arcs and character development arcs.

I've gone on at length about the ways Mycroft's shadow world has been the source of layer after layer of plot--James Bond spy-story plotting, of course, but also brooding hints of family, home, and catastrophic years of drug use. That in and of itself is a powerful practical story-telling engine, as Mycroft becomes the gateway through which dark things come, whether he wishes to or not, whether he tries to protect Sherlock or not. Even before this most recent episode, it was clear that Moriarty came to Sherlock from the depths of Mycroft's world, rather than existing outside that realm. Sherlock was always, for Moriarty, a bon-bon, a delicious treat, a surprise obsession he picked up out of fascination, not obvious necessity. In Moriarty's existence, Mycroft was a player, a target, a source of power, an enemy warrior. Sherlock was something unexpected who only affected Moriarty in minor ways. There was never any need for Moriarty to confront Sherlock other than infatuation of a sort that seemed the inverse of John's: both men were fixated by the Wuthering Heights drama of Sherlock, all emotional crags and high winds on the tors. It was Mycroft who simply lived, quietly, effectively, on Moriarty's side of the borderland, keeping watch over the sheep Moriarty wanted to rustle, and fighting off the wolves Moriarty sent. Sherlock was an outsider in that dynamic... From the very beginning, unstated and unmarked, Mycroft was the figure who stood between John and Sherlock's London, and a Mordor-London of great beasts and desperate madmen.

But Mycroft also became a counterpoint to John--and, seen through John's eyes and Sherlock's resentment, a misunderstood monster in his own right. Most particularly he became from the beginning the alternate friend/brother...like Lestrade, the man who could as easily have been the hero of the story as Sherlock and John, particularly John.

Here's the thing: Moffat and Gatiss have always been quite open about this being a love story between two men who save and humanize each other. The Army doctor who never came home
from the war; the junkie detective solving cases to control his addition. Two profoundly flawed men who are likely to have led increasingly dysfunctional and unrewarding lives if they had not found each other. You can hope it's a slash romance or you can accept its a plain, non-erotic BFF story, but either way, it's the story of two brothers-by-choice. Both men are set up in the very first episode as having siblings they do not deal well with. John has alcoholic Harry, of whom he does not approve, though it's never made entirely clear on how many levels he and she fail to mesh. She's alcoholic--that's uncontested. She's a lesbian--and while John approves of her wife/ex-wife, it's not entirely certain he is equally approving of the marriage, or that he's not frustrated that having married same-sex, Harry couldn't at least have the decency to stick with it. What is clear is that John's disapproval is real and binding. Added to ACD canon, which established both the original Brother Harry and John's father as alcoholics, there's a feeling of deep dysfunction and distaste, explaining why John Watson is so alone even when he does still have family living.

In the meantime we are given Sherlock's brother, Mycroft, who is first dangled before us as a possible Moriarty. He and John are immediately put at odds.

It is strange and wonderful to re-read that first encounter, and realize how many ways John's understanding of the entire thing was wrong. I particularly love John assuring Mycroft that John's observation of Sherlock's life--and Sherlock's life itself--can't be any of Mycroft's business. Mycroft, being the reserved, secret keeping man he is, says only that it could become his business, only to have John assure him that no, it can't.

In review, that passage reminds me precisely of John's equally determined claim to Lestrade that Sherlock can't possibly be a junkie...an error it takes years for John to ever really grapple with honestly. There we are, in the first episode of the story, with John passionately embracing two radical errors in his understanding of Sherlock and the people around him. Sherlock is Mycroft's beloved, maddening brother, his sometime-subordinate, his professional and personal Achilles' Heel. He is Mycroft's nightmare fear--that someday Sherlock will, like Eurus, need to be sectioned or killed for the good of the nation. He's his cherished sibling. He's the one person Mycroft feels a clear sense of contact and kinship with--and until John shows up, Mycroft appears to have been Sherlock's only close associate, too. Sherlock is a sufficient national threat that he's legitimately under surveillance much of the time--a better choice than being Eurus in a basement cell, but still a figure of both hope and fear to those who guard the country. In the same way, Greg (and through Donovan, Greg's team) offer another set of truths John chooses to reject and redefine: that he's a great man--but NOT a good man. That he's an addict. That he's got some serious sociopathic tendencies, even if he's not technically the sociopath he calls himself. That sometimes the only way to manage Sherlock is with a solid smack from a cricket bat. Add in Mycroft's intense warning of Sherlock as utterly untrustworthy, and you've got a brilliant sketch of what's wrong with Sherlock.

John's rejection of that warning provides an equally brilliant sketch of what's wrong with John.

I sometimes wonder if Mary did, in fact, tell him enough about her past to have started a dialogue--only to have John rewrite it on the fly so completely that she gave up, preferring John's rose-tinted hallucinatory version of her to the less pretty reality. Just as John, ultimately, admits he loves the better man Mary was able to see in him...the aspirational John he wants to become.

In any case, we are left at the very start with a set of drawings we can take away from the interaction of four different men--John, Sherlock, Mycroft, and Lestrade. Between them they not only accomplish the practical grunt work of the narrative, but also set themes and relationships in motion. As, in the end, we see, Sherlock at least is fulfilled in his first-episode omens, becoming a man one can trust, and a good man.

What is less fully played out are John's themes, but more on that a little later.
Structure in story telling is most obviously seen through contrasting symmetry. At the beginning we are presented with Sherlock and John, with symmetrical bad relationships with siblings, cut off from the families-by-choice most of us make on our own (and which John almost certainly had in some form in the Army and in med school), who find each other and become a two-man brotherhood/family-of-choice. While we never see John's family issues played out with Harry (except hinted at in the online blog), we do see Sherlock's presented over and over again, with Mycroft playing roles of substance in every episode but The Blind Banker. In each of those episodes we see Mycroft framed through the vision of Sherlock and John, as the "rubbish brother." But we also see him through the more dispassionate eyes of the omniscient story teller, as not quite what John and Sherlock think him to be.

And, of course, what they think him to be is not even one consistent thing. Sherlock from the start has a better grasp of much of Mycroft's reality than John, and John never seems to get a grasp of the actual brotherhood that exists between the two men. John seems to see Mycroft as an interloper, not an actual relative, much less the closest relationship Sherlock has in life other than John. The result is quite like many in-law relationships, though I dread saying so lest the in-law comparison force too many to jump to the conclusion that I see John and Sherlock as "marital." An equally good comparison would be the battle between an old Best Friend Forever who is largely displaced by a new and jealous friend. As the nature of the show invites us to see through John's eyes, and feel with his heart, it's easy to understand his perception that Mycroft's interfering, offensive, pompous, dishonest, malicious, manipulative, and far too disrespectful and dismissive of John and John's dignity. John himself does not have the personality or the skills to step back and reverse the spin, seeing Mycroft as a close and loving relative with profound fears and reasonable fears for his brother in both personal and professional ways, and reasonable uncertainty whether John's entitled to see into the national and familial secrets Mycroft is bound to keep.

What we have are two brothers, shown in two conflicting ways--the more heavily weighted being through John's eyes, the less heavily weighted being through a more objective universal eye. Through that universal eye, though, a structure becomes clear, of two men who love Sherlock, who emotionally need Sherlock, who waver between collaboration and competition to keep Sherlock alive, but who do not really like or trust each other.

Our culture is a bit flip about family ties. We wax sentimental over the life-long love of a brother or sister, but in truth we regard too much in-family togetherness after adulthood as a bit peculiar. The ideal adult leaves home, gains a career, a spouse, a family of their own, a friendship and career based family of choice--and the old in-law ties are expected to become largely sentimental and distant. We love mum and da to death--from a safe distance. We help each other out--but not as completely and intimately as our family-by-choice does. John (and the audience), not knowing all the different elements tying the two blood-brothers together, can't understand why Mycroft is so intrusive and controlling, nor why Sherlock turns to him in a split second rather than to John. And, yet--it is true.

Sherlock's most trusted ally is not John; it's Mycroft. For all their anger, competition, resentment, rivalry, and deep misunderstanding, they are each other's anchors. By the end of The Final Problem we've been shown enough to understand why--the family traumatized by Eurus, the older brother trusted with a care for his brother that can only start to make up for the loss of Victor, the friend, the years of Sherlock's fall into drug use and despair, Mycroft's natural and profound reserve being reinforced by too many real secrets he must keep and carry, with no one to connect with but Sherlock himself. By the end of four seasons we've been shown a Mycroft who joined his baby brother in the crack-houses of London, to drag him back to life and health. We've been given hints of a Sherlock who's earned at least some place in the espionage community, if never one reliable enough to leave him as a "trusted ally." We've found out that Eurus, by her nature, has isolated both brothers together from childhood on, even while also isolating them from each other.
But we're also John's friends. John's viewers. And John lies to himself all the time. To the very end, even to the conclusion of The Final Problem, John can't bring himself to *see* Mycroft, nor can either Sherlock or Mycroft bring themselves to force sight onto John, as Sherlock did for Mary and John in the intervention scene.

John Watson is Sherlock Holmes' best friend and brother. But he will never be able to understand fully why Mycroft is Sherlock's other best friend and brother. Nor, I think, can Mycroft ever fully look at John Watson and see anything but an amazingly naive, two-dimensional thinker, a mere goldfish...an interloping idiot.

Yet that story--that dynamic between the two men, that competition, is a huge part of what has made the show work. Each man, competing with the other, has opened up windows into character, plot, and story-telling that are just exceptional, the moreso in that Moffat and Gatiss chose NOT to telegraph it all.

By the end of the four seasons, Sherlock is finally a conscious, aware, sensitized participant in both relationships, and for the first time fully aware that both men are precious to him, flawed, and painfully vulnerable. And, for the first time, Sherlock wants to help Mycroft only to realized that's not his role. Mycroft is his brother, and I suspect can forever trust Sherlock to play that role with more love and respect than previously--but Sherlock has realized, too, that someone else has to become Mycroft's friend. Both Holmes brothers NEED someone outside their precious, codependent little universe of just-the-two-of-them. Sherlock needs John--and John at this point desperately needs Sherlock. Mycroft, though, also is in need....and one hopes that some constellation of people will come through for him, too, if Sherlock can make it so.

Now, for a quick tour past John again.

At the beginning of the show we were given two men who needed to grow through their respective arcs. I am not completely convinced that John's arc is done--as I have commented, he's got anger issues and understanding of how he himself works--and how the people surrounding him work--that need to be brought further along. Where Sherlock has, this past two seasons, been humanized, John's become increasingly out of control, his anger like a drug in its own right, and his misunderstanding of basic truths getting more and more out of hand. John will never be the one who sees through to the hidden truth easily, but right now he's wandering into delusional shadows that satisfy his ego or, conversely, his need for self-loathing. Ghost Mary nails him for that, when he comments on her disapproval--if she's his inner Mary, a sock-puppet of his subconscious, her disapproval is a proper statement of his growing rejection of himself. Much as I can approve of his understanding that Mary's idealized version of him offers him something to aspire toward, it's become obvious that over the past years he has come to a raging state of hating both the outside world for failing him, and hating himself for somehow being deserving of nothing better.

He was not healed of this by the end of The Final Problem. Indeed, he's a fucking little pill by the end of that, dragged back and forth between Eurus and Mycroft as the third contender in a battle for Sherlock's attention.

Eurus killed Victor to maintain possession of Her Playmate. In struggling to deal with the aftermath, Mycroft tried to be Mummy and Father and Eurus and Victor all at once to Sherlock while also being The British Government...and got it all bollocksed up. The Final Problem could easily have been a bipolar battle between those two "real" siblings for Sherlock's possession.

With John there, though, it became three men against Eurus...And I want to think about why that may be so. It's an odd shift when I come to think about it--that John is what makes the battle into a three man alliance against Eurus, rather than a two-sib fight over the middle child. Perhaps because
Eurus is equally angry with all three men for failing to simply give her Sherlock as her rightful due.

I am not sure.

But I am sure that there remains an element of angry, lost, self-loathing John fighting to offer to Sherlock something--anything--Mycroft can't. When the whole "shooting the Governor" thing plays out, John radiates scorn for Mycroft, who from the start knows he can't do it...only to find he himself can't, either. John's so torn up through this entire ep--angry, angry, angry, and at the same time every time he fails to provide a resounding solution to their growing desperation, you can see him wilting. He's measuring himself against Mycroft, finding Mycroft revoltingly short of the mark--and then finding he himself is even less worthy than Mycroft, or at least no better. So he's got his own judgement pummeling him, and he's got Eurus' rage pummeling him, and he's got the ongoing anger at finding out that Eurus was key in his cheating on Mary to haunt him...

By the end of season 4, Sherlock's the Great Man of Baker Street. But John's actually not yet the Great Biographer. One development arc we were presented with in the very first episode has been completed, but the symmetrical arc of John's development is not done. Now, I think it can eventually be rather quick, because for all he's gone down and down deep into despair and anger, it's been by way of some huge learning experiences that can resolve in greatness. He's got inner Mary and outer Sherlock to help him, now. But his arc is just not right.

Sherlock's Sherlock. He will always be the center stage of a Sherlock Holmes story, and that's why Moffat and Gatiss could, if necessary, quit now. But I can't help hoping that as they move into the "older" Sherlock and John, they can complete that second arc that's been there from the start. Leaving John as he is does not leave us with a truly heart-satisfying outcome.
Short Notification, Impending Life Changes

Chapter Summary

Trying to help people keep up with my writing who are interested, while not offending or imposing on those who are not interested, and while respecting AO3’s self-promotion rules. I hope this is both helpful and within the limits of honor.

This log of essays has grown very large over the years, and while it's always mainly been about Sherlock meta, it's ranged far and wide as well. I've covered books, drama, history, genre norms, and on and on and on...and many of you have been kind enough to not only enjoy, but to make a point of tracking me in essay and analytical mode.

The thing is, I expect to be here less for some time to come. Not only is Sherlock back in hiatus, but it may be concluded--no one knows, including Moffat and Gatiss from the looks of it. Moffat is leaving Doctor Who at the end of this season, which leaves me with one less genre show to link in over here. On top of that, I'm beginning a real world project that is simply going to take most of my time and my analytical writing, as well as a LOT of original fiction and (maybe) revamped fanfic. I'm going to be spending my words elsewhere.

I do not expect or demand any of you follow. I do think some of you may wish to at least look in.

This is an attempt to give you directions without breaking AO3’s rules.

So--I am sending you to a Facebook fanpage, that will give you more of an idea of what's going on without getting anyone's back up or placing anyone in uneasy legal positions.

Here:

I am in the process of shifting my real life endeavors in ways that are likely to affect my work here. That does not mean I am quitting. It does mean that I'm going to need to spend more time on other projects. If you are interested in my current material, including what I hope will eventually be revision and de-fanficing of some of the projects I started here, I'm going to offer my Facebook fan page as a link to my other work. I do NOT want to offend by ignoring AO3’s rules about commercial promotion, and I think this is the logical way out of that. So--if you are interested in my current projects, which I hope to launch in mid-to-late April, follow my Facebook fan page and wait for the announcement of launch.

https://www.facebook.com/pegfiction/

You can also find links to my current work here:

https://www.tumblr.com/blog/tammanyt
Meanwhile--I can't swear I will never be back here. It remains the best choice i have for doing Sherlock analysis, and I love you all. Thank you for an incredible ride, and great company, and an outlet for thought that the world does not offer easily. I love you all, and can't tell you what this place as meant to me over the last few years. Whatever else, go in peace, with my very best wishes.
A Quick challenge posed by a shift in assumptions.

A discussion on another thread and other person's post entirely has me wanting to pose a question/challenge.

Most people seem to assume that, no matter what Moffat, Gatiss, Cumberbatch, Freeman, or anyone says, there remains a "real" possibility that Sherlock's gay and John may be too. In other words, rather than treating the characters as created beings whose creators may be presenting them with ambiguities that are misleading for reasons of theme and character development, viewers/fans are choosing to treat Sherlock and John as "real" people, and suggesting the creators/writers/show-runners/actors have no more knowledge and insight into the "real" motives and behavior of the characters than they would have into the lives and motives of any celebrity they know only at second-hand.

I do have to admit I find this odd. It's like suggesting that no matter what the writers and actors think they are writing and performing, it's all being redirected by some mighty invisible hand that turns all the elements into something else entirely.

Now, this is not necessarily a bad thing. I mean, come on, I am writing slash myself, that's only demi-canonical at best. What we choose to do with the show once its in our fevered little brains is ours to decide.

Here's the thing, and it may seem a bit alien to some folks, but--

If viewers are wrong, and the writers/actors are right, then all the stuff that's been used to discuss Johnlock and to debate the sexuality of the characters is, almost by definition, obscuring the thematic material that the writers and actors are actually trying to present and perform. Our own assumptions are interfering with our reading of THEIR intended line of discussion.

So, here's the thing. I have to do some serious pro work today. I literally dare not miss my deadline, and I'm not free to pursue this any further than I have already today. But it interests me a LOT. Are any of you interested in starting a discussion I can take up in a day or so, regarding the themes and theses of "Sherlock" if I am correct, and the authors and actors were honest, and the show was always, always about two straight men (one geeky and ambiguous and not conforming to gender expectations) who love each other, and all the ambiguities were just that: ways that two straight men can still appear ambiguous?

What story was told over four years, if it was not Johnlock, or "queer Sherlock," but was also never anti-gay/anti-queer? What story arc were they telling?

And, on an entirely different angle, I am still working on a venue that must not be named. If you want to know any of what I am up to, feel free to check into my fansite and tumblr account at:
https://www.facebook.com/pegfiction/

You can also find links to my current work here:

https://www.tumblr.com/blog/tammanyt
Announcement of posted review/discussion/essay on Moffat, Doctor Who
series 10

Chapter Summary

What it says on the tin. I'm continuing to write essays/analysis of Moffat's work, when work arrives and begs for comment. Season 10 of Doctor Who does beg, to my way of seeing things. I am posting the material in the venue which must not be named, but for free, which I think still clears AO3's standards.

If you are interested and would like to read and discuss, you can find more information on my Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter, at:

https://www.facebook.com/pegfiction/
http://tammanyt.tumblr.com/
https://twitter.com/Pegeel

I really do hope I can move the discussions over to the free material on the site. Do feel welcome to come chat.

https://www.facebook.com/pegfiction/
http://tammanyt.tumblr.com/
https://twitter.com/Pegeel
Chapter Summary

This is a Moffat-focused essay dealing with Doctor Who: It's posted here not to bother fellow Sherlock fans, but to keep my Moffat/analytical writing together. At some point I may use it as a jumping off point to discuss what I like about Sherlock, seasons 3 & 4, but this bit here is Moffat and analysis looking at The Doctor. Consider yourself warned?

One of the things I like most about Steven Moffat’s work is the shape of his character arcs, and the underlying empathy he feels for his characters. I find that especially true of his handling of the Doctor, in Doctor Who, and the women who love him, and whom he loves. Even before he took charge of the show, his contributions to the emotional growth and development of the Doctor was solid. From the very first, he showed a romantic sensibility that rang true and sweet. In the two-parter “The Empty Child/The Doctor Dances,” he caught the Doctor up between contrasting longings, and ended one on a brilliant, joyful note—and the other one on a note of pathos. By the end of the two-parter, we’ve seen the Doctor rejoice that today, just once, nobody dies. We have also seen the Doctor helpless in his attraction to Rose, and his inability to find a way to woo her, while showing her clearly as the young, and youthfully heartless ingenue she is. Rose is attracted to the Doctor, yes—but he’s so much older, and he’s put up such walls, and along comes Captain Jack, sexy and interested and sweet-talking, and Rose turns to him in delight, failing to see the Doctor’s jealousy, even as he pushes himself to enter in.

In terms of hero-ing, he dances divinely. In terms of wooing a young adult Lolita, he dances like a donkey on dope. He is ancient and immortal. She is very young, and ephemeral—due to die in the blink of a Gallifreyan’s eye. He is a traumatized, shattered veteran of a war of such scope it can’t really be described in mortal terms, sure of his own guilty dual-species genocide. She’s incapable of guilt, and even her “tragedies” are really just areas of emptiness—her father’s death occurs before her birth. She’s young and bright and full of energy and hunger, and he’s old and brilliant and restless and ravenous for something to blot out his own pain.

All that is there in those two episodes, clarifying why an ancient immortal might long for as shallow and self-centered and young a girl as Rose Tyler—and at the same time showing how tragic a match that is.

“The Girl in the Fireplace” carries the characters’ love arc further. Rose is back more or less with Mickey, with the Doctor distancing himself while still attracted—only to be offered the heart of a legend: the beautiful, brilliant, amazing Madame Pompadour.

We know it’s doomed. The Doctor knows it’s doomed, too. But he’s charmed, fascinated, attracted, capable of wishing as all people do that what must be, won’t be, and what will inevitably happen will be escaped. He knows who she is. He knows how she dies. He knows she is mortal—and so crucial to history that it’s not going to be easy to change the time lines, if he can at all. And yet…with Rose hosting her own boyfriend/buddy, and romance calling, he can long for what he knows he can’t have.

The show takes the two themes of “The Empty Child/The Doctor Dances,” and combines them: the
Doctor’s war against death, and his longing to have a companion. In this one, death steals her away, and we’re shown why an immortal hates death: not out of fear it will someday take him, but out of knowledge that it will someday take away everyone he loves. Death will steal them all from him, without mercy, without stopping, without even a pause to let them look back in regret.

And then, after the Doctor-light “Blink,” he wrote another two-parter: “Silence in the Library/Forest of the Dead.” In those he gave us River Song, whose first introduction to the Doctor is the proof and certainty that he will lose her.

This comes after Moffat had been witness to quite a lot that Russell Davies did with the Doctor and love. The Doctor had lost Rose—twice over. He’d been tagged after by an amorous Martha. He’d been tied in a fiercely asexual friendship with Donna. That had been a tidy, but rather emotionally plebian arc—an emotional pattern that could have been true of any mortal lover who lost the first girl, ignored the second, and escaped the whole issue with the third. It’s almost a classic post-break-up pattern, with very little sense of the Doctor as an immortal suffering an immortal’s loss. Perhaps the closest we come is the Doctor’s hunger for his mortal wife in “Human Nature/The Family of Blood.” In that, the Doctor appears almost to have willed himself to be lost and without memory, so he can live a life on the same time-scale as the mortals around him, for at least a time. And, yet, the story seems, if anything, to suggest the Doctor is too afraid to face love and immortality. Martha, who has earned his notice, goes not only unnoticed, but ignored to the point of insult, with the Doctor preferring a pretty, clueless, time-blind wifey, with courage and spine but no awareness to allow her to criticize him or object to his choices, and a lot of nice Victorian conditioning to keep her passive.

In “The Silence in the Library/Forest of Trees,” Moffat spins all of that around on its head. Instead of being the one who holds all the cards, knows all the future holds, makes all the choices, Moffat hands the Doctor a woman visually older than him (and older in character, too—someone with spine and courage and self-willed certainty). Someone who knows more about him than he knows about her. Someone who does not put up with much from him, and who behaves with a brash and flamboyant bravado that matches every swashbuckling, sashaying performance he’s handed others, over all his incarnations. She’s outside his knowledge, outside his control, beyond his understanding—and by the end of the two episodes he knows she is his future. By then, he’s more than a little convinced he’s met his wife—and lost her. He’s seen the woman he marries die—to save him. A woman whose most ferocious desire is that he not rewrite a single moment of the time they will have together. Someone who’s so passionate about it, and about him, that she will die to protect the years he has yet to see. He knows he will trust her with his name. He knows he will give her his heart.

He knows that every minute of what will come will be colored by her death. For him it will be a Greek chorus, a specter at the feast of love. The Doctor, already at war with death, already hating Goodbye, already aching from the cost of love for ephemerals, has been handed his True Love (and yes, do please think in grand, mythic, Princess Bride terms here). He’s been shown the promised land—and watched her die. For him.

He saves her, of course—but in a way he at least seems convinced is only an echo, though one is forced to doubt he’s correct. (I still consider her saving in the Library to be a painfully obvious get-out-of-jail-free card. There are too many ways obvious just in the context of the two episodes to get River back to life...just as all those thousands of “saved” people are brought back to life....)

I am not sure how aware Moffat was of his coming promotion to show-runner at that point. I am sure that his own work not only created a clear set of statements about the Doctor and love for ephemerals, it helped sort out his reactions to the Davies-era romances and romantic companions. Those episodes established clear and comprehensible conflicts in what the Doctor would like—and
what he fears so badly that it colors all the relationships he can have.

He’s an immortal surrounded by beautiful, lovable mayflies. He can’t help wanting love—and falling in love. But every time he knows he’s going to be left alone again. And when he’s finally shown an adult, mature woman who seems up to his weight in a way Rose never was (though Madame Pompadour might have been), he meets her under circumstances that make his greatest fear completely inescapable. He can’t even *hope* that she will outlive him.

Note: this is why it’s vital to the arc that River later gives away her regenerations to save him. It reprises the problem as stated the first time in TSITL/FOT: She is the woman whom he will love and marry. She’s the woman who loves him utterly. And because she loves him utterly, she gives her life for him—first in the Library, and then, again, in the episode “Killing Hitler,” when he no sooner finds she’s a Time Lady of sorts—with the potential to live as long as he does—than, whoops, sorry, she’s given those lives away. Because she’s willing to believe in him. She overcomes her conditioning, and she’s wonderful, and terrifying, and sexy, and mysterious, and she hits him like a thwack in the head with a cricket ball—and she does the one thing that ensures she will not live as long as he does. That the loop he and she can experience may be long—much longer than it would be with Amy, for example—but that it will still be limited by a single Time Lady’s lifetime, with no regenerations to fall back on.

That conflict, between love and loss, is the soul of the Doctor’s ongoing pattern with River from then on. He loves her. He’s fascinated by her. He’s terrified to give himself to her, though, because she WILL die. He knows it—bone deep. He knows far too much. In spite of her caution with spoilers, at the end she told him more than he should know, and he’s breaking apart with the knowledge.

In the end, Moffat even wrote him as abandoning River for Clara, skipping that final date at the Singing Towers of Dirillium, to avoid having to experience that final, inevitable end, as though by failing to take her to see the towers, he can ensure that she will never go back to the Library, and he will never quite completely lose her.

And Clara….

Matt Smith at one point commented, in regards to River and Clara, that "It's always awkward to choose between your wife and your girlfriend." The implication’s obvious—as was the relationship between the Doctor and Clara: he pursued her, exactly in reverse of his long, slow, reluctant path to River, in which he resisted all the way.

The reason’s right there, of course. It’s one of the things I love about Moffat: the reasons are not only there, he’s often told the viewers multiple times what the problem is in the first place.

The Doctor hates death. He hates endings. He hates “goodbye.” He avoids them. It’s part of why he’s avoided getting embroiled with his companions throughout the entire history of the show. It’s why he leaves Sarah Jane behind. It’s why in spite of all temptation, he ultimately resisted Rose, no matter how he loved her. It’s why he actually seems quite relieved to give Amy over to Rory…and why her decision to then follow Rory into a fix point in which she will never see her “Raggedy Man” again destroys him.

And then, when he’s beginning to fear his time with River is soon to end, when he’s stricken to the very core by the loss of Amy Pond, he realizes that the Impossible Girl is out there.

The girl who never really dies.

The girl who can be his companion forever and ever and ever.
The girl to whom he need never say “Goodbye,” without anticipating a certain matching “Hello again!”

Of course he goes chasing after the tantalizing dream, turning his back on River and her approaching death, hoping to find the anodyne to pain.

Yet even Clara turns out to be something other than what he hoped—and he “loses” both Clara and River as “immortal loves” in “The Name of the Doctor.”

And then we get the longish, tangled-ish arcs of “The Day of the Doctor/The Time of the Doctor.” In which, ultimately, the Doctor accepts his own death in one last, glorious face-off, only to find himself regenerated, with the eternal conundrum of what to do with all that time, and love, and lack of fellow immortals facing him.

Which brings us to Capaldi, who, to me, is as close to the Doctor Moffat always dreamed of writing as it’s possible to get.

A doctor who steps into life angry and confused and grumpy and trying to rediscover himself in the face of being granted a new lease on life he didn’t exactly want. He’d found a resolution. It had no longer mattered that River was going to die, and even Clara was going to die—though she’d be with him in spirit forever. Yet, whoops, hey-presto, he’s back, having to decide who he is—who THE DOCTOR really is, with so very many of his previous certainties shot to hell (Can you say “War Doctor”? I knew you could…) He’s having to face a Clara who, in spite of having traveled his entire prior life-tangle, does not KNOW him just because he’s changed his face: his “eternal” love not only fails to be eternal, she fails to be his “love.”

We get to watch him retrench. Start over. Try to establish a new set of parameters for himself and the Impossible Girl who can’t be what he hoped for, while avoiding his “wife,” whose death haunts him. We see him forge a Donna-like relationship with Clara, on new terms, with new understanding. She may not be what he hoped, but she’s more than merely mortal in ways that matter—and she’s mourning the Death of Danny Pink just as he’s mourning the death/impending death of River. They are widowed together. She is his child/mirror/protégé.

At the same time we’re allowed to follow the narrative of “Me.” Ashildr, who is herself “immortal.”

Ashildr is “proof” that the Doctor can’t hope to simply magic up a perfect, immortal companion/mate. In the end she’s an ego wrapped in a handwritten approximation of self, her memories largely reconstructed from her own diaries, her personality bent through so many different mortal pains she no longer bears much clear relationship to the girl she began as. She’s another route blocked off.

Yet Clara is growing, expanding, changing, and she’s still the Impossible Girl. She partakes of certain elements of the Doctor’s own nature. She’s been imprinted on his very life. She could, perhaps, become an immortal companion/girlfriend/fellow widow.

And then Clara, too, dies.

And then the Doctor harrows heaven and hell to retrieve her.

And then she steals his memories, leaving us wondering how much he has recorded, like Ashildr, to allow him to reconstruct any of it.

And then he mourns the loss of the Impossible girl, haunted by a chalk painting of her in a twining
copse of roses drawn on his Tardis—and in the melody of a song.

(There’s always a Song when you need it most….)

And then he lands on a planet at Christmastime and ends up at the one place he’s been avoiding for centuries—millennia—of his time. Dirillium, to see the Singing Towers.

And then he finds what all his fear has cost River…that she has spent all HER years certain he does not love her.

(And yet, she perserveres…)

(And yet, she still loves him…)

And he finally marries her. Really marries her. Gives himself to her for her life—and her death.

And then we see his mourning—in the “Doctor Mysterio” Christmas special, but even more in the season of companionship with Bill, as he struggles to find hope and companionship again: with Bill’s asexual stability. With Nardole’s steady mother-hen routines. Most of all, with Missy, his only real peer—the Other Immortal. The dear friend we have already seen the Doctor loves beyond all good sense.

It all flows together and makes sense, you see. Emotional sense. Good, sound, comprehensible, LOVING sense. Moffat has looked into the Doctor and seen a myth with two hearts—and both hearts ache. An immortal helpless in the face of a dying universe. A man who wants love, and feels love, and fears love, and hides love, all because love is so fleeting.

I like Moffat. I love his arcs. I love his sense of the Doctor as both great and strong—and silly and sad.

I will miss him.

I hope to hell Chibnal can come close to anything that rich.
One Last Doctor Section, Moffat's Structures

Chapter Summary

Warning-warning-warning.

After a whole lot of thought, I have decided to open up a new Meta stack over on the Doctor Who section of AO3. With Sherlock at least temporarily on the back burner and no series 5 in sight, and with both a Christmas Special and, eventually, a new show runner and a new Doctor giving me a lot to think about in the coming year, it seems entirely too likely to me that I will be doing a lot of Who writing, and that much of my Moffat related stuff will be there. I feel like a cheat putting it up over here.

However, I will post this last Whovian section here, while encouraging those of you who want to follow to follow Meta: Whovian Analyses over on the Who channel. At least those of you who like my analysis will know where to look.

Season Ten: The Doctor and Death.

This is going to be a compromise article. It will go on too briefly about a topic demanding exhaustive depth and precision, while going on too long for most short articles.

That said, it will be as long, and as precise, as I currently have time for, and it's too crucial to the current status of how one interprets both the Doctor and Steven Moffat's overall arcs not to want to dig further into something I have already touched on briefly.

I will be citing a huge block of canonical material before I actually get around to arguing my point, because even as fleeting an examination of this subject as I am attempting needs support. Therefore it seems only fair to state outright and upfront that, unless I miss my guess, season 10 can and should be read to some degree as the Doctor's negotiation with his own death, and with a depression that is willing him to commit some form of suicide. "Suicide by misadventure," perhaps? Just--I'll explain more explicitly after I marshal my canon points, many though they are. But just let it sit in your mind while you review my background logic. By my interpretation the Doctor spends season 10 mentally turning toward death, preparing himself to end the game begun so long before.

First, I would choose to point out a few constants of NuWho.

1. The Doctor longs for and needs companions.
2. The Doctor hates losing companions. As River says, he hates endings and he hates goodbyes.

3. He hates death--it is the antithesis of who he wants to be as "the Doctor." He wants to be a healer. He is miserable and angry when he feels he is instead a soldier.

4. The Doctor does not like it when regeneration comes upon him. All four modern Doctors have mourned their own passing, to greater or lesser degrees. All four have treated their regeneration as a form of death.

5. This is in keeping with Old Who, though more explicit. It is also in keeping with the Old Who tendency to talk of prior incarnations as completely different people. Old and NuWho both show multiple Doctors, when brought together, as showing an uneasy, often catty competitiveness, as though each is vying for their right to exist and occupy the Doctoral Throne.

Now, for a few points in a too-short timeline.

1. The 10th Doctor, having fallen in love with Rose, sacrifices his own chance to exist with her, giving it to yet another pseudo-regeneration who is merely mortal. He himself returns to his own Doctoral role, and mourns moodily--a state of Hamlet-like gloom made worse by Donna's necessary (but vile) mind erasure. He enters his own regeneration stating outright something the 9th Doctor only implied strongly. "I don't want to go." His behavior makes it clear that he, as a specific incarnation, will "die." He does not comment on what will survive, but he makes it clear he himself will not. (wry grimace) And if he himself can't be believed, after 9 (10) regenerations, who can?

2. During his incarnation as the 10th Doctor, he encounters River Song, and is presented with the painful knowledge that he will love and marry someone he will eventually cherish (insofar as evidence can be trusted), but will know all the time he is with her when and where and how she will die. If he is to respect the nicer strictures of time-travel he will be unable to share that with her, or change her destiny--and she herself does not want her "past" altered. Given what we already had been shown about the Doctor, this is a form of living hell: he will love her. He's already half in love with her. However, he won't have the luxury of not knowing precisely what's coming to take her from him. She comes to him pre-deceased, as it were.

3. He incarnates and promptly picks a companion *he* most relates to as a little girl. That she doesn't really join her until she's a fully mature and sexually active woman does not change the underlying relationship between the Doctor and little Amelia Pond. When, eventually, he and Amy begin to be mutually attracted, that child-bond and Rory are sufficient to allow the Doctor to keep his amorous Companion at arm's length, sparing him any fear of romantic entanglement--and missing the fact that, romantic or not, he and Amy have one of the closest and most intimate peer-like relationships. She's not just his friend: she is his intimate companion, who understands his
motives and second guesses his thinking and meddles in his life with more freedom than any other Companion I can recall. Indeed, their intimacy and willingness to meddle in each other's personal lives turns the Amy-Rory-Doctor era into one of the most soap-opera eras of Doctor Who. This is only intensified by the return of River Song and all the complicated plots that then ensue.

4. The most outstanding aspect of the 11th Doctor's relationship with River is his constant defensiveness and rejection. He is intrigued, attracted, mystified, and fascinated. His is also fearful, angry, resentful, sarcastic, distant, and heavily armored. It is no accident that he insults her often, rebukes her regularly, but never says he loves her. Even as he is drawn into a romantic relationship, he wards himself against her eventual loss—a loss he knows is coming. Note that, in the 11th's last encounter with River, when she appears to him as a data ghost, he says he always sees her, but has never admitted it because he feared it would hurt too much. When she suggests she could have born the pain, he corrects her: He states explicitly that he had feared it would have hurt *him* too much—and that he had been right. I myself think it is important to apply that statement to all the Doctor's interactions with beloved ones—and all his own evasions, and all his mourning. Losing the people he loves is agony. Their memory is painful. He runs away into new regeneration after new regeneration and clings to new companion after new companion, always bleeding from past losses, and always dreading future losses. And it will only get worse. It is his nature coupled with his immortality. He will even mourn his past selves—or at least fear joining them when the next regeneration comes along.

5. The 11th Doctor goes haring after Clara for one clear, simple, openly expressed reason: because she is the "Impossible Girl." He does not give himself fully to that search and the following relationship until after he has lost Amy and Rory, and during a period in which logic suggests he's also aware that the coming final date with River is becoming harder and harder to avoid. He wants Clara because she appears to be immortal, in way different from but similar to his own regenerations. He is looking for a companion he can't lose; who can die and still return. He wants that so much that he turns away from River, and boxes up his grief for Amy and Rory, and throws himself into the Impossible Girl. When he finds her, she's not really what he hoped, and she leads him back to River in a strange and backward way. But she's also still the Impossible Girl, and she's woven into his life.

6. In "The Husbands of River Song," Capaldi's Doctor does what no other Doctor has done to our knowledge. He marries for realsies. Twenty-four years plus any and all time he and River may steal for themselves by means of Tardis-jaunt. And if even then the Doctor avoids an outright statement of his love for her, he manages to express it in a charade so explicit it might as well be words. He *surrenders* to his love, and her death, because he realizes in the end that it's not just him paying the price as he avoids her: he's making her pay a price too ugly to keep demanding of her. He can't continue as he has, making her think she's unloved and unvalued. The principle of not talking to her ghost—or her real self—for fear of the pain to him, fails to take into account the pain he inflicts on her. So in the end, he bows head and bends knee and hands over his sword and armor, and gives himself to her for all the time they have left...a gift he has made no other Companion we know of, though there's obviously plenty of room to retcon other loves in, given the blank spaces in millennia the story leaves us.
7. In "The Return of Doctor Mysterio" the 12th Doctor returns after River's death. We can deduce a few things from the show: first, he's been roaming post-death for some time. His relationship with Nardole is not in any sense "new." The two have already developed a comfortable "couples" bicker and banter. Nardole has learned to drive the Tardis. Thus, while this appears to be the first time the Doctor has returned to Earth since he's lost River, and it's twenty-four years between his encounter with Grant as a young boy, and his encounter with him as an adult man, we can't say anything useful about how long the Doctor has been in mourning other than "it's been awhile." He's sooooo not over it. He will continue to be shown to be not over it in the season 10 episode "Extremis," when even Missy will recognize the Doctor as being in mourning for River, and Nardole will change his course of action by reading from River's diary regarding her reasons for loving the Doctor. He will still be mourning River in the first episode of season 10, when his behavior and his desk photos make clear he's still in mourning. It may not be a thousand years since Missy went into her Vault...but it's not recent, either.

The Doctor certainly does not "get over it," during season 10, though he does appear to have finally found a good choice of companion in Bill--one who tempts him back out into time and space, and whose cheerful, curious, comfortable personality hits a perfect asexual sweet spot between friend and student.

Now, how does that all add up to the Doctor wanting to suicide, or at least to bow his head and bend his knee to death, as he did to love?

Let's remember he's died over and over, and while he hates doing it, he also seems more and more reluctant to do it *again.* That's canon over at least the first three incarnations of NuWho. Every time it's time to die, he resists, mourns, regrets. His new personality is not always a happy one, either, though you have to go back to Colin Baker in Old Who and match him to grumpy, uncertain 12th Doctor to make a clear argument for it. On top of that, the 12th Doctor is not just a new regeneration, he's a regeneration that is apparently unprecedented. He never should have been "born" by prior assumptions. His prior incarnation seemed to have come to a kind of peace with his expected "final" death on the planet Christmas. He may accept his sudden, unexpected new cycle with vim and vigor--but it's nothing he understood or was prepared for, and it forced him once again to "die."

So from the beginning, Capaldi plays a man unsure of what comes next, and reassessing who he is. He has been handed a gift he did not request. It will ensure that he does not find "peace." Life is not peaceful. He's not sure what his long immortality has made him: a monster or a marvel or something else entirely? Is he a "good man"?

He's a confused and frightened man. He's an angry man. He's a man wary of being hurt. Yet Clara immediately does hurt him. In spite of all she knows, and all she's experienced, she is unable to accept the 12th incarnation as being the posterity of the 11th, of carrying on his life and legacy. He's not HER Doctor, at a time when the Doctor needs his Impossible Girl to provide the continuity and sense of continued identity he sought, and the constancy of love/friendship he hoped for. He may see the ghost of River everywhere, but Clara can't see 'the Doctor" even when he's
standing right in front of her.

It's a bad start for a man facing a situation he can't understand or make assumptions about. It's not clear if he's been given one more life, or twelve more, or a million more. It's not clear if the rules of regeneration have changed. What is clear is that, contrary to his expectations as he approached death on Christmas, it's not going to be the end, nor can he even begin to guess when it will end. We all know we will die some day, and few of us know when or how...but all of us can say roughly how long we can hope for. When we're human, it's the ordinary Biblical "thee score years and ten" -- seventy years -- that serves as a very rough estimate. When you're a Gallifreyan Time Lord, you may not be able to guess how many years, but you can expect it to be twelve incarnations ma, and then you're off the hook. You can lay it all down, let it go, stop fighting.

The Doctor, having already outlived most of his fellow Time Lords as near as we can determine, thought he had reached that ending. Instead he's expected to begin again...and this time with no promises except that someday he will die.

This truth weaves in and out of 11's two seasons with Clara: seasons that are all about death and loss, in so many ways. The death of Danny Pink and the entire Missy-oriented story of the false afterlife is only a start on all the permutations of death and survival and survival guilt that drench those years.

Moffat apparently originally thought those years might end with "The Husbands of River Song." He made it his swansong. He closed the book on his characters by giving them the ending he wanted for them--not just for River, but the Doctor. Happily ever after isn't forever. It's just time--a little time in which to be happy. To love each other. To stop protecting ourselves from the inevitable sad ending, to enjoy the pleasure and treasure of the middle. That was where he thought he was leaving them, and is final say on the matter.

But, like the Doctor, he got a new and unasked for regeneration. One that can't have been well-timed, with a major Sherlock season coming down the tubes, and enough rocky to leave him knowing he didn't want to keep doing Doctor Who forever, and would not be allowed to in any case. But they gave him one more year...and he had to decide what he wanted to say with that year. So he's been talking about what an immortal thinks and feels and does when he's lost his true love, he's unsure he will ever just end naturally, and the closest thing he has to a peer is an evil villainess in a vault who claims to want to be redeemed but who can't be trusted to mean it.

Over the season Moffat plays with the Doctor's vulnerability and fragility. He blinds him--and shows him as both too vain to admit it and too helpless and stubborn to get help. He shows the Doctor faking his own regeneration process...

Think about that. Think about the implications of intentionally summoning up your own internal
death-pyre. To me it looks quite a lot like the Gallifreyan version of "cutting." Where the 10th Doctor could push aside regeneration for a short while, holding his death at bay long enough to accomplish what he needs done, the 12th can call up his own death, let it play over him, and send it back to its kennel...and when it comes for him in earnest, he can hold it off, and hold it off, and try to trick it into letting him commit a true final sacrifice--or at least, that is what that fast burning end as he takes down the cybermen looks like to me.

In "The Pilot" the Doctor and Bill run from something inescapable that has absorbed her love, and which can absorb them, too...something that can follow them wherever they go, whatever they do, and that turns away only because enough of Bill's love, Heather, remains to not want to harm them. Nice big death metaphor. The "Smile," in which you can't show your grief and mourn, or the emojibots will kill you. "Thin Ice," when the Doctor takes Bill to the last Frost Fair on the Thames, and where death now lurks beneath their feet. "Knock Knock," in which a parallel is drawn between a man keeping his mother alive (if in captivity of a sort) by feeding her students to maintain her vitality...and the Doctor, feeding himself companions, and feeding his Vault Prisoner to keep her alive. And through that, the hints on Nardole's part that the Doctor is dicing with death in dealing with the prisoner in the vault. "Oxygen," in which the Doctor risks his own life to save Bill, then gambles on "saving" her by letting her be killed, and loses his sight. And lies about recovering. He's dicing with death--Bill's and his own--through the whole episode, and overplays his hand enough to take serious damage from it.

The whole season is like that. You can sit down and go through and find the Doctor not just being reckless and wildly optimistic, as he has always tended to be. He's pushing too far, taking risks without bold elan, but with cold, calculated brinksmanship, seeing how far over the end he can hang before gravity takes over.

By the time we make it to "The Doctor Falls" it's explicit, and laid out over and over. Missy and the Master explore ways of killing the Doctor, asking for "requests." Bill states, outright, that she does not want to live if she can't live as herself--and asks the Doctor if he understands. He not only says he does--look at Capaldi's face. He's saying clearly that, yes. He DOES understand. He does not want to live if he can't be himself. He no more wants to feel a new "Doctor" take him over and destroy the old him than Bill wants to feel the Cybermen taking her apart, a bit at a time, replacing who she was with something else. The whole show is a prolonged discussion of people facing death. I mean--Nardole, "stronger than the Doctor," sent to become the father and husband and hero he's never been, but losing the right to "explode" that the Doctor is giving Bill--who wants to die, because the Doctor can't cure her. Nardole is explicit: the Doctor intends a suicide mission. A real one. Nordole KNOWS about regeneration, and he's treating the upcoming combat as suicide, and he wants to stand with the Doctor. The Doctor's speech about why he does what he does. He says without hesitation that he's going to be dead in a few hours. He argues it's worth it for this--for kindness. For decency. He challenges the Master and Missy to say what they would die for...what was big enough to give themselves to? There's the Master and Missy, killing each other. She kills him to be free to change, sending him away to become her as he regenerates. He kills her because he can't, won't change. He won't change. He will never stand by the Doctor, and he would rather die than see his own core self stolen away. And Missy's seductive, sentimental, haunted speech about how much she had loved being the Sim incarnation, who "burned like a sun, like an entire planet screaming." How she will always remember that feeling, and miss it. She remembers what it was like, when the Master was her--but he is dead in her, no more than a memory. Yet the living
incarnation of that memory kills her.

The whole damned thing, to me, is the culmination of years of Moffat weaving in and out of the bittersweet nature of what it would be like to live so long, and be so alone. About the necessity of endings, which are always sad, and the joy of new beginnings. About what gives life meaning, and whether you can keep on if that meaning stops being there.

By the ending sequences, which question life and death over and over, It's a perfect storm of themes. And when, at last, the Doctor finds he's once again alive and on the verge of regeneration, it's entirely justified that he screams that he can't keep doing it--can't keep becoming someone else, dying over and over to let someone new take not only his place, but his memories and his life.

Twelve is the regeneration who knocked down an unbreakable wall over billions of years, to save his Impossible Girl--the eternal pseudo-Doctor Clara had become. He is the incarnation who surrenders to love and mortal loss of love. He is the one who appears to mourn for decades, and possibly centuries or millennia afterward. He is the incarnation living a life he never thought to get, with no remaining guiding rules or reliable expectations, and no end in sight but the end of the people he loves, over and over again.

He is also the First Doctor of a new cycle. It's perfect that he and the First First Doctor are going to come together, cross lines, learn from each other, and have their destinies changed. That they will both find reasons to accept the two-edged sword of regeneration, with all it implies: survival and death all in one package.

As for Moffat? He has to have laughed his ass off. He was ready to end his tenure with season 10. Then he found out that Chris Chibnal didn't want to pick up the Christmas Special, and it would not happen if Moffat didn't. So he's having to regenerate one more time, turn his two-parter into a three parter, and to take one more shot at sending his beloved Doctor off properly. He gave him a fit happily ever after with River, and it didn't stick. He devised a proper death taking down the Cybermen, and it didn't stick. I've got to admit, I am curious what one more trip to the well of the Doctor will bring us. What can poor Moffat find to say that is enough to make two different regenerations of the Doctor accept change, and to launch Jodi Whittaker's arrival as the first female Doctor?

Me, I hope it's good--and I hope that it will allow Capaldi's Doctor to die with the taste of "happily ever after" lingering, like honey in his mouth, rather than the ash of noble sacrifice. Of the two I prefer love and time. Just a little time.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!