Rating: Mature
Archive Warning: Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category: M/M
Fandom: Sherlock (TV), Sherlock Holmes & Related Fandoms, sherlo
Character: Daniel the fire bug, Father Sigerson Holmes - Character, Sherlock Holmes, John Watson, Greg Lestrade, Mycroft Holmes, Jim Moriarty, Eurus Holmes, Molly Hooper, Rosie Watson, Mrs Hudson, Sebastian Moran, James Sholto (Sherlock), Janine (Sherlock), Sally Donovan, Harry Holmes
Additional Tags: Christmas Angst, Christmas Party, Can you Imagine the Christmas dinners, Jim is a good husband, Mycroft is an idiot, John Watson Bamf, Broken Hearts, Mended hearts, Jealousy, Homecoming, Post Series Four, Post-Season/Series 04, Sherlock Angst, sherlock humour, Bickering, Recreational cannabis use by adults, Hartley's lime glitter jelly, hangovers, The consequences of the video age, Fight Scene, Canon-Typical Violence, Non-Canon Relationship, Canon Compliant, Canon with surprise twists, Angst with a Happy Ending, Addition to canon to fill plot holes, References to Depression, Lestrade-centric, Poor Lestrade, POV Lestrade, Sherlock & Greg friendship, possible infidelity, Poor Mycroft, Active Shooter, Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse - Freeform, supernatural occurrence, divine intervention, Mind Palace, here be dragons, Mycroft Being a Good Brother, Mycroft's Meddling, Mycroft Feels, Mycroft is a Softie, Mycroft is a Bit Not Good, a bit of wingfic, hospital stay, Major Character Injury, Angst and More Angst, Implied/Referenced Child Abuse, Implied/Referenced Torture, Fluff, romcom with heavy angst, conflict moves the story, author promises happy ending but lots of demons on the path to get there, All Comments Welcome
Series: Part 2 of The Camera Never Lies series

Love Factually

by Howlynn

Summary
There are wedding bells in the air for both Holmes brothers, but really, was it a good idea to plan it to take place at the quirky home of James and Eurus? Can you imagine the Christmas dinners now that James and his wife, Eurus, are hosting out on their island of Misfits? Let the party and the Angst begin. Guaranteed happy ending, but sometimes the best things in life are not perfect, nor what you expected. They are just Love Factually.
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Love Factually

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Whilst there will be some inspirational bits from The namesake movie... this is part two of The "Camera never Lies" and not a crossover. I tried to figure out how to do this as a bonus one shot and it just would not work. We will follow the angst and Crack format of last time and I can promise you a "Mostly" happy ending.. but do not assume that things working perfectly is the only happy ending and there will be a lot of conflict and bickering and down right nastiness on the way... welcome to the crazy train... woot woooooo! Buckle up...

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For anyone who may be unfamiliar with the music in this story, I will try to include a link at the beginning of each chapter, in case you would like to listen.

Walking in a Winter Wonder Land

https://youtu.be/lkFP0VwpPRY

In the meadow we can build a snowman
Then pretend that he is Parson Brown
He'll say, Are you married?
We'll say, No man
But you can do the job
When you're in town
Later on, we'll conspire
As we dream by the fire
To face unafraid
The plans that we've made
Walking in a winter wonderland

********
The season of lights on Oxford street and Regent Street and fairy lights going up all over London, did not surprise Greg Lestrade this year. Carnaby Street in Soho had their crazy do whilst Duke of York had their classic dignified presentation begging for romantic evening strolls and rosy cheeked flirtation. Christmas was coming, and for the first time in years, Greg was not losing his battle to remain cheerful.

He had been alone for Christmas for years, even when married. Especially whilst married. Three Christmases ago he had found a pretty shirt box wrapped with tinsel and flourish and placed on his desk the afternoon before Christmas Eve. He was working a murder and his wife was furious as always. He had been so surprised and delighted at the gesture, he had grinned like a barmy kid. He had taken a photo of it, because it looked expensive and he could not explain how moved he was that she had gone to the trouble to make his Christmas bright.

Inside were divorce papers and the key to the flat. Linda had picked up on the first ring and said she had just landed in New York for a lovely Christmas across the pond with someone named Kendrick. The next day thirty inches of snow were dropped on the Big Apple.

Linda had gone to the Philippines the year before last, and enjoyed their fine Typhoon season whilst he sat alone and drinking, getting a late night text from John that Sherlock had just murdered a media mogul on the steps of Appledore.

Last year his ex-wife stayed safe in London, and there was a superstorm named Barbara, and Sherlock was nearly murdered by Culverton Smith.

There was no word on her expected location for this years festivities, but he had come to the conclusion that disastrous Holidays were perhaps not his fault after all. One location he was certain would be a Linda-free zone was Saint James Island, Ireland, where there was to be a double wedding on Sherlock's Birthday.

Sherlock had insisted remembering a single date would be conducive of future marital harmony. Mycroft insisted he hated Christmas and always had. John insisted that spending Christmas on the actual Island of Misfit Toys was the most hilarious thing he'd ever heard.

Greg had insisted on no murders and no near death experiences.

From the second they had sorted their feelings, life had come out of the shadows and into the sun for Greg. Mycroft was the most attentive, patient and kind human Greg had ever dated. Every day he found a new way to display his adoration of Greg. The gestures were not too excessive on the surface. He was not the proud new owner of an Aston Martin or anything like that. They did not fly to Paris for brunch or weekend at Royal Thames Yacht Club. Life actually looked about the same on the surface, though Greg obviously dressed better than any DI in the history of NSY.

Mycroft tended to lay out a selection of coordinated garments, or have the butler see to it when he was indisposed with his work. Some people may have found this gesture controlling or somehow annoying but Greg found it a delightful treat each morning to wake up, shower and simply throw on exactly the right tie with a neatly pressed shirt and know he looked like a walking GQ star. He could not tell aubergine from plum and it took a frustration out of his morning, so rather than be petty and resentful that he was told what to wear each day, Greg thanked Mycroft and accepted the gesture exactly as it was meant.

He did want to look nice for his fiancé and he also loved the fact that it meant that Mycroft was thinking of him every morning whether their paths crossed in the morning rush or not.

Greg had moved in, of course. His flat was already let to another DI and it was unbelievable how
much money he had tucked away in just three months now that he only had a few bits and bobs as expenses. For the first time in his life he had some breathing room financially and that stress gone had done wonders for his health.

Speaking of health, one of Mycroft's little gestures was a gym membership, having found Mycroft's private gym rather lacking of weights, rowing machines, and refusing to even try the elliptical machine. Another morning he discovered a slow juicer, much like Sherlock had all set up for him in their kitchen. There was a note attached to it explaining they both should consider preventative measures to ensure the longevity of their future. There was a recipe book and therein was an Aphrodisiac section that Mycroft had hi-lighted and one recipe he had hand written suggestive improvements.

Greg had lunch delivered to his office each day, and the offerings were everything from Obento to lovely New England Chowder. Every day brought forth a delicious surprise and he often found a handwritten note in his delivery.

"Though this is technically the vegan option, I think you will find the handmade tofu to be the most delightful temptation in London. I am having the same meal today, myself, and though we cannot dine face to face, it makes me feel as if we are still having lunch together.
I hope you have a productive day, my love. M"

When he was on a crime scene in inclement weather, delicious steaming coffee or tea was delivered for the whole team.

Sally had had a change of heart on the Mycroft Holmes dating her soon to be former boss question. She was a newly minted DI, just waiting for the paperwork to finish processing. Mycroft was kind enough to include her in on the lunch delivery regularly enough that he won her heart. She still thought he was scary, but delicious scary.

There were lots of gestures and none terribly noticeable alone, but Greg felt loved and spoiled most every day. Mycroft was a doting companion. Greg had never felt so cared for and nobody had ever gone out of their way for him. He was being courted even though he had already agreed to be married. Life was brilliant for the first time in his whole life.

With one exception.

Greg and Mycroft had agreed to wait until after the wedding to engage in sexual activity. It sounded very romantic and sweet when he'd agreed, but now Greg was getting nervous. People just did not wait any more and precisely because he was so very happy, trepidation had crept into his mind.

What if Mycroft was into something weird? What if Mycroft was not into anything or only felt the urge once every three years or what if he was hiding some sexual secret that ended up being profoundly disturbing. But, his greatest fear of all was, what if Mycroft found him disappointing?

Sex with Sherlock had been so easy. Once they had made that leap, they simply played. It was fun and silly and effervescent. They bickered and teased and laughed. As much as he wanted Mycroft, he also feared that waiting may be a mistake.

He had been a little surprised when he moved into Mycroft's home. It was enormous and so museum like and empty that it gave Greg the creeps a bit. You could house ten families in this place. The "small" guest room was nearly as big as Greg's whole flat. There was a projection room for films. There was an exercise room that consisted of one treadmill, one electrical recumbent bicycle, an elliptical machine, one poncy chair and a bloody suit of armour! The fridge was five times the size of Greg's fridge and contained one jar of capers and six mummified oranges when he moved in.
Everything was the best money could buy and empty. The entirety of his home was a perfectly preserved life, like a butterfly on Sherlock's mantle.

Greg thought it represented Mycroft very well. He was the finest man Greg had ever met and yet his great heart was mothballed and there was nothing Greg could buy or do for Mycroft to return the gestures. He could certainly not sneak into Mycroft's many office bunkers for lunch or have flowers delivered. They were sleeping in separate places and he could not ever purchase something for Mycroft that he could not buy for himself... and he could not demonstrate it with raging spectacular blowjobs yet.

The only thing he could think of to offer were things that made Mycroft laugh. He bought the ugliest kitschy Excalibur lamp ever created and put it in Mycroft's room one night replacing his tasteful bedside lamp. That was followed by a King Arthur spread on his bed that had Mycroft in hysterics at half-three as he returned one morning. Greg had heard his exhausted groan as he had finally closed the door and divested himself of his "British Government " armaments and head to the fridge where he expected that Greg had left him a treat. Sure enough he heard a whispered "bless that man," as Mycroft discovered the gooseberry tart that Greg had picked up in Camden market earlier in the afternoon. The bed covering was unexpected.

"What in the bloody..." Mycroft had flicked the light switch and began chuckling with little control of his ability to stop. Greg loved him for thinking it was hilarious and not being stuffy or angry.

There had been near intimacy that night and Greg had tried really hard not to feel completely rejected when Mycroft had put a spanner in Greg's intention.

Greg filled Mycroft's tub with sixty miniature rubber duckies he bought off EBay one night, waited up for him and drew a ridiculous bubble bath. Mycroft frowned as he was lead in and disrobed. He sighed heavily when he saw the extent of the foam, but he had gone along with it. Most of his exasperation stayed disguised until the bubbles began to disappear, revealing tiny Elvis duck, Red Riding Hood duck, Robin Hood duck, Biker duck, Valentine duck, Construction duck, Pirate duck, Policeman duck, Dinosaur duck, Giraffe duck and all their various companions. Mycroft had laughed.

That was all Greg knew to give him back. He would put laugh lines on this man who never laughed, come hell or high treason!

But no matter how fun, and well loved, the lack of sex, when the object of his desire was right there, was driving him mad. Theoretically Greg adored the idea of making their first time special. In reality, his cock had all the control of a fourteen-year-old porn addict. Yet, they waited.

Each couple had been offered one of the several cottages that dotted the St. James island, offering a small and private wash of beach and lovely views as well as seclusion for honeymoon activities. Greg's future brother-in-law had insisted. Mycroft was not heartily in accord with these plans because he strangely did not trust that his sex life would not be uploaded to YouTube or be broadcast on every channel and mobile phone in the U.K.

So, Greg was stressed. What if they arrived and Mycroft used that fear as another reason to postpone the consummation of their relationship? He had tried talking to Sherlock about it and been thoroughly humiliated with his retching noises and complaining that any knowledge of his brother's sex life would result in the immediate need to burn his mind palace to the ground.

"Think of the cases! All that knowledge will be lost and I will live out my life on benefits thanks to you continuing to place objects of horror in my brain!"
Greg had tried to let it go and be content with how happy he was in every other aspect of his life, but he had had small tastes of Mycroft and though the memories were part of a drunken fog, he could not help but want more.

His pile of gaily wrapped gifts for the Holidays on the island had grown to silly proportions. He would have no ability to shop once they were on the island and so he had tried to remember everyone just in case. He had even purchased a carnival style popping corn machine for the garrison of creatures down in The Village Of The Damned. Mycroft had rolled his eyes and sighed, but had not said a word.

"You don't approve?" Greg had asked the wall of newspaper presenting itself at the breakfast table.

"Mmmph." The newspaper said without a twitch.

"They were all very kind to us when you were away. They have three movie nights a week. They can have popping corn now with this. I would be dead without them. I think a few Christmas trinkets are justified. They pulled your brother and me out of a burning helicopter. And they got us away from the Russian mob sent to kidnap your sister." Greg sipped his green juice as he justified his mound of gifts.

The paper snapped and half of it bent down. "I have not said a word about how you chose to squander your funds upon a made up fantasy of holy gesture meant to boost the profits of retailers a half-quarter from bankruptcy. Do as you wish. I still hate Christmas and all the falsification of sentimental nonsense and droll conditioning of goldfish to the notions of greed as virtue."

"Why do you hate Christmas. You never told me."

"The twinkling lights, the fake smiles and the constant need to wish people some randomly selected good fortune based in their private faith. Good lord, you cannot even attempt that without asking to offend someone these days. 'Guess my religion' and hope you manage to land on the appropriate phrase...and god forbid you use the plural of Happy Holidays... even that offends lesser minds. They have no concept that Holidays is plural signifying more than one, so they seek to chastise anyone who fails to cow-tow to their personal shade of celebratory bosh. They are offended by basic grammar! It is heinous. But, I have made no attempts to dissuade you." Mycroft snapped his paper back in place as he finished speaking.

"I have always been alone at Christmas. I always worked. It is our first one together. I asked off for the first time in nineteen years. I just wanted... never mind. Doesn't matter. I will just cancel my request," Greg mumbled as he cleared his dishes and took them to the kitchen.

He did not hear Mycroft follow him into the kitchen. Greg jumped slightly as Mycroft spoke. "I do not mean to hurt your feelings. Truly, I do not. This time of year is problematic for me. It is not one simple explanation, but multitudes. My work often has rather inconvenient and incidental slip ups at this time of year with terrible consequences of which I, of course cannot share details. But it is not work alone that aggrieved me. There are a string of personal happenings that have shaken me and all I hold dear. The highlights are that Eurus was removed from our care days before Christmas. It did not make for a very happy time. Later on, two of my featured memories involved Sherlock overdosed at Christmas. One in which I was in the eighth percentile against his possible recovery. Whilst he was away, there was a report that he had been captured and killed that crossed my desk his first Christmas away. And our Jolly time at Appledore and recently with Culverton Smith, has simply given me a superstitious aversion to the season. I know that my dread is factually wrong and yet, I cannot begin to compress all the things that can possibly go wrong with our plans this year into a manageable pill to swallow. My casual association with that band of reprobates will bite me in the
backside at some point in the future, yet I see no way of stopping it when they did save both your life along with mine as well. Just be aware that leopards never change their spots? In the mean time, I will endeavour to do my best to not allow my distaste for the festivities to sour your enjoyment."

Greg studied Mycroft. He seemed so sincere in his discomfort that Greg felt the urge to take him in his arms and comfort Mycroft. He wrapped his arms around him and guided his head to his shoulder. "Alright, super-spy, I get what you are saying and I will try to not take it personally. But you need to look at it like me, just a bit. Most of mine have been pure misery too and I am not letting the past win and steal my future. This is us now. We make our future brighter than our past. Even if we were sitting in a run down council estate and had nothing to give each other... this would still be my happiest Christmas ever, because spending it with you is the only present I need. Just keep that bit in mind? You are the best gift of my whole life. Okay?"

Mycroft let his ice-man mask slide for just a moment and he looked at Greg with soft affection and wonder. "For a man of your IQ, you are incredibly brilliant. I had not thought of it like that, my dear. You are correct, in that you are the greatest gift I could imagine, as well."

Greg kissed him and his want began to go from sweetness to demanding single focused ravenous craving. Mycroft backed away and gave him one of those disapproving looks. "We agreed to wait."

"Not really. You made that rule. I think it is bollocks. Two grown men playing blushing virginity games like a couple of brides."

"You thought it romantic!" Mycroft accused.

"Mmmmmph. Before I moved in and you were leaving trails of pheromones all about for me to be tortured by every moment. Now, I just want to shag you until we are hospitalised for exhaustion," Greg said low and sexy.

"Charming. I want you as well, but I do feel a break between relations with me and my brother might be appropriate, don't you think? A bit of distance from that error?"

Greg shook his head and stepped back. "If that bothers you so much, you should have said. Sherlock was not a mistake, just to be clear."

"Oh please. Though I am sure it was a novel interlude, you and he would not have lasted."

"Funny that you think that, My," Greg said, his interest in this conversation flagging. "Because I have a suspicion that had he and I not been together, you and I might never have even started?"

Mycroft gathered all his most superior and snobbish facial expressions and rolled through them to settle on a combination that somehow felt like a shot to Greg’s heart. "Be careful what you wish for?" He asked as if he already knew the answer.

"If that is how you feel, then let's just forget this whole thing. I love you. Have for donkey years. But if all of that suddenly bothers you, then we either sort it or call it off. I got work. Going to be late. You need to figure out what you want, before you look back and tell me one day that I am some mistake to you." Greg did not allow him another reply as he distributed his keys, wallet, mobile phone and badge into his pockets and fled.

He had not let on to his inner struggles and kept up the appearance that everything was fine. He had a lot of practice with that and he knew how to do it well. He just had not really planned to start a new life with his old patterns and so feeling the need to pretend just felt disheartening.
Mycroft obviously cared for him and he felt guilty for questioning his extraordinary luck. He could not simply feel confident and excited about his dreams coming true because he was letting his doubts get in the way. But, he was existing in terror induced stress that each day would be the day, Mycroft, decisive and brilliant and beautiful would manage to realise how pathetically ordinary his choice was and politely ghost him without a backward glance.

Mycroft had been called away the day before they left. Greg knew what it was like and sincerely understood, but that did not make the trudge out alone any less painful. He selfishly wanted Mycroft here now, no matter what part of the world would blow up in his absence.

John, Sherlock, Rosie, Mrs. Hudson, and Mr. Holmes all flew out to the island. Mrs. Holmes would come with Mycroft on Christmas Eve. They had top secret itinerary and everyone suspected Mycroft had been roped into several shopping excursions judging from his delightful mood.

To be perfectly honest, Greg was having second thoughts and the only possible person he could have spoken with about it was now a trigger for his future spouses jealous passive displays of aloof disapproval. They worked together and that was all fine but only in a chaperoned setting. If John or other yard birds were around, there was never a cross look, but if they so much as rode a lift together unaccompanied, Mycroft had one of his hissy fits. In Mycroft Holmes case, this involved much newspaper rustling, heavy sighs and silence but Greg certainly felt these subtle shifts like earthquakes.

Two days before Christmas Greg flew out to Saint James without his fiancée. Greg understood and yet he felt a strange sense of foreboding that had him reflecting on the whole relationship.

There was a huge blow up Father Christmas waving a sword in the clipping wind, welcoming them to St. James. It had a pirate face and sharp teeth and it wiggled against the wind humorously defiant. It frightened Rosie. "Delightful. " John said in his politely pissed off voice followed by a tense smile.

As they exited the helicopter, Greg leaned to Sherlock. "He seems in a mood?"

Sherlock said in a low voice, "He is terrified this is a mistake."

Greg looked horrified. "The wedding?"

Greg and Sherlock selected the back seats of an executive golf cart. John sat in the front with the driver and Rosie, safe on his lap. Mrs. Hudson sat right behind John so she could make eyes with the baby and Mr. Holmes sat next to her competing for smiles and giggles.

"Bringing Rosie here. Amongst these people. In theory, he was fine with it, then reality set in. Woke up paranoid that Auntie Eurus would whisper in her ear and we will have a demon child that will serial kill everyone on the Island in our sleep. He says this is the perfect set up to a teen slasher movie... whatever that is..." Sherlock grumbled to Greg, as they sat on the back of the golf cart heading up to the main house.

"So realistic couple fears then. " Greg teased.

Sherlock smiled pleasantly as he said, "John is her father, Mary was the mother. I will be her Step Father. She has an Uncle Mycroft and an Uncle Jim. Auntie Eurus will adore her. Define realistic. Mycroft and I have a wager. She will either cure cancer or be the greatest mass murderer of the Era..."

"I see his point. Does John know about this bet?"
"He heard me on the phone with Mycroft and ..." Sherlock waved his hand in the air and rolled his eyes. "Wagering on an outcome does not affect the results. His superstitious fears are creating a small identity crisis. I am forbidden from any form of gambling that involves Rosie. I did bet she would be a Doctor like her father... John was still angry, fearing we would both psychologically influence her toward our expectations to the point we would end up in the middle with a mass murdering physician who would bring about the zombie apocalypse."

"Jesus. So you are having wedding jitters too? I thought it was just us. You know your brother dear is round the twist? That he is terrified that we are going to cheat on him?" Greg turned his head into the brisk breeze making his eyes and his ears burn in the cold.

"I sort of understand. John cheated on his wife with my sister. I think I either resign myself to his inevitable stress related infidelities or ... or I renew my acquaintance with Morpheus. He gets very walky and chatty when I work a case without him. Possibly that is about his own standards, certainly not mine," Sherlock said with casual disregard, but Greg knew he must be very upset to have just spilled all this so easily.

Greg looked at him and grinned, "Yeah well, they damned well should worry. We were perfect! If we play up on that slightly... maybe they will behave better."

Sherlock looked at Greg, his mouth hanging open. "If I had known how sneaky you were I would have never thrown you over for ..."

Greg smirked, "Yeah you would."

"Yes." Sherlock agreed with a grateful smile at how quickly Lestrade could see his complex fear and take measure to lighten his mood.
Do you hear what I hear

Chapter 2

Do You Hear What I Hear?

https://youtu.be/6l70G3Nd2PE

Said the little lamb to the Shepard boy
Do you hear what I hear
Ringing through the sky Shepard boy
Do you hear what I hear
A song, a song
High above the trees
With a voice as big as the sea
With a voice as big as the sea

The main house and village of the damned were festooned in fairy lights. It was a hustle of cheery
greetings, hugs, introductions, cups of festive beverage pressed into hands, warm smells and hearty
dishes balanced on throw away plates. People continued to arrive regularly and Greg was unsure
where all of these people intended to stay. Greg stood back near the drinks trolley, slightly sipping a
very good Scotch.

He did not hear him slide up behind him, but Lestrade smelled Jim's spicy cologne and smiled as he
poured three fingers and handed Moriarty a glass. "This is the biggest Christmas I have ever seen.
Like a postcard," Greg both confessed and complimented.

Jim smirked, "The only person in this room who has never murdered someone is Rosie, and maybe
you, hardly a picture of world peace and brotherly love. It is nice, don't get me wrong, a pretty
facade to wile away a few hours of existence."

Greg looked over at Jim and saw dark circles and misery in the eyes just beneath the smiles. "You
alright?"

"No worries, Ta," Jim dismissed with a shrug. "My Grandmother seems to have hit it off with Mrs.
Hudson. That is a somewhat terrifying concept, don't you think? " Jim answered.

"Eurus seems to be having the best time ever?"

Jim nodded and a genuinely kind smile graced his face. "She has many to make up for. I wanted her
to feel human. Everyone deserves to feel ... included in the trapping ...at least once in their lives... to
feel loved and connected and happy. Don't you think? I never have... but she can. I want that for her."

"You treat her well. You truly love her, don't you." Greg smirked, "I mean really... like love."

"She is my wife?" He replied as if confused amusement was all he could muster. "I don't know. I don't feel things... you know? Not really. But, she is not the romantic love of my life like in the fairytales but she makes me feel... something? She is my window. I will never be human, but I can watch the party through her. She is as mad as a bag of ferrets, of course, but somewhere deep down, there is a spark of human that can reach my nothingness. Is that love?" Jim seemed to want him to judge if he was good enough at his game.

"She is a lovely person. I think very highly of her... overlooking the murdery bits". Greg chewed his lip and glanced down at his drink.

"Speaking of arseholery, how are you and Frosty the Iceman doing? "

Greg grimaced and shrugged. "He isn't here yet."

"I see. He planning on showing up for the nuptials or will he send one of the B team to say his vows and business as usual?" Jim goaded slightly.

Greg swallowed hard. "Who knows? I am his boyfriend, not his keeper."

"Of course. He needs twelve of those... you'd get lost in the crowd if you were his keeper." Jim waved at Eurus as she held Rosie for the first time ever. Eurus was beaming in delight. John was somewhat poignantly absent, but Sherlock was adjusting the child's weight and Eurus and Rosie were gazing at each other with instant adoration.

Greg raised his glass to Eurus as she caught his eye excited and rapturous. Greg was rather enchanted with her pure joy and the fact that Rosie went to her with no question and no fear of this woman who frightened most everyone.

Sherlock hovered attentively. Greg wondered if she had seen many kids in her life. He could not imagine this might be the first little child she had held, but he supposed that could be exactly what he was witnessing. "Spit it out."

"Wot?"

Greg cocked his head. "You sought me out. You are depressed and blurring secrets to shock me. You know I am upset that Mycroft is not here and you are, in your way, trying to comfort me or bond... something. But, you have something you want to say, but you don't know if it will help or piss me off. So.. spit it out."

Jim tilted his head back in mirth. "You really did sleep with Sherlock, didn't you?"

Greg shrugged. "Was no secret, that."

"I didn't believe you. You surprised me. That it was true. And he has obviously rubbed off on you... a little..."

"Nope. I wish, but nope. I am a half-decent detective you know?"

Jimmy grinned sheepishly and with the amusement of the psychopath he actually is, "Oh, Gregory. No you're not. You are a good and decent man, but you are adequate at best in your detective skills.
The only reason you still have a job is that you have that supernatural inexplicable coppers instinct... your looks and that are your greatest gifts. Kindness is not an advantage. Being Fair hearted is a trap. Justice is a fickle master. Mycroft is fascinated with you because he cannot quantify how you 'just know ' when someone lies, when they are guilty, who to save and who to turn off the scaffold."

"We don't have the death penalty in the U.K. any longer. You do know that, right?"

Jim grinned and winked with exacerbated conspiracy. "Not on the surface of course, but deep down in the belly of the beast, you know that is not quite true’

"Okay? May have to give you that one. What is it you wanted me to know?"

"Siger will be here if Mycroft and Mummy Holmes have their say about it. That is what came up. Shhh... you cannot tell him you know... much less that I know... that would really Jack his mojo," Jim shrugged. "I thought it might help? ( not that I care if it doesn't). But on the whole you are a good guy... which truly is the rarest of commodities in this world."

Greg swallowed and frowned. "Wait... what? Are you saying he has gone back to that bloody place and... taken his Mother? Is he insane? Are you sure?"

Jim smiled with interest and nodded. "That surprise you? You really have no clue about the delightful family dynamics you are about to chain yourself to, do you? For me, well, look around. It is fine, what I'm used too. Going to be harder for you, being a Holmes. See the guy by the tree? The world thinks he died in the troubles. Now he sells cars. The bloke he is chatting with? He looks like any old todger now. He was sixteen on Bloody Sunday. Watched his Da die that day. They say there were over 200 explosions and near that in nail bombs lobbed, targeting the British army that year. I am not saying he was responsible, but if you are interested in how to blow things up with improvised devices, that is the man to ask. Not so long ago, once upon a time...he Rigged up my little vests for me."

That, statement made Lestrade frown. A lot of people died when he killed the blind old lady. Greg had lulled himself into almost forgetting who the man beside him was. The glitzy shine of the festive dressings lost it's luster and Greg could suddenly see it for what it was. It felt like a coat of paint over a blood spattered wall. He suddenly missed Mycroft horribly, feeling he could finally see Christmas like the British Government did.

Jim sighed, following the DI's thoughts. "You know who I am."

"Yeah. I do. Just hard to reconcile sometimes."

Jim nodded. "It is hard. Most of the people in this room are one variety of monster or another. But, nobody realises that monsters are just people who learned their craft in pain. This is their sanctuary and I do know how he feels about his important position and all his lovely political power, but do keep in mind that I invited your future spouse here as well."

"Mycroft isn't a monster. He is a great man. He is," Greg stated firmly.

"Yes, well. He accepted the invitation. Think about that just a bit."

Greg took a long drink and grimaced. He was about to say something cruel but Jim whispered,"We will chat again, glad you are here." He turned on his charming host persona and made his way to the door greeting a large group of posh looking new arrivals.
Greg caught Sherlock's eye for a moment as he gathered Rosie back into his arms so Eurus could greet her new guests. Greg was not sure what his face showed but it made Sherlock falter and do a double-take. He questioned with his eyes if all was well.

Not wanting to seem pathetic or put a damper on the evening, he held up his glass and pointed at his head, indicating it was just a headache. Sherlock gave a mimed "Oh." Then nodded.

The evening became increasingly loud and boisterous. Greg was not unhappy when John found him in the kitchen talking to the bomb expert that Jim had pointed out earlier, and informed him that they were cutting out early, because Rosie was getting fussy.

"You are bunking with us for the moment at the west cottage, every flat space is taken. Bursting at the seams, this place. Just have to make the best of it."

Greg shrugged, "Had worse. Long as it has normal toilets, I'll manage fine."

John did grin at that. "I suppose if we can survive a dog pile in a sand storm, this is really not so bad. "
Little drummer boy.

Chapter 3

Little Drummer Boy

https://youtu.be/hxzJiYlSHfQ

Little baby
Pa rum pum pum pum
I am a poor boy too
Pa rum pum pum pum
I have no gift to bring
Pa rum pum pum pum
That's fit to give our King
Pa rum pum pum pum,
rum pum pum pum,
rum pum pum pum

The real reason they were leaving the party was very clear two minutes after they arrived at the cottage. Greg had evidently missed the fireworks between John and Sherlock. The tension erupted as they were trying to figure out who should be where. Mrs. Hudson took the tiny room off the kitchen. Rosie, Sherlock and John, the only room that had a cot in it. He and Mr. Holmes took the other two rooms in expectation of their soon to arrive better halves and everyone was giggling about close quarters when from the large bedroom voices could be heard easily.

"I trusted you, and you put my daughter in the arms of a woman who killed a nurse by chewing out his throat with her bare teeth! And took bloody photos!" John roared.

"She is my sister! I was right there, John! You didn't seem to mind her so much when you bloody shagged her! Must have been good too, because you obviously survived to shag another day!" Sherlock bellowed back.

Rosie began to cry and Greg slipped into the room to quiet them and take Rosie to the kitchen. "Hey, keep it down, yeah? You are scaring little Bee." Greg lifted her from John without asking.

John locked his jaw in anger and said in a lower voice, "You just let him hand her over. Ha, and you thinking you might adopt her. I thought you, of all people, would know better?"
"He was right there, to be fair. There was no danger, John. Eurus, was so enchanted... I don't think she would hurt a baby."

"She would not hurt her... I swear to you she..." Sherlock trailed off at the look of pure fury on John's face.

John fumed, voice low and dangerous, "Oh? News to me. Did you forget she left a little boy in a hole to drown? All but destroyed her little brother's life? Her record with kids is not some stellar example to throw in my face. I should have predicted that you would be on his side..." he trailed off letting the accusation hang and shook his head as if he could see that Greg and Sherlock were always going to be searching for stolen moments to bunk off for an illicit shag.

It hurt Greg's feelings and he was just exhausted and tipsy enough to lash out in his quiet reasonable policeman voice, "You know, I get enough of that from Mycroft and I try my best to reassure him and be understanding, but guess what, I don't have to take it from you. Here is the deal, Doctor John, if we wanted to, it would be the simplest thing in the world with his mad skills and my schedule. I can't say it won't ever come to pass but that isn't the important point. The bit you need to evaluate is why it might? Because, there will only be one reason. You and Mycroft pushing us to feel so bloody lonely, that we have nothing left to lose. You need to check your monsters, John, because that room was full of them and Rosie was safe as houses."

Greg did not give him time to reply, he bounced Rosie on his hip out to the living room and plugged in the Christmas tree for her. It was not as big as the massive one she had seen earlier up at the main house, but it was charming and more child friendly. He let her examine the well secured plastic bobbles and pull gently at the tiny colourful lights, stopping her from putting them in her mouth each time she managed to try.

The voices from the bedroom were unintelligible whispers with the tone of shouting but Greg did his best to ignore them.

Mrs. Hudson dithered with a pot of tea and Mr. Holmes had obviously retired rather than become involved in any unpleasantness. She handed Rosie a biscuit to distract her from wanting to chew fairy lights.

With a heavy sigh she whispered, "Those two."

Greg set Rosie next to him on the musty smelling old sofa between he and Mrs. Hudson.

"Wedding jitters." Greg picked up a mug and poured the cooling tea, using the little silver strainer and adding milk and sugar.

"I hope. They never bickered like this before. I did not realise it until there was such a sudden shift in who was engaged." She smiled at her inference that she would be all ears if he cared to confide in her. "Sherlock explained what you were up to, but I think it went a bit deeper, between you two?"


"So how are things with you and that snake you settled for?" She asked, face all innocent wide eyes and mischief rolled into the acceptance of long years.

"He is... oh hell, why lie. I am about one more secret away from calling the whole thing off. He and Mummy are not off shopping. I get it for work. Just have to accept that I can't know stuff, and it is fine. But, this?" He snorted his disgust. "Personal secrets... I don't know what to even say. Considering how he watches every move I make like a creepy controlling stalker and yet his life is a
total mystery to me, you'd think... he knew I would be furious and so... he just did it anyway. And didn't say a bloody word."

"Who tattled?"

"Our host. No idea how he knew, but I believe him."

Mrs. Hudson set her tea down and wiped Rosie's face and fingers. "Well, I am not one to judge, but I never could stand the man. He is always popping up at the worst possible time. Sherlock came all the way to Florida to get away from him back in the day. Of course then he helped me with Frank and within a week, they dragged him back to London. Sherlock gave up the first taste of freedom he had ever known, just to help me. When I finally came home after getting all that business settled as best I could, Sherlock was in a bad way. I think his idiot brother means well, mostly, but the way he goes about it. I don't know how you stand it."

Greg smiled bashfully and asked, "Is it pathetic to say even with it all, he is still better to me than what I am used to?"

"Nooo. We love who we love. I tried really hard to love some very nice men over the years. Even at my age, I still hope, you know? But, here I am, and the love of my life, whoever he was, never showed up." She shrugged.

"Mine only took ten years or so to notice I exist and now he is so worried... about ... things that were never exactly what they seemed that... well, I have to wonder if there is such a thing as a real love of your life. Disheartening, honestly. If even they are like this, I don't know why I think all this bother is going to be... worth the trouble."

Rosie crawled up on his lap and yawned. She put her head on his chest and sighed. He looked down at her and had to sniff back tears.

"I wish I could be like her. All this chaos around and just a biscuit and a snuggle and she is right as rain."

"They are in the moment. No future and the past is out of sight out of mind. My sisters husband was the same way just before he passed." Mrs. Hudson stood stiffly and bent to take care of the tray.

"Go on, I will get it. Going to put sleepyhead down, then go for a walk on that beach. See if the wind will clear the cobwebs a bit."

She glanced at the windows, as if he were talking nonsense, then nodded. "Better bundle up. That ocean wind is brutal at night. I will leave the kettle on for when you get back. I saw some drinking chocolate in the cupboard... I will leave it out where you'll be sure to see it. Sleep well."

Greg waited a few more minutes, then ventured to ground zero to see if the earth had stopped rumbling. "Look, hate to intrude, but little bit is out. I am going for a walk so take your fuss to the sitting room?"

He put Rosie down, looked at the two pouting men and sighed as he took care of the dishes and turned and began bundling himself for a moonlight stroll. It would have been romantic if Mycroft had been there. The moon was so bright he cast a shadow on the decking that lead out to the sand.

He took his shoes off and left them on the wooden planks then shivered as his bare feet touched the chilled sand. He wandered along, up then back down the small beach contemplating all he had learned this evening.
A tall black camel greeted him with one of his shoes in its mouth. "Hey there. I remember you. That is mine, thank you. You were just a tiny thing when I saw you last." Greg reached up and the camel lowered his head, obviously expecting a scratch. Greg obliged. The camel dropped his shoe and it plunked onto the wood.

"You have made a friend I see?" Sherlock said stepping softly and startling Greg.

"Shouldn't you be inside, making up to himself?" Greg asked.

Sherlock lit a cigarette and offered one to Greg. "Thought I would follow this one and bed down in the zoo my sister has collected."

Greg shifted and the camel rubbed its head on him hoping for more. He accepted the cigarette and bent his head and covered the offered light from the wind. He felt the draw of the intimate moment that Sherlock held the light and he inhaled the smoke and let it escape from his nose as he studied his former lover. "That bad is it? Take my room, I can bunk on the sofa for the night?"

"Unnecessary. I have no interest in sleeping. Anger puts John right off to sleep, has the opposite effect on me. You too, obviously."

"Yeah, just stewing. You have any idea where your Mum and Mycroft got off to?"

"Plays... shopping... dull."

"Guess again."

Sherlock's head turned a half inch and his eyes narrowed suspiciously. "What did he tell you? You have been off all week. What is it?"

"No, that was other stuff. This is just the icing on the great Mycroft cake. Got a heads up from Jim. They bunked off back to the sandbox." Greg studied Sherlock as he said it trying to determine if this was new information to him. The stunned look on his face and the deeply inhaled and held breath told him, this was news to Sherlock. "Sorry. I really suspected you had some idea."

"Well, No... I don't know what to even say to that. This evening just keeps getting better." Sherlock took a hard drag and turned back toward the house, putting his back and his great coat to the wind. "Do you think we have made a mistake with all this?"
Oh Holy Night

https://youtu.be/e7xkA8xoQn0

O holy night the stars are brightly shining
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks a new glorious morn
Fall on your knees
O hear the angels' voices
O night divine
O night when Christ was born
O night divine o night
O night divine

Greg patted the camel and stepped closer to Sherlock. "I wish I could say no. That I was sure this wasn't going to be a mistake down the road. I love him and will fight to the last breath to try, but, it is the hard path. You and I were ... easier."

Sherlock dipped his chin into his scarf to absorb the warmth. "Who knew it could be so hard to just breathe sometimes. He is always angry with me, no matter how hard I try. The constant suspicion has lost its charm entirely and even this--"he held out his cigarette, "will be another lecture. I know it is because he cares but... I just..."

Greg did not need him to finish. "I wanted there to be some fun... I mean there is some, but it isn't when I need it. He tries so hard to be... everything perfect that he has become... I don't know. Hard to explain."

"Sometimes I wish he would hit me again." Sherlock said so low it was almost lost to the wind.

"You don't mean that."
"Not the way you think. It was unpleasant but after, it was like he woke up and was sorry.. so we could just be us. Now he holds back and it is not the real John, but some sort of disapproving school master who has to fake calm every moment and resents longer each time. He doesn't even shout at me properly when he is cross. He just leaves. He says things at me, straight out of his therapy sessions, but it isn't his words. I know he is trying, but he's only saying what he's supposed to say and I can't find my John any more. When I try to speak, to really connect, he walks out and I never know if this is the time he won't come back. It is becoming petty and... boring. It hasn't been fun since before he thought I died. I don't want to get married." Sherlock looked at Greg, horrified. "I shouldn't have said that. Please just delete it. I didn't mean it. I cannot be without John. I will figure it out."

Greg nodded. "Sure we will, Sunshine. Just drunk and frustrated. The both of us. I miss just... being able to talk to you for five minutes without having to justify it and it is getting to me that your brother has no feeling that he owes me the same."

"John is afraid I will sleep with you. I am afraid he will sleep with, anyone of convenience, he meets on a bus or getting coffee. Women thrust themselves at him like sacrificial chickens. I find their notes and numbers constantly. He dismisses my fears whilst driving the bus over the cliff about you. It translates to we have lost our trust and I have no idea how to reclaim it." Sherlock stomped on the cigarette he dropped and straightened his posture.

"Maybe your sister could help?" Greg suggested.

Sherlock smirked and then a smile broke at the audacity of the idea. "You are drunk."

"Yes. Probably. But, just in case I start calling her Mummy, here's a heads up. I plan to talk to her," Greg admitted.

Sherlock cocked his head, "You're serious? Aren't you afraid she will tinker around in there until you are barking?"

"I don't have anyone else. Weirdly, I used to have you, but that causes the problem I want to fix. I like your sister. She is not what ... you all think she is." Greg dropped his own fag and picked up his shoe to grind it out.

"If you say so. You do know the story of the Doctor who she convinced to kill his family and himself, just from talking to her?" Sherlock questioned without forbidding him from giving it a go.

"So I've heard. The question nobody asks is why she would do that?"

"But you think you know... something? About my mad sister that everyone else has missed? She is playing with you, Lestrade."

Greg shrugged and dropped his eyes. "She likes me. And I like her, if you want to know. I'll take my chances."

"And we call John Watson the danger junkie. Mrs. Moriarty, Therapist to the deathwish club...has a certain ring to it."

"Maybe she's a Consulting Therapist?" Greg teased. "Once upon a time everyone thought you were a murdering lunatic as well. But, I liked you."

Sherlock turned toward the brightly lit horizon as if he could see the main house from their low position on the beach. "Mmmmph... human error."
Greg wondered if he should just tell Sherlock what his sister had confided to him. Here, alone, he knew Sherlock would take his words seriously without the disparaging influences of John and Mycroft. He hesitated because, Sherlock and John were already fighting over Eurus and he didn’t want to burden him with the position of having to be her champion when she was in the place of one of John’s battle lines. He would have to think about how to talk to each of them, so that John would let any anger be fired at him and not Sherlock or Eurus.

"Come on." Sherlock gave him a crooked smile.

"Where?"

"Back to the party. May as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. Free intoxicants await us."

Greg snorted and slipped his shoes on. One was slobberly. "We make terrible choices when we are tits up an gutted, so, yeah... good plan."

"Exactly. Room full of drunken killers and bomb builders and criminals... one policeman and a private dick... what could go wrong?"

"Trouble always starts out as fun. I missed you too, wanker." Greg walked beside Sherlock and for the first time all day, let all his Mycroft worries float away.
Have a Holly Jolly Christmas

Chapter 5

Have a Holly Jolly Christmas

https://youtu.be/nVMCUtsmWmQ

Have a holly, jolly Christmas
It's the best time of the year
I don't know if there'll be snow
But have a cup of cheer
Have a holly, jolly Christmas
And when you walk down the street
Say hello to friends you know
And everyone you meet

The party was still going at the main house and down the hill the lights blazed at a second, obviously wilder party. The golf carts wandered overloaded and drunkenly up and down the hill to the Village of the Damned and then heavy laden again as they lumbered back to the main house. Gunshots could be heard in the distance. "Well, this escalated quickly. Let's start up top. I am going to have to be a great deal closer to cabbaged to take on The Village of the Damned."

Greg nodded, eyes wide and a silly grin on his face. They entered the house and found a conga train making it almost impossible to navigate to the drinks, so they latched on and joined in. The train twisted and wound around the house and people danced to the loud music, everyone having a delightful time.

There was a barrel of whiskey with a spigot in the covered porch area for people to help themselves. The kitchen was bustling with three men making drinks as fast as they could. Greg and Sherlock grabbed something fruity and melting from its frozen state, lined up with take-away cups full of the rainbow of offerings.

Sherlock smiled and tipped his blue drink to his lips. Greg picked a yellow thing with little pineapple bits decorating the side of the glass. It was sweet and cold. Perfect for the overcrowded and overheated house, the fancy drinks were delicious. They wandered from room to room watching the merrymakers.

Eurus found them and she was tipsy and sweet as she hugged Sherlock and kissed Greg's cheek. "You came back? Ohhhh and you had a fight with John. Have you seen my camel? Some naughty let him out. I think it was Bertie but it may have been Max."


"Down on the beach. Tried to eat my shoe, I gave him a scratch. He is fine. Seemed perfectly happy.," Greg volunteered.

"Seeeeee? Anytime you want to find something... just ask a detective and my brother the deductive detective... that sounds like detective duck... and your hat has two bills so you are a double duck detective... I am now drunk." Eurus said in a casual chatty monologue.

"Are you having fun?" Sherlock asked her though the answer was obvious.

"I am. Went clubbing a few times when I was... escaped. But this is better. Jim said parties were better. Do you think this one is adequately Rep... re... do you think this is a good party?" She swayed slightly and shook her head.

"I think it is the most wonderful party in all the world," Sherlock told her with all sincerity.

"Oh, good. It is my first one so I did not know. He made me banish Quasar from the kitchen ... said he was too big. But, it was worth it. I definitely like parties. Jim is down at the big one, you should check that one out too."

"We probably will." Greg smiled and said, "You look very pretty tonight. It is lovely to see you so happy, Eurus."

She grinned, suspicion making her coy, "Yes. You do not have to butter me up. I will help you."

"No... he actually likes you. Please do not strip his screws, he has always had a few loose ones. Besides, he is, in fact telling the truth. You look quite beautiful, sister mine," Sherlock said most of this with his eyes cast downward, but he ended it by meeting her eyes.

"I see you too, brother. We should spend some time together and get all those little emotions back in their boxes. Go have fun, it will ease the burden," Eurus said, hanging on his arm and concentrating very hard.

"We will. I promise."

"Oh look, there is Peter... he promised to show me how to ... something. Bye." She waved and took off toward a grinning ogre of a man in a nice suit.

"Surreal, idnn'it?" Greg whispered.

Sherlock watched her weave and dodge through the crowd then turned to Greg, "Think you are ready for the next level?"

"Yeah... we should take a booker, see how the wild side lives." Greg finished his drink and grabbed another and off they went to the carts. The drivers were far from sober, but nobody seemed bothered in the least even when they swerved suddenly to miss a cart headed in the other direction and nearly tipped over. Their companions all screamed then laughed like the drunken lunatics they were.

The house party was tame compared to the Village party. It took all of four minutes for them to deduce that they were going to be in trouble come morning.

There were scores of scantily dressed women of a certain profession that Greg had learned long ago to spot on sight. Half the main hall had been turned into a casino, but everyone was gambling with chips. It was explained that the chips were to be used on Christmas Eve for gifts from the Mr. And
Mrs. In the cafeteria there was a wrestling tournament in full swing and much cheering for the sparkly lime jelly covered participants.

Sherlock observed this bizarre sight for a few moments and declared, "She is never going to get that out of her hair. I don't understand the rules."

"The rules really are not the point, Sherlock." Greg scratched his head, unsure how to explain the sport to Sherlock.

Something else caught his attention at that point and Sherlock was off. Greg followed out of habit though he was quite enjoying the naked ladies covered in glitter Jelly and whipping cream.

Finally Greg spotted what Sherlock did. Mrs. Hudson and Grandmother Moriarty were here, playing poker and evidently winning spectacularly from the piles of chips by their elbows.

"Going to bed early were you?" Sherlock asked with obvious disapproval.

Mrs. Hudson balked bashfully but smiled innocently. "Early in the morning, perhaps, I was not specific. I see you, and raise fifty."

"Oh my god, you are baked, Mrs. Hudson!" Greg said in absolute dumbfounded horror.

She looked up and grinned, "You can hardly blame me. They have over sixty varieties to sample. I recommend the Strawberry Rhino. But you stay away from the Coke, Sherlock Holmes. Now go away, I am on a winning streak!"

Sherlock glanced at Greg, a question on his face.

Greg shook his head no.

Sherlock stepped away from the tables and shrugged his shoulders. "You ever tried it?"

Greg blushed. "I was a kid once too, just so you know."

"I promise to stay away from the sweeties, but when in Rome, what's the harm?" Sherlock bumped his elbow against Greg.

"There are people here. I could lose my job," Greg whispered loudly."

"True, but who here is going to tell on you? They may be criminals but they are hardly hypocrites. Look around, half of them are blackout drunk or well on their way." Sherlock inclined his head toward a room that was obviously on fire from the billows of cannabis smoke escaping each time the door was opened.

A huge tray of drinks passed by and Sherlock snagged two off the roaming selection. He handed one to Greg.

Greg sniffed it and asked, "What's this?"

Sherlock sipped. "Hard to tell, vodka and coffee based, tastes like fizzy chocolate milk. Just drink it and say yes to doing what you want for one night. You can go back to your boring pillar of society life later. If you were honest, right now... no worries about tomorrow, what do you want? To have a bit of fun or go back to the cottage like a well trained pet?"

Greg sighed and sucked on the straw. The drink really did taste nice. "Mycroft is going to be very cross with us, you know?"
Sherlock grinned, "That is actually making my argument for it more enticing. All settled then?"

"Yeah, what the hell. I am going to blame you. Just to be clear." Greg followed Sherlock to the hooka lounge.
Jinglebell Rock

Chapter Summary

You are getting extra, up front, unsure when I will have Internet next so blasted out several chapters.

Chapter 6

Jinglebell Rock

https://youtu.be/D3wPzpTRDeE

What a bright time
It's the right time
To rock the night away
Jingle bell, time
Is a swell time
To go glidin' in a
One horse sleigh
Giddy-up, jingle horse
Pick up your feet
Jingle around the clock
Mix and mingle
In a jinglin' beat
That's the jingle bell rock

They joined the other customers at the counter and looked in the glass case. There were shapes and colours of exotically named buds. It was like a coffee shop in Amsterdam, only traded for with chips.

There was a bit of confusion initially because Sherlock and Greg had no chips. But the helpful girl at the counter took care of that straight away. They each had 100 chips that she assured them they should have received at check in, but the computer showed plainly they had somehow missed the boat. She plopped down papers for them to sign, mostly a release from liability and list of rules that included seven specific references to refraining from the murder and bodily harm of other guests.

Sherlock barely glanced at his before signing with a flourish. Greg did his best to read every word, laughing as he read some of them out loud to Sherlock who was busy pointing and pocketing several selections that caught his eye.

"No point, reading the rules. I just break them. Are you going to buy anything or just read like an old
man."

Of course Sherlock knew the age reference would get Lestrade's bad boy hackles into flight position and the look he passed Sherlock was priceless.

The chips were evidently worth around twenty pounds each and they made their purchases and could have bought an armload of the tiny one ounce prepared baggies labelled with colourful artwork and what amounted to brand names. Sherlock was more eclectic in his selections but Greg stuck with fruity flavours of, Strawberry, pineapple and grape.

"So now what do we do with our drugs purchase? Last time I did this, the choices were paper or pipe."

"We ask an expert. Don't forget your little plastic thing."

Sherlock strolled over to a table in the corner and glared at some of those sitting at the table. Jim opened his highly bloodshot eyes and smiled knowingly. "You found me. Knew you'd turn up." He waved his hands and the others made efforts to get up or make room. Greg and Sherlock took the newly empty seats.

"Oh, nice selections. What are we trying First?" Jim asked checking his phone and grinning without preamble.

"Wait, you have a record on your phone?" Greg asked, not amused.

"By numbers only. Randomly assigned. Last year, one of my heroes tried his hand at opening his own chemist shop on the side, took advantage of my generous nature. My wife implemented some safety checks to make sure my guests could enjoy this treat but not make overtly stupid leaps into attention from authorities with perversely nosey natures. You are perfectly safe, Detective Inspector."

"Then how do you know our numbers?"

"I am a genius, genius... oh and you were the last two at the counter." Jim laughed thinking the obvious was very funny. "No, cocaine, Sherlock? Thought that was your favourite."

"No. I tend to cause trouble. Thought this might be the better option."

Jim shrugged, and said conspiratorially, "I only serve up the best. If you change your mind, we don't have to tell Doctor John."

To change the subject, Greg jumped in, "So how does this work? This hooka thing?"

Jim showed them what to do and soon everyone was feeling the effects of the happy plant. Sherlock told stories and so did Jim. They reminisced about their trip to the Middle East and Lestrade felt the tension of his life simply float away on a puff of smoke.

They continued to drink as well and before he realised it, Greg knew he was way past his limit and any ability to make good decisions. But he was with friends and warm and happy and he could pay for this tomorrow, because at the moment he was having the time of his life.

His thoughts were like bees in his head, bouncing around like echoes and all that mattered at the moment was that Jim was telling the tale of the pool from his perspective and it was hilarious.

"...so We get to location finally and I tell John that if he doesn't say what I tell him that I will blow
him to bits and the cheeky bastard says that when he gets out of that bomb that he is going to break every bone in my body whilst naming them. Good lord he is the worst kidnappee of all time. He could care less that He is covered with explosives, the thing was actually disarmed the whole time because I was afraid he would blow us all up just out of spite!"

"It was disarmed? Seriously?" Sherlock banged himself on the head as if he should have known.

Jim points at Sherlock and is leaning over with mirth as he says," Thank god I did, it was the first thing Watson bloody tried. Had his arm around my neck and I am thinking hold the phone, I can't out psycho this psycho and Seb, god love him, has all these laser pointers, his rifle and scope is top of the line, he doesn't have visible lasers... he's not the SAS. But, he is holding like five of these stupid little power point key chains, bloody bluffing... You can't set Semtex off with bullets, it isn't Tannerite, so he is holding them all on Sherlock's head, just praying that John lets go before he squishes the fucking remote in my pocket! Sweating buckets and I am laughing and John let's go of me... finally... I am just calming down and remember the whole point was to woo Sherlock away from the side of the Angels and I kidnapped a bloody honey badger rather than the mild mannered lap puppy I expected."

"You did leave. And John made a joke about me ripping his cloths off in a darkened swimming pool and all of a sudden you came back to kill us after all." Sherlock can barely speak for his laughter.

"I couldn't believe I had been played so. Also, I had pushed the button because you pissed me off and I wait, and wait. No boom. I go back in and my vest is laying in a heap of wires and completely bloody useless, and Johnny is sizing up which bones he wants to break first. Sherlock threatens to shoot the dead vest and I am so fucked until I realise you still think it will blow up. The old lady's vest malfunctioned, we think it was her medical alert sending a no movement signal, we screwed that up, but of course you thought it was set off by a bullet. You two want to blow it up on purpose and are complete lunatics. That was when my phone goes off." Sherlock pipes in, "It was some tedious oldies pop song, and Jim is so embarrassed he goes brilliant red ...but he answers it! I thought it was his Mother at first...".

"So, lovely Irene says she can deliver the brother, with her phone. This has already gone tits up and Sherlock is mad for boring John, and I just look like a clown at this point, and I'm just trying like Jesus to make a cool exit. I thought I was going to impress him, close the deal, and instead I felt like the nice boy at the dance who bought the princess a corsage and she runs off to dance with the chaperone! It was mortifying...

"You were going to kill me! You would have had more of a chance if you had come alone. Did you know that when he first came out, I thought John was you? Threw me right off my game."

"Be honest, Sherlock, I never had a chance with you... and I married the most clever of the litter anyway."

"That you did. But you cheated with all those cousins. That is what really threw me. How many of you look alike? Or was it just..."Sherlock trailed off, unsure of how sensitive a subject his dead cousin was.

"There are six of us who can pass for the others... five now... Bub or Fitzrobert is a bit older, losing his hair now, so it is getting harder... needs a hairpiece to pull it off, Fitzpatrick is getting a beer belly and if he doesn't knock it off, he is going to have to give up the charade. So I am down to two true doppelgängers, I could never keep my schedule alone. It allows me some freedom. It is a stressful career. Right now I am also in Hong Kong, negotiations and in San Jose at a technology conference. They do the boring bits... I am the creative director, so to speak.
"Why are they not here?" Greg asked.

"We don't like to be seen together, If you see us together then you can learn to tell us apart... bad for business." Jim signalled he needed more drinks and reloaded the hooka.

The last thing Greg remembered was a fuzzy image of Mrs. Hudson and Grandmother Moriarty sitting at the table and counting their winnings.
Grandma got run over by a Reindeer

Chapter 7

Grandma Got Run Over By A Reindeer

https://youtu.be/MgIwLeASnkw

Grandma got run over by a reindeer
Walking home from our house Christmas eve
You can say there's no such thing as Santa
But as for me and grandpa we believe
She'd been drinking too much eggnog
And we begged her not to go
But she forgot her medication
And she staggered out the door into the snow
When we found her Christmas morning
At the scene of the attack
She had hoof-prints on her forehead
And incriminating Claus marks on her back.

---

His first sensation was the intense smell of fruit and his eyes felt like they had been glued shut. He listened for the beep beep sound of hospital, aware from how his body came on line that it had been a headshot that got him in the end. He wondered if there was brain damage and he needed the nurse to change his bandages and get him some pain meds at once. He tried to move but was restrained.

One eye slit open and he managed to get his arm up to his head. There were no bandages and yet, his head had dried blood and gore all over it. He opened his eyes further and did not comprehend why his skin was a disgusting green. He tried to pry his tongue off the roof of his mouth and discovered it was not just dry, but full of fruity flavoured hair.

Movement made the pain explode. The helicopter ride to Sherrinford came to mind and he wondered if he had dreamed it all. Maybe he was burned and that explained the green slime dried to him. Some medical thing for burn victims.
He remembered Sherlock flying about the inside of the beast as it twisted from the sky. "Sherlock... are you alive. How bad are you hurt?" He mumbled.

The weight on his chest moved and the darkness rose along with a good deal of Lestrade's chest hair.

"Oh god. My head!" Sherlock croaked.

"We were in a helicopter crash..."

"Shut up, Lestrade, it just feels that way. You are green! I am green... and sparkly.. Why the hell are we Green and naked. Oh god..." Sherlock looked at Lestrade in pure horror as the truth descended on them both at the same time.

In unison they groaned, "Jelly wrestling !"

They were in fact still in the area of the gelatine pool, had a somewhat complex tangle of green glue holding bits of towelling in place and had passed out amongst the other participants also in various form of skanty to non-existent clothes. What was not numb, screamed in pain and his lungs felt like he had contracted tuberculosis in a matter of hours.

Just to add another level of delight, Greg gazed up into the lethal blue eyes of John Watson who smiled at him with not-a-smile.

"God help me. Sherlock, we have company. " Sherlock twisted around to see John sat in a plastic chair, leaned forward, elbows on knees. He had evidently been sitting there watching them passed out and there was no description for the look on his face.

"Oh, hello. Didn't want to disturb the two of you, figured you needed your beauty sleep. You may want to check your email for interview requests, because it seems that on five social media sites that I have seen, so far, the videos of your exploits earlier this morning, are trending," John said, his voice a growling dangerous facsimile of calm.

"God. If you plan to shoot me, please hurry, otherwise, stop talking and perform an emergency head transplant at once," Sherlock whispered.

Lestrade was equally suffering and yet he had the presence of mind to keep his mouth shut.

John shook his head. "I have exactly zero sympathy for you right now. The cruelest most evil thing that I can think to do to you both right this moment, is let you live to face your own music. I have not found Mrs. Hudson yet, but, you can thank her for at least one of the videos. But, probably not for the best one of the lot, because she was IN it!"

At that moment, John took the opportunity to live stream the video of two drunk and naked men in a sixteen hundred gallon vat of green Hartley's glitter jelly.

They lunged at each other drunkenly and giggling as if already out of breath. Lestrade easily performed a bump of Sherlock's leg, with the precision of a cop, having done it a thousand times, knocking Sherlock's feet out from under him. Sherlock was taken down with a squidgy spat, but held on, dragging Greg down with him. Sherlock at once wrapped his long white legs around his opponent and gained superhuman leverage and straddled Lestrade.

Greg whooped loudly "Bring it on, Sunshine!" As he flipped Sherlock into what looked a tiny bit like a rapey missionary position, holding Sherlock's arms above his head and began vigorously humping and enthusiastically professing that, "Yeah, call me Daddy! Daddy knows what you like."
Lestrade's backside was covered in the green goop, but as he thrust, each movement cause his muscles to ripple and sparkle.

The audience was cheering and egging their antics on but when Sherlock twisted and slithered away, scrambling out of Greg's reach, as they stood, now both covered in jelly and whipping cream, it was quite evident that they now sported much more impressively sized green sparkling danglely bits.

Greg's cock, though not overtly large, made up for it with impressive springyness and the cameraperson managed to just catch a shot of Sherlock licking his lips and dropping his eyes to the area as they circled each other, looking for the next opportunity for victory or at least further humping.

Sherlock feigned a lunge and stepped back at the last second. Lestrade overcorrected and lost his footing for a split second and the tall skinny green man sprung into a low tackle which caused them to slide all the way to the edge of the pool to the delight of the viewing crowd. Some of the closer audience members were treated to a tidal wave of ooze splashing them like a killer whale show in a theme park.

Sherlock landed with his face directly in Greg's lap and Greg had the wherewithal to look straight at the camera and give a rakish double thumbs up along with a cheeky grin.

Lestrade, trying to get away, twisted and came up on his hands and knees, using the low pool side for balance. Sherlock wound around his middle and to the observer it looked suspiciously like gay sex with an abundance of green lubricant.

In his deep aroused sex voice, Sherlock growled, "You can do better than this, come on, old man. Give it to me!"

The crowd was going mad, at this point and the camera bumped around a bit. But, it stabilised, just in time for Greg to fling himself backwards and again there was scrambling and rolling about and absolute chaos for several minutes when a drunk elderly lady wandered into the scene, slugging through the knee deep slime.

Mrs Hudson grabbed each man by their ears and separated them, chastising them for making fools of themselves and leading them to the edge, obviously intending they exit. She had good intentions, despite the crowd booing her, right up until she lost her footing in the slick green gunk. She was solicitously helped to her feet by a drunken apologetic Lestrade, but Sherlock made the mistake of letting his landlady's fall into the green, tickle his funny bone. She huffed in anger and suddenly the game was on.

Sherlock found himself under her, drowning in jelly and completely helpless to the hilarity of it all. Others began to enter the arena, and soon the whole match had descended into some kind of Sploshing editorial.

People actually began having pseudo-sex and Greg and Sherlock were spotted in a passionate kiss, just as the Camera person spun the lenses onto the very red eyed Jim Moriarty who grinned bashfully and blinked charmingly at the Camera.

Jim said with supreme surety, "It just isn't a party without Jello!" He opened his mouth wide in pretend naughty shock and the video ended.

"Oh, God," was all Lestrade could think of to say.

"Just so you know, I also took pictures of you just now. Will make a lovely addition to the blog!"
John stood up, the chair slid backwards screeching the anger John was attempting to keep under manageable standards.

"John?" Sherlock pleaded.

John gave him a last look then did a quick turn, military style. He threw over his shoulder as he practically marched away. "Might want to get yourself sorted. Mummy and her entourage are four hours out. Hate for them to find you ... post coital or whatever the hell this is."

John did not look back and the exit door banged against the building as he walked through the door, with the finality of a cannon.

Lestrade sighed with exasperated defeat and collapsed back onto the floor. "I am still drunk and everything hurts!"

"Me too. You look wretched."

Greg laughed and returned, "You know you look like a zombie cockatoo? Your hair!"

"Aren't you angry with me? You did say you would blame me for this," Sherlock asked carefully.

Greg took a deep breath and gazed up at Sherlock with a fuzzy toothed grin. "Naw. That was probably the best night of my life. Any idea if we got a leg over or not?"

Sherlock seemed to wiggle around and catalog his transport before admitting, "Nothing penetrative that I can detect, but the pain is superseding any endorphins one could expect to be lingering."

"Fancy way of saying you have no bloody clue if we cheated or not," Greg shook his head as he considered the probable consequences.

"Precisely," Sherlock said with lip nibbling guilt. "Balance of probability is skewed in favour of that event being likely, however."

Greg raised his hands to his head and squeezed. "God, my head." He looked over at Sherlock and grinned mischievously. "You know what this calls for?"

"Extensive showers and an investigation into the location of our clothing?"

Greg sat back up with a groan. "That, as well. But first, Hair of the Dog?"

"First, I am still drunk. Second, it was not so much one single dog, as the entire kennel, so I have no idea where to start. Third, please, shoot me, in the head, it will hurt less." Sherlock, with as little grace as possible, legs splayed like a drinking giraffe, made it to a standing position.

He extended his hand to help Greg up and they made their way, having to step over the occasional body, to the hooka lounge in search of answers.

And, pants.
What Child is this

Chapter Summary

Just when you figure out your life there is always a plot twist.

Chapter 8

What child is this.

https://youtu.be/YwNb3RQYIAQ

So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh,
Come Peasant, King to own Him
The King of Kings salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.

They were clean, paracetamol ingested, clothing restored, and just a little Strawberry Kush for pain management and to induce calm. It had been decided that might be better than more alcohol.

Understandably they were embarrassed that they had partied like rock stars the night before and yet, they were also rather chuffed that they had partied like rock stars the night before with the abandon of youthful exuberance... well that bit could just be the buzz.

They were feeling much better and though they were, no doubt, in trouble with their future spouses, they were optimistic that forgiveness was just around the corner. It was almost Christmas and from the crew of men trying to right one of the big carts that had been wrecked sometime in the night, their singular antics obviously did not stand as the worst of the evening’s events.

They trudged past the main house and on down the lane to the west cottage. The fireplace was going, the tree was lit in the window, and everything looked quaint and calm. It looked like a postcard, except that the airport was very noticeably close. A pair of Helicopters took off, fully loaded with people, whilst two others came in to land during their walk.

People only there for last nights party were getting transport home while the families of the men who
had people to share their holiday with, were now arriving. It all seemed to run like clockwork. Mummy and company would be on their way now and landing within the next few hours.

Tomorrow was Christmas Eve and that was when the gifting for the troops and guests was to take place with a massive dinner in the mess. That would leave Christmas morning for more intimate family activities and Boxing Day was when Jim passed out awards and honours for excellence to his employees. The airport, normally a quiet space was alive with activities and would continue to be so until after the main events of the season were finished.

The private planes were lined up as well and if one ever wondered if Sherlock had truly wiped out the web, this was a very pointed testimony that he had barely scratched the surface.

Though Sherlock found this annoying on one hand, the actual work he had done was still worthy of his efforts. He had closed several child trafficking rings, kept countless weapons out of unsavoury hands, wiped out some cyber plots against the French and kept a certain truth teller out of the hands of the Americans though he was still locked away in an embassy and not truly free. He and Mycroft were still enemies over that bone. Mycroft was just having a power fit, because he had been both thwarted and completely wrong. Sherlock expressed his hope that Greg might soften his brother up a bit. Greg listened attentively as Sherlock let his thoughts wander aloud.

Greg grunted in appropriate spots, fascinated at Sherlock's candid self-analysis of his time away.

He had tracked down almost forty wet-work specialists who were both brutal and of no moral ambiguity whatsoever, killing anyone for cash, as well as other ugly projects that hovered on the outskirts of Moriarty's core operations.

Knowing now that Jim had been alive all along, and guiding him, certainly irritated him, but, he also felt that his efforts had been at his sister's instruction and her approval did make up for some of his suffering. The fact he only undertook the work to protect John, Lestrade and Mrs. Hudson had been a costly smokescreen, when he had actually been protecting Eurus in the long run. But, he had worked as best he could with the information he had had at the time.

Hangovers evidently made Sherlock chatty.

They opened the door to the kitchen and found Mrs. Hudson wearing an uncomfortable looking blue medical boot on her foot and sipping tea, with an ice pack over one eye.

"Mrs. Hudson? What the devil happened to you?" Sherlock demanded, his protective instincts jumping to full alert on sight. Nobody dare harm his landlady.

She grinned with a little wince, "Oh nothing but a bit of bother. I am fine, though you could be a dear and hand me those digestives on the counter. No the chocolate ones, if you don't mind."

Sherlock did as requested, frowning and examining her eye for clues to how she was injured and whom he could drop out a window for their effort. The Island was full of supposedly reformed reprobates.

John was suddenly standing in the doorway, arms crossed with disapproval, and explained, "She and Mrs. Moriarty, the elder, decided to jack one of the transport carts, turned it over with approximately thirty people on it. They are only built to seat twelve. Broke all five of her toes on the one foot and hit her head. She is lucky she didn't kill someone, considering she had a blood alcohol off the charts and was covered in green slime which was covered in sand. I had to help her bathe before I could
even examine her. Lost a tooth as well."

Martha grinned and showed them her missing lateral incisor. "Have to get an implant. No idea where it went."

"Well, serves you right for putting me on YouTube," Sherlock said with fond irritation. "You got me in trouble!"

"Oh, sorry Sherlock, I have no idea how that happened. I wasn't the only one, you know. Seb Moran was very naughty last night. Uploaded all sorts of things he shouldn't have." She tutted and sighed.

"Yes, he surprisingly didn't touch a drop last night. Said he prefers to capture the best moments. Hard to deny who was driving when they try to run over the cameraman," John admonished with fond mirth.

"Well, he is certainly on my naughty list. Thank you very much," Mrs. Hudson replied as she shifted stiffly in her chair. She dunked her biscuit in the tea and nibbled the damp section.

Sherlock listened to the sounds of someone familiar playing with young Watson in the sitting room. He cocked his head and brushed past John, who had a mean smirk on his face and crooked his finger at Greg, telling him to follow.

The fire and the tree looked like a perfect Christmas movie. Sherlock's father was sat in a wingback, reading a book, the perfect picture of stately dignity. He looked up and smiled, eyes twinkling in pleasure at seeing his son, despite the kerfuffle.

On the floor, Molly Hooper was playing building blocks with young Watson, who was concentrating very hard to stack them. "Ahhhtaaahhh," Rosie declared, holding a block out to Sherlock.

Molly sat up and glanced quickly at Sherlock then blushed nervously. "Hello? Hope you don't mind me just popping in."

"Molly? You are either getting fat or you are approximately five months along. Which is it?" Sherlock blurted.

"Erm, the second one? Merry Christmas Sherlock. You're going to be a father. Little Bee will have a sort of brother... if you want...only if you... want."

Mr. Holmes smiled fondly, and answered for his son, "Don't be silly, of course he wants. Mummy is going to be so very delighted. We all are, my dear."

Molly smiled gratefully to him, but looked up at Sherlock with pure fear.

Greg took out his phone and snapped a photo of Sherlock's blank fish face. John followed his example. Sherlock blinked then staggered toward the sofa and collapsed without a word.

"I told you. Same as when I asked him to be my best man. Complete operating system shutdown. Don't worry, he'll reboot in a few minutes," John pronounced with anger edging toward smug retribution.

Mr. Holmes inquired politely, "Have you thought of any names?"

Molly dropped her eyes and shook her head. "I don't know where to start. Sort of depends on what he says next. I won't force him to be part of this. I only decided to even tell him, because of how he
felt about Rosie. I was angry at first. I am so sorry, John. Again, you were not together at the time. I meant to wait til after the wedding, but..."

"You have nothing to be sorry for. Frankly, the whole wedding plan is a shambles already, so this, may all be for the best," John said as kindly as he could.

Molly set down the blocks and stood, using a chair to assist, her hand covering her tummy protectively. Only now does her condition seem obvious. "What? No. That is not what I mean, John. I don't want to take him away from you or anything. I just..."

"You're not. Look raising a baby alone is awful. Sorry, but it is. You cannot believe how much nappies cost--" John begins.

Molly is suddenly cross with him and she takes a deep breath and very clearly and firmly interrupted, "Just stop it. I am not here for a bloody hand out. I have spent enough time taking care of Rosie, that I know exactly what I am taking on. Have I ever asked you for anything when she was with me? No, I bought a cot, and high chair, even a stroller, though it was second hand. I bought clothes and nappies... anything she needed. You do realise that I make significantly more than you do, don't you, John? I live very frugality for London. But, I save. I don't have any parents to help if I get in a bind. I don't splash out on clothes and flashy things. I can do this on my own. I thought long and hard on this. It is a surprise, but not a whim."

John held up his hands in a gesture of peace, "No, I am sorry... this is just one of ten things that have fallen at once, I didn't mean to seem--"

Sherlock popped back into the land of the living and stood up, taking four steps to stand before her like she was the only person in the room. "Oh, Molly..."He gently reached out and took her hand and with his eyes asked permission to touch her stomach. She grinned and set his hand on her left side and the whole room held their breath. Nothing happened.

"Just wait. He will get bored." She said with a giggle.

Sherlock smiled patiently then his eyes shown, misty with wonder.

"He only started doing that. It feels so strange, you can't imagine. He was just a conceptual eventuality and sort of like having the flu before. But, when he kicked, I knew," Molly said, watching Sherlock's face carefully.

"What's his name?" Sherlock asked suddenly.

Molly smiled and shook her head then explained, "He doesn't have one yet, silly. You could help me with that if you wanted."

"Yes," Sherlock answered at once.

"But, it has to be an actual name and not a chemical element, and absolutely no naming him after infamous murderers or weird things that will get him beaten up at school. A real name, got it?" She demanded and explained.

Mr. Holmes interjected, "Do what your mother and I did, William Sherlock Scott, Edmund Mycroft Shane, Katherine Eurus Tamara, Arthur Sigerson Jack... one traditional, one unique and one trendy... let them pick, Though all four of you picked the odd names. You at least had the options."

"That is a marvellous idea, Mr. Holmes. Thank you," Molly replied politely. She looked back at Sherlock and was surprised to see abject misery and terror on his face. "What is it? What happened,
Sherlock shrugged, shook his head as if flummoxed and his eyes darted around the room. His voice was intimate, but not quite a whisper, "Why? Why would you... what I mean is, you could have had anyone. Why.. me. Even with your good influence he may be ... you know. Like me?"

Molly's face went from guarded to sympathetic and then she smiled, finally getting his point. "Oh, well. That is my hope actually. I quite like you, in case you didn't know that. You are somewhat clever even if you are sort of plain looking..." She giggled at her own sarcasm. "Sherlock, he's going to be brilliant and unique and probably save the world, just like his father, though he will hopefully be less of a dick about it. We can talk all this through later, in private. After you have gotten used to the idea."

"There is nothing to discuss, at least about his eventual offload. I've no idea what to say, because all I can think of is thank you, and thanks to god and bad decisions and that sounds pathetically lacking in describing my joy that this has happened despite the obvious inconveniences his existence must be placing on your transport. No Christmas will ever aspire to match this gift... and thank you sounds cold and yet... Thank you, Molly."

She melted at his words. "Oh, ummm, no, you are fine. Your welcome... I mean to say, for telling you, at Christmas. I knew you'd figure it out soon.. but, I am happy I came, after all."

"How did I not see? I am slipping," Sherlock questioned.

"Well, no. I wasn't sure ... and wanted to make my own decisions... without anyone influencing me. You haven't been around much... since I turned down your proposal, and bulky jumpers and lab coats hid a lot. I haven't even told my coworkers or anyone until now. I needed to tell you in my own time. I would have hated it if you had noticed before I was ready. Come on, I hid that you were not dead for two bloody years. That was a lot harder. I just started showing properly, though I have felt like a cow for weeks..." Molly prattled on, but for once had her audience hanging on her every word.

Sherlock bent and placed a solemn, reverent kiss on her cheek, "You are the most bovine free, lovely thing I have ever had the honour to set eyes upon, Molly Hooper. You are radiant."

She sighed, blushed and smiled all at once, "And starving. Sorry, just... he is already like you in that when he demands something, it is really hard to ignore."

Greg had watched this entire exchange in shock. He had no idea what to think and yet he really didn't count in the conversation. He somehow felt more jealous than overjoyed. Everyone seemed to get to be a Dad except for him. He had wanted to be a father, counted on it. Had actually considered Sherlock's crazy plan to keep Rosie from going to strangers.

It did cross his mind that if they had followed that path, or Sherlock had died out in that Godforsaken sand pit, that he would have been both Rosie's Dad and looking forward to the birth of Sherlock's son and who knows, maybe one or three of their own in the offing. If he were not melancholy already, that wisp of elusive smoke felt like rocks grinding in his belly.

He found it an odd paradox that he was so very happy for Sherlock and though he could not bring himself to actually wish it had turned out otherwise, feel so sorry for himself that he was not fated to have what he thought of as a real family, with kids being the binding force. He caught himself swallowing repeatedly because he just could not bring himself to speak.

He slipped out of the room, told Mrs. Hudson that he wanted to go to the airport in case Mycroft arrived early, and left the cottage without another word.
Chapter Summary

Just a short bit, for the namesake

Chapter 9

Christmas is All Around me

https://youtu.be/5Fmf3D9oNn4

(Notice baby Martin in this video!)

I feel it in my fingers
I feel it in my toes
Christmas is all around me
And so the feeling grows
It's written in the wind
It's everywhere I go
So if you really love Christmas
C'mon and let it snow

"I always loved airports. I skive off out to Heathrow when I find myself in the doldrums. See, in my line of work, you see so much. Awful things and no end to the lives shattered in hate and greed and jealousy. I pick up the pieces and try to see the good in the world, but it is pretty hard sometimes. So, I go to the airport and bluff my way into the arrivals and sit and just watch people. I love watching people, probably why I became a copper. But some days, I think that I am not helping anyone.

"Kid dies in your arms, they never give you messages of hate or revenge. They tell you to pass messages of love... every time. That is always what's important to them in the end Cop or Criminal or Consulting Detective.

"So, I go out there and watch people, mothers and sons, brothers, war heroes coming home to their
sweethearts and new fathers meeting their kids for the first time. No matter what drama or
disagreements or the facts in their lives, for that one moment, well, that is the real deal there. It is a
tiny window into the truth of love and that factual visible something, it gives me hope every time I
see it. So airports, never bore me. I have someone coming.. see... and I am waiting for my... moment.
So I hope you don't mind. I just want to sit here and for a few minutes believe that even if we don't
always see it, that in fact, love is all around. "

The airport manager, who had come to ask where he was going, looked slightly dumbfounded at the
soliloquy, but shrugged and said, his nasal American accent harsh to Greg's ears, "Yeah, no problem,
bus. I just wanted to see if you were heading to London, is all. Got a bird to fill. If you're not
leaving, do whatever. Don't need your fucking life story."
Chapter 10. The Christmas Song

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=hwacxSnc4tI#

My first comment was from Hikaru_Suzumiya and this chapter is in honour of her wish. I hope you like it!

+~~~~~~~~~,

Chestnuts roasting on an open fire
Jack Frost nipping at your nose
Yule-tide carols being sung by a choir
And folks dressed up like Eskimos
Everybody knows a turkey and some mistletoe
Help to make the season bright
Tiny tots with their eyes all aglow
Will find it hard to sleep tonight
They know that Santa's on his way
He's loaded lots of toys and goodies on his sleigh...

He sat in the airport, practicing his apology to Mycroft and watching various people wander in waiting for someone and watched the smiles and hugs, sometimes just dignified handshakes and a pat on the back. Each group in their own little world, unaware of a voyeur sucking at their happy moments like a vampire.

Watson and Sherlock came in, the others deciding to greet their arrivals later. They were down one transport cart and figured it would make things easier with how busy the small private airport was today.

Greg caught John glowering at him and with a sigh he stood and knew it was time to make amends
for the possibility that he and Sherlock had acted less than honourably.

Sherlock was off conferring with the manager who had told Greg off earlier.

"Hey?" He said, stupidly.

"No," John replied.

"To what?" Greg asked.

"To any of it. No, I don't think it is funny. No, I don't forgive you. No, he and I have not discussed this new shitstorm and no, I don't care what you have to say, so don't bother. If it were not for Rosie, I would be on the next thing leaving. But, she is delighted and going home now is out of the question, hell, I don't even have one. So, thanks for that, mate."

"I just wanted to say sorry for last night. It was my fault." Greg stated, though he did not think it was all his fault.

"Oh, good. Thanks. You think that makes it all better? Here I am, thinking he does not even do that sort of thing and he seems to have slept with everyone we know. How do you think that makes me feel? Hmm?" John hissed at Greg, trying to keep his voice down.

"Oh yeah? Five people in his whole life? I got eight, lifetime total. Seen you do that in a month! Mr. Three Continents? You don't have much high ground here. Seems like someone who makes the mistakes you have might just have a shred--" He never saw the fist coming.

He was so shocked that John got in three more roaring punches before Greg ever lifted a hand to defend himself. John moved in for the kill quickly, dropping Greg to the ground by knocking his knees out from under him. This had all happened so quickly and so unexpectedly that Greg only felt adrenaline ramp up his system as Watson held him down and tried to bash his head on the Lino.

Sherlock was there, screaming and dragging John off him, when John turned his fury on Sherlock. "Get the hell away from me. This is between me and him!" John shouted making a further scene.

"I disagree. This is about me. I am the one you want to hit. Admit it."

"Doesn't matter! I promised to never hit you again because you can't even bloody defend yourself. You're like a girl... can't hit you!" John did not realise he was being herded away from Greg.

"Ohh... big mistake there, John. You are not quite as bad arse as you think you are." Sherlock warned, low and dangerous.

John laughed with fake amusement as he sized up Sherlock. "Your hospital records would beg to differ, my dear!"

"Indeed. That is what you think? That I cannot put you on the floor and beat you to death if I choose to? I never hit you back because I didn't want to, you dull overbearing cold hearted idiot! Try me now." Sherlock had circled him and now had him across the room from Lestrade in the far corner away from Greg. Greg had seen him do this before, each movement ballet smooth and his eyes locked on his prey.

"Sherlock, don't. It's alright! Just let it go." Greg said wiping his bloody nose and standing.

Sherlock continued like a snake charmer opening the basket. "You want to learn the difference John? Try me here, no law, nobody to stop you. Let's see what you have when I am me? I am a sociopath,
when I choose to draw on him. You are all just things to me, but My Things, you see? Mrs. Hudson, Molly, Mycroft, Eurus, Siger, and you... but the man you just attacked, he is mine. That crosses my line so either you show me, or I will drag you to the nearest window and show you. You have wanted to for ages, just this once, have some fun..."Sherlock paused and gauged John's breathing and heartbeat. "Probably not as much fun as Grisham and I had ... last night..."

And lift off.

John sprung and Sherlock weaved. John feigned and threw a punch and Sherlock dodged both and delivered a token blow in between. Of course this made John angrier and he really would have been lethal if he could have just landed any of those punches.

The thing that finally made John lose his mind was when Sherlock twirled away and flicked John's face. John turned red, his face read pure hate and his fighting skills massively improved. He landed his first blow and Greg could hear the breath whoosh out of Sherlock and the painful death noise as he fought his diaphragm to get it to function again. Greg hoped Sherlock would not make that mistake again, John was a Doctor and he knew how to kill.

Greg held a handkerchief to his bloody nose, and tried to think of some way to stop this. Oh, sure he could hold his own against Sherlock in a playful setting, but he certainly didn't have the skills to take them both on at the same time.

If John was attacking Sherlock, then he would have jumped in no matter what, but this was different. This was two alphas, settling a long standing fight for domination and Greg decided to save his strength until they were both a bit more worn down and would rather step in just before someone died, rather than be the one who comes out scrambled.

Sherlock pretended to set up for a punch and surprised John with a round house kick straight to the side of John's head, then punched him. Now John's nose matched Greg's. But with John, the more he hurt the dirtier he fought and he was ready for the next fancy kungfu crap Sherlock tried. John countered by grabbing the leg and pulling whilst kicking Sherlock right in the balls and unceremoniously dropping him to the ground.

Sherlock was not finished though, he waited for the kick he knew John would deliver once he was down and Sherlock wrenched John's knee, with a sickening pop and rolled as John fell, the sounds were making Greg's teeth grind.

John screamed out in pain but rolled and got back up, finally ready to murder Sherlock. This was the moment Sherlock began talking again.

"Do it. Not the first time that I have seen it in you eyes. Mild mannered John in his little old man jumpers, working his way through the female population of London... tell me, are you really upset that I got Molly pregnant or does it just irk your masculinity that it wasn't you? I know, John. I know."

John grunted and replied. "She swore she would never tell you!"

"She didn't. You just did. May have been off my tits that day, but there was still tension between you. She was uncomfortable around you and trying to hide it with disgust at me taking drugs, but she understood exactly why. She asked me if I had spoken to you, about her. Took me a while to figure it out. Played on her good nature and pity did you? A way to get back at me? Ladies man, will hit anything that walks if it will hold still long enough."

"Shut up! You don't know me!" John said, bloody grin held on his face and still sure he would win.
"You are not as clever as you pretend, you know."

"That is true. You prove that every day. Walk-away-John, can't have a conversation without getting furious. You're too much of a coward to let me in!" Sherlock landed a left hook that made John's head pop back.

John recovered and grabbed Sherlock's hair and as he pulled his head down to meet his fist, he punctuated his words with blows. "They all fooled you! Mary. Moriarty. Your sister. And me!"

Sherlock was dazed and dropped to his knees, blood gushing from nose and mouth. John held his head by his hair and walked behind him. He held him by the top of the head and the chin, as if preparing to snap Sherlock's neck. "Still think your all that? I can make it the last thought you ever have?" John said as if noticing and commenting on the weather.

"I think not." Sherlock said and rose like a guided missile from the floor, the top of his head clipping John's jaw so hard it sounded like he cracked teeth. But it broke John's neck snapping hold and the fight was on again, though both were in pain and beginning to feel the exhaustion of the fight as adrenaline ebbed and flowed.

At this time, Mrs Holmes wandered through the door and immediately walked over to the two fighters and with seeming delight, began offering each man tips. "No, keep your elbows tucked close, Sherlock, you are open. Oh John, that was a terrible feigned left cross, he knows you won't use that and your eyes gave you away. There, Sherlock, you have the advantage of longer arms. He has to move in to reach you! John you have a lower centre of gravity, move in, plant your feet and keep your dominant arm towards him to block!"

Lestrade watched her for a moment. "You are encouraging them both? They could kill each other. Shouldn't you be yelling at them to stop?"

Mrs. Holmes looked away from the action and her eyes focused on him as intently as Eurus or Sherlock, "I taught all my boys how to fight. Why didn't you stop them if it bothers you? You started it."

"Do you see them? I don't want to die!"

She rolled her eyes, and said on a sigh, "Oh for God's sake, hold my purse." She slammed the purse into Greg's stomach and waded in. It took her exactly fourteen seconds to have John's hand in hers and Watson on his knees begging her to stop. All she did to Sherlock was pinch his neck like a Vulcan and he howled in pain. "You two... enough. Now give Mummy a hug and try not to bleed on my blouse."

Huffing in absolute exhaustion both men seemed to wilt at her words.

She walked away and took her purse back. "There, was that so hard?"

"When I get back to work, will you come teach that to my ... everyone at NSY? Please?" Greg asked in sincere awe.

"Perhaps. Ask me again after Christmas. We will get it on my Schedule." She dug in her purse, riffling about, then pulled out an envelope. "Don't believe a word of it, he is just in a snit. I will have him here by tomorrow and you can work it out. Day after at the latest. I am sorry, I raised one lunatic, one god botherer, one arsehole and one who couldn't pull his head out of his own arse with a crane. Do try to figure out which one you wish to marry, otherwise the two of them will rip you apart, trying to beat the other."
She addressed John next, "I know you are angry and I don't care. Take me to Rosie and my dear husband at once. Sherlock, you see that Siger and Mahmoud and family get settled in up at the main house and take Daniel down to the barracks...before he sets something on fire, again... Well, what is it? What are you waiting for?"

"I can't. Mummy, I have a surprise... at the cottage. Siger finds his way all over a desert, I think he can manage to ride up a hill on a cart--"

"Mummy? You came?" Eurus ran across the room followed by Jim who was looking at the three bloody nosed men with utter glee.

Eurus fell into her mother's open arms and they exchanged hugs and kisses.

"Did I miss all the fun? You guys are sssooooo messy! Who won?" Jim asked softly as he followed his wife to meet his Mother-in-law.

Greg piped in, "Mummy did. Be very careful.. seriously."

"I believe you," he whispered before turning on his charming Jim routine and kissing her hand. He spoke something in French and she replied in the same.

"Mummy? This is Jim, my husband, who saved me." Eurus said with obvious pride.

Mrs Holmes looked at Jim and sized him up carefully. "Well, aren't you something. You and I are going to have such a lovely time."

Greg tried to read if she actually meant it as she said it or if it was one of those Holmesesque multiple conversations. He was about to ask when the tallest of the Holmes, wearing a full Jesuit cassock and looking like a reaper with his red curls shorn except for the top, strolled in with the rest of the party. Pudgy little Mahmoud, his sister-in-law in her burqa and his young nephew in his school uniform followed.

Everyone spent some time greeting each other and Lestrade was hugged and delighted to see everyone, but he felt a slight distance.

He had not read the note, but Mycroft was not coming. These were supposed to be his family now, and instead it just felt like another "almost "in his life. He looked out the window toward the west and if there had been another helicopter leaving tonight he might have just got on it. Love was all around him, but he was just the eye of the storm.

Everyone decided to come see Sherlock's surprise before settling in for the night. The three nosebleed-eteers were barely speaking to each other but they put on a good show and nobody asked what started the fight or even why. Mummy did not ask if they were okay and everyone pretended not to notice a thing.

Nobody noticed, Except, Mahmoud's nephew, Abdullah. He noticed and grinned a big white smile with sparkling eyes and obvious excitement to be out of school and to see his Uncle, back from the war. He really had no idea what to expect about Christmas, his mother only approved because her only other family was here. Mahmoud followed where his best friend led him.

Greg went along and smiled and chatted politely as they rode the short distance to the west cottage and he was delighted he did.

Mummy went offline with a system failure even longer than Sherlock had.
( A little reasoning for this scene. First, I made an offer to the first commenter that she could pick a
word or subject or phrase and it would be included in the Story! So she picked, "Greg has a
nosebleed" and so, this was how Greg got a nosebleed!

~~~Thank you to Hikaru_Suzumiya for this nose bleeding trio! ~~~

So, Greg has been punched by John and it just got away from me? Well, a bit, but it is also sort of
my 'heal the booboo' for the morgue scene. John was abusive to Sherlock, because Sherlock would
not take up for himself. However, we know he Will take up for a friend (Mrs. Hudson) and I
reminded you of that in the kitchen. John hit Greg. Sherlock is not taking up for just himself this
time... He is actually angry, having had enough of John's crap. This time he answers. Now, we have
seen Sherlock fight, we know he can. I just wanted to show that Sherlock's fighting style and John's (they are both quite lethal men) does have a balanced force, and it would be a toss up who won in
hand to hand combat. I did give you Mummy breaking up the fight to lighten the mood.

Some of you may be angry about this fight scene. But please remember, I promised a happy ending
and Conflict Moves the story. Hugs to all my wonderful commenting dear ones. I love to make you
laugh
Blue Christmas

Chapter Summary

The telling of Mummy

Chapter 11.

Blue Christmas

https://youtu.be/Uwfz5mMLSDM

I'll have a Blue Christmas without you
I'll be so blue just thinking about you
Decorations of red on a green Christmas tree
Won't be the same dear, if you're not here with me...

As they entered the cottage, Mummy first noticed Mrs. Hudson. "Dear lord, have you been fighting, as well?"

Mrs. Hudson, had evidently been busy and giggled with a red-eyed glassy smile. She replied slowly, "I was driving a golf cart when a mad man with a gun, leaped out in front of me, unexpectedly. I swerved to miss him, but you know, the suspension on those things. Well, we lost control, rolled down an embankment and ended up flipped over. But, nobody was killed thanks to my quick reflexes. That is the important part."

Sherlock rolled his eyes and commented as he passed by this exchange. "She was potted and the reason we are short a cart."

"Oh, you. Be nice!" Mummy scolded.

"The truth is out there, Mummy. On YouTube, in particular." Sherlock hurried on into the sitting room, tossing his coat in the vicinity of a chair, which at once slithered to the floor, on the way as he quickly whispered and shushed and disappeared out of sight.

Greg took it upon himself to take the guest coats and hang the others neatly on the hooks. Mummy smiled at her husband and gave an exhausted sigh, just for him. Mr. Holmes beamed at her as he
stood and opened his arms.

"You have been worrying, I see." She said snuggling to his chest and taking a deep calming breath as if his presence restored her.

"Not a bit. Knew you'd be alright. Worry about those who cross you, but never about my girl," he reassured her, placing a kiss gently on her head and squinching his eyes to hold back his tears of relief.

"I am getting too old for this sort of thing. I am absolutely exhausted this time, my heart." Mrs. Holmes said sadly.

Her husband grinned and chuckled petting her hair. "You have been saying that for thirty years now. So long as you come home to me, I know that old lady routine is a load of coddle-swap, and you always do just fine."

She sighed and whispered, "What the hell has been going on here?"

Siger took Mrs. Hudson's hand and introduced her to Mahmoud and Abdullah, then the sister-in-law removed her burqa and handed them nonchalantly to Greg. Greg's mouth hung open.

He had always imagined her with a huge hook nose and probably a unibrow. He had expected an older, more lumpy woman made of gravel and rust. Instead a stunning woman in her early forties, with huge liquid eyes and a sweet smile stood before him concentrating hard on speaking. She wore jeans and a long sleeved black jumper, her head covered in a fetching hijab so blue it nearly glowed.

"I am delighted to see you again, Detective Inspector Lestrade. I have always hoped to thank you for your kindness to me," she said carefully.

Greg could not hide his shock and looked down at the burqa in his arms. "I thought you had to wear this, always?"

She smiled bashfully, and said softly, "I do still in public, but I am getting used to more freedom." Her eyes darted to his face, "Here is family. I am allowed. It is much change, yes?"

"I think it is brilliant. How do you find your life in England? Good, I hope."

"It is very expensive. I cry when I buy things sometimes, knowing how many could eat for weeks on the price of one simple meal. But ess very good. I estudy the nursing and will soon have work. Mr. Mycroft has been our angel and seen to Abdullah's estudies in good school. All proper. Visits me with chaperone... erm... Ant The ah. Helps me with English and money just until I can work. Ess very nice." She struggled through some words but Greg was just fascinated that he could see her face and have a conversation with her.

"Nursing? That's lovely, though I am surprised you are not going to be a chef. I will never forget all the wonderful food you prepared. It meant a lot. Still the best meal I ever had. Maybe someday, I will have the good luck to enjoy it again," Greg said, remembering how he could not even thank her at the time.

She grinned happily and shook her head at him. "Mr. Mycroft says you are ... flattering man. He say you would ask for my cooking. You make me smile, and I agree, with my son's approval, of course."

Lestrade looked at Abdullah, who was talking to Mrs. Hudson, but keeping an ear on his mother's conversation as well. "He has to have grown three inches since I last saw him. Mycroft says his grades are fast improving as his English gets better."
"Yes, he had no esschool before so is all very difficult for him to understand in the beginning, but he is becoming typical English boy, no guns and only learning so he can help his mother. Ess good boy, now," She bragged.

"So, are you okay with this whole Christmas thing? It doesn't make you uncomfortable does it?" Greg inquired.

"No, I am very interested. In U.K. Many enjoy it, though not all approve... is their way. I am looking very forward. Will be much fun, no?" She said, not at all put off by his questions.

Siger picked that moment to stand at his full height and take charge of the chatter. "Alright, we have all traveled a long way or brawled ourselves to exhaustion. We have several days for catching up, so could we please move on to this silly surprise thing? I obviously have hours of prayer ahead, considering the disastrous condition of your souls from all appearances and I do hope to have opportunity to bathe before dawn?"

Jim smirked and weaselled his way near Greg, "Surprise? Do tell."

Mr. Holmes kindly asked everyone to come into the sitting room and they gathered before the fire. Mummy was placed front and centre, she looked around expectantly as Sherlock stepped from the hallway, Molly behind him but hidden.

"My surprise is something that I wish you to see." He slowly guided Molly out from behind him. His head tilted, waiting for her to deduce.

Mrs. Holmes took in her son's friend but remained confused. She looked up at Mr. Holmes for a clue but he just smiled at her and raised his eyebrows.

She turned to Sherlock and shrugged. "Well? Someone is going to have to explain, because, I do not understand at all. Congratulations, by the way, my dear, but what has this to do with me?"

"Mummy, you are to be congratulated as well," Sherlock said cautious and reserved.

"For what? Sherlock, I am tired. What is it you are trying to say?"

Molly took a tiny step forward and tried, "Because... my little boy will call you Grandmother... or Granny.. something like that."

Mrs Holmes turned to her, a flash of anger but then rolled her eyes, "That is very kind, I am sure, but I barely know you and..."

Sherlock jumped in to head her off, "Mother, she is not offering you some honorary hoopla, this is a Holmes. My child, your actual, genetic offspring."

She was too shocked to temper her response, "How is that possible?"

Sherlock rolled his eyes, exasperated and said, "For God's sake Mummy! In the traditional way such things occur? I offer a recollection of Mycroft's surprise conception. You planned for Siger, but then another unplanned bundle of joy escaped your womb, which reportedly ended your meteoric career as a spy. Untrue obviously, but a fun story. If I recall correctly, repeated unplanned pregnancy fated the world with what you have euphemistically dubbed the four horsemen. Two of which are snickering that I have to give you such a detailed description of the birds and bees. My bee pollinated her flower and soon there will be a joyful--"

John Watson stepped in at this point with some doctorly medical jargon, "He was pissed off at me
and had a shag with Molly, now she is up the duff and Sherlock junior will be arriving sometime around Easter I should guesstimate. Congratulations, your favourite has spawned."

"Oh....... " was all Mrs. Holmes said as her face went blank and her eyes stared at nothing.

"Well, Joy to the world! Sherlock, you dog. My ex? Really? Good show... guess I know what you were having a dust up about now?" Jim said "Darling, your family here, sharing their Joy and... pain? Second Best Christmas ever. "

Eurus turned and jumped up and down. "I am going to be an Aunt! Oh, and I get to be the Crazy Aunt too. This is going to be sooo much fun!"

Siger burst out laughing and Sherlock dropped his eyes to Molly apologetic and embarrassed.

"Ohhh, now I see," Molly confided, bumping his shoulder with her own.

Sherlock sighed and shook his head pressing his lips and nibbling the bottom one before speaking, "Tryed to warn you. Genetically speaking, my side has been inbreeding since the fourteenth century."

"Charming. Is she going to speak any time soon. The bun is on my bladder, need the loo?" Molly asked.

Those assembled, who planned to sleep elsewhere, eventually grew impatient with waiting for the return of Mrs. Holmes facilities and an exodus left the little cottage feeling close and stuffy. Greg was itching to get off by himself to read Mycroft's letter.

Molly and Mrs. Hudson were giggling at the similarities of Sherlock and his mother and John had gone upstairs to check on Rosie and make sure she was still down.

"Hey, Molls. I want you to take my room. Just kick my stuff out the door?" Greg offered.

"Oh no, sofa is fine for me. Sleep on mine all the time."

"Yeah, well this one is lumpy and full of dust, besides, I have a mind to go catch up down at the VOTD with a few buddies from our adventures. Probably won't even be back... just bunk down there with the other blokes without family. You will be much more comfy and no offence but if these two bicker all night, I don't want to hear it." Greg said in his gentle but exasperated voice.

It was settled and finally he could escape. He put on his coat and began the trek across the island.
Silent Night

Love Factually chapter 12

https://youtu.be/9T4WB2zfmps

Silent night, holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With dawn of redeeming grace
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth

The night was clear, the wind had blown off the damp. Greg felt relieved to be out in the cool of the evening. A cart with four people and the driver stopped and offered him a ride which he politely turned down. It sped off and he continued onward.

He paused at the main house and the windows were misted with the steam from cups of tea and people inside, bathing, laughing, telling stories and baking. He could just discern the scent of burnt sugar on the ocean wind. Eurus passed before the big window and the tall black rake of the priest strolled by her side.

Greg watched the brotherly motion of Siger brushing her hair away from her face and palming her cheek in fuzzy affection as she obviously spoke of some list she wished to convey, holding up fingers in excitement.

He looked down the hill at the VOTD and it seemed calm, though soft Christmas music played and he could see the passengers from the electric cart alighting with their baggage and gifts in tow.

He did not want to be there either. The beaches were dark, save the winking of the several cottages dotting the islands coastline. He knew for a fact, the tiny ones did not even sport the kindness of electricity. They were lit with oil lamps and probably only pressed into service once a year. Still, people filled them and he thought it might be a quaintly sweet way to spend a cosy family holiday.

Up the hill, past the backside of the main house, at the highest point of the Island stood a forlorn little chapel. He stood for a moment, undecided and then, overwhelmingly, that was where he wished to be.

The climb was rather steep and he arrived slightly out of breath. Even at night the view was spectacular. The full moon was on the rise in the east thirty degrees above the horizon, lighting the water a deep churning silk. When he looked west, lights from the mainland winked on the horizon
line and the other islands dotted with Christmas seemed otherworldly floating on the charcoal sea with the wandering stars of boats all aglitter. A few lighthouses could be seen and this lonely craggy bump of elevation felt as sacred as any cathedral in London.

He stepped inside. The place was empty but others had been here. Long-burning beeswax candles provided light and warmth and he honestly felt a presence with him. On one side, there were prayer candles and six or so burned low and sputtering. He moved in front of them and lit one for his first DI, and one each for his Mum and Da. On a whim he lit one for himself, with the simple call of a whispered, "Please. Help me?"

He sat down in the same place as he had the day he had found John Watson in here praying for the death of a warrior and the protection of those he loved, knowing at the time he was embarking on a fools journey. At the time, Greg and Sherlock had been faking a relationship and Greg had almost told John the truth, until John had bragged that he had every intention of stealing Sherlock away if they lived. The audacity of that had silenced Greg's tongue and when they had, against all odds and reason, survived, sure enough, John had used every tool he could muster to win Sherlock's heart.

John still had no idea that, it had always been his. Greg had only been safekeeping it until it was claimed by its true master. Greg smiled at their little game of seduction. He and Sherlock had played so well, and won all the prizes.

How had it all gone so wrong?

Greg was supposed to be married here in a few days. Now, instead he carried in his pocket the doom of that lovely fairytale. Somehow, it was right that his heart break here, once and for all. Alone, in this place, he would sit until he accepted that his lot in life had always been to tread the earth alone. Here, he could ponder how much longer he wished to continue.

He reached in his pocket and took out the letter and ripped the paper flap with his finger. The note was folded in thirds and dashed off, one page, in Mycroft's familiar script.

Dearest Gregory,

As I am sure you can deduce from my absence, a void between us simply must be. Your recent actions have forced my hand and you do not meet the requirements for the vetting processing necessary for our continued association. I am devastated, of course, but you knew the level of accountability that surrounds my position.

On a selfish note, I rather wanted to tell them all to go to hell, but, my absence from the Queen's service would be tragic for untold lives and my one minor life, simply must be sacrificed toward the greater good.

It is my deepest sorrow that you allowed my brother to lead you into such scandalous circumstance. I shall never forgive him.

Your things shall be removed from my residence post haste and I will do you the kindness of making arrangements for comfortable quarters within your price range. Please do not attempt some dramatic insistence that we meet in person. I think you know just how illusive my position allows me to be. Please, let us simply have a dignified cessation and no ugly recriminations.

I love you too much to bear such tedious displays.
I wish you long life and my fondest regrets,

M

Greg read it a dozen times but he did not cry or even rage. He just felt as empty as the little chapel and nothing out there felt very important any longer.

He bowed his head and prayed for a warrior's death. He had maintained his cheer through so much and everything he had ever done was all for naught. He prayed that when his end arrived that he be allowed the single moment that he knew for a fact that it was worth it.

His mind was lost to all and he had not heard the soft rustling of the cassock, nor the slight hiss of the pew behind him being occupied. Only when the soft murmur of Latin began did he startle and look behind him.

He did not want to disturb Father Holmes so he rose quietly and meant to leave the man to his prayers.

"Sit?" Came the deep rumble, more request than order.

Lestrade paused and looked down at Siger. The closed eyes opened and he scooted over and patted his hand on the seat. "I see you, Gregory Lestrade and I well know the look."

Greg did not move.

"I do not deal in hearts, but I can easily see a soul and sometimes I manage to save a few of them. Yours glows with self destruction and that is, from long experience, one of my fortes. Please, sit. Just for a few moments, if you please."

Greg swallowed and did as he was asked, fiddled with his letter, attempting to stuff it back in the ruined envelope.

Siger held out his long hand. "May I?"

Greg hesitated and mumbled, "Bit private."

Siger lowered his hand and began to speak.

"Really? Let's think it through, shall we? I wonder what you will choose? Will you wait until everyone sleeps and hang yourself from a rafter, no, you don't have a selfish bone in your body, you'd never ruin everyone's Christmas. Drinking yourself to death takes a really long time and it hurts, trust me on that one. Oh, I know, you are a policeman. Policemen get shot, stabbed...murdered in the line of duty.

"They will remember you if you do it that way and won't even fault you for it, even if they see the sacrificial nature of your decision making process. Nice plaque with your name on it, photo up on the wall. Funeral will be well attended, that is guaranteed. Yes, that would be your best option and God knows my brother will afford you plenty of avenues for a mistake.

"Of course, Sherlock will blame himself and never be the same. You saw what he was like after John's odd little wife? Multiply that by several factors, its fine, I have expected him to top himself for years, when he did, and I believed it for a day or so, I was actually quite serene, relieved almost. It
meant I had the perfect excuse to... follow him.

"Oh, that surprised you? Our first conversation, I told you, my sins would surprise you. I am a priest and frankly a legend in several countries, but even I am a human under it all.

"I am one of the few who absolve and forgive that sin, lied to the Holy Father himself on three occasions, that it was my belief that an act of God had occurred rather than a suicide. I have no hope of redemption, but I believe with everything I am that God does not forsake us even in that moment of anguish. He blesses us with the will to find our rest."

"No offence, but you sound like you are an advocate. Not sure that is the right approach in your line of work."

"How can it be a sin when our own saviour did, in fact, allow his own sacrifice to be, when he could have saved himself? Is not that the very thing you contemplate, because the burdens he has lain before you seem too great to survive?"

Greg felt a keen ache in his stomach. He studied this man beside him both horrified and truly mesmerised by his words. "How?"

Siger shrugged in a very French way.

Greg swallowed and tried to gather enough saliva in his dry mouth to speak.

"They said you were some kind of Djinn. Mahmoud swears he knows it for a fact. I almost believe him."

Siger smiled and held his hand out for the letter. "You come here and pray, yet when you are sent help, you think some elusive fire monster has answered. The four horsemen are on the side of the angels, no matter the fear their presence inspires in the cowardly goldfish of the world. You must give me a chance if I am to help you."

Greg slowly handed him the letter, eyes wide and a skepticism wonder on his face.

"There is no way in the world that you could know..." Greg trailed off and thought about it. "Jim has this bloody place bugged, doesn't he?"
It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

Chapter 13

It Came Upon a Midnight clear

https://youtu.be/YiSqct-Ei80

And still their heavenly music floats
O'er all the weary world;
Above its sad and lowly plains,
They bend on hovering wing,
And ever o'er its babel sounds
The blessèd angels sing.
Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song which they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing.
And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow,
Look now! for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road,
And hear the angels sing!
For lo!, the days are hastening on,
By prophet bards foretold...

Siger read the letter and smirked with disbelief, "Good lord, just when I suspect he cannot wiggle his head into his own bowel any deeper. Are you sure you can do this? Be with him for the rest of your life? I have known hell on earth in every possible form and no promises of earth or heaven could temp me to yoke myself to that."

"Acquired taste? He is the best man I have ever known," Greg was helpless in his inability to find fault but he did add, "He is also a poncy git but I won't stop loving him, not ever. Not even now."
"So you are going to do as he demands even if it makes you both miserable?"

"He explained. I didn't pass the vetting, and that is my fault," Greg said resolved to his own stupidity.

Siger chuckled, "Ohhhhhhh... he has you buffalooed. Think, Lestrade, who on this earth says no to Mycroft? I can name them in order. The Queen, Prince Phillip, Camilla, the PM if Mycroft is feeling charitable, Mummy, Me, Sherlock, John Bloody Watson... who names a child that? Eurus, Jim and Rosamund Watson. That is it. That is the list.

"Don't you see? He is using the vetting to cover his own butt-hurt feelings. He is the final word on all vetting. He can therefore be convinced to change his mind." Siger finished his sentence with a flick of his wrist and a flourish of his fingers.

"How! He says plain enough he has thrown me out and won't even see me."

"Here of course."

"He isn't coming. Did you need to read this again? You missed some bits."

"Don't be silly. He has to come. He promised his sister. She dragged that grand piano all the way out here for the four of us to play together. Tomorrow night, I am to give a brief midnight Mass, for anyone, Catholic or not, but before that, the four of us will play, it is our gift, to Mummy.

"You play piano?"

"Cello, Eurus and Sherlock on violin and Mycroft on piano? Does he not play for you? He has that overpriced monstrosity taking up half a room last time I was there?"

"No. I thought it was just to look at. He plays piano? One more thing I didn't know. Had to hear about from someone else. Look, I give up. I am never going to understand what makes him tick and maybe leaving things as he wants is for the best."

"Oh. Okay. I have no patience for cowards. You said you loved him. You did the most stupid possible thing you could have ever done going all the way to Samarra and I therefore believed you. If a piano makes you give up.. pfft."

"No. I didn't mean that. Just hurts. He never played for me, in all this time. Sherlock seduces John with his violin--"

"Stop. The apparatus of their sin is not my area. I do not want to know."

"Sorry. Forgot you were a priest for a second..."

"Awwww. Thank you. Now, back to the matter at hand. If he does not show, it will be the wrath of all of us, combined. Even Father would be cross. The four children, playing for Mummy, when they were told Eurus was dead for all those years? He is lucky Mummy has not placed an open bounty on him already."

"But, you knew? All those years, you knew she was alive?"

"No. Not all. I believed like all of them. Then, She began escaping. Oh and Jim, was.. involved. I would not be here today if she had not... I had too many burdens to carry alone, you see. She... I thought she had come to kill me. It is a messy long story, I would have been far more afraid of her if I had known she was there to save me instead." Siger took a very deep breath and let it blow out his mouth.
"She didn't kill him. That little boy," Greg stated.

"What makes you think that? I have asked her a thousand times."

Greg looked him straight in the eye and said, "I just know. I am going to prove it someday. Coppers instinct."

Siger shook his head, "She has killed others, you know?"

"Yep. She and her nutter husband. But, not the boy. She didn't do that."

"How did she convince you of that?"

"She didn't. I saw. I see way too much in my job. She did confirm that I am right. But she only did in a round about way. She already knew that I knew." He shrugged.

"Can you prove it? After all this time?"

"Think so. Doesn't matter any more, just to us, guy who killed him is dead, or at least very missing. But, I have been working on it. Just... for everyone's peace. And that kid's Mum. I have a file. I intended to see it through at some point!"

"Will you finish it? Even if you decide to... leave on your own ticket? Will you? Prove she was innocent? It would, help my Father. And Mummy."

"Yeah. Sure. Be glad to do it."

"It will probably kill Mycroft if you do."

"Not if you can... convince him to keep me... he wouldn't be as messed up if I was there... he listens to me. Sometimes."

Siger blinked several times and held his breath. "It seems I was sent here to ease your burden and you have, deeply and surely relieved mine as well. If you want him so much, I will serve you my idiot brother on a platter. Either of them actually. Take your pick, from the sound of it, they are both currently available for adoption. I recommend Sherlock, at least he is trainable. The other one quite deserves to be put down."

"Not Mycroft. It was your Uncle Rudy who put her away like that. By the time your brother took over, he was too young and she was too old to fix it. Easy to sit back and say he should have done this or that, but for years, he was all she had, and he did try, within his own abilities. Once he bought her an actual Stradivarius for Christmas. Every year, no matter what she had done. He showed up."

"He just wasn't the one she wanted." Greg leaned forward crossed his arms and balanced his head on the forward pew. "I care deeply for them both. I do. But, I would always pick Mycroft. You all may think doing the right thing all the time is boring or weak or something to make fun of, but living in the rules, doing what is expected, what you are told. It is the hardest, bravest thing of all. You guys don't see him. But, big brother outshines all three of you. To me."

"I do have some understanding. We will never consider partaking in carnal love, but Mahmoud and I are like that. More than brothers, across time. I spent so many dark years, no moon to guide me. Everyone sees a pudgy Arab, but he is so much more, to me. Bravest soul I have ever had the honour to know. These last few months have been the happiest of my existence. Every day, the same and in his presence, to speak to a living ghost... " He trailed off shaking his head, then grinned. "Who, but I, could be a man of God, yet find spiritual peace amidst war." Siger tilted his head and
put his hand on Greg's shoulder. "If this works, maybe, you will reconsider, stick around to see the finale?"

Greg narrowed his eyes. "Why'd you come up here tonight? Said you were tired."

It took him a minute while he considered his answer. "I could feed you any number of false but reasonable excuses. But, I think for you, I will take a chance that you will not think I am crazy."

"You're a Holmes. Bit late for that. You're all barking."

Siger stood, stepped up on the pew and sat on the back, leaned over, knees on elbows. "I was called here. I had just run my bath. I don't hear distinctive voices. It isn't a brain tumour. I have checked, more than once. In here," he said pointing to his head, "I can hear something that originates here," he pointed to his chest. "I have never been able to convince a single person of that truth, and I don't care. It has never led me wrong. It does not fix everything and it is not some hoaxers trick, but sometimes something happens."

"Thanks. For telling me the truth, then."

"Why. That's what you want to ask. It is simple, you call it your coppers instinct, but I think it is the same thing. I think you can understand."

"Yeah. Alright."

Siger clipped his legs over the pew in the most disrespectful and silly thing Greg had ever seen a priest do. He stepped on the back of every pew like a railroad trestle and leaped down.

He turned to Greg as he reached the door and grinned broadly, eyes dancing with a mirth he rarely showed to others, "You see, Greg Lestrade, I may not follow the laws and may flaunt my disdain for the tedious little traditional fashions of conduct, but I do understand exactly what you said about my brother. You see, when my master calls, I too obey, every time. Without question. And you are right, it is both hard and brave." He pointed skyward and his eyes followed for a moment, "You don't think anything of this world could have put me in this dog-collared man-dress and offered me no sex as a bonus, do you?"

Greg paused for a moment then burst out with a boisterous bellowed laugh. Siger winked at him and slipped through the door.
Greg stood outside the chapel after lighting six more candles, the first for a nutter priest who he now concluded was more frightening than he ever suspected and yet, a supernatural force of good that he did not have any way of explaining. He had seen this man draw an army with his mere presence in the wilderness and the news said he had helped to defeat the Daesh. Words like Holy, Smite, and Vengeance came to mind when one thought of him. Greg was curious, if he saw the man’s back without clothing, if he would find phantasmagoric wings, or the scars from when he had fallen.

He stood outside the little chapel for a very long time, watching the dark water and the climbing moon. He was still a very distant way from cheer or any semblance of happiness, but something had clicked and he had no compelling urge to walk into the freezing dark sea.

Greg headed back down the hill from the chapel and turned to his right at the house, knowing exactly where he was headed. He still had a pocket full of chips and a little pack of Pineapple Jack which promised to provide weightless euphoria, lifting sprits whilst keeping your chin up amidst stress and depression. That sounded like the exact thing Greg needed right now.

The commons room looked boring and empty after the extravaganza of last night. It was nearly
deserted except for men beginning to set up folding chairs and draping a high stage in greenery.

He was concerned the Hooka lounge would have disappeared as well, but found it open and doing a quiet business compared to the night before. People sat at the various tables, and chatted quietly, no boisterous drunken singing or skanty dressed revellers tonight. Greg spent some time at the counter and bought a few things that sounded interesting. Tonight he was offered a much smaller hooka, meant for a single user. He took his treasure over to the smallest table and spent some time fiddling with the gizmo before he finally lit it and sipped the inviting smoke.

Without the booze, the experience was completely different. He felt a high pitched key in both his ears as if he was hearing a dog whistle. His pain from last night and today seemed to fade and suddenly everything felt fine. He sighed with the relief and sipped some more, though it did have a sweeter scent, he did not really taste pineapple.

His lips tingled and his tongue felt dry. He sipped the fizzy drink he had ordered and it was the most refreshing delightful sensation he could imagine. He continued to catalog the increased high as he chastised himself for being a cop when he could have been all happy and peaceful instead. He had just convinced himself that he should quit copping and keep smoking when the wrath of God walked through the door in the form of a broken nosed, eyes swollen, chapped cheek, split lipped, and livid, Sherlock Holmes.

Greg took one look at his floofy curls and angry continence and giggles erupted without restraint. He waved at Sherlock and Sherlock did a double take, then his eyes narrowed but once his business was concluded, he made his way straight to Greg’s table and plopped his purchased items on the table, shed his coat and suit jacket, unbuttoned his shirt one more notch and flopped down with a heavy sigh of frustration.

"Bad day at the office?" Greg asked smirking smugly and holding back his laugh.

Sherlock did not respond, he just grabbed Lestrade's hooka and inhaled. Holding his breath he quickly assembled his own, loaded it and lit it. Ten minutes later his shoulders dropped and he relaxed and leaned back into the soft chair.

"I have no place to sleep, " Sherlock admitted as if amazed himself. "The one time I really want to actually lie down in the dark and sleep and John informs me I am not welcome. So I think fine, knock on your door, Molly answers, I enter and she informs me that I am not welcome there either? Can you believe that? She is having my child and kicks me out into the cold. I hate people. I tried the sofa, sneezed 11 times in four minutes, went to my sisters, no room at the Inn, even went to the menagerie, but something loud seems to be giving birth, there are not even beds available in the barracks. They better not say one word come tomorrow. I fly out of here the moment the bloody crackers are pulled. I hate Christmas."

Greg pulled his letter from Mycroft out and scooted it toward Sherlock. "There is my Christmas. Opened it early. Second time in my life, I got dumped on the Eve of Christmas Eve. Starting to see a pattern. Take a look."

Sherlock read it and frowned. "Pompous liar. I am sorry."

"I was pretty down but funny enough, feel fine now. This Stuff broke my givadamned. I think I may just set up house here. Got fizzy drinks and no worries here. We should just stay... never go back." Greg reloaded the little burner and Sherlock added a bit of one of his purchases labeled Hell's OG.

"Ta." Greg said and inhaled deeply.
They were comfy and baked when the young lady told them that the lounge would be closing in twenty minutes. "We don't have anyplace to go."

"I'm sorry. It's the rules." She smiled at them sympathetically but made obvious signs of cleaning up to close.

Sherlock got out his phone. Dialling he smiled at Greg. "Hey Jim, Greg and I got kicked out of the house. We are in the hooka lounge but they are closing. If your bored, want to come out and play?" Sherlock listened for a moment and smiled at Lestrade. "Be here in five minutes."

Jim arrived and let his girl leave assuring her he would lock up. He wandered over to the table as if he had no particular destination and stood looking at the table, hands in his pockets as if he were about to toss someone off a roof.

"Hi, honey. How was your day?" Sherlock finally prompted.

"I am so tired. I like your Mother. Can my Grandmother come stay with you? I will even trade for crash-Hudders. I have no idea how I am going to survive tomorrow and the day after that. Gimme a hit boys and do tell me all the news." Jim said in his random, distracted way.

He slid in next to Greg and rubbed his eyes. "Do you know that your landlady and My Gram have caused more trouble than all the criminals of Sherrinford combined? Did you know Daniel set fire to the presents he himself was bringing? If your mother had not caught him, they all would have blown sky high. Mycroft won't fly on my Helicopters... some blarney about stolen blah blah blah. He has to bring his special helicopter, and thinks I should give him assurances that it will be safe whilst he is here, which he only plans to stay until the end of Mass. He is such a whinging plonker."

Greg handed over his note. Hell everyone may as well read it, so he didn't have to explain.

"Goooooof him? In my opinion, you dodged a bullet. How about you, Sherlock? That was a turn up, wasn't it? From Watson"s limp, I'd say he was not best pleased by the blessed Easter Bunny?"

Sherlock coughed smoke out his nose. "Wasn't over that. Well, a bit. He hit Lestrade. It was a long time coming. This is exactly why I never Do Christmas. I don't even have a bed now."

"I own his bed. Want me to kick him out?" Jim offered reasonably.

Sherlock laughed at that image. "No. Rosie."

"Oh yeah. But, what if I kidnap him, just for fun! He likes that! Mycroft does it, Irene pulled it off, Gus did it, oh and that nutty Chinese lady too. Even my wife! It is my turn again!" Jim snorted as he said the last bit and everyone roared laughing. He started typing on his phone and grinned.

Greg added, "This one got kidnapped by his landlady."

"You have seen her drive a golf cart... imagine an Aston Martin... in traffic. I could've never survived if I hadn't been high as The Shard. She is terrifying! " Sherlock assured them.

"Just so you know, I sold your brother's special helicopter. Out of spite. "He turned his phone around and grinned whilst shrugging like a naughty little boy.

Greg squinted. "My god, I am in the wrong business. You haven't even stolen it yet."

There was a tap, tap, tap at the glass door. Sebastian, beefy troll-faced charming grin lighting his face, waited to be admitted.
Jim stood and let him in, twisting the lock again once his second in command entered.

"Been looking for you, boss," Seb said apologetically.

Jim sighed as he took his seat again, "What did he set on fire this time?"

"Nothing. I took the propane tanks away in time. Wanted to make Djinn on the beach, for Christmas. Got him in the brig. He wasn't hurting anybody, but he's bored and you know what that leads to. Should I get the priest... only one who seems to be able to channel his... talents."

"No, I will speak with him in the morning. Leave it and join us, Sebby."

The night grew drowsy and the boisterous conversation ebbed.

Greg could no longer feel his legs. He let his hooka die, stretched out in the comfy chair and drifted off to the sound of Sherlock and Jim Talking about theoretical physics, butterfly effect and how one tiny event could change the outcome of everything. The last thing he heard was something about where everyone would be if Sherlock had been sent on the suicide mission for killing Gus Magnussen. Greg smiled at the idea that one thing could split worlds. It meant in some of the worlds, Mycroft still loved him and wanted him. That idea made him hope he could perhaps guess all the correct splits to retrieve the path he wanted.

When his eyes slit open, Sherlock's head was on his lap and Jim and Seb Moran were gone. He could smell that the mess was serving breakfast and he was absolutely starving. He wanted to go back to sleep, but the crick in his neck and his aching face from the fight yesterday was not going away and his bladder told him he drank way too many fizzy drinks to have a Consulting Detective asleep on it.

"Hey. Sunshine. Need the loo. Get up."

Sherlock groaned. His face was huge.

"Oh my god. Sherlock. We need ice. Lots of ice."

They had raided the bar for ice and baggies and just settled in for breakfast when a whoop-whoop sound caught Sherlock's attention. He lifted his head and cocked his ear. He stood suddenly, grabbing his jacket and coat.

"What's the matter?" Greg asked.

"Everyone is here, except Mycroft. Small helicopter, so that has to be him!" Sherlock was on his way out the door, his coat slinging up like a cape and down on his shoulders with flair and dashing dramatics, except for his face looking like he needed an opera mask.

Greg stuffed a bite of food in his mouth and chewed as he grabbed his coat and shoes and ran to follow.
Frosty the Snowman

Chapter Summary

Small ratings change here.

Chapter 15
Frosty the Snowman

https://youtu.be/k6zW225k_O0

Frosty the snowman was alive as he could be
And the children say he could laugh and play
Just the same as you and me
Frosty the snowman knew the snow was hot that day
So he said, "Let's run and have some fun now, before I melt away"
Down to the village with a broom stick in his hand
Runnin' here and there all around the square
Sayin', "Catch me if you can"

The airport was completely empty of people, just the traffic control guy up in the tower and someone in the flight office, monitoring the phones and weather. They had nicked a cart, so arrived just as the helo made it's final turn to land on the pad. They watched it cut engines and Mycroft and Anthea diddled about in no hurry for once. He brought a single attending minion who dutifully loaded a significant number of packages onto a luggage trolley along with their minuscule travel bags.

Mycroft looked dower and reserved, but not particularly heartbroken or even sad. His eyes scanned his surroundings but the glare on the glass kept him from spotting Greg and Sherlock standing inside. He straightened his tie carefully and smoothed his hair as the rotors slowed and they got out of the hurricane draft.

They wandered toward the building, Mycroft used his umbrella to point toward the cart and instructed his underling where to offload the many boxes.

The only indicator Mycroft allowed when he saw Greg waiting, was a slight intake of breath and a slow blink.

Greg raised a hand, then let it drop. His eyes locked on Mycroft's and he simply thought all he
wanted to say, just in case Mycroft felt like reading his mind one last time.

*I won't fight you, if this is what you want. I hope? You have to know you mean everything and this is going to kill me. Please.*

Sherlock stepped forward and Mycroft's face darkened. He exuded fury at his brother. "You seem far more prepared for Halloween, than Christmas. For once, I must say, I don't blame him, a bit."

Sherlock ignored him.

He circled round his brother comically and fell into step with Anthea.

"Hello, there. How was your flight?"

Anthea raised her brows and chastised, "You are in trouble! And lost most of your pretty. You should get Ice on that!"

"Transport. Am I really in trouble? What for?"

She held out her phone and the light reflected, predominantly green upon Sherlock's face. She smiled and Sherlock rolled his eyes. "How many times have you viewed that?"

She looked at the screen. "Who knows, hasn't stopped being funny yet."

Sherlock got down to his purpose. "Let's go outside. Give these two a moment?"

She smiled with pity and shook her head. "You know it won't change anything?"

"I do. Let's do it anyway." Sherlock pleaded conspiratorially. But, he took her arm and guided to prevent further discussion.

Mycroft, annoyed, gave her a minute nod. He watched them exit before he spoke without looking at Greg, he addressed the empty room and fidgeted with his umbrella handle. "I have nothing to say. I imagine you wish to change my mind, but--"

Greg's mind was jumbled, but he interrupted, "Had my chance. I get it. I blew it. But, you know the saddest thing to me? So did you. You cheated us. So, Super-spy, a letter goodbye just isn't good enough. I love you," Greg, with nothing left to lose, stepped forward and grabbed Mycroft, pulled him close and planted the most passionate kiss of his life.

Mycroft backed away and tried feebly to throw him off. Greg was having none of it. He followed and attacked the lips he wanted again.

Mycroft relented for a long minute then, breathing heavily, turned his face and said with fire and ice raging for domination, "Stop this. It is pathetic."

Greg snorted through his sore nose. "Yeah, maybe it is. But, your flush and your dilated pupils, tell me to keep going. Actions speak louder than words. You want me to keep going. If you didn't you would use some of your Mum's little tricks and make me... stop."

Greg kissed him again and Mycroft stood perfectly still, and closed his eyes as if he could not help himself. His umbrella fell to the ground, muffled by the narrow path of carpet they stood on. A tiny rumble sounded in the back of his throat. Greg smiled, knowing he was waking the beast. His hand found Mycroft's fly and slipped inside.

Mycroft startled and slapped his hand away, except Greg did not follow his guide and holding him
steady by the neck with his left hand, slipped his other hand in Mycroft's trousers and went straight for his obviously interested and quivering for attention mutinous cock.

"For God's sake, not here." Mycroft hissed.

"Why not?" Greg circled the shaft with his fingers and silenced his protests, "Nobody around. Should I stop because you think it is stupid? Because we might get caught? Because, I don't care. Neither do you, deep down. You want this. If I stop, you will never let me near you again." His hand moved faster, bringing Mycroft closer to the madness of need, not playful or trying to prolong the encounter.

Mycroft could barely stand, his breath huffed and he silently shook his head, but leaned in, lost, his hands now roaming and holding Greg close back. He nipped the DI's neck as Lestrade continued to talk, low and sexy, in Mycroft's ear.

"You cheated me. So this last moment, I am not going to let it slip by. I wanted you. So badly, and now all my fantasies are gone. You always tell me what we are going to do, how we will go about every detail of our life. You never ask me. And, that works most of the time. But, just so you remember, it would not have been that way, here. Not like this. Here, I am not your goldfish.

"Anything you ever dreamed, I would have taken care of you. I will never be inside of you, because I did one stupid thing. But, you need to see... to live it... that everyone does something stupid sometimes, because they are in pain... or so damned alone, they give up control, just for a second.

"Just this once. You won't cheat me out of seeing, what you look like. This time, without hiding in booze, in the plain Sun... I will see you. For me Mycroft. Show me how you would have loved me for a lifetime... Show me who you are under all the masks and armour. Come for me, I feel your need, you cannot stop it, even if you actually wanted it to. Because this is something stupid and I am the only one who knows... and you would give me anything this second. But all I ask of you is that you... that's right, just let it go... yes...

Mycroft shivered all over with each fast stroke. His mouth fell slack and his eyes widened as his breath held and he trembled violently. The pale grey eyes lost focus, rolling back and a loud almost cough escaped Mycroft's throat. He began to spurt warmth against Greg's hand as the man guided Mycroft Holmes into a perditious ecstasy.

"God!" Mycroft cried, just once, on the ebbing of the lava in his veins, knowing he was forever damned and quite unable to reconcile the truth of it, just this second, as he helplessly clung to Greg.

They quieted and Mycroft suddenly looked about himself, conscious of the impropriety of this indiscretion. He hurriedly did himself up and nearly had a second jolt as he watched Greg, lick his deposit of unseemly DNA from the hand just retreated from his trousers. Greg eyed Mycroft as if he were pleased by the taste of semen.

"That... was...". He was at a loss whether to apologise, be angry, run or return the favour.

"The hottest thing I have ever seen," Greg finished with complete sincerity.

Mycroft softly asked his shoes, after glancing at Greg's crotch hungrily, "What can I do... to...

Greg straightened his shirt and blew out some air to regain control of himself. He pulled out the letter and handed it to Mycroft. "You can read that again, and notice. This was never about me, My. I would have fought for you, but I won't fight you. I would have always forgiven you for doing something a bit stupid. I forgave you every day for all the stuff I never could know. It was all fine.
Your brother the Father had to be the one to tell me that you play piano. I am looking so forward to seeing that. I might have even forgiven that I didn't know that, never even suspected. Guess we will never know. I'll give you a minute. Goodbye, My. Now we can be the strangers you always dreamed we would be."

With a tiny wink of regret, Greg spun and walked out, leaving Mycroft standing there in the airport a shambles.

"I always loved airports..." Greg said back as he opened the metal door and let the wind close it with a thud.

Greg waved at Sherlock, behind the wheel of the cart. There was a question on Sherlock's face and Greg just shrugged and shook his head. "Going to go beach-comb for a bit. See you later."

He had just barely got down the footpath when he heard Sherlock chastise, "Eewwwwwww! Get in the back! You need to be Down wind!"

"Ohhh... Grow up, brother mine!" He heard Mycroft growl. He heard the whirring of the electrical motor as the cart zipped away and only the sound of unintelligible syllables caught his ear as the sea wind coaxed him with sparkling water and blinding light.
Chapter 16

They call him, Surfin' Santa
Hangin' ten frozen toes!
Surfin' Santa
He surfs everywhere he goes

When Surfin' Santa arrives on a Christmas Eve
What does this North Pole surfer leave?
He leaves all the kids little surfin' goodies
Like bright colored surf boards and shiny new Woodies

They call him, Surfin' Santa
They call him, Surfin' Santa

Greg lost track of time, down on the beach, his pockets stuffed with shells. It was cold and he took his clothes off on a whim and walked into the sea.

He was already so cold, the water felt warm, but he knew he did not have any ability to stay in it for long. He rinsed off and felt renewed and alive, he body surfed, letting the waves bump him forward. The air was colder than the water so he let the waves break over him a few times and turned to run back to shore.

Eurus stood there, grinning.

"You may want to turn around. I'm starkers!" He yelled.

She smiled more and picked up his shirt, holding it out for him. "Or, I prefer Not!" She called back.

He stood there for a moment, knowing there were only two options here, and he was sort of obligated not to ruin Christmas.

He decided, what the hell and walked to shore while he was still capable.

Eurus never looked away from his eyes and held his gaze steady. He accepted his shirt from her, gratefully, because he was shivering badly now. He put on his coat next, then his pants and finally his trousers. Teeth chattering he offered a rather lame, "Sorry, just did that on a lark." His feet, too wet to put them on, he picked up his shoes and socks. "What brings you down here?"
She picked up a shell and tucked it in her coat pocket. "You do. Wanted to make sure you came out of the sea."

"I was intending to," he said attempting a charming smile, then laughing at himself, remembering who he was with.

"Intentions often go awry and become tragic expressions of human error. You will not feel the cold with the adrenaline in your system and the currents here are unpredictable and swift. If you had gone out a bit further, you would never have returned. Your muscles would have been too weakened to fight."

Greg thought about that for a moment. "Why come. You could not have saved me."

"No. I would have just watched. I cannot swim at all. Never had any place to learn."

"Did you want to watch?" He asked carefully.

"I don't care. Does not bother me. Death is nothing. Nothing at all. I have killed lots of people. My brothers would all assume I made you do it. But, I would have watched for you anyway. So you would not be alone when you closed your eyes." She said watching the water as if she could see it happening.

He had no idea what to say to that, but he understood that she felt she was doing something nice for him. "They keep telling me that. That if you wanted to, you could stand here and say the right thing and I would walk out there and never look back. I think everyone you killed, you had some reason."

"John Watson has a gun. He brought it here. But nobody thinks he would use it without a reason. I have my brain. I don't use it without a reason, and it protects me. The problem with John's gun is that he has to remember to bring it. He didn't think he would need it at his therapists office. Now, it is always with him."

"Did you need protection from that therapist?" He asked, knowing he was treading on shaky ground.

"No. That was murder. I wanted to understand Culverton Smith. He said it was the best feeling in the world. I didn't feel what he did. It did not make me happy or sad, but it coincided with convenience."

Greg shook his head. He had had some mad conversations in his time, but she made him dizzy.

"Sherlock said you wanted to talk." She waited to hear the subject he wanted her opinion on, already knowing, of course.

"Yeah, I told him that. Unfortunately, what I wanted help with does not exist any longer. But, thanks."

"Oh, it still exists. We just have to fix it."

Greg strolled along with her in the dry sand, his feet cold and he laughed. "I am not sure that is quite possible."

She smiled, smugly and whispered. "He thinks he is leaving tonight. Daddy sold his helicopter. Gives you more time than he thinks."

"I don't want to trick him. If I trick him, it isn't real."

"Then, maybe I will trick you?. He is practicing. Would you like to see? He won't see you, we could
talk whilst you watch." She offered focused and serious.

"Sure, that sounds ..." He grinned. "From the outside, if I told people I was going to go off with you for a nice chat, you do realise they would think that I only went because you forced me? You and your three mad brothers, I just need to get a tee-shirt that says, {Yes I actually have a death wish} and call it a day."

She laughed. "You really are the bravest, the stupidest or think entirely too highly of your instincts. According to my fans, I could make your head explode, just like that." She snapped her fingers. She looked confused. "Miss fire?" She snapped them again. "Seems to have malfunctioned."

"Lucky me."

"I could make you bark at people, or something. Would that be good enough?"

"Yeah, or you could walk into any prison in the country and empty it by making them fully functional, reformed human beings. You should write books. Every bookstore has a whole section of self-help feel-good crap. I think you could really help people, and I mean that sincerely," He mused.

"Why would I want to do that? Regular people are horrible creatures and never listen. Only broken things want to be repaired by amateurs."

Greg walked a bit, trying to figure out something that she would understand. "Jim and Sherlock were talking last night about something. I probably have it wrong but it is something about how every decision splits the universe into more universes and we exist in all these parallels... I don't understand it really, somehow a cat was involved, but the important thing I got was, say for instance, I decided to go swimming today, in some universe, I didn't go swimming at all, did something else, but in at least some of them, I did swim out and got sucked out to sea. In one you watched, in maybe another you called for help and saved me, in another you did talk me into it, another, you tried to help me and drowned too... every possibility has a universe... see?"

"Yes, the multiverse. Also the quantum foam theory. Makes time travel impossible and of no use whatsoever. You can only travel forwards of course. Never back, they have figured that out already, haven't they? Sorry. Go on?"

"I am not a copper because of the riches and Joy of picking through people's sorrow. I am a cop because it feels good. See, most of my cases are depressing as hell. Nobody would do this, if there were not the cases that you make it all better for someone. You maybe prove some Man did not kill his wife, he raises a good son instead of going to prison. Kid grows up to be a copper too and one day, he is the bagman to the guy who saved his Dad.

"Saves his life and the old guy retires, gets to die, in a care home, watching "On The Busses" which was his favourite show, and not buying a cuppa on the street thirty years earlier? Gets to meet eleven grandkids and see two great-grand kids and have a lot of really good years. But, he wouldn't have got that, if he had not saved that one Dad. Because he had no idea, that he had changed a life and saved his own? So, I may not get it all right, but, I do get the parts that matter. I don't do my job, to save them. I do it to save me?"

Eurus looked at him and tilted her head. "Nobody saved me, why should I? Your incompetence saved me. You could not catch my husband."

"I did catch him. For the Crown Jewels."

"Then he got away? It was meaningless."
"No. Not really. If he had not been arrested, Mycroft would never have had reason to introduce you? Jim was just another brick in a wall of criminals.

"He had not found his Holmes yet. Just knew he needed one. Mycroft would have never introduced you, If your brother had not questioned the Carl Powers case as a boy, even though he failed--"

"Sherlock saved me. Ohhh. He didn't even remember me... but." She tilted her head, confused.

"Yeah. You might save the mind of a little girl, she cures some disease, just in time to save someone you love..."

"You are very good at this. Not as good as I am. What did you want to talk to me about, before he got cross about the video?"

Lestrade stopped talking and shrugged. He looked down at her, rolled his eyes and gave in. . "He and your Mother, bunking off without a word? His constant jealousy and fear of Sherlock while pushing me away? Not really important any more. But, I am really glad you came either way."

"You would have actually let me fiddle with your mind? You are a suicide waiting for a tragic tool." She said obviously teasing him.

"Meehh. I have survived dating two of the four horsemen... nobody lives forever?" He said, enjoying her smile.
Eurus showed Greg to an office at the VOTD, and flicked on a monitor. She clicked the mouse a few times and held out his chair. He sat and looked at the large screen. Sure enough, Mycroft sat at the piano. He did not play, but simply stared off into space, his hands resting in his lap.

"He's not doing anything." Greg looked up at her and she nodded.

"He is practicing. He memorised the music, and he visualises his exact actions. When he plays, he will play it correctly, mostly, the first time. He always did it that way. Cannot stand a mistake." Eurus brought a violin case out and told Greg to stay there and watch.

Soon Eurus appeared on camera, stood behind him, she began playing her violin. Mycroft stiffened for a second, then with no fanfare or dramatic action, his head bent to the keys and he joined her, fingers nimble and precise. His head bobbed slightly to the rhythm just as she swayed gently in time.

They played a montage of classical token sections of pieces. Greg knew he had heard some of the bits, but could only name one here and there as they jumped from one composer to another, to another. Eurus would break away from one song and enter the rhythms and style of a completely different and random piece.

The piano would stop for a second, then Mycroft would smile and play with her again. It was a charming little game. Then Mycroft changed the rules and played something more modern, Eurus frowned then the notes flew from her violin, matching the melody he had begun. It became less, contest and more dance.

This continued until finally he found something she didn't like. "That is you. You are trying to cheat, Mycroft. You broke your own heart. I do not want to hear that self-pity."
"Not all of us find success in our choices--" He began with irritation.

Eurus prompted him, "Play me?"

He immediately switched to a duelling repeated melody in two off keys at once. She laughed.

"Am I that much trouble? Play Sherlock," the song took on the stomping rhythm of important things to do, picking up in tempo and sounding playful and dangerous at the same time with a gypsy flare.

"True, but you are biased. Play Mummy." He at once played a bond theme song, 'Live and Let Die', which amused them both.

"Play Greg." His head turned, hands paused above the keys. Then his hands frolicked on the keys, playful and silly. Suddenly a random deep sharp key bang was added in and that sound became more frequent until it took over and the frolicking slowed, becoming repetitive nonsense until suddenly it chased up into the high keys then slipped down in a three note jumping slide and turned mournful and powerfully sad.

Greg watched in awe and she had been right, he was beautiful when he played.

His ad-lib concert ended. He stared at the keys.

Siger stepped up onto the stage dragging an enormous shiny plastic violin case. He carefully positioned the bulky but sleek case that looked like a small sports car and unbuckled the closures. Carefully, he lifted a beat-up looking cello. He took a chair, facing the piano, back to the Camera, and began warming up the instrument and tuning it. Mycroft hit several notes on the piano and Siger listened then adjusted the pegs until all were satisfied.

They played a short piece and began another when Sherlock finally showed up. Everyone, paused and took in the significance of the four of them playing together again.

"It has been a long time coming. I have missed this," Mycroft played the opening notes to The Nutcracker and the others joined his piano, one at a time.

They did not stick to script precisely, each improvising as they saw fit, but the base was still recognisable even to Greg. He grinned at the Holmes kids, reunited, and his eyes grew a bit damp as he sat hidden in the office, a voyeur to a string of miracles.

It was not until just then that he realised what this would mean to their parents. A tear splashed his hand at the thought of two people in their seventies having to wait their whole lives to see this.

He was locked onto the screen for nearly an hour. People had paused to watch the improvised concert. Suddenly, just seeing it through the cold screen was not enough. He did not care if Mycroft noticed. He stood suddenly and quietly slipped out of the office, down the hall and emerged into the newly staged concert hall.

The sound, was different here, not crunched through tiny computer speakers. The acoustics were a bit echoing but seemed to add the the ethereal sound. He could feel the cello in his bones and the violins in his teeth and throat, but the piano only spoke to his heart.

He had entered unnoticed except for a millisecond glance from Eurus who smiled sweetly and dipped to a jaunty spot in her part.

Greg reached in his coat pocket and began recording on his phone. He never wanted to forget this.
Somehow, without seeming to have taken any vote, they all simply stopped. Mycroft closed the dustcover on his piano. Eurus lowered her violin and loosened her bow, Sherlock reflecting her motions.

Mycroft was speaking to Siger, holding his cello whilst Siger put a stand together for the instrument, when Mycroft's spidey senses tuned in to Lestrade's exact location. Greg smiled and was glad he had not stopped recording as Mycroft took him in with no expression then frowned and lifting his chin, pointedly ignored him.

Greg grinned. He had no idea what that was, how Mycroft's eye had just found him as if he had a compass pointing at Lestrade, but that moment, that radar, was sexy as hell to Greg. Despite the fact that he got the cold shoulder routine, the extraordinary luck that he had caught that Mycroft lock-on phenomenon on camera delighted him.

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Updates will be more sporadic for the next few days, my youngest ships out to basic on the 4th. Hoo-oah. I am going to bask in what is left of my baby boy, proud of the man who will return... but missing my smooshy like air. Thanks for your understanding.
Chapter 18
All I want for Christmas is you.

I just want you for my own
More than you could ever know
Make my wish come true
All I want for Christmas
Is you
You baby

"Oh, I won't ask for much this Christmas
I won't even ask for Snow
And I'm just gonna keep on waiting
Underneath the mistletoe"

https://youtu.be/yXQViqx6GMY

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Preparations for the evening were underway. The west cottage was bustling. Mummy and Daddy Holmes as well as Mrs. Hudson had foreseen the last minute crush and were ready and happily fussing over Rosie. Molly was in a tither that the dress she brought did not fit any longer and Mummy had her mouth full of pins, doing a makeshift alteration.

John had showered and had his trousers and dress shirt on and his tie looped loosely around his neck. Sherlock was in the shower and Molly had allowed Greg the kindness of laying out his things in what had been his room, but he needed to rinse the saltwater off before he dressed.

Sherlock popped into the hallway wearing only a towel. He knocked and told Greg the bathroom was all his. Just as he closed the door, John began a rant about Sherlock parading around like that.

"Oh, for God's sake. Who here has not seen me?" Sherlock asked in amazed annoyance.

"Only people in care homes, too elderly for YouTube I would imagine at this point!" John said back loud enough the whole house rolled their eyes in synchronised exasperation.

Greg turned the taps to find there was no hot water and what came out the water saving miniature sprayer was now a cool drizzle. Also, the drain was clogged and the old tub had two inches of water in it still.

He stepped in anyway and soaped and rinsed as fast as any soldier could. It was only as he shut off the taps that he wondered where they got the water to keep this place running.

He knew that Sherlock would be in his formal tux, whilst playing tonight, but he was not prepared for the sight of him. His swallowtail morning coat was black velvet with a waistcoat made of deepest amethyst embroidered brocade. The charcoal grey trousers set it off and stretched his long frame, making his overall impression reminiscent of steampunk rather than Edwardian.
Lestrade stood with his mouth agape. "That is very purple."

"Eurus. Her plan and doing, not mine." Sherlock said adjusting his cravat.

"It looks good. It really does."

Sherlock rolled his eyes. Greg began dressing and across the hall, John's footsteps could be heard limping down the stairs. Sherlock had done a number on John's knee in the fight.

"How's that going?" Greg asked softly, tilting his head to indicate that he was asking about John.

"Do you remember when I was dead? Same level of communication."

"Wedding?" Greg asked.

"Off, as far as I know. He has not told me that, specifically, but one can infer. You and I could be in London, solving the exponentially boring knife crimes and be of far more use. This has been a disastrous waste." Sherlock turned and tied Greg's tie for him, then dropped his eyes and said, "Into battle."

There was a banquet set up for all and though there were to be a series of dinners requiring evening wear each of the next two days, this one was more of a casual atmosphere. No jeans or camo trousers were to be seen, but neither were the others dressed in formal wear like the Holmes siblings or Jim who was on M.C. Duty and dressed in a flashy blood coloured tux that was meant to make him look Christmas themed, but just made him exude a picture of Satan come to life.

Mrs. Hudson was adorable in a deep emerald frock coat with frilly white lace sleeves hanging out and a fancy silk gold scarf tied in a complex designer knot. Molly, hair up and looking sweet in her fitted dress of blue velvet and Greg honestly could not tell any last minute alterations had happened, but it did make her condition quite obvious.

Greg found his place-card and took his seat at the front centre table. Mr. Holmes sat two chairs over and was placidly watching all the milling people with interest. Mrs. Hudson and Grandmother Moriarty soon joined the table with drinks in their hands and mischief brewing in their pointed looks and secret grins. Greg had no idea what they were up to now and he didn't want to know.

He figured out where the ladies had found the open bar and after checking with Mr. Holmes, made his way there. He found Siger there at the bar and hurriedly slugging down a gin and tonic.

Greg ordered and while waiting Siger leaned in and asked softly, "How's the hunting? Has my brother forgiven you?"

Greg looked up at him. He shook his head and replied, "He is pretending I don't exist."

"Ah. None of Sherlock's games working? Shame."

"Sherlock has his plate full with John, who is at least speaking to him, but mostly to define all the things he would like to make clear that he hates about him."

"Good. Just a heads up, I may have dropped a hint or two that you had decided to return to the Middle East with me, to fight. When the information reaches Mycroft's ears, I expect he will break his silence. Just play along. Be determined that we have it all settled and you have made up your mind."

"What? Are you really a priest?" Greg whispered. "Isn't telling lies one of those things you are
supposed to advise against?"

Siger smiled over his glass with all the amused indulgence of a bishop hearing a young boy's first confession. "Be sure to emphasise how he no longer can influence your choices. That ought to spike his blood pressure and recede his hairline another inch."

"What makes you think he is going to care one way or the other? What if he doesn't believe me?"

"Child's play. In the 'Art of War' Sun Tsu told us to always give your enemy a way to escape. Ch'en Hao reworded the idea saying that Birds and Beasts when brought to bay will use their claws and teeth. My brother is one of the world's foremost negotiators when backed into a corner. This is the corner. I did promise that I would deliver him on a platter. Just keep your promise and prove Eurus didn't kill Victor. Gotta go"

Greg looked at him and by the time he took in what he had said, Siger had waded through the crowd and only his flaming curls could be seen.

Greg's neck tingled and the sensation slithered down his back to just between his shoulder blades. He spun around and happened to catch Mycroft glaring at him as if he were a particularly gruesome insect. Greg met his eyes evenly and raised his chin toward his former fiancée. Mycroft's eyes narrowed but he received no other acknowledgement.

Greg sighed and let all his misery bleed into his mind, letting Mycroft deduce what he would and broke eye contact. He searched for a path through the hall and found an exit door, thinking to have a quick smoke before the show began.

He was on his third hard puff when the door opened and he knew exactly who it was without having to glance.

"Smoking again? " Mycroft stated with disapproval.

"I never stopped." Greg reached in his pocket and held out the pack. "Neither did you. It was all just pretended."

Mycroft hesitated for a moment then accepted the pack and lighter. He took a long drag, and examining the cigarette he began, "I have heard a ridiculous but disturbing rumour. Would you like to confirm it or have I misunderstood?"

Greg blew smoke out his nose and sighed. He finally replied, changing the subject. "You look very grand in your tux. It suits you."

"Oh. I did not expect that. It is true then. You cannot be serious. To what purpose do you imagine ... what value could you hope to be in that arena? " Mycroft demanded, almost insulted by the stupidity of the idea.

"No longer really your concern is it?" Greg said quietly.

"You won't last six months. Two will be my best guess."

"Yeah? Thanks. No down side then."

"Don't play maudlin, Gregory. It does not suit you. Why would you even consider this? It isn't a place for amateurs. You have spent your whole life working for Scotland Yard. In five years you will be eligible for your pension if you so choose. Why throw it away? Is it spite? Do you wish me to
"God forbid. Look, it is none of your business now. You made that perfectly clear. You are leaving straight away and we will never speak again, no matter where I am, so just... whatever this is, don't bother." Greg found himself actually warming to the idea and remembered his feeling of loss when he had come home. The world had felt so petty and shallow. Everything here was taken for granted.

"What about Sherlock? Getting yourself killed will destroy him. And do mark my words, that is the only outcome." Mycroft let some annoyance seep into his tone as he regularly puffed on the fag and grimaced at the taste of the smoke.

Greg bit his lip. "Haven't told him. But, I think it is worth mentioning that the vote of confidence is inspiring, considering you took your Mum. Thanks for that." Greg threw his half consumed cigarette on the pavement and stomped on it in frustration.

Mycroft sighed dramatically. "Don't. Do this?" His voice was quiet and sincere suddenly. "I am sorry for the way it sounded. But, I am right. You will not survive. Please..."

Greg paused, scratching his eyebrow and gave a disgusted snort. "Is that the best you can do?"

Almost as if he is bored by what he himself is saying, Mycroft replied, "Not at all, I can stop you."

Greg grins. "Maybe. But, if you do it by force, just be sure you take a look at the streets of London these days. You cannot keep me safe just by ordering it be so. There is no place that is really safe. Is there?"

Mycroft flicked his cigarette away towered over Greg, full Holmes awareness focused and attempting intimidation. "Do not trifle with me, Gregory. You forget yourself and who I am."

Greg did not back down. "No, My. Because I loved you, you think me weak. I deferred to you out of love, not lack of will. That part of us is over now. I don't care who you think you are because that pompous arse, took everything. If I had been asked to pick you or my job, I would not have made the same choice you did. You wanted me out of your life. Maybe, Siger really is a Djinn and your wish was just granted." Greg reached for the door handle and yanked firmly before glancing back at Mycroft.

"You think I am so weak willed, yet it was you who let a video of a bit of fun destroy our future. It was you who didn't have the bottle to tell me what you were really doing. You let me arrive here, feeling rejected and have to hear about you and your Mum's adventures second hand. So, don't lecture me on what I do or where I go." Greg took a deep breath and exhaled with a sigh, attempting to calm himself. "I can't wait to hear you play tonight. You were the sexiest thing I had ever seen this afternoon. That was before I saw you in this kit, yeah?"

Mycroft cleared his throat intending to speak, but his loss for words let his emotions flicker on his face for a moment.

Greg did not allow Mycroft to gather his thoughts and begin speaking, he just pushed onwards and let his voice hitch with the truth of his regret, "Wish I had known the sight and sound of you at the piano, in your dressing gown, playing just for me. But, I didn't. You never even mentioned you could play. We all make choices other people don't understand. I think sometimes, we just have to do the best we can and realise that we probably never will figure it out. It is what it is..." Greg didn't give him time to reply, he pulled the door just wide enough to slip through and left Mycroft staring at a closed metal door.
Greg went straight to the bar, ordered a ridiculous number of fingers of whiskey and had downed a quarter of it before reaching his seat. John Watson, Rosie in his lap, gave him a wide eyed look of either disapproval or shocked admiration, it was hard to tell.

Greg looked down at the fussy little bit of greenery they passed out as a salad and began eating so he could focus on something besides where Mycroft was and if he were watching and also so he could get away with mumbled responses.

Molly, sitting to his left, had her program open and was commenting on the menu and trying to make polite chatter. She nibbled at a soft roll covered in cinnamon butter. Greg glanced up on stage and sitting with his cello readied, Siger gave him a smug wink.

Jim stepped up onto the stage and took the microphone in his hand, "Good evening, my names is Jim, for any of you who may have not sobered up from...."
Run, Rudolph run.

Chapter 19

Run Rudolph, Run.

*Out of all the reindeers
You know you're the mastermind.*

*Run, run Rudolph
Randalph ain't too far behind
Run, run Rudolph
Santa's got to make it to town
Santa make him hurry, tell him
He can take the freeway down*

https://youtu.be/MVu4c7dhDRE

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Jim carried on a delightful monologue through most of dinner. He was surprisingly funny and welcomed his audience with charm and humorous observations on the subjects of Christmas themes and what constituted a proper Christmas tradition.

His reading of a Christmas story he wrote as a child, was disturbing and yet the audience roared at the tale of 'the hungry donkey', and as politically incorrect and insensitive to the spirit of Christmas as it was, the audience found each gory detail delightful. Greg looked around and the kids were all giggling and not seeming traumatised.

Jim explained that he and Eurus were determined to make this holiday brighter for the men who served him throughout the year and if this year was a bit over the top, that it was only their due.

The dinner progressed and everyone was having a nice time. Siger played a throaty commentary on his Cello sporadically and added drama to the stories and jokes as if this was a long practiced trope between them. Even John had relaxed and his eyes shown with pleasure as he catered to Rosie and kept her entertained with tasty bits from his plate.

Santa made a quick show, Jim explaining that he had arranged a kidnapping of Father Christmas for the special entertainment of his youngest honoured guests, there was even a reindeer involved and Sebastian Moran was a fantastic Jolly old elf. The dozen or so children present were gifted extravagantly and Rosie too, had her moment in the sun when an enormous elephant was pulled from the bag with her name on it.

Finally, as the pudding was served and plates cleared, the four Holmes siblings took their place on stage and the lights dimmed as the opening notes to The Nutcracker were sounded.

Mr. And Mrs. Holmes were enraptured as were most of the audience. Greg only had eyes for Mycroft and recorded a good portion of the program on his phone.
The final bit was a lovely mass said for everyone and a surprising number of people came forward for Holy Communion, which Father Holmes offered non-denominationally for all in attendance. Greg found himself in the queue for no particular reason other than it felt right to be forgiven by this man who felt more like God's Holy Wrath than a normal priestly servant of God.

Siger placed the wafer on Greg's tongue and wiped the cup of wine before bringing it to Greg's lips with long practiced grace. Mycroft did not partake. He had left without a word of goodbye, other than to receive his mother's thanks.

Mass had barely ended and people were dispersing, many walking back to various cottages when Mycroft burst through the door, livid, demanding to know where his helicopter had gone. Greg was just toasty drunk and feeling somehow lighter in spirit enough to burst out in a fit of laughter.

There was a bit of scuffling as Jim and Mycroft had a debate about who would be held accountable for the missing transportation and Mycroft made a few loud inferences about exactly what Jim could expect in the way of torture if Jim ever set foot on English soil again. There was a halfhearted chase, but Jim escaped by jumping from table to table as Mycroft tried to navigate the sea of tables and now haphazard chairs.

Anthea spoiled everyone's amusement with a resounding whistle using her thumb and forefinger like a pro footie coach and a harsh single syllable, "Sir!"

Mycroft, still absolutely volcanic, managed to cool his corybantic pursuit and regain his composure as his assistant reassured him that the bird was reported stolen and that alternative transportation had been arranged, though it would be the afternoon of Boxing Day before they could leave.

Greg could not suppress a smirk when Mycroft grumbled about hating Christmas and all the inexcusable bother it involved. He was still making snide comments under his breath as they made their way back to the cottage. Greg was too warm and happy to more than observe, and somehow he had been given the job of holding the enormous purple elephant during the brief cart ride back to the west side of the island.

Due to the cramped sleeping arrangement, Mrs Hudson gave her room to Anthea, and went to stay in the main house with her new best friend. Her medical boot seemed to have not slowed her down in the least.

There was a great deal of bickering about who would sleep where and Sherlock was allowed to sleep in Molly's room just because it was an emergency and somehow, the more unreasonable John was, the more Molly defended the future father of her child.

John announced that Greg could bunk with him. (Revenge or not, Greg was not turning it down to fight Mycroft for the horrid old sofa.)

That meant Mycroft was left to make due on the sneezing sofa and he was so stoically silent, that when Greg brought him sheets, a blanket, and a pillow, he never said a word, just stared out the window.

Greg waited a moment, then plopped his offering on the sofa arm and went to John's room. As he passed the other door, he heard Sherlock soothing Molly and suspected that Molly was having a hormonal cry over something.

He hoped fervently that Sherlock was not the one making her cry, but the odds were probably not in Sherlock's favour.
'Chapter 20

The little boy Christmas forgot.

He's the little boy that Santa Claus forgot
And goodness knows, he didn't want a lot
He sent a note to Santa
For some soldiers and a drum
It broke his little heart
When he found Santa hadn't come

https://youtu.be/JgCNbfbQltQ

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Rosie had gone out like a light and John was propped up with his laptop on the side of the bed near the cot. The room was stuffed to overflowing, and most of Greg's things were neatly stacked in the hallway. He ducked into the loo and changed his clothing. He felt sheepishly out of place, trying to scoot along the wall to enter the bed, there was not an inch to spare on his side.

"Even if it is just for revenge, I appreciate having a place to lie down. Nap on the beach is the best sleep I have had since I got here. I am knackered."

John took a moment to speak, and when he did, it was directed at his laptop. "No problem. It was you or Mycroft and I picked the lesser of two evils. Look... about earlier, I really was out of line and..."

"Forget it." Greg wiggled under the covers, trying not to jostle the laptop.

"Is it true?" John asked after a short time., startling Greg from almost sleep.

Greg looked his way not understanding what John was asking. "Depends on what you mean?"

John glanced at him and spoke, caught wanting to see Greg's exact reaction to his words. "You are going back to the sandbox? Going to get yourself killed."

Greg sighed and it turned into a yawn. "Yes to part A and a hopeful no to the second bit." He yawned again, closing his eyes and nestling his head deeper in the pillow.

John sniffed in a disapproving way. "What about Sherlock?"

"Haven't discussed it. It just came up."

"No. What do you think is going to happen when I move out and you go off on a suicidal adventure?"

"If you care so much, don't move out. You have all the power on this one." Greg replied.

"Doesn't feel that way. Not from my view. Everyone demanded I do this and don't do that, and yes,
in hindsight everyone was right. I was stupid for thinking I should give up on my baby girl, but now he has a new child to look after and five minutes alone with you and everything we were, didn't matter enough to stop him from... I feel a bit betrayed. Not the worst Christmas, not by a long ways, but not the one I expected either."

Greg spoke, leaving his eyes closed, his head felt a bit like the room was spinning and he was really hoping for silence. "You don't know if we did betray you or we didn't. Hell we don't know. But, I don't think a damned thing happened in the middle of the room on the floor, in front of other people... no matter how baked and fried we were that night. So for me, this punishment without so much as a civil conversation, feels like ... well, it feels like it is better now than January seventh or a year from now. I knew it was all too good to be true.

"But, I am tired, John. Not just tonight, tired of hanging on, hoping someday that someone will pick me.

"So, the Syria thing, well, at least nobody will disappoint me there. Maybe it isn't as bad of an idea as all that. I was sort of happy there in a weird way. What have I got here when you look at the whole picture? I almost had a family and it all slipped away again. Five years from now, I am eligible for a bloody pension and if that isn't the most depressing thing ever contemplated, I won't have any idea what to do... get an allotment and grow marrows and tell strangers stories of when I knew Sherlock Holmes?

"Thanks, but no thanks." Greg finished, his arm slung over his eyes. He fought the emotions building as his mind faced reality out loud. It was looking like a possibility to actually consider the more he got used to the idea.

"Honestly, I can see the temptation. If not for Rosie, I might have decided to join you. Keep your bungling old pensioner arse alive for a bit longer at least. But, just... really think it through, Greg. That game... just isn't on. You know? " John said more kindly.

"Yeah... maybe. But the more I think on it, the more I figure, why not?" Greg said and wiggled to face the wall.

"I thought you might take up with him if Mycroft and I were out of the picture, " John offered with hesitation.

Greg's eyes popped back open and he spoke to the wall, "Complicated. I care about him. I do. But, you have to understand, John. You and I are in really different places here. You are wrapped up in your own imagination and fear, and throwing away the best thing that ever happened over pride. That's the truth, and I am sorry, but it is. Maybe that leaves a door open for me, but the part I don't see working for me is that about the time I get attached and start counting on that, one word from you, when you finally come to your bloody senses, and here I will be again. You see?"

"You really think that? That I am being the unreasonable one?" John asked expecting a polite denial.

Greg sat up with a sigh. He twisted and sat cross legged and pointed his finger at John. "Before I say this... no hitting. Yeah?"

John closed the laptop and folded his hands on top with a nod, but pursed his lips knowing he was not going to like what he was about to hear.

"Good. I think a lot of you, I really do, but you are a hot mess, more even than him. You got married, had an affair with his sister, who was evidently married to Moriarty at the time. Your wife
tried to kill him and he needed you so much, he forgave her. Then, she saved him, and you nearly killed him."

John tried to interject, "Now, hold on--"

Greg kept going, having none of it. "He was not just on a downward slide, he was on a snowboard planning to descend Everest with no safety and you, because of your. Judgement. Pride. Disappointed expectations? Were just watching. Egging it on. And I can empathise with where you were and all, but one of these days, his luck is going to run out. You knew about Smith. You left him to that. Sure you called me at the last minute, but I would have been too late. Pure luck you got there before... and he forgave you, no questions asked."

"That is not what--" John tried again, exasperated.

"Don't. You asked and this is the real truth as I see it. So you find out he and I are trying it on and all of a sudden you are telling me to watch out when we get back. And sure enough, you made him an offer and he jumped. All fine. But, then all of your romance had an undertone of guilt. You make him feel bad, to control him and it is toxic to him. Everyone in the world thinks he is the manipulative bastard and that is notable but not the whole picture, is it? You bonded with him because you accepted him, experiments and bloody severed heads in the fridge and all his quirks. You thought he was amazing. He is. And he has put you through absolute hell. I get it. But, you put him through it too... but only one of you gets a free pass...."

"I hardly get any free pass, as you put it." John shakes his head, more frustrated than angry.

"You get his heart, free and clear every time. On the other hand, you are still so hung up on the score that you don't even have a clue why he went back to that party with me and got so drunk that you found us the next morning. You cannot see. You make him feel like he is letting you down over small stuff. You are withholding love to control him, and that ain't love, mate. You don't see how that translates to the big things. You have to do what you think is right for you, John. Me too. I don't think I can save him this time. Maybe Molly can. I really hope so, because I just...don't think I can. I can't even save me now. I don't want to see it. So, maybe, this leaving is not really going to matter one way or the other. Do you see?"

"That is really a load of shit, Greg. It is. You guys caused this and now the both of you get to play victim." John leaned over, forcing eye contact and giving him a face as if explaining to a child.

Greg smiled uncomfortably. "You ever talk to him about the Smith case? Like about what was going through his head as that creepy bastard had his hands on him, watching him die? Have you asked him about how all that came to be?"

John shrugged. "It was a plan. He predicted the whole thing."

"I am a detective, John. I may let a detail slide here and there for the common good, but I am not actually stupid. You and I both know his story does not add up. Not as the two of you tell it."

"What do you mean. He planned it out. He had back up plans."

"John. That is completely bollocks, and if you think about it, you know it."

"Well, it must not have been, because it did, in fact, work. Right? It worked." John shrugged and tapped his fingernails on the laptop as punctuation.

Greg took a deep breath and held it, before he said a word. "I could rip your heart out right this
John snickered and rubbed his eyes with the palms of his hand. "You missed the bit where that happened already? Did you? Go for it, nothing left to rip these days."

"John, okay, there was no great plan. At least not what he filled in for you in the offing. Let's run it through? If you want."

"What do you mean? Of course he planned it. That is what he does!"

"No. He is lucky and takes credit for it, hoping to impress you. He does stuff, then later pretends to explain it. You really think he knew you would bring him your walking stick? Come on. Are you havin' that?" He said the last part in a fair impression of Jim's Irish lilt.

"Well, he must have. Because I did it and he put the bug in it, so as amazing as it sounds, that did happen. It is the only explanation."

"No it isn't. It is just the one you want to believe." Greg reached out and put his hand on John's arm to ease the pain of what he was about to say. "Did you check the rest of your flat? The bug was not to get Smith's confession. It was not even the only one. He was cut off. You would not even speak to him. Not like he had to break in. Had the keys to your flat. Knew your schedule. He was listening to you talk to Mary. I want to give him the benefit of the doubt and say it was to monitor you out of concern, and that was probably part of it. But, if I were to place a bet, I would say it was out of loneliness and hoping he could find some small bit of human error and pop in to play hero. To gain your forgiveness out of gratitude. To make sure you were not about to top yourself? He expected your limp to come back and took the chance that he might hear you interact with people outside. I would also check in your med bag, your shoes, hems of your jackets, probably in your key fob, all over really and also check your phone for a remote keylogger and probably spy software that allowed him to turn it on and listen, remotely."

John didn't say a word, but stood up and went to his bag, extracting his keys from a side pocket. He looked at them for a second and tossed them to Greg. He stood waiting.

Greg looked them over then pried on the metal logo set in the plastic. It popped off and sure enough, inside was a bit of electrical gear the size of a cold pill. He pushed the button and a tiny light blinked then dulled as the last of the tiny battery discharged.

John wiped his face with his hand and said softly, "Well... shit."

"So, the real story is not quite as heroic. Before, Sherrinford, before Iraq, you came seconds away from losing him. Mary told him to go to hell. And he did. But, you didn't notice, so he went further and further and you still did not see. He bugged you, your flat, your possessions and he heard you, talking to the wife you blamed him for losing. He was not just holed up in his flat, he was listening, that whole time. Blamed himself for driving you to madness and his actual plan was to not just go to hell on earth with the expectation that you would save him, like she said. But, to pay for his crime, by going all the way to hell and join Mary if that was what it took to --"

"I get what you are saying. I do. But, there is something you have forgotten. Our ghost driver case, Charlie Welsborough Remember? Sherlock was obsessed with a broken statue. If he had left that alone, none of that would have come searching for us. Mary would have never left and her former friend would have never found us. And Vivian Norbery would have retired and gone on with her pathetic little life and not killed my wife. But he had to pull that thread. He thought he had found a noose for his own neck and it was really a noose for my wife. And to top it all off, he was wrong. Had nothing to do with Moriarty. Nothing to do with anything that could be fixed." John said, regret
making his throat scratchy.

"At least she went to prison. They got justice in the end." Greg offered.

John shook his head. "No. Mary's friend was tortured to death and her other friend to madness and it was that old woman's fault. She killed my Mary. Now she lives out her remaining years on Her Majesties' Pleasure, which is pretty cushy for the lives she ruined and the suffering she caused. Not justice. Not even close in my book. She won, and all of that was because he wanted a last game with a dead man who was not even dead. It was pointless in the end and he was wrong."

Greg looked up at John for a moment, assessing him like a suspect. "You know, I have just figured out something. You are in love with the 'Great Sherlock Holmes--"

John snorted and shook his head, "Yeah. As he would say, obviously! Thanks for that in depth--"

Greg interrupted John right back. "No. That is not obvious at all. You are only in love with the mysterious detective you created in a blog. The public one. The problem is, that is not the real man. All that is a load of bollocks and somehow you forgot that. You are not in love with Sherlock, not if you cannot forgive him for being wrong sometimes."

John shook his head in amused denial, edging on anger. "Lot of nerve there, mate. You saying that to me, when I thought that you arresting him, was a big part of why he committed suicide. Hmmm? For two years, I would have sworn..." John trailed off, unable to even gather the air to voice the rest of his sentence.

Greg dropped his eyes to hide the pain of that direct hit. "One thing you can trust, Doc. Whatever you were about to say, the thought ... it went through my head every minute while he was gone. You were not the only one, you know? When he came back, I wasn't even angry with him, because, I am sure you never noticed or cared, but you were not the only one who went to some dark places. I kept reaching out to you, cause it gave me a reason not to be the next messy crime scene. That's why I forgave Donovan. She was the only one in my world... who even bothered to see..."

This information was a bucket of ice on John's building fire of fury. In a very small, rather hoarse voice, he said, "Shit. Greg... I don't know what... I am so very sorry. Jesus." John flopped back down on the bed and his entire demeanor changed. His eyes assessed the other man as a doctor would and not as a jealous boyfriend lashing out.

"Doesn't matter. Just making a point. Nobody is perfect. As Siger says, we all sin. You can't just Love parts of him you approve of. In the big picture, so what if we had a spectacular shag? So what. You are cheating yourself out of a lifetime of them and all the moments that would have been, over something I honestly don't think even happened. You, and Mycroft are both dropping atom bombs when a conversation would fix most of your anger." Greg shrugged and fell silent.

John asked peaceably, "Scale of one to ten, how bad are you right now?"

Greg could not hide the smirk as he answered, "Eurus caught me swimming, today."

"It is a nice pool. What do you mean, caught you?"

"Not in the pool."

"Where?"

"In the ocean. Starkers, by the way." Greg furrowed his brow and sniffed.
"The water temp has to be like nine Degrees Celsius! Hypothermia can begin in five minutes? And, which beach? There are undertows here. You know that, right? Oh my God. Greg, I... we need to...". John looked around the room desperately searching for something to say.

"Nothing to be done, John. Not this time. And before you decide to section me, just remember that I am a copper and know all the right stuff to say. "

John pursed his lips, considering. "Yeah, and it will end your career. Just like me. So, no. Not unless I see that I have to. Just for reference, what stopped you?"

Greg shrugged, "Sort of promised Siger that I would not ruin everyone's holidays. And Eurus showed up. Everyone would blame her. Say she made me, when all she was doing was trying to make sure that I ... anyway. I had way too much Scotch and I am going to regret this in the morning."

John put his hand on Greg's shoulder and said with quiet firmness, "Look, sure as hell not where I expected this conversation to go, at all. But, I am glad you told me. It clears up a few things in my mind, unexpectedly. You know I have been there, and you know you can trust me. Impulsive behaviours are just part of the package, you know? Maybe not the best time to make life altering decisions?"

"Do as I say..." Greg replied with cheek and a knowing grin.

John tilted his head far to the left in acknowledgement and added, "Yeah, yeah. When we get back to London though," he bit his lip and took a breath, "You need to see someone. This doesn't just go away."

"I'll think about it. Just promise me this, you will not tell him. No matter the why. Between us? Okay? I mean, sure he is in the mix, but I am not some jilted lass, making a gesture. I will not be that to Mycroft."

"Honestly, I can't promise. He knows everything. I won't volunteer. But, I have been told that I am a terrible liar."

"What idiot told you that? You lie all the time." Greg said as he switched the lamp out on his side.

John twisted and stared at Greg as if he were offended.

"What? For Christ's sake, John. You killed a man and stood chatting up Donovan five minutes later. You convinced all of London that an ageing, junky, twink a half step on the wrong end of the law was a national treasure. And you never told me that Mary shot Sherlock and nearly killed him. Along with where this conversation started, you knew Sherlock was about to be murdered, with Smith's favourite room spiel and you walked out of the yard that night, never gave me a hint. You lie better than himself, because your tells are masked in ordinary."

John frowned and he blinked slowly as he spoke, "Wait, go back. You said, I don't know what was going through his head when that evil bastard had his hands on him, as he was suffocating? Are you saying that you do know? How?"

"You know, John. Despite what you believe, shagging was not our only activity. I miss talking to him. You and Mycroft made that bloody hard. We talk. See you are fine talking about my problems and helping strangers with private matters, it is your profession after all, but you in turn don't let people in. I would say this is none of my business and you should ask him, but he might not tell you, fearing the truth would hurt your feelings. He was scared and going to go through with it anyway.
He was awake when you were there, you know? He knew that you knew what was about to happen. And you came to say goodbye. He fought off a trained professional assassin weeks before, but could not fight off that evil squirrel, Smith?"

"His kidneys were failing. He was sedated," John challenged.

Greg asked calmly, "Do doctors usually introduce more drugs in an overloaded system? If drugs damage kidneys, are more going to solve that?"

"Well, with careful monitoring it can be... "

"No offence, but right now, I don't care. My point is, he did not have the slightest inkling that you might return in time. You can argue each point separately, but each bit adds up to a bigger picture. He was effectively on the roof again, for real this time and you told him to do a backflip on the way down. You and I know he is balanced on the same tight rope we are. It may be a steel cable, but if the wind gusted just right, you know we would all fall. Now please go to sleep?"

"Greg?"

"What now?" Greg said grouchy and exhausted.

"You have both pillows and are hogging the blankets."

"I will need two pillows if you want to keep talking." Greg said pulling one out from under himself and slinging it toward John.
Santa Baby

Chapter 21

Santa Baby

_Come and trim my Christmas tree_
_With some decorations bought at Tiffany_
_I really do believe in you_
_Let's see if you believe in me_

Santa baby, forgot to mention one little thing, a ring
_I don't mean on the phone_
Santa baby, and hurry down the chimney tonight
_Hurry down the chimney tonight_
_Hurry, tonight_

I could not find the boy lyrics to this song but thought it was wonderful for Greg.

https://youtu.be/JnOLam2AwXY

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It was nearly half four when Greg woke up. The house was silent. He slowly crept from the bed and retrieved a stack of packages he had not yet distributed. The others were all under the trees where their respective recipients were lodging, but these were the ones he had chosen for Mycroft. Of course, he could no longer really give them to him as he'd planned. Not now. But, if Mycroft found them at the foot of the sofa on Christmas morning, at least he had made the gesture.

In the sitting room, Mycroft snored in a soft boyishly adorable way. Greg set the gifts next to him so they would be the first thing he would see upon waking.

He took a moment to observe. It was hard to believe he would never wake to this charming face again with its distinctive nose, thin lips and funny expressive forehead. Never again would those grey-green eyes, pop open and twinkle at him as Greg told him it was past three and he needed to go to bed for a couple of hours. They would not consume him at the end of his day and be able to just know what sort of day Greg had had.

He carefully and softly leaned over and whispered a kiss on that stubborn curly tuft of hair Mycroft used to deny that he was going bald. Greg found it weirdly sexy and loved it when it broke free of its hair product chains and clumped together in a defiant cupie doll curl.

Mycroft smiled a little in his sleep and took a very deep breath as Greg pulled the blanket over Mycroft's shoulder and tucked the corner in to keep it in place. He moved softly and stirred the fire, noticing the wood was all but empty, he decided to make a quick trip outside and get a few small logs for the morning.
He put the last log on the fire carefully and went to the kitchen, turning on the light and grabbing a long musty smelling knitted coat. It was no fashion find for sure, but would do for a quick run to the woodpile. The sea air was cold and the wind was blowing just enough to make it pretty uncomfortable, dressed as he was. He was hurrying along when a flicker of flame caught his eye.

Sherlock was outside, having a smoke and staring at the sea, his coat, made exactly for weather such as this. Greg detoured, making enough noise to be sure he did not startle Sherlock.

He reached in his coat and held out the pack of cigarettes. "John kick you out of his bed already, Gurbel?"

"Yeah something about my knob taking up half the bed? And he accused me of being a cover hog?" Lestrade joked.

"Hmmm. I never noticed the cover hog bit." Sherlock said in his dry flirty way.

"Well that is because you slept on me, so I had to kick them off or get heatstroke." Greg lit his cigarette and handed the pack and lighter back.

"This is my favourite time of Morning in London. I cannot wait to get back. I miss her far more than I do my own mother. This is the time of news agents and bakers and bin men. Those early morning worm getters and insomniacs"

"And coppers. It is a given that if it nasty outside, or Shit-o'clock in the morning, we will have a shout."

"Are you going to explain? Were you even going to tell me?" Sherlock drew hard on this cigarette and it painted his face in orange light as the brisk wind flatten and tossed his hair about randomly. Greg sighed, "We only decided this. Is there anyone who doesn't know? Did he take out a bulletin in the Post?"

"Oh yes. Mahmoud did not know. I hoped that meant it was a trick. What does Siger want with you?"

"Charming. Does everybody actually think I am useless? No, do not answer that!" Greg said as Sherlock inhaled and opened his mouth to speak.

"In London you are invaluable. In the sandbox you will be scorpion food," Sherlock said anyway.

"Better than old and alone, talking to my cat and trying to get friends to take my extra radishes and courgettes!"

"You don't have a cat. I happen to love courgettes. Mrs. Hudson makes a cake, though it is called bread for some reason."

Greg smiled but did not reply.

Sherlock cleared his throat and looked at his feet, uncomfortable and nervous. "If your heart is not set on this, I kindly ask that you reconsider. I am resolved to seeing my brother murdered in some public fashion at some point in the future, but if you could possibly refrain from including yourself in that scenario, I would greatly appreciate it. For my own sanity, you are needed at home far more than I can convey."

"Is that posh for you'd miss me?" Greg teased.
"I cannot imagine London without you. I would, miss you, and with your inevitable Atherosclerosis I dread the day approaching in the offing with each passing year. You still have some good ones left, before bypass surgery can no longer be avoided, and I had hoped to keep you for a bit longer if you could manage." Sherlock chewed his bottom lip and reached for another fag directly after flicking the last one away.

Lestrade chuckled. "I might consider sticking around if you learn my damned name, permanently."

"No, you would miss me teasing you, but done, if that is what will tempt you not to throw yourself on that never ending pyre. Please stay, please don't take yourself as expendable. You matter. To me."

"You are, uhem, the only one who has said that. Look, this is not set in stone. Just something I am thinking about. The way your brother is going, he may have the whole thing solved by the time I was ready to go. I'd have to clear out my stuff, wherever your brother piled it, tender my resignation, deal with all the little stuff, you know? Not like this is happening tomorrow or anything."

"I will do anything that need be to change your mind. You know that, I hope," Sherlock said carefully.

"Cheers. Hey, how is Molly? She seemed to be crying last night." He left the statement hanging in the air as a question.

"It was not my fault."

"Didn't say it was."

"Well, it crossed your mind."

"Yeah, it did. So whose fault was it?" Greg asked.

"Pregnancy hormones and exhaustion. Wreaking havoc with her emotions. She said she saw an advertisement last week for homeless dogs in India and cried for two hours. The thought of all of us playing together for the first time since childhood set her off, she said. But who knows. I have no time for emotional twaddle."

"Yeah? Funny, sounded like you were doing a fine job of comforting her. I was proud of you." Greg added the last bit with no sarcasm.

"Do you think so? I am not sure I did anything useful to her. She continued to cry. Thought I was probably doing it wrong."

"You were there. Sometimes that is enough." Greg said, though not speaking only of Molly. "It is freezing out here, I am going back inside. Got to get a load of firewood."

"Go crawl back in bed with John. Stick your cold bits up against him. He loves that." Sherlock prompted with malicious glee.

"Oh sure, and here you were lecturing me about not getting killed? Fine friend you are? Happy Christmas."

Sherlock replied automatically, "I hate Christmas."
We wish you a Merry Christmas.

Chapter 22

We wish you a merry Christmas

Oh bring us a figgy pudding...

https://youtu.be/g-OF7KGyDis

***

Greg returned to the house, huffing from the large load of firewood he was carrying to find John and all of his warm bits, staring at a drip coffee machine as it spit out the first of its tar with a sickly protesting hiss.

"There you are? I woke up and you were gone." John said, the relief at odds with the accusation in his voice.

"Firewood. Be right back. I want a cup of that." Greg lumbered carefully through to the sitting room and stacked the logs quietly. He added one to the fire and was focused on getting it well positioned when he heard Mycroft moving. He spun, dropping one knee, for balance.

"Mmmm. Gregory. What time is it?"

"Just after five. Want coffee?" Greg responded, knowing Mycroft had not quite come on line yet and taking advantage of it.

"I need to call the office. Coffee would be appreciated. I dreamed you and I..." Mycroft's sleepy face froze and then his eyes popped open and he sat up abruptly. "What are you doing? Spying on me while I sleep?"

"Yeah? Firewood, spying and coffee service. Thinking of starting up a business."

"What's all this?" Mycroft asked, eyeing the pile of colourful boxes in front of him.

Greg stood, "I already had them. Be right back."

Greg returned with two steaming mugs and handed one to Mycroft. He sat in the wingback and cleared his throat, "Look, it is Christmas and there are other people to consider. We are stuck, so just for now, can we call a truce."

Mycroft stared into his mug. "I suppose that is for the best. Just so you know, I did not bring you anything. Under the circumstances, I..."

"Yeah, can't remember the last time someone got me a real Christmas present, so no worries. Perfectly fine. No place to put it if you had." Greg said stretching his feet toward the fire and bending his neck back and forth to pop it.

"My brother called me an idiot."

"Did he? Which one?" Greg asked, not realising how that sounded.
Mycroft shook his head with a resolved huff. "The elder of the two. I threatened to go to his superiors, if he continued to pursue this ridiculous plan of his."

"Oh. Well. That is just your version of going to the pub to watch the footie, isn't it? Trying to frighten the unwashed masses to get your way? You should try it on Kahn a bit, get him to quit making us confiscate people's work tools and old ladies quilting scissors. He is starting to lose it."

Mycroft shook his head and smiled, "Yes, he is turning into a public relations nightmare, frankly. He had such promise, but he seems to feel his role as Mayor of London is to dictate policy to other countries. He is quite the diplomatic spanner these days."

"Half the force is going through firearms training. It just isn't right. People are going to kill each other. Take away guns and knives, they may have to step up their game a bit, but it won't stop them." Greg sipped his coffee and sighed. He had technically gotten his Christmas. It was a glimpse of a waking Mycroft still in love and contented in his presence and phone videos of him playing the piano. It was probably for the best he didn't have a mind palace of his own, because he would tuck that away and crawl into it and live there.

Mycroft picked up one of the gifts and shook it then sat it back down. "I don't know the proper protocols for this sort of thing.

Greg smirked, "Well, you pick up the one on top and you remove the paper and--"

"Yes, thank you. I mean in the instance of no reciprocal gifting, I am at a loss. Do I open them now privately, and pretend they do not exist? Or, is it considered more humiliating for me to open them in front of others. I am embarrassed that you have provided this bountiful mountain of trinkets whilst I have nothing to assuage my own determination to be seemingly heartless."

"I could leave if you don't want me to see you open them. Hell, Mycroft. Do what you like. Throw them away, for all it matters now. I was not trying to embarrass you... again. I can't give you anything you couldn't buy a thousand times over and more posh. But, you were not angry with me when I got those and, I mean, you are here and there is no sense them going to waste, just because they happen to be from me."

Mycroft sighed and shrugged. He looked at the top one he had just set back on the pile. "Well, the least I can do is open the Sugar Sin one to nibble with our coffee?"

Greg grinned. "You already know what all of them are, don't you?"

"Sweets, a shirt from Huntsman, a scarf from that Donegal wool place you like on Fleet Street, some sort of do it yourself kit, probably for polishing shoes, an Umbrella with some horrid screen design, some sort of jewellery, most likely a tie pin, an IPad, socks, a joke ugly Christmas jumper, a lovely not-ugly hand knitted jumper, some sort of musical device I won't know how to use, an antique cigarette case so I know you have not quit, and various movies you deemed we should own. The other four are a complete mystery. How did I do?"

"I am not that impressed. You did not deduce the colours or what movies. Guess you still have to open them. And hurry it up, I have been smelling that chocolate for two weeks," Greg said, still delighted by the way Mycroft could do that. "And don't be embarrassed about not getting me anything. I knew if you even bothered it would have been from Anthea doing the legwork. Oh, and there is stuff for her under the tree, but it says from both of us so just a heads up."

Mycroft looked like he could almost cry, "Oh, Gregory..."
John entered the room, fresh from the shower, mug of coffee in hand. "Mind if I join you? Or is this private?"

Greg gestured for John to take the seat across from him. "Just discussing the Mayor, so if you are a fan, best pop off. My was deducing his prezzies, and we are about to spoil breakfast with posh chocolates. There is enough to go around if you want one."

John smirked and reached deep beneath the tree, handing the heavy tubular box to Greg. "Here, this should add to our morning coffee? If you are game? I am pretty sure that will make this day go a lot smoother."

Greg opened it and each added a gulp of the single malt highland costal Scotch to his coffee with naughty grins.

Mycroft hummed in approval at the addition to his coffee. "This Christmas spirit thing. I may be able to get into it after all."

"No, that is it getting into you!" Greg added with a huge grin as he tipped a bit more in his own mug. "Cheers, John. This is great."

"Sorry, it was addressed to both of you. From both of us. Jesus this is going to be a mess, isn't it? " John propped his head on his elbow and slumped further into the chair.

"We are all adults, here. Whatever is addressed to whom, we will simply have to strive to make it proceed as smoothly as possible. Is that an acceptable plan?" Mycroft stated with aloof determination.

"Your plans are never acceptable, brother mine. Though from the smell, you will all be too sloshed by lunch to remember any plans, so who cares. Me too?" Sherlock held out his own mug of coffee toward Greg in a fair Dickens sort of pleading way, then pulled the ottoman in front of the fire and sat with his backside to the flame.

"You are soaking up all the heat, Sherlock." Mycroft chastised.

"Keep talking. Nobody will notice. Have to open windows if you get on a roll. Give me a chocolate," Sherlock popped back.

"No, they're mine and I don't like you?" Mycroft held the box firmly, then without giving any notice threw one at his brother.

Sherlock tried to catch it, but it rolled down his shirt and onto the floor. Undeterred, Sherlock bent, picked it up, removed a strand of hair and tossed it in the air before catching it with his mouth.

"Are you high? You always do that when you are high." Mycroft gave his brother a hard look.

"What if I were? Nothing getting in my way of it now."

John leaned forward, "You promised? Hmmm? Rosie?"

"That only applied whilst we were a couple? You hate me, Greg is leaving and Mycroft, well he is the reason Greg is going off, so who cares what he thinks. Great to be in my proper place as the black sheep again. Holiday cheer and blessings in disguise. No, I am not high, Brother dear. Not yet." Sherlock huffed and stood. "Going back outside. Watching the grass not grow and clouds is less boring than you lot."
The three looked at each other knowing one of them would need to follow this up. It seemed rather complicated to decide who should go. Greg looked between John and Mycroft and with a sigh, stood up and said sadly, "Yeah, while you two knobs work it out, I am just going."

"Thank you, Gregory."

Greg turned and looked at him. "The two of you need to get over yourselves. It is Christmas for Christ's sake."

John pulled his chin in, in confusion. "I didn't hardly get a word in?"

"You are not jumping up to go after him either," Greg shot back.

"Not sure it would help if I did." John replied calm but obviously angering.

"Maybe. Just keep in mind that when you send us off to bask in your never ending disapproval, then you get your tails up when we find things to entertain ourselves. Happy Christmas, one and all."

Greg picked up his bottle and with a last, sarcastic "cheers", he headed to the kitchen to bundle back up and head back into the cold.

Sherlock had not made it far. He was determinedly headed toward the VOTD. Greg jogged a bit to catch up. He was out of breath as he fell into step.

Sherlock didn't acknowledge him other than to say, "Got the short straw again? Bad luck there."

"Yeah. Happy Birthday Jesus.. not my division." Greg sloshed his coffee more than he had running as he tried to move the bottle to slide into the musty pocket of the borrowed ugly knit monstrosity.

"Slow down? Not going to a crime scene. You in a hurry?"

"Scavenger hunt. Have no gifts for Molly. Going to see what is left after the Shopping thing last night. You can help me carry whatever we can find that will seem appropriate."

"Oh. That's a good plan. So, going to be a father? That is a bit, unexpected. How you doing on that idea?"

Sherlock took a deep breath but said nothing. "I... erm."

"Kinda throws a spanner, yeah?" Greg said with amusement.

"My initial response was genuine. It is upon reflection that the concept seems... less like joy and more like... terror."

"You will be fine. You know that, right?"

"I imagine myself at sixteen and I fear you have no idea what a spectacularly fatal flaw your platitude may have."

Greg laughed. "I knew you in your twenties. I can actually imagine what you have in store."

Sherlock stopped flat and his eyes widened. "Dear lord. I forgot about Uni. I'm in a lot of trouble."

Greg held out the bottle.

"I am going to need a lot more of this. Cheers." Sherlock took a deep draw straight from the bottle.

Armed with an annoying array of picked over foot baths and fancy flowered stationary and
horrifically scented bath products, haphazardly wrapped with various sources of gifting kitschy Christmas themed papers, they made their way back to the cottage loaded down with their Molly bonanza. They were actually quite chuffed to have managed to proffer so many last minute items. Molly would not have thought twice about having nothing much to unwrap, and that made it fun, because she would not expect anything. They tucked the gifts around the tree, not answering the inquiring eyebrows of Mycroft and John.

Greg felt uncomfortable and returned to the kitchen, deciding that he would play chef and do a lovely Christmas fry up for everyone. It would keep him busy and make him feel useful.

Sherlock wandered in and plopped himself down, looking bored and annoyed. Greg found a tray and put coffee, a slice of lemon cake, some grapes and strawberries on a plate. "Take that up to Molly. Surprise her. She needs some spoiling."

"You take it. She will never for a second believe I did it."

Greg gave him a stern look. "It is Christmas and she is going to be the Mum of your child. It's a whole new world now, papa, and you will do better. Now go."

Sherlock sighed, "Delightful, I am now the butler. Not my area." But, he picked up the little tray and did as Greg asked.

Anthea opened the door to the room she had stayed in, looking perfectly put together and ready for a busy day. She helped Greg by slicing tomatoes and mushrooms and stacking them on a plate beside the hob, then she began preparing bread for toasting.

Greg attended to the rashers of bacon and the bangers as he scrambled eggs and added a bit of salt and vinegar to a shallow pan of simmering water for poaching. He and Anthea worked silently but efficiently.

She dug through the fridge finally sighing and shaking her head in disappointment. "There is no black pudding. It is hardly Christmas without."

"Yeah, last Christmas I had rubber eggs on a bagel with some kind of fried ham loaf and a builders from a food caravan by the hospital on my way to pick up Sherlock. I have learned to be thankful for any meal that does not involve me standing under canvas or trying to search my pockets for the correct change," Greg said with a sheepish grin as he removed the bangers and drained that and the bacon, before dumping the mushrooms and tomatoes in the grease left behind.

"Oh, that's right. The Smith incident. And then the beast from the east, I bet you were a busy boy. I was in Paris... the room service was rather divinely sumptuous. But, there was no black pudding then either." Anthea said giving the oats a stir and adding butter to the pan. She returned to the fridge and got out the clotted cream then began arranging fruit on a platter.

Mrs. Holmes came down just then and wished everyone a loud and enthusiastic Happy Christmas. She bustled about and threw her hand into the kitchen doings as if the other two were her staff. She took over at the stove and when Sherlock reappeared with a bright eyed Rosie she was just finishing up the eggs and setting dishes on the table.

Soon the kitchen was pure chaos as everyone loaded their plates and found places to sit for their meals. The kitchen just was not big enough for everyone to sit at the counter and small table with all the food. John took his daughter and set her in a portable chair that hung from the counter and made it a squeak every time she kicked her legs. She made sure to decorate passers by with slobbery goo if anyone dared to invade her space.
Chapter 23

Deck the Halls

Fast away the old year passes, Fa la la la la la la la!
Hail the new, ye lads and lasses, Fa la la la la la la la!
Sing we joyous all together! Fa la la la la la la la!
Heedless of the wind and weather, Fa la la la la la la la!

https://youtu.be/SIFqnEoctI4

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Sherlock was glassy eyed still having mostly a liquid breakfast, by the time everyone adjourned to the sitting room for presents.

The morning melted away to the flash of photos and the sound of ripping paper and laughter. Lestrade made polite conversation and Mycroft spent his time studying the goings on from a corner of the room. Greg pretended he didn't notice the other man's scrutiny and tried to not let on that he was disappointed that there was nothing passed to him that bore a familiar scrawl on the tag ending with a poncy M. He knew to expect nothing from Mycroft, but it still stung nonetheless.

On the upside, Molly gave him a yellow tie with silver and blue diamonds on it. Sherlock handed him six cold case files, all but one solved with detailed notes and extended cross references and a Rotary watch similar to the one he always wore. Greg opened several gifts addressed to Both he and Mycroft.

Of course the main event was the embarrassing shower of gifts for Rosie. She was tired of opening long before the pileup was well dented. She began to fuss and they just decided she could open more on Boxing Day. She showed not the slightest interest in the boxes or wrapping papers but had collected a nest of bows around herself and was content redecorating her new plushy toys with the colourful ribbons. John whinged about making certain she not put any of them in her mouth. He feared the bright dyes were probably poison and Sherlock concurred.

Greg had a headache from his breakfast of champions and decided to lie down for a while and see if the beginnings of a hangover wouldn't ease with a nap.

He awoke several hours later to a quiet house. He actually felt pretty good but was terribly thirsty. He headed down stairs taking no particular care to descend silently but the sound of voices slowed his steps. He froze then sat in order to better hear the conversation. He did not set out to eavesdrop, but he had always been rather good at it.

He felt he had every right to hear what was said, since he appeared to be the topic of the conversation.

John's voice was conspiratorial and low, making it difficult to hear, "I don't think it is... Mycroft, he isn't like your brother... If he says he is going, you probably better bank on it."

"He is being dramatic. He wants my attention and when this nonsense fails to deliver it, he will find some reasonable way to back out. I am not playing games, John. I have made my decision and that is my final answer," Mycroft replied obviously both confident and annoyed.
"You are probably right, not saying you aren’t. Just wondering what would you do if you were actually wrong. If he leaves? Then what?"

"Doctor Watson, let me be clear, you have a vast experience in my more affable games that I play purely for my own entertainment. I annoy you at the cash point and kidnap you for the sake of a conversation that I could have by phone. I send cars on you behalf before you realise you will need them. I have many perks that balance the weight of my extensive burdens. You are a relaxing diversion. You are also often quite useful in the wrangling of my brother, but, do not for a moment, believe that what I have at my fingertips has been more than glimpsed by my little interactions with you. I do not wish for him to leave and therefore, let me give you my assurance that he will find it impossible to do so. There are sixteen ways that I can force him to spend the rest of his days on English soil, if I so choose. Those are the simple answers. Should he exude any creativity whatsoever, I can speak with absolute certainty that he can be countered."

"No offence, Mycroft, but I have also seen you fail. Spectacularly?" John lilted the last word with emphasis, bringing several old wounds to the forefront.

"When dealing with my brother, yes. We are on a similar level of skill. I sincerely doubt Gregory Lestrade has been through MI6 training, nor do I hazard any illusions that his IQ could be in a mean deviation of seventy points of my own, therefore, he has no hope of winning against me in a battle of wits and intrigue. He is a kind man with very positive instincts, but he is still in the low gifted range at best." Mycroft let it hang in the air that John too was his intellectual inferior.

"Yeah we get it, you can memorise things faster than the rest of us, but, I think you forgot to factor Siger in, because he is as smart as you and Sherlock and he seems to have invited him. So I seriously doubt Greg will be relying on his own swishy skills alone." John came back at once.

"Siger burns though his own brain cells with the esoteric. Hardly a challenge." Mycroft set his cup of tea down and stood to stir the fire.

"Has it occurred to you that we could end this whole discussion if we just forgave them and ... trusted them? Are we doing the right thing? Because, all I know is that I am bloody miserable." John asked after a few moments of silence.

"Yes. As am I. But, if we are wrong, that is far better than turning a blind eye for sentiment only to later be proved correct. I will never get that picture out of my head. And I was not even there. I cannot imagine the betrayal you must have experienced upon discovery of their stupidity. I cannot speak for you. But, this is the correct thing for me. I will not have him bleed out in the Persian glass mine, but my foray into fragile whims of the heart, have simply reinforced my resolve to never partake again." Mycroft sounded rock solid on his resolve, to a casual observer, but Lestrade could hear the slight warble in his voice and he knew there was little he could do to turn that into a crack of hope.

Greg had heard enough. He finished descending the stairs noisily and could barely contain his anger as the two of them suddenly switched to discussing the merits of using Black Cabs over Uber.

"Don’t let me interrupt. Just passing through. Let me know when you get my life sorted for me, yeah? Too stupid to have any input in my own affairs. By the way, both of you can go to hell."

"Greg? Hey, listen--" John began then bit his lip with guilt and frustration, "Look..."

"Just save it. Merry bloody Christmas."

Mycroft took a deep breath and held it, but did not even attempt any defence.
Chapter 24

On my heavy metal Christmas my true love gave to me,
Twelve silver crosses
Eleven black mascaras
Ten pairs of platforms
Nine tattered t-shirts
Eight pentagrams
Seven leather jackets
Six cans of hairspray
Five skull earrings
Four quarts of Jack
Three studded belts
Two pairs of spandex pants
And a tattoo of Ozzy...

What was deemed a quiet dinner at the main house, just for family, turned into a circus of Greg attempting to avoid people he knew. Everyone wished to offer their opinion on the subject of his supposed departure and the more they spoke and laughed at the idea, the more determined he became to actually do it.

Greg Lestrade nibbled at his lamb in a side room fitted out with table and chairs enough to accommodate nine people, three of whom were under the age of ten and two more were barely teens. Mahmoud and his sister, along with her son rounded out his dining companions. He was more relieved at this arrangement than slighted.

Shuffled to the kids and people of lesser standing table meant he did not have to glare at John or be glared at by Mycroft. He did not have to answer the enquiringly amused looks from Jim, nor be given a lesson in why big boys don't pout by Eurus or be randomly asked uncomfortable probing questions by Mrs. Holmes. He sat contentedly at the children's table and happily teased and joked with the little ones and kept Mahmoud talking at length about their endeavours and future alliances that Siger hoped to gain in the near offing.

He enjoyed speaking to Mamoud's sister and her son. At least they didn't treat him like he was cannon fodder the second he would set foot in Iraq. Mahmoud actually encouraged his plans and discussed the various battalions and how they interlaced with the allies official armies.

He respected Lestrade and even updated him on several of his fishing friends, one who had died bravely and was remembered as a kind but heroic man. Greg envied him in some ways, because he knew he himself would probably be touted a foolish romantic if he himself died out there. Would anyone ever call him brave? He doubted they would even notice his absence, except for Sherlock when he was in the throws of boredom.

"We had planned to stay for The Djinn to officiate, unofficially of course, the ceremonies of your ...
erm, companionship? We do not have such in our home, but is very interesting to view open acceptance of love. Yes? He has been quite torn with the notion, he has such a strong morality, yet he is in favour of such union as well." Mahmoud patted his nephew. "Our boy here will have better life, he is somewhat like you and the Sak bab. Oh, sorry. Mycrotch. He will be the end of our family line, but he will have good life and avoids the ... unkindnesses of our way."

Greg glanced at Abdullah and it dawned on him what Mahmoud meant. His nephew was gay and would have lived in misery if he were not now a British citizen.

The youngsters delighted him, but also brought him a sense of longing. Sara West was eight years old and vivacious and unencumbered by rules, with the exception of table etiquette. She had a halo of fiery red curls up in pigtails and a face not sweetly dotted with freckles but invaded and dominated by them. She was on the pudgy side and critiqued the others table manners with giggles and sharp tongue. Her mother had wandered through twice and admonished her about her bossy ways, but Greg found the little mite utterly charming.

"You don't tell me what to do, or I'll tell your Mum!" Robert Harper told her after the third time she told him to sit in his chair properly and not tuck his feet under his bum. "I can't reach. The Chair is too low."

"You're just too short and your serviette is on the floor again. No proper lady will marry a man who can't even eat without flailing about like an Ape on a banana tree," she fired back.

"I don't want to get married. I am going to be a pirate and I will eat with a bloody sword if I want." He then stabbed a hunk of lamb with his rounded end knife and began to gnaw it off the improvised sword, just to spite her.

Greg couldn't help but giggle. She turned her eyes on him, offended and he winked at her to show no hard feelings.

"And you smack when you chew and eat too fast," she informed him with all the authority an eight year old could muster.

"You are quite right. I am a policeman and we often have no time for meals, which becomes a very bad habit." Greg set his fork on the edge of his plate to force himself to slow down.

"You better be lying, because policemen are not allowed on Uncle Jameses Island. You know that, right?" She questioned.

"Yeah well, I am not a very good policeman evidently because your Uncle Jim likes me. But he keeps a weather eye on me to make sure I don't get a sudden urge to pull out my handcuffs." Greg sipped his wine and grinned at her.

"Oh, well. My mum says there is always an oddity in any group. That's usually me. This time you got stuck with it. Do you want to be my friend? People should be kind to the weird ones. They usually aren't, but they should be." She added the last bit with such sincerity that it both melted and broke his heart.

"I would like that very much. I can use some help with my table manners. Maybe that is why nobody wants to marry me?" He smiled and she tilted her head at Robert as if to say, 'See, I told you so.' and since he had just proven her right, Greg had just made a friend for life.

Kids were easy. He asked them what they got for Christmas and what their favourite video game was and the conversation could have rolled along until dawn with their enthusiastic chatter. It was
the grown ups lurking in other rooms he wanted to avoid.

Greg excused himself as soon as pudding was served, pretty sure he would not be missed. He lazily strolled down the hill finding only Molly and Anthea watching the Doctor Who special. He looked at the screen, then at his new watch, then back at the screen, confused. The lady Doctor appeared to be battling various versions of Father Christmas turned evil. He sat, enthralled.

"How are we seeing this? It is just time for the queen, isn't it? Did they put it on early this year?" Greg asked.

"Shhh," the women both hushed.

Anthea looked at him and finally said, "Well, I am MI6 brass you know. It has a few... advantages. God knows the pay is utter bollocks."

Greg contemplated for a moment. "I am rethinking my life choices. Coppers can get speeding tickets cleaned up and some parking fines waved. This is so much better."

"Yes." Anthea lifted the remote and turned up the volume and backed it up to the beginning.

*******

Sak bab- son of a dog.
Chapter 25
How do you like me now.

You were always the perfect one
And a valedictorian
So under your number I wrote
Call for a good time

I only wanted to get your attention
But you over looked me somehow
Besides you had too many boyfriends to mention
And I played my guitar too loud

How do you like me now
How do you like me now
Now that I'm on my way
Do you still think I'm crazy standing here today
I couldn't make you love me
But I always dreamed about living in your radio
How do you like me now?!

https://youtu.be/3umaLe37-LE

****

Boxing Day was a repeat of Christmas for Rosie. She still didn't manage to get finished, but she had the hang of it now.

"Another day of this and she is going to expect it every day," John said wryly.

Greg would have preferred to beg off for the awards dinner that evening, however, he and Sherlock had been pulled from a burning helicopter by some of the men to be honoured. Months ago he and Sherlock had inconveniently decided to break John out of Sherrinford just as a Russian paramilitary group had decided to raid the prison. They were shot out of the sky and would have burned alive if not for the bravery of Jim's Misfits.

Thank goodness this night was considered casual, because Greg was sick of formal wear. He was comfortable in a suit but his tux was not his favourite thing to be wearing when there was food involved.

His other reason for deciding to go was the fact he had watched Mycroft take off for London that afternoon and could not stand the thought of how he would probably never catch a glimpse of the irritating twat again. It was not as bad as fearing Mycroft was about to be executed, but it was still the
same in other ways. He watched the chopper until it was a speck in the sky.

Molly hitched a ride back with Mycroft and Anthea because she had accomplished her purpose of telling Sherlock that he would be a father and Sherlock's parents left as well, with no wedding in the offing now. They were wanting to take Molly baby shopping and do some legal planning for the soon to arrive prodigal son. Molly was Mrs. Holmes new favourite person and Sherlock agreed to rescue her, should his mother overwhelm her.

The cottage felt rather empty.

Greg sat up in his reacquired room, thankful for a bit of privacy and had busily tracked down his scattered items but had made no effort to actually pack yet.

He and Sherlock were sat together. John and Sebastian Moran were chummy at another table. Miss Rosie was at the main house with Nana Hudson and Jim's GrandMum. Greg could not imagine that that was going to be a good plan after the two of them had been a whirlwind of mischief since the moment they'd met, but it was not his call.

It was soon evident why this award thing was so important. Jim passed out bonuses on merit and they were bloody extravagant. Serving Jim made millionaires and the bigger bonuses that went with the major awards were astonishing amounts. He even gave these to the families of those killed doing his bidding. Greg had not made these numbers in all his years put together working as a police detective. Jim casually passed out cars and motorbikes as door prizes. John won a cute little caravan and he not only accepted it, but was chuffed to bits with the photographs. It was sitting in a legit caravan sales dealership and not even stolen, but brand new.

Greg was too stunned to know how to even react when his own name was called and he was handed papers to a vintage Harley Davidson. He didn't know one model from the next but from the ohs and Awes, he knew it must be special. All he heard was pan head and the photos showed a shiny blue motorbike with crisp turquoise and purple flames and long extended front forks. He didn't know how to ride it but it was the most gorgeous thing he'd ever seen and he would learn. He had a scooter when he was a young man, but nothing like this and he'd sold it when he got married.

He was too shocked to breathe until the thought of Mycroft watching him cruise about London on this monster brought a huge grin to his face.

It was strange that something so unexpectedly frivolous could cheer his mood to such a measure, but Greg was pretty sure this was the best day of his life and the more he looked at the folder, the more excited he became.

He went to sleep with a huge grin, as did many people on The island of misfit toys that night.

Finally all the hoopla was over and people began the inevitable exit. The airport was abustle by sunrise and Greg was watching the the small jets and parade of helicopters from a bench by the chapel. The sun was out and the wind was blowing a gale, but sheltered by the building, he was comfortable enough. The take offs were affected by the headwind. It was interesting sitting and watching them compensate.

There was a weather advisory and they said they were watching a building storm out in the Atlantic. It was said it would rival last years storm. Greg peeked around the building from time to time to check the ominous looking cloud bank rolling their way. By late afternoon the chaos had slowed and he was bored with the beauty and frankly cold. He went in the unheated chapel and lit candles. He was just about to leave when Siger appeared at the door, long frame leaned on the last pew, arms crossed and a small smile on his lips.
Greg startled as he turned. "Jesus Horacio Christ, I wish you would make yourself known and not just appear out of thin air!"

"And two Our Fathers," Siger Holmes said with a slight dip of his head. "You are a very good actor, my dear man. I have been accosted by six people who are rather furious with me. Mycroft left in quite a huff and that was absolutely delicious. He has assured me that there will be grave consequences if I pursue the notion of stealing his Sherlock wrangler, now that John has become unfit for duty."

Greg couldn't help but grin at this warrior priest with the charm of a genie from a lamp. "Well, having dealt with a few champions in my line of work, I have discovered the best way to lie is to tell the truth. If you have no objections, I think I might just pop over and help you save the world, after all."

"O ye of little faith. I did have an enlightening conversation with John. He did everything but come straight out and say he thought you were going to top yourself any moment. He tried very hard to persuade me if I allowed you to die that he would personally rewrite the book of Revelation and would have the full backing of his 'Lordship of Twat' to quote the good Doctor who has a very strange and slightly hypocritical interpretation of his Hippocratic oath."

Lestrade threw his head back and belly laughed as he imagined tiny John Watson trying to intimidate this giant on his behalf. The image of a meerkat threatening a giraffe popped in his head.

Siger continued almost musing to himself. It had to be a Holmes genetic marker. "He is an angry little man. He is incredibly jealous of you, yet he is protective of you as well. Told me I may as well shoot both of my brothers and save them the misery if I intended to murder you with my lunatic cause. He meant every word of it too. Not a man of idle threats. Now, I know the plan has not yet reached fruition but I have not yet given up. Mycroft stews on things and this period of bluster and thinking he is right will be shortened if we simply pretend that--"

"I'm not pretending. I honestly want to go, if you would have me. They all think I am some useless plonker too stupid to last ... two months out there with you. Mycroft thinks I am bluffing. I don't want to be. So, the first question I have is... would you even let me go?" Greg dug his fingernail ruthlessly into the finish of the nearest pew. He only realised he was actually doing vandalism in the form of an M, when he heard the intake of Siger's breath. 

Siger looked down upon Lestrade, the smirk gone and a look of contemplating analysis flicking in his furrowed brows and grey eyes. "Oh dear. That rather changes the game, doesn't it. Well, yes you are welcome, but I want you to consider this very carefully, before you decide."

Greg's shoulders sagged. "Everyone thinks I'm useless. You think I'm going to die too."

"Mmmm. Possible, but no. I am very good at this war stuff. Obviously you have considered one possibility and reconciled it already. You have not considered the really hard scenario." Holmes took a step toward him and stood with mesmerising calm study of Greg.

"Alright? What did I miss, then?" Greg asked rather than try to guess.

"The worst thing of all. What if you live? The consequences of that far outweigh the slight possibility of your death." Siger tilted his head and the grey eyes blinked from grey to blue to fiery green.
Well, I'm crazy 'bout ya Santa 'cause ya bring me Christmas cheer
Well I'm crazy 'bout ya Santa
Cause ya bring me Christmas cheer
Make a little stop just once a year

***

Greg looked up into the eyes which changed hue with each blink like a shutter and the hairs on the back of his neck stood on end as if he were actually looking at something supernatural and the embodiment of beauty despite the heavily scared face. "Sometimes, rewards and consequences are sort of the same thing," he said and tried to control his breathing and not give away his inner prickled skin by actually shivering.

"Indeed they are. Yes, you can go. You have an uncanny way with people, even when you cannot converse with them. Exemplary Morality and fair hearted. That has as much value as any marksman or combat expert. You would be of use because I have seen your ability to adapt. You would be an asset in my company. But just know that it will be a battle to get away from Mycroft and I hate to corrupt you, for he will never forgive you, if we should succeed."

"Thank you, for saying that. Yeah. I do get it. About Mycroft. No matter how it all came to pass... I have sort of feared that would be how he and I had to end. He was always going to find something he couldn't forgive. So, the salad cream doesn't matter if the Rocket is bitter." Greg snorted and shook his head at his own silly metaphor. He hated Rocket lettuce, because it always tasted off to him.

"We will iron out the details. Take your time and consider this carefully. Anyway, Jim sent me. It seems you won a very expensive motorbike last night. He wanted me to go over its operation with you. He worried you would take it into London traffic and be squished by the first bus you encountered. I'm to give you lessons."

Greg laughed. "What? You mean now? Here? It is here?"

Siger rolled his eyes and grinned, "I love motorbikes. I have one back in London. They don't approve of me riding it, this bloody man-dress looks ridiculous on it so I wear an adaptation." He billowed his cassock and showed Greg how impractical his garment would be. "You know where the motorpoole is? There is a long metal fabricated building around the back. Your prize sits within if you would care to have a booker. Meet you there in twenty minutes? I need a quick costume change."

Greg walked with Siger as far as the main house. He had never been to the motorpoole. But he had been on the beach located below the rocky Craig in which it sat. He thought about it and could not quite fathom why there would be a large building for vehicles on this tiny island. He stepped inside and was noticed at once.

A man covered in splotches of grime grinned and greeted him. "You're that copper bloke, ain't you?"
One what got the sweet ride last night, aye?"

"Umm. I got a Harley. This one?" He held up a picture.

"Yeah. She is called 'The second Circle' and she had a bit of a run in the states at the shows. Got a case a trophies and stuff. She were put up to auction for the bloke who built her's medical bills and Jim won her. Rode her twice for real on the streets then brought her here. You got the lucky bingo, mate. He gave away six bikes, sure, but this one. This here's the stuff of dreams." He said all of this as he wiped his hands, found the keys to the building, led Lestrade through a haphazard mash of machines Greg could not identify other than a couple of them were big Green and said John Deere. Out a back door and to the side, to another door and into a blackout cavern. Suddenly the lights flicked on and the man waved Greg to follow.

There were literally hundreds of shiny toys within, each given a space and displayed as if from a museum. They rounded an aisle and there was a haughty rake of metal crouched in a corner of the display with a cabinet of trophies standing guard. The man smiled at Greg and waved for him to check out his new toy,

Greg's eyes swept the lines of the bike. The bike sat perfectly still but almost waiting for his approval. He let out a low whistle and thought to himself, this is the first inanimate object I have ever seen that feels like it can make a man feel like he has just had sex.

"Why is it called the second circle?"

Another voice sliced through the surrounding darkness and explained, "That would be for Dante. The second circle of hell was for the fornicators and they were forever to be tormented by the restless winds. Have to admit, I didn't think of you when I decided to let this go. I thought it would go to Sherlock, but perhaps she picked her new master."

Lestrade squinted as Jim stepped from the shadows. "You know, she is beautiful but... I would be smarter not to take it. The Met frowns on bribery. It's just..."

Jim dismissed the shop fellow with a wave, "You're you and I'm me and people do talk. Yes. I anticipated that. So, congratulations on the essay contest you entered. You won the grand prize. How fortunate for you."

Jim reached into his pocket and withdrew more papers. "Your official prize claim form, taxes paid. Oh and your boring essay on blood spatter errors in forensics is going to be legendary. Do read it, in case you are interviewed. My wife banged it out for you, just in case. Now, that the cat has been fed, do you like her?"

"Worse, mate. I think I want to marry her!" Greg grinned sheepishly.

"I felt that way when I bought her. She was pure magic. But, it is always my lot. Shiny things only flicker for a while then the candle gutters and I have to find the next thing. I love this time of year though, I can feed off of others happily ever after vicariously."

Greg listened and Jim spoke at length on the particulars of the Harley. He told him of who built it and of the fact it was quite difficult to turn. "The forks are raked so far out you will have to use your weight to steer. She is lovely, yes, but pretty things can be dangerous. I would not ride her in inclement weather. She will buck you off and..."

Greg grinned. "May have to work around that. Live in London? If I can't rider her in the rain, means she may as well sit here."

Jim bit his lip, licked them, then asked, "You do like drama, don't you? I hear you won't be in
London much longer. Christmas dinner was as awful as I had imagined. You were lucky you cut out early. There was a rather heated exchange, mostly about you. Don't take it with you. Sand is her worst enemy. You can let me know if you want to store her for a bit. I will ship the bike here and you know it will be maintained...if/until you return."

"I... thank you. That would be very kind. I don't really know how to thank you, for all the trouble I have probably been. I have never had anything like this..."

Jim shrugged. "I sold a helicopter. Most of last night was a couple of days work for me. Now that it is over, I am glad we did it. You bought my wife a gift. Not because you wanted anything from her...just because you like her and it was Christmas. That means something to somebody who never had that."

Greg smiled at the floor, "It was probably lame. But, yeah, I do like her. I really do. Some days, it messes with my head because you are both mad as a bag of ferrets, but I do actually like both of you. More all the time. Which makes me mad as a sack of wet cats, as well."

"It really does. But, likewise, I'm sure."

"I have to ask, how did you and Siger become ... friends?"

"Oh, that. Well we--"

"Shall perhaps save that story for another time?" Siger said suddenly a few feet away, yet neither had been alerted to his footfalls.

Lestrade glanced at Moriarty and read that he was trying to hide his own startled reaction. It wasn't just him then.

It was dark by the time he put the bike back into its spot. He was chilled to the bone and could not feel his fingers, but his heart felt like he must actually glow with the trill of this bike. After just a few hesitant trips around the island, he had felt as if he belonged on the bike. It was the best therapy session he'd ever had. He could not wait to get her to London.

He returned to the nearly empty cottage and sighed deeply as he closed the kitchen door. John and Sherlock were having a knock down drag out. He was tired, happy and sore and he just didn't want to deal with it.
Hey, Paula

Chapter 27

Hey, Paula

https://youtu.be/W7vcRyBAQZA

*Hey Paul, I've been waiting for you
Hey, hey, hey Paul, I want to marry you too
If you love me true, if you love me still
Our love will always be real
My love, my love*

***

Sherlock slammed out of the house and Greg was startled awake. He rolled over and said to himself, 'not my division.'

Sherlock had not returned by the next morning. John was in pretend-all-is-normal, then snap at everyone mode. He was obviously frustrated and that made Rosie fussy.

"Hey, John. I couldn't help but hear. Sorry, but look, how about I take miss Rosie until you get yourself sorted?"

John wanted to lash out. But instead he sighed and bent his head, rubbing his temples. "I cannot do this any longer, Greg."

"What do you mean?"

John sighed as if explaining would physically hurt. "I mean Sherlock. We argue all the time." He held up his hand as if to anticipate what Greg was about to say. "I know, we always did, but not like this. It was good natured and he was ... I don't know. May just be me. I have no patience with him. None. And he just seems to hate me. I am ready to just give up, you know? He exhausts me, which, just like now, affects her. Do you see what I mean? I thought there was more between us than crime scenes, but here, I am starting to believe... there just isn't."

Greg sat next to him and thought for a moment as he played paddy cake with Rosie. "I don't actually believe that, if you want the truth. This is none of my business, it really isn't, but I am on the outside and I can see some things, maybe you don't."

"Alright. Tell me?" John fell backwards and closed his eyes.

"Let's go back to that day by the lake. When I came and got you and we were losing him. He was hours away from death and there was nothing anyone could do. What if Irene had not come through? Think what you would have given at that moment for a chance like this?"

John sucked his breath in and held it. "Jesus. Yes. I would have done anything."

"I know. And you always see, when he is hurt, but then... you forget. And you reject him and he doesn't know why. He is brilliant, but he has spent his life in an emotional vacuum... mostly for the sole purpose of dealing with rejection. You are everything to him. But every time you reject him, hell, the man would rather face bleeding torture than your face when you are wanting rid of him."
Any sane man would tell you to piss off. You have to quit playing this the way you would with a woman. You can't make him cry then hold him and soothe him. He doesn't cry, he cries out. Which usually turns self destructive. Not telling you what to do, you know? But, you better do something."

John sat back up and nodded.

Greg decided saying more was not necessary and he lifted Rosie and said, "I will drop her off to Mrs. Hudson on my way to pick up O2."

"Pick up what?"

"The bike, mate. Her name is The second circle of hell, but I am just calling her O2, because I think she is my new oxygen. Wave me down. I will let you give her a spin. See if she doesn't make you feel all warm and fuzzy inside, as well."

John grinned in astonishment and nodded. "Yeah. Might do."

John's phone beeped. Then Greg's trilled. He looked at his and saw a text from an unknown number.

[The docs phone must be off. Can you find him and bring him to the VOTD? Moran]

Greg texted back. [Is someone hurt? DIG]

[Not just yet. But it is in the offing. Moran]

"We need to go. They need a doc, I guess," Greg said carefully.

John stood and nodded, "Nope, Sherlock needs a Doctor. Got into the sweeties again. Take Rosie to Mrs. H and then follow? I may need you. He. Shit. He may not listen to me at all."

Greg nodded and they said no more, each on their own mission. It was only twenty minutes later when Greg managed to get to the barracks and what he saw, broke his heart a little.

Sherlock, face a belligerent storm, was sat at a table, nose frosted, mouth running too fast to even hear properly, and John towering over him, hands on hips, face red and veined with pure fury.

Sherlock bent to the table and snorted a line of coke dramatically and John had had all he could stand. He knocked the tray and the whole lot onto the floor. "I said, Enough!"

Sherlock finally looked up at Greg and a mean sneer decorated his features, "Oh look my former handler is here. Great old times. Too bad Mycroft ruined him, but just as well, because I am done being handled and cajoled and admonished and chastised and guilt tripped into your little boxes and house trained and trapped and given stupid rules by people who don't even like me anymore. Go away. Play your social nicety and lies for the sake of what people think somewhere else. I see you! I see all of you! I see Lestrade going to Iraq just to spite my brother... because he has given up and the fact I need him... that I will go insane without him, oh too bad, and my best friend who has hated me yet can't quite let go, I have put up with his torture and bloody rules and he is leaving me anyway. Not worth marrying but delightfully worth a few shags and then dumped at the alter for something I don't even know if I did. Guilty until proven innocent and you can't prove a negative. Oh joy, going to be a father, and Mummy steals her away and now that has a bunch of random new bloody rules as well. Everyone thinks I am their own pet, just like Mycroft and I am not going to be their tame little dog any longer! I do what I want and anyone who has a problem with it can just..." he reached into his pocket and with a flash of defiance in his eyes, he pulled out a small bag of white powder. "...piss off. All of you. Leave me alone." He waved his hands as if telling school children to go play elsewhere.
"Oh, Sherlock. Damned this. Damned it all. " John's voice hitched and his eyes were red and watering and he did a quick turn and marched away.

Greg sucked a deep breath and eyed John's retreating figure. "Be right back. Sherlock hang on. I am going to fix this. Just, try not to make yourself sick. You are just making it worse."

"Sod off, Gilroy. And stay away!"

"You don't come back, he is going in the brig!" Moran shouted to Greg's back.

He caught up to John and begged, "Please stop. Just for a minute. I have to tell you something. Please."

John whirled and glared. "Nothing for you to say Greg. Not after that."

"Yeah. There is. What If I told you he and I were never together? What if I told you that you have no reason to be jealous. We were only... shagging a bit after Iraq. Not before. And then it was mostly just to soothe our broken hearts. Mine for Mycroft and his for you. John, please. He loves me, but he was never in love with me. He will never love another human like he loves, you. Please get your shit together and just once. Try something else?"

John stood there, his voice went deadly calm, "Why would you do that. That is the most shitty thing... both of you have played this game .. to what ? No. Just no. Unbelievable."

"This is my fault. The whole thing. I wanted Mycroft so bad, for so long. He was trying to help me. Yes we were actually going to marry for Rosie. But that was all."

John smiled his psychopath smile, "But you didn't just pull it on Mycroft. You pulled it on me. Hmmm? You pulled it on me."

"I tried you tell you. The night in the bar, but you had to be a dick. So I didn't. Then in the chapel, but you decided to be a dick. Then when he was about to die in a tent, I tried, but you were a dick... are you seeing a pattern here? Because you are being a dick right now, in fact. How can you not see, it isn't a little fight that put him here."

John shook his head. "No. Don't blame anyone but the addict. He made these choices and our relationship was a price he willingly threw away. Just now. I am done! You win. You can bloody shag him and watch him destroy his life. Not me."

"It is his responsibility for jumping off the wagon with both feet. But you and I both know, we put him here. He has been dealing with my depression for a very long time. But it hit me like a dust storm there for a bit. I'm sorry. I have never had it so bad before. You know that isn't fake. You know." Lestrade stepped closer, right in John's personal space.

John met his gaze then softened and dropped his eyes and nodded.

"He knew a long time before you. He knew about when he was... gone as well. For someone who doesn't really know how to navigate at all, he has been swimming as fast as he can."

"He, won't let me in any more."

"You keep walking away. Marry him. Show him that you are not going to walk away. He does everything with both feet. He doesn't know any other way. Jesus, John. You are supposed to be
smarter than me. If I were really trying to steal him away, would I fight for him and you every time? Would I step aside every time? Just because I don't get a happily ever after, doesn't mean I don't want you to have one. Please. Marry him and if you are worried about him and I, I will go to Iraq."

John's eyes narrowed, "You're doing that anyway."

Greg grinned, "Yes. Just reminding you." He tilted his head and directed his eyes back toward the building. "Come on. Let's go save Sherlock Holmes."

Sherlock's eyes were squinting and bugging out as he finished an additional line. He shook his head like a dog. Then noticed John and Greg coming toward him. "Oh dear, did you forget some insult combo? Coming back for another shot? Do carry on, try for something creative this time."

John looked down at him and smirked. His head tilted and his eyes twinkled with fondness. His hand reached out and touched Sherlock's cheek and gently he tilted Sherlock's head toward him.

Sherlock, quite obviously confused now, looked at Greg for guidance and became even more confused. "John? What has happened. What is going on?"

"Do you still want to get married? To me?" John asked with his eyes bright with love.
Chapter 28

O little Town of Bethlehem

O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight

https://youtu.be/Vc4rnbLY0S4

****

Sherlock answered without hesitation,"Of course I do. It is you that called it off."

John nodded and said, "I know. I'm sorry."

Sherlock shook his head. "What did you do to him, Gerwin?"

Greg grinned, patted Sherlock on the shoulders and leaned over him as he said, "I told him the truth, about us. About operation Mycroft."

"And he called me a dick, several times," John added.

"I don't understand. Is this a trick?" Sherlock asked.

"No. But if you hand your cocaine to that nice man over there and stop deducing everyone into an early grave, Greg and I will help you back to the cottage and when you are not high, I am going to ask you again, just to make sure, then we are just going to do it. No hoopla, no fuss. No more of that... just like we wanted. Deal?"

Sherlock nodded, mouth gapped open and terrified hope in his eyes.

They got him back to the cottage as he hummed some kind of mad march and conducted an invisible symphony in his mind palace.

They put him to bed on the sofa. Lestrade stayed with Sherlock while John went to collect Rosie.

Once John was out of the house, Sherlock fell silent and one eye popped open. "Now, how did you really do it?"

Greg snorted in mirth. "I don't know. I said a lot of stuff, but something stuck, didn't it? That's the important bit."
"He will change his mind."

"Not if you can keep your mouth shut for a couple of days. Then he's stuck with you. Try not to screw it up?" Greg was just teasing, but there was an undertone of truth.

When John returned, Rosie was not with him. He shook his head and simply explained that five slightly psychotic adults were putting on a butterfly play for his daughter and said daughter told him to go away.

"Eurus won't hurt her," Greg volunteered, reading his troubled face.

"Mrs. Hudson said that too. And Sherlock. And Jim. And Moran. But, she is my daughter and I have to protect her. I am coming to terms with it in a group of people." John said this, but he very clearly was trying to convince himself more than Greg.

"Well, I guess I will just go and let you two get yourselves sorted. I have a date and she may just be the one for me."

Sherlock furrowed his brows, "Oh really?"

"Don't be jealous, Sherlock, but when I wrap my legs around her, she purrs and when I want to make her growl, all I do is--"

"Oh, for God's sake, he is having sex with that motorbike, isn't he?" Sherlock grumbled.

John snickered, "Got news for you. I want to have sex with his motorbike. Have you seen it?"

"Dull." Sherlock said with an exasperated eye roll. Greg dug in his pocket and pulled out a picture holding it in front of Sherlock's face. He squinted then looked slightly impressed. "Oh... not dull. Can I ride it?"

"No. You are high. High people do not get to ride my baby."

"Then what's the point of you?" Sherlock replied, but there was no malice to it.

"Be back later. If you are shagging when I get back, be in your room or expect my critique of your techniques--" he smirked, "on video!"

"You always were a bit kinky!" Sherlock said batting his eyes.

"Sherlock... bit not good," John warned.

"I was so," Sherlock mumbled.

"Yeah? That's why you can't ride the motorcycle right now. You have no muscle coordination." Greg grinned at John. "Doesn't know to close his mouth to keep the bugs out."

"It's winter." Sherlock looked out the window. "The bugs are dead."

"And you would be as well if I were stupid enough to hand you the keys." Greg headed out the door. The storm was still coming and the clouds were looking ominous.

It was surreal riding the bad arse bike around the private Island. The brooding clouds, the silvered sea, and the wind burning his face all made him feel so alive and he delighted in the rush of joy this silly two wheeled monster gave him. On reflection, he felt in the moment the same way he'd felt in Iraq. It was a day worth sticking around for and something he had never craved ownership of was
surprising him with how it gave him something to look forward to. Of course he barely shifted up when it was time to downshift but it was really good practice.

It grew dark and he rode the main road with the headlamp for a while, but the temperature was dropping and he could feel the sting of crystals of ice beginning to fly. He didn't take it back to the motorpoole this time. He parked it right in the kitchen. After all, Euris had a camel in her kitchen for months according to everyone.

John had fallen asleep reading to Sherlock. Greg gently woke him and said he'd take over if he wanted to get Rosie. "There is a storm coming, it is beginning to snow and getting bitter out."

John hustled out and returned with Mrs. Hudson as well. She was less than pleased to find the Second Circle crouched in the kitchen, forcing her to squeeze by the smelly machine to get in her room.

"Bloody thing is leaking oil on the Lino! I am not cleaning that up, Detective Inspector, I am not your housekeeper."

"Yes, ma'am. Sorry. I rode too late to take it back. I can swing it out a bit if you need?"

"No, then it will block the fridge. It will be fine, so long as I don't have a rush to the loo in the middle of the night and forget about it. Last thing I need is to break a hip. I'd be in a fine mess then."

Greg moved the table and chairs and parked the bike against the wall then put the table and chairs where the bike had sat. It still was crowded, but with the chairs pushed in, at least Mrs. Hudson falling would not be on his head.

The storm moved in gently at first then sometime in the night it grew to a snow squall and dumped three foot on the island. Dawn broke in near darkness as the flakes turned huge and visibility was about ten meters at best. The little cottage settled into board games and Sherlock feeling a bit manic, but otherwise it was peaceful and the world was quiet.

Mrs Hudson entertained Rosie and baked pies. The phones went down by afternoon and Sherlock and John made a trek out to get firewood and then later to check in up at the main house. They returned with huge smiles. It seems that whilst there, John asked Sherlock again and everyone was delighted that at least one wedding was back on.

Jim assured them his men would have the roads clear a few hours after the storm broke but for now it was best to hunker down and simply wait it out.

Sherlock won every game they played. He cheated, but he won. Mrs Hudson found a huge jigsaw puzzle and everyone set to work on that. Sherlock found a chess set and that kept he and John entertained for hours, mostly to argue about Sherlock cheating, but it was that good natured bickering that had been their old normal.

Greg heard snippets of their low conversation while he napped on the couch. They spoke at length of the errors each had made and what they could do to prevent them in the future.

Greg faded in and out. Sherlock assuring John that he had a reason to stay clean and that he was a user and not actually an addict. Sherlock told stories of his childhood and things he got up to at the five boarding schools he had been thrown out of at some point. Two Chemistry lab explosions had been responsible for two of his adventures of being sent down. By the time he had entered Harrow, he had stopped trying to fit in and Graduated early sitting his A levels a year early just to spite the Headmaster. He had taken two gap years before Cambridge and told John it was the happiest time of
Greg thought back to when he'd met Sherlock and all he knew was that something had happened in the years after Uni, because the man he met had certainly not been a happy person.

John and Sherlock quietly ironed out relationship details, thinking Greg was sound asleep.

John brought up the subject, not unkindly, "You have to stay clean, Sherlock. No matter how angry you are at me. It was my first rule."

"I know, and I am sorry. But, to be fair that deal only bound me whilst we were together. The dowry must be returned if the groom's groom resends the match."

"Does that work to excuse every hissy fit? This is a lifetime commitment. Even if not with me, with Our... our daughter. You do get that, right? You can walk away from me any time you decide you have had enough. But, you don't get to walk away from her life? Damned sure not for drugs."

Sherlock cleared his throat and he swallowed several times. The corners of his mouth turned down and his chin quivered.

John tilted his head to the right in confusion, his eyes asking what caused this reaction.

"Our... you never called her that."

John sighed in relief, then smirked fondly at Sherlock. He leaned his head on his fist, and let his face speak for the pride he felt at his little girl having Sherlock Holmes wrapped around her finger.

"It was not just a hissy fit, John. I needed to think. Everything was ending. The prospect of the work alone is not enough any longer. It must include you and him. He has been, well, sometimes I worry about him."

John sighed and scratched something loudly. "Yeah. I get it. I really do."

"We can't shut him out. He has been better the last couple of days, may have turned the corner, but he is so alone. I could not face being alone again and I am good at it. Greg isn't. He..." Sherlock said the rest as if he were revolted, "llllikes... people. The witch took all their couple friends. I ran off all his supposed work friends. My idiot brother is virtue signaling and poor Greg doesn't understand that he will sit in his office and moon over him until some opportunity to save him from some imagined life error. He will swoop in like a vulture and make it all better. But, he will never see what I do until it is too late."

"Is what he said true? Sound like he may not have got it right."

"Which part? I wasn't there."

John's voice was carefully neutral but cautious. "You weren't really together? That bit?"

Sherlock sighed. "That is mostly true. Until we had both given up. I refuse to regret it, John."

"Yeah. I do understand. I don't regret my time with Mary either. I just regret that I didn't know how little time we had. So, damned much of it was spent fighting. That must be me. Because you and he didn't fight. Not that I saw."

"No, we didn't, I suppose. But his first impression of me was at my worst. He has different expectations of me. If I am not hurling on his shoes, he probably sees that as an improvement. You
watched me fly and now I have fallen... still."

"You can't keep falling, you know?"

"It's just like flying. The destination is all that differs. Maybe I was always falling. It just looked like flying from where you stood."

"Then it is my job to catch you. I haven't been doing that very well for a long time. We need therapy, and we said that before then let it slide."

"Anything you want, John."

Greg took a deep breath and without opening his eyes said "No."

The others startled. "Is he still asleep? " John asked hopefully.

"What do you mean, no?" Sherlock asked both annoyed and amused.

Greg groaned and sat up. "I mean this 'anything you want' crap. I have a rule. I maybe have several."

"You don't get to make the rules." Sherlock began.

"John has to stop walking away. John, mate you have every right to step away and cool down. But every time you do it, this one genuinely thinks that is it and you are never coming back. You have to promise to always, every time, no matter how furious or justified, you will indicate that you plan to return. Do your walk, whatever you need. Call me and we will go down the pub and have a proper bitch about himself. But, don't you ever walk away and leave him thinking his bloody life is over, not unless you mean it."

John's brows furrowed and he leaned in, elbows on knees and asked softly, "Is he right?"

Sherlock shrugged then sighed and nodded.

"Ahhhhh, Sherlock. How do you not know? I am always coming back. My pride says stupid shit, but, I am miserable without you. Okay, I agree to Greg's rule."

"Good, now, the next thing is, he and I can be unsupervised. You cannot do this off the charts jellies and green eyes thing every five minutes. I swear to you, on my honour, that if we ever... I will tell you. I lived with a cheat, John. I get it. I know what it does to your head. I may never get Linda outta mine. I hate cheaters and I won't be one. Swear."

John swallowed several times then nodded at the floor. "Yeah. Yeah, Okay."

Sherlock looked poignantly at Greg, checked where John's attention was then mouthed "Go away!" Before smiling benignly as John caught movement and locked his gaze on Sherlock.

"I only have one more. But, I reserve the right to add addendums as needed. You both have to be nicer to Mycroft."

"No"
"Not happening!"
Each said at the same time.

Greg took a deep breath and sighed. "Look, I know you both think me going with Siger is a lark, and maybe it is. I don't know when, we have not worked it out yet. But I am going. First of all, I
liked it there. I was scared, don't get me wrong, but I was also perfectly at peace. I don't know how to explain it, but this copper stuff is swiftly coming to an end, for me at least. My instincts tell me something big is just over the horizon. Maybe it is this. I have never done anything like that and I want more. So, I am not going to be around here."

"You can't go. What about my work? I need you here."

Greg smiled and shook his head. "Not any more you don't. You have seven other DIs feeding you cases now. You don't need me any more. Who knows, maybe when I get back, I can consult with you two. At least keep your paperwork sorted."

"If you do die, I will never forgive you."

Greg snorted his exasperated mirth. "I forgave you. Look, if I do do something that gets me killed, so long as I know it means something, so be it. I just want to look back at that time and say it made a difference. Just to be clear, the corner has turned and I am back on track. Thank you, for worrying. Means a lot. But, the point is, My has nobody but you and Anthea. I know he is a royal Bell-end, but for me...I want you to invite him to dinner, once a week..."

"God no... twice a year"

"Every other week."

"Four times a year, and that includes Christmas," Sherlock negotiated.

"Bi-monthly. Come on, Sherlock, be sensible."

"Once a month, my final offer and they don't have to be precisely monthly. Twelve times a year, at our convenience and if he turns me down or cancels, it still counts"

"If he cancels it counts. I know you, you will only invite him when you know he can't go. Twelve dinners a year and I will write you a letter of recommendation and introduction to every senior level DI that I have ever had an ounce of respect for. You will have more cases than you can find hours in the day for."

"Done."

John shook his head at the rapid fire negotiations. "I feel like I have been to an auction."
Someday, I wish upon a star  
Wake up where the clouds are far behind me  
Where trouble melts like lemon drops  
High above the chimney top  
That's where you'll find me

Somewhere over the rainbow  
Bluebirds fly  
And the dreams that you dare to  
Oh why, oh why can't I?

Well, I see trees of green and red roses too  
I'll watch them bloom for me and you  
And I think to myself  
What a wonderful world

https://youtu.be/V1bFr2SWPiI

***

The snow continued but sporadically. Greg found out what some of the machines were for in the motorpool. They had plows and blowers and all sorts of equipment crawling all over the island and in no time it was navigable again. There were numerous snow fights and in general no grumbling about the work. Jim's army had the place up and in business in no time.

Good to their word, a wedding occurred. Sigerson officiated and as he was an official Solemner registered in Ireland, the documents needed only to be filed. They had had to apply three months in advance so it was all ship shape and Bristol fashion.

Sherlock wore his tux and John was in his Fusilliers finery. They held the ceremony at the main house and though it was a bit of a mash up and thrown together, it was a fantastic day. They had wedding pies, not a cake, because Mrs. Hudson had been very busy during the snowstorm and they were going to go to waste otherwise.

Sherlock's vows were a bit odd. He played his violin for John and when he was finished, John said, "I do, love. To all of that, I do."

Greg was confused but Eurus, Siger, Sherlock and John seemed to understand what he'd said perfectly well, so who was he to judge.
John pulled a folded paper out and said his, only glancing at it once, but the paper shook the whole time.

"You will be my priority, I will not lie to you, I will protect you to the best of my ability. I will honour you and cherish you and do my best to make your life a happy one all the days of my life. I will put up with your moods and your experiments and I will follow you into battle with my heart full of joy for the honour of standing beside you in thick and thin. My heart is scarred and battered but it is all I have to offer you. Will you take me, a sorry beat up old soldier, as you husband forevermore?"

"I do, John. With pride."

"Friends, on this occasion, you have witnessed these vows, taken with due consideration and care. If anyone knows of cause to stop this union, I ask that you please ... keep it to your bloody self?" Siger stated with all the officious humour of an Irish priest.

Several people stood up to offer joke objections and John pulled his service revolver, (unloaded and the threat as bogus as the objections), and everyone laughed heartily as intended.

Siger quickly ran through this bit at about 300 words per minute and slowed down only for the "I now pronounce you husbands, quick kiss him, brother, before he changes his mind or shoots someone"

Yes it was trashy and more comedy than tears, but it also made for a fun and unique memory.

Greg served as John's best man, and Jim served as Sherlock's. Eurus assisted Rosie as the flower girl and Daniel, well he put on a lovely celebratory fireworks display.

He called it his practice for New Year's Eve, and Jim had shrugged and whispered, "Just go with it, it has kept him busy for days. He set fire to the swimming pool Christmas night."

"How does that happen?" John had asked.

Siger had interjected, "He is a good man. The challenge is keeping his creativity channeled."

They dutifully assembled outside for nearly an hour of festive and honestly beautiful fireworks set off from the main beach and from their high vantage point, perfectly reflected in the still mercurial ocean.

Sherlock and John were then driven to the cottage originally meant for Greg and Mycroft's honeymoon and Rosie, would stay with he and Mrs Hudson to give the newlyweds privacy.

After they had been driven away, Siger asked that Greg follow him into Jim's study.

"I want to bring a matter to your attention. You won't like it, but hear me out before you say no."

"Alright." Greg sat across from Siger who stood behind a large ornate desk with gold bobbles adorning the deep red wood.

"I have a proposal for you. I would like you to sign this." He passed the document to Greg.

Greg looked and his jaw dropped. "This one was ours. Our marriage registry. That can't be right. That's his signature I would know it anywhere. I don't understand?"

"The application and paperwork were already here. I want to make it official. Not only as an annoyance to my brother but to thwart his plan to keep you in London. You see, if you are married
to him, he cannot single handedly put your name on no fly lists and various other methods he plans to implement to keep you in England. As his spouse, it presents a conflict of interest."

"But, he is not even here? How did you get him to sign this?"

"I didn't. Sherlock has been able to forge his signature since we were young. But, he was there in person for the application, the ceremony is really a bit of a misnomer. You are married at signature and documented filing, not at the moment of "I do, kiss, kiss" so I am going to file it."

"When he finds out, he is going to bloody kill us!" Greg stated with absolute certainty.

"Which segues nicely with my next bit. Greg, you know that I never intended for this plan to come to actual fruition. But, nor am I opposed. That is up to you. We all must answer our own calling. So I ask that before you leave, that you prove my sister innocent then, no matter what he pulls, I will get you in country. He will be livid, a bonus feature for me, of course. But, should the unthinkable happen, he would be able to collect your remains, legally. I think it would be a source of solace to him, in that frame."

Greg looked at the paper. "I don't know. This is shady and..."

"If you were injured and could not make your own medical decisions, to whom do you wish that burden to fall? Obviously. This makes that happen. Also as the spouse of a diplomat, it gives him some standing to get you released should we be captured." Siger shrugged. "Not that that is worth much. But you never know. In all probability he will never know. This is Ireland. It won't ping his system. And he will not be searching for Hershel Holmes to be leaving country. He will never pick up that name as a potential flag."

Greg sat, he let his heart break a little, then he picked up the pen.

"Congratulations, I now pronounce you man and idiot. He should have been here and I am sorry he has failed."

"Wasn't just him," Greg said handing the document back and taking a deep breath to steady himself. "Anyone asks me, I know nothing about this. I don't know how it happened and I will not be the one he takes to the dungeons and tortures!"

Siger smirked. "It was the Tower and he had to give up his duties several years ago. When they turned his favourite office into a tourist display."

"God, I hope you are taking the piss."
**Chapter 30**

Mamas don't let your Babies Grow Up to be Cowboys

*Them that don't know him won't like him and them that do
Sometimes won't know how to take him
He ain't wrong, he's just different but his pride won't let him
Do things to make you think he's right*

*Mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys
Don't let 'em pick guitars or drive them old trucks
Let 'em be doctors and lawyers and such
Mamas don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys
'Cos they'll never stay home and they're always alone
Even with someone they love*

https://youtu.be/nIIEoKg8ZQg

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The morning after the wedding, Greg packed up to leave. He didn't want to stay for New Years Eve, because London was always all hands on Deck and he didn't want to sit out on the island and count down the days to his not wedding. He knew if he jumped back in, he would be so harried he likely wouldn't know the day of the week, much less dwell on the 6th of January.

So, he and three guys he didn't know took a bird to London. He called Donovan to let her know to get him on rotation and wheeled his monster gorgeous bike off the back of the Helicopter and mounted up for his first ride through Traffic. He grinned every single time he turned a head. He couldn't wait to show it off and drove straight to the New Scotland Yard garage. He called Donovan and amidst all her questions was a dancing squeal of delight at his new ride. She hopped on back without invite and he did the best he could to give her a quick shuttle around the building.

He checked in and then realised he had no idea where home actually was. He headed to Mycroft's house, rang the bell and was let in.

"Gregory, what in the world. I had arranged a car for you on your expected return on the 13th. You are early."

"Wasn't much point staying and burning through my time off. Save it for retirement. Besides, I have transportation now. Just need to know where I live."

"I, well, I have only let it. I have yet to arrange the removal company. I did not anticipate your return. My apologies. Your things are still here, if there is anything you require. I can arrange a hotel if you prefer."

Greg dropped his eyes and bit his lip. Mycroft was wearing the soft turquoise jumper he'd bought him for Christmas. He let his heavy ruck slide from his shoulders with a groan.

"You look exhausted. And why are you damp?"
"It is foggy. And I rode down the embankment."

Mycroft's brows furrowed and he walked directly to his own front door and threw it open. "What in the name of God is that contraption doing in my drive?"

"Don't call her a contraption. She is mine."

"Yours? Have you lost your mind? You can't ride that in London. That is not transportation, that is a death wish wrapped in a predictive paint job. You will be on fire within hours. What idiot talked you into this madness?"

"I won it in an essay contest."

"No, you didn't," Mycroft snapped.

"It was a door prize. John got a caravan."

"Jim. Well, he took my twenty-three million pound helicopter and gave you a pretty bullet for your head in exchange. Delightful."

"Yeah, she is beautiful isn't she? So this flat you got me, need a place to park her. Indoors. Can't leave her on the street either. So garage or ground floor."

"You're actually serious. Aren't you a bit old for a midlife crisis?"

Greg grinned, "Funny. I count seeing you as my Midlife crisis. This? This is just my new therapy, which I need after you breaking my heart."

"I didn't realise," Mycroft said with a wry smile.

"You sure as hell did know!"

"No, I didn't realise you are a fourteen year old girl and still having a wobbly. But the evidence is leaking brown fluids onto my pavement. Can you actually steer this ridiculous object? The front wheel angle means you turn on the side of the tire. It will hydroplane and you will never be able to negotiate traffic."

"Shut up. You have to lean to turn it. It's fine. Want to hear it?"

"God no."

Greg grinned and swallowed. "The more you hate it, the better I like it."

"Then you will be married to it within the week."

"Oh yeah. Your brother got married."

"To whom?" Mycroft demanded mildly.

"John came to his senses. John pulled his illegal gun to silence objectors. Jim was Sherlock's best man and Sherlock said his vows with a violin. We had pie... and fireworks. It was nice." Greg delighted in the facial contortions of Mycroft's disapproval.

"Charming. I'm sure."

"Better than ours." Greg goaded, just because he knew there would come a day, when it all would
come back to him. This was Greg thumbing his nose at the abyss.

"Yes. Regrettfully I suppose that is true."

"Well, guess I better grab a few things, then be on my way. You can text me my new address when you get around to it."

"You could, for tonight, at least stay here. It is late and tomorrow is New Year's Eve. There is nothing decent that hasn't been booked for months." Mycroft pronounced while looking down at his phone.

"You sure that's a good idea?"

"No. Not particularly. Midlife crisis." Mycroft walked toward the utility and pushed a button. "Do push that beastly noise maker into the garage however. The neighbours."

Greg did not push it. Instead he fired it up rode it into the garage and revved it up a few times in the confined space. She really was deafening. He grinned as he shut it down.

The look on Mycroft's face as he entered the house was worth the probable hearing loss.

They were sitting by the fire with snifters of brandy, which would have been stodgy except for the scoops of vanilla ice cream floating in each glass.

"This is really good. Where'd you come up with this?" Greg asked.

"Mmm. You will laugh. There is a college town in Oklahoma. Twenty years ago Mummy and Father had just begun their line dancing obsession. I needed Mummy and went to personally retrieve her. Delicate operation and she was being stubborn. There was a dodgy little place called The Ancestor that I suppose passed as luxury dining for the hoof in mouth whilst stomping to tortured musical device club. After consuming globs of cheese and hamburger on crisps they called Nachos and a surprisingly adequate steak, what they called Brandy-ice was served. This concoction, though rather dowdy, is something I still indulge in. The place closed long ago, but I still very much admire this one small gift of something deceptively simple. I am glad you like it."

"You got plans for New Years? One of your fancy dos?"

"Three. It will be misery."

"Yeah, try working. I'll go eat the posh nibbles and you can deal with the drunks and stoners and chudder stars. They say there have been terror threats, which is the forth year in a row. I'm at ground zero. Should be a great bash."

"No worries there. I have that under control. The knife crime is our biggest concern. Ghastly trend, that." Mycroft swirled his glass and sipped. He still got white cream on his upper lip and he caught the haunted hunger in Greg's eye as he watched him lick it away. "Sorry, rather messy without a straw."

"You're beautiful."

"Excuse me?"

"Sorry. You don't want to hear that. But, you are. I wish..."

"Please don't. I can't... I ... I am not the machine you think me to be. I don't regret us. I simply know
it will not work. Best nipped in the bud."

"Yeah, alright. Look, it was nice of you to let me stay. Thank you."

"We should get some rest. Goodnight, Gregory."

"Sleep well, super spy."

New Year's Eve was the nightmare he expected. He was spit on, only once, but mostly because he was an invisible presence, milling in the crowd. He stopped a probable rape, that was fun. He caught two pick pockets and confiscated eleven pointy no-nos.

He arrived back at Mycroft's at four am, just as Mycroft was getting up. They had coffee together. Then Mycroft went about his day and Lestrade went to sleep. That night they both got home and sat by the fire again.

"Have you given up on going with my brother? His Passport went through security at four-oh-two this afternoon, as did his faithful companion's. Did they leave you behind?"

"Nope. My first assignment is to prove your sister innocent."

He smirked cruelly and snorted. "Innocent of what?"

Greg dipped his head as he calmly said, "Killing Victor Trevor."

"Don't be silly. She admitted it. She toyed with us. Do not buy her mask. Do not let her get in your head. She does this. She is toying with you." He was quite sure of himself.

"She didn't ask me to. I already know what happened and I know who it was. All I have to do is find the others he was associated with, and corroborate her story." Greg lifted his chin and met Mycroft's eyes.

"How have you concluded that she is innocent thus far? If she were, I would have solved it."

"No. You were too close, too young and afraid of her. You were biased."

"I have reviewed this multiple times and..."

"Mycroft, has it ever occurred to you that nobody looked in a well for a lost child? That is not the way it works. It would have been the first place anyone looked. Even if he did drown and didn't call for help, Mycroft think. The smell would have guided the searchers soon enough."

"The water would have been cold. He would not have lasted an hour down there. There would have been no smell it was late Autumn."

"Sorry, to be graphic but corpses bloat, even when refrigerated. It slows the effect, but it doesn't stop it. Come spring, you would have known and so would the neighbours"

Mycroft shrugged. "We were gone by then. She tried to burn us alive. Happy Christmas one and all."

"Well, I can tell you that the man who actually killed Victor is dead and I can also tell you he was molesting your sister. Victor was not the only child I suspect he murdered. Back in those days, say 1979 to 1987, there were approximately 79 child murders a year. Those are the ones we find. Little Victor was not on that roll, because he was unsolved and listed as missing. I started just nosing about, a bit here or there. I found 3 other kids who were left in a well. They were within range of
Muskgrave Hall. The thing is, from a statistical standpoint, that is not a coincidence. Only one other kid died in a well in all of England during that time, then three within a half hour drive from your house, with Victor we have four. Interested yet?

"How do you know he is dead?"

"I just do."

"What happens if you prove this lark?"

"Then I am out of here and off to save the world with your other mad brother."

"Then I won't help you."

Lestrade snickered.

"What do you find so funny."

"No offence, Mycroft, but you have had about thirty years to solve it and you still haven't. My IQ may be Seventy points below yours, but I have been doing this for twenty years and spent ten of them being instructed by your brother. You don't have to help me. I am slower than your brother and when lives are at stake, that is not worth my pride to be the one to eventually get there, but I do get there quite often, without either of you even noticing."

"I wish you luck in your endeavours. However, I fear he has sent you on a wild goose chase. I hope you won't be too disappointed when you discover there is nothing to solve. Why bother if the person you think is guilty is already dead?"

"It would clear her name?"

"For all the good that will do. My sister died in Sherrinford. It doesn't matter any longer. Even if you cleared her name of that one incident, there are many others you are unaware of. She is who she is. I will abide this little experiment of hers so long as she does not venture forth and cause mayhem. But do not try to tell me what a lovely misunderstood girl my psychopath sister is."

"It does matter. All that happened later, that was the beginning."

"Even if you were right. Nobody cares. Certainly not her equally psychologically damaged husband." Mycroft reached over and got the poker and stirred up the fire leaning forward from his chair.

"I can think of six people who care. The main one being your Mum. Just so you know, I care as well. She has not bothered to murder me and I am so stupid, I would have been an easy target."

"You are not stupid. I never meant it that way. I sent you to meet her in the first place. I had great faith in you, if you recall?"

Greg stood up and tucked his backside to the fire. He sighed in pleasure. "You did mean it, just the way you said it. Everyone is a goldfish to you. It is fine, probably true. Never did understand what you could possibly see in me. But, I have to say, you're the one I feel sorry for."

"Don't bother. Why? Would you feel sorry for me?"

"Because, you have this great mind, but you don't always have a very open mind. And that need for everything to be calibrated and calculated keeps you from experiencing the unexplained and
unexpected."

"You're speaking nonsense. You think one of my brothers is a mythical being, the other brother some kind of dragon slayer and my murderous sister an innocent. Beggars belief what you must think of me." He rose and went to his drinks trolly and poured several finger in a glass. He raised his brow, offering a pour for Lestrade.

Greg indicated he would like some as well. "You? You're James Bond and the Kingsman all rolled into one very lonely stalker."

Mycroft rolled his eyes and handed Greg his glass. "You are easily impressed."

"If I prove her innocent, will you be impressed?"

"If you prove her innocence, I will be rewriting the IQ tests for the western world to reflect that you are more clever than I. I don't see that looming in the offing, but by all means, carry on."

"Lovely to have your permission," Greg punched back sarcastically.

Mycroft snorted and returned to his seat. He looked up at Greg and tilted his head. "I had no idea you could be so disagreeably stubborn."

"You see a lot. But, you don't see everything."

"True. And on that note, I see it is Midnight and time for bed."

"You aren't tired. You just want to end the conversation." Greg strolled over to the piano and touched it reverently. He lifted the dust cover and struck a random note. It hung in the air, fading crystal and sweet. He hit the key next to it. "Play for me? Just once?"

Mycroft considered for a moment then without a word he stood and crossed the room, taking his seat and cracking his knuckles. He did not play the obvious classical selection that Greg expected, but an old Waylon Jennings song. Greg grinned and took in the sight of Mycroft Holmes, having a lark at the posh keys of his Grand Piano.

When Greg came down the next morning, he found a note. It told him that his new flat would be ready that afternoon and inside were two keys and directions. The removal company would be there that afternoon.

The house was quiet and Greg sighed, realising Mycroft had not even bothered with a goodbye.

He pocketed the the keys and note, pulled the Harley out of the garages and revved it in frustration, then rocketed out of the gate. He turned the bike at the end of the drive, putting his foot down for balance and looked back just in time to see the twitch of a curtain. He raised his hand in farewell, just in case it was not the butler. Then, Lestrade put his iron horse in the wind.
The flat was modern and stark. He had no furniture at all. It had been sold or left behind when he moved in with Mycroft. The floors were blond wood, the kitchen had a washer and granite countertops and his bike, just squeezed through the door. He parked it in the dining area and tucked some newspaper under it.

The bedroom was an empty box with a window and perfect view of a brown and red brick wall. The bath was compact and the shower was short for his taste. Still it was clean and temporary in his mind so he dug through the boxes stacked in the centre of the sitting room and found his kettle and a couple of mugs.

There was a Marks and Sparks just up the road and he made a quick trip for tea, milk, eggs, veggies and crisps. He bought a single foam cushion meant to top a bed. He put it directly on the floor on top of a fluffy blanket then made it up as his bed. It would have to do. He was not going to be here that long and he would soon be sleeping far rougher than this. He hung his suits, made tea and sat on his counter watching videos on his phone.

The kitchen box had the juicer. He sat it on his counter and ran some of his apples and veg the next morning for breakfast.

Donovan picked him up so he could get his car and he was back in the grind. Day was night and night was day and his work log climbed back to his 90 hour week pre-Mycroft schedule. On decent days he rode the bike and bought a ridiculous black leather trench with a split back to protect his suits and accommodate his ride. He learned to strut shoulders first to maximise the swish of the swing skirt and stand facing the wind to let it billow and ripple dramatically. He subtly watched the CCTV cameras in car mirrors and window reflections to see if Mycroft was still his faithful stalker. When he was not, Greg tried hard to let it go, but he also found that sometimes someone seemed very interested in him.

He was somehow the cool guy now and his social life picked up a bit. John and Sherlock came home and were perfectly sickening. But, the first time they both walked on scene in their cool coats,
collars popped and in Greg's case wrapped sun glasses, it did make an impression.

The word, Rockstars and The Doctor, became associated with his division and he had begun to feel a bit like one. It was self imposed. But he found himself working with near manic need to live up to his new reputation.

He dropped sugar out of his life and, due to the fact it was just him and he was too tired to cook, he pretty well lived off his juices. It made him feel better so he could keep up the pace he set for himself. He did not give up smoking and now, he didn't feel like trying.

He was assigned two new Sergeants and a handful of bright starry eyed Constables.

DI Donovan was making a reputation of her own and he was as proud of her as any parent could be. Career wise, Lestrade was having the time of his life.

He even dated once or twice, just casually for the conversation and never brought anyone home. Home was a pile of blankets on a cushion and a coffee machine, a kettle and a juicer on the counter. It was a motorcycle in the dining room and a cheap folding chair and footstool in the sitting room with a second hand floor lamp facing a wall covered in clumped together notes on child murders and molestations reported in the period between 1979 and 1987.

He had made headway on his case for Eurus. In the mean time he had stumbled on a vast parental nightmare of deception and betrayal. He currently had seventeen cases he could probably prove against The Shoes in Jim's closet. That was seventeen families he could finally give answers to. He was consumed with it and suddenly there were days here and there that were too hot for coats and he had rolled through most of winter chasing justice for all. Spring was in the offing.

He worked a murder on Pancake Day. Domestic violence and had it solved by eleven that night. He solved a poisoning on Saint Patrick's day, saving untold lives, and the press labeled him a Bulldog hotshot.

There was a photo of him leaning on a panda car with just enough wet ground for atmosphere and a halo of smoke adding to The competent rebel detective in a leather super hero coat and hard fierce eyes having caught the photographer at just the right moment. They interviewed him and he pulled off a good impression.

His ex, Linda, called him, wanting to get together for old times. He looked so handsome in the paper. She was divorcing again and still loved him. "Don't get sappy, darling. Just marry the bloke you cheated on your new husband with, like you always do. You still have a few years left of your charms. But, trust me I grew immune long ago." He then hung up on her and felt like he had conquered Everest.

Sherlock always answered his calls now, but he'd been busy with Vice solving a supply chain for a new version of Drone that was a great rush if you didn't get frightened and gouge your own eyes out. Some of his homeless network had been victims and Sherlock was livid. He'd made it a priority.

He read in the papers that Sherlock had broken the case. He came home late after filling his bike with petrol and saw his lights were on. He was armed response certified now and he left the bike at his door, drew his weapon and burst in to find Sherlock rearranging his suspect wall.

"You've been quite the busy boy, Garfield," he said, putting his hands high and adding, "Don't shoot, I will comply." He smirked in a flirty way and went back to his task.

"Jesus, nice surprise to see you and all, but a heads up would save us both an ambulance ride. Nearly
gave me a heart attack." Greg secured his weapon and took a deep breath.

"Nice place. Chair, bedroom nest, newspapers dropped with oil and tire marks on the floor. Love what you have done with the place but isn’t it one of those law things about parking that cool machine in the house. Figured you’d be up on that, you being a Rockstar Detective and all. What exactly do you think you are doing here? Peeking into my life like this?"

"It is all temporary and I was in a rush. Don't make the bed every day. Nobody sees it but me." Greg went back out and pulled the bike through the door in his backwards duck walk he had to use for the handlebars to clear the doorframe. He parked it, gave it a quick wipe-down and went to the kitchen, flipping the kettle on. He let Sherlock evaluate his work in silence, not wanting to defend his project.

"Mmm. This is impressive, actually. Have you spoken to Mummy about this?"

"Not yet. Almost ready. Going to take a few days and make a bit of a tour. I have talked to some on the phone. Had a few bingos I want to follow up with. Victor's Mum has agreed to talk with me as well. Wanna come?"

"God yes. Lestrade, this is going to get you a promotion."

Greg smiled and shrugged at the praise. "I honesty don't care about that. She was innocent, your sister." He walked up and pointed to a photograph. "Do you remember him? Name was Henry Brian Mullins. He was a local handyman. He killed Victor and two score other kids I know about. He was a monster. I was only going to prove your sister didn't kill one little boy, but I can't help but ... all those Mums and Dads with no answers. I keep thinking I am going to reach the end of it, but so far, it just keeps coming at me like an avalanche."

"Are you busy tonight?" Sherlock asked tilting his head and smoothing a police report to better read it, high on the wall in a cluster of data about Jamie Littleton, a boy of eight who disappeared in 1986.

"I have been trying to link that one up. Not there yet but, I just know. He is one of them. Not busy, Why?"

"I am calling John. Oh and Molly, she can help too. Whatever you do, don't call her big as a house. Trust me, there is slapping involved. Due any day now. You are supposed to say glowing instead. I don't know what that means, assume it is a misplaced euphemism, because Baskerville Bunnies Glow and she does not. She has gained three stone and it is my fault somehow. You, on the other hand, have lost another stone. We need to get your trousers taken in. "

"I am not really set up for guests, Sherlock. I have one chair. Pregnant lady? Sitting?"

Sherlock looked around. "You have boxes. Sitting exactly where they were parked by the removal company. Someone can sit on the motorbike. We'll make due."

Greg sighed.

John and Molly showed up with folding chairs. They hashed and rehashed where Greg had gotten so far. They ordered take away.

Greg was fascinated with Molly. She was as big as a house, and soft and sweet and she smelled nice. He paid her a great deal of deferential attention and somehow John got it in his head that things were progressing into interest and he clumsily seemed to be pushing them to date. It was embarrassing more than helpful and finally Sherlock stepped in and told John to knock it off.

John's eyes lit up and he mercilessly teased Sherlock that he was jealous.
It was bending towards a spat and without really considering Greg blurted that it did not matter, that he was unavailable anyway.

Sherlock, laser focused and willing to do about anything to get himself out of the mud, began deductions and came up empty handed. The look of confused disbelief on Sherlock's face, was priceless and Greg was having a great time denying each of Sherlock's guesses and desperate tries to catch him and figure out his game.

"Sherlock, you need to drop this, now. You can't deduce this one and I cannot tell you," Greg told him firmly.

"Oh, of course. He married you didn't he? Siger did it behind my brother's back. I knew he was up to something when he had me forge the signature! It was your registry. He actually talked you into it! You never said a word. I assumed your moral boundaries had prevented it! Ha! Oh God, it's Christmas!" Sherlock was twirling and leaping with pure joy.

That was the moment it sounded like someone poured a gallon of water on his wood floor and Molly said in a tiny voice, "Houston, we have a problem."
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 32

Wild World

Now that I've lost everything to you
You say you want to start something new
And it's breaking my heart you're leaving
Baby, I'm grieving

But if you want to leave, take good care
Hope you have a lot of nice things to wear
But then a lot of nice things turn bad out there

Oh baby baby it's a wild world
It's hard to get by just upon a smile
Oh baby baby it's a wild world
I'll always remember you like a child, girl

You know I've seen a lot of what the world can do
And it's breaking my heart in two

https://youtu.be/4ihaOLOt29U

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The three of them rushed Molly to the hospital. Unlike Mary's experience, Lestrade ordered the Doctor in the backseat with the woman giving birth, had Sherlock navigate and he drove, blues and twos clearing the way.

They made it to the hospital in plenty of time and called Mummy. She bustled in three hours later, still four hours early to the main event. Greg sat alone in the waiting area while Sherlock and John were busy "assisting" in the birth. Mrs. Holmes gave him a hug and sat with him until Sherlock came out to give a report on the "Heir Apparent's" eminent arrival.

Fifteen minutes after Mummy went back, Mycroft showed up, looking bored and imperious. He stopped strolling and tilted his head in confusion, "Gregory?" He asked conveying the question of his presence in a single word.
"She was at my flat when her waters broke. I drove. Have a seat. The circus is that way, but I think she has enough coaches. Didn't figure you'd show up. He is your nephew, I suppose."

Mycroft sniffed. "Miss Hooper and I have an arrangement. I will have no heirs and my title would end. Father doesn't care, but Mummy does. This would have been so much simpler if my brother would have married her rather than Watson. I have had to introduce DNA to peerage law, I am praying it passes, otherwise, I will have to marry her to convey my Earldom to the child. It is probably a great deal of nothing, but if he ever wished to sit in the House of Lords, it would afford him the opportunity."

Greg's heart stopped. "But you didn't marry her, did you?"

"Not yet. It is still an option. If we cannot work around the obstacles by other means, this would be the simplest course of action." Mycroft smiled benignly at Lestrade.

Greg thought he was going to be sick. "Oh, god. Fuck me."

Mycroft blanched at the unheard of swear word coming from Greg. "Are you quite alright? Hush that, it is paperwork only. You are the only person I ever considered doing it for real with. Just a formality."

Greg leaned forward in his seat and rubbed his temples. Mycroft offered him a paracetamol. Greg took four.

Sherlock came out, followed by Mummy. "Bit of a set back. Going to theatre for a Ventouse procedure. Molly is very tired."

Mummy saw the blank looks and added, "Just a vacuum extraction. Nothing to worry about, John and Sherlock will attend, but I am not allowed. Only one is allowed, but John has standing at this hospital and he is tasked with keeping Sherlock from making everyone cry."

Sherlock glared at his mother. "John is her Doctor. He gets to be there because of that. Not to shield the staff from me. I will let you know when my son has existed the birth canal. Someone get Greg a fizzy drink, his blood sugar is dropping and looks like he may pass out. Laterz!"

Greg sipped the sugary soda his mother-in-law brought him. It calmed his stomach but not his nerves. If Mycroft married Molly, it would mess up everything. He could lose his position if it ever came out that he was married to two people. He could lose his title.

"Mycroft, we need to talk. Your brother and I have done something and you are going to be furious."

"Oh, for God's sake. What has Sherlock done now?"

"Umm. Not that one."

"I don't understand."

"He married us. You can't marry Molly. Siger registered us. We are married."

"I don't understand. I was not even there!"

Mummy looked dumbfounded, then she began to chuckle. Mycroft turned increasingly red as Greg grew more pale. "Are you going to make me disappear?"
"It is the obvious solution to my problem, don't you imagine! How could you!"

"I don't know. He made it sound.. like a hell of a lot better idea than it does right now. I am sorry."

Mummy patted Greg's knee and murmured with delight,"Good job. I knew you'd figure it out!"

"You are not angry?" Greg looked at her carefully.

She shrugged. "Who do you think suggested it to Siger? Oh, Mike, do stop with the death glare. It does not work on me. I taught it to you! Greg, welcome to the Holmes family. You will never be bored."

"Do I get to have any input here?" Mycroft said with his most charming angry smile.

"You have proven what an idiot you are, so no. Congratulations, son, you have our blessing."

"I don't want your bloody blessing, Mummy. This is an outrage. And your grandson is now going to be illegitimate and the precious title dies with me. I will, of course be filing for divorce. It isn't even a question. Why would you do this?"

"Because you had seventeen ways to block me leaving and so if I got killed ... I got sent home to you. I didn't really have anyone else," Greg said with exhaustion. "And... Your sister didn't kill Victor Trevor. I proved it and then some."

Now Mummy blinked and her voice was low and dangerous, "What did you say?"

Greg sighed. "Do you remember Henry Brian Mullins? He molested Eurus, for some time, in fact. Told her he would have her sent away, kill you all, the usual. Victor saw. He murdered him. If his MO is the same, he was dead when he was thrown in the well. He showed the body to Eurus. She made up a song trying to tell you. He was listed in your search party. He searched that area, is my guess. Put chemicals in the well to hide the smell. He had done it before and he has been at it for years. She thought Sherlock would tell if he caught him. But he shut down, blamed her for Victor and she was so miserable, at that point she set the house on fire. She was drawing pictures of what Mullins threatened to do to Sherlock if she told anyone. It wasn't her who killed that little boy. It was a monster. I am sorry. That's what I was coming to tell you. But the case has gotten so big, I have twenty-three other victims now. That is what we were working on when Molly went into labour. There are more, as well. I have thirty or so other possible victims, not all were killed. There are so many, Mrs. Holmes. He fooled so many people."

She took in all he said then calmly asked, "Where is he now?"

"He is two pairs of Shoes in Jim Moriarty's closet. I don't think it much matters where the rest of him is," Greg said gently.

A tear leaked from Violet Holmes eye and suddenly Greg was being squeezed as she cried into his shoulder. He put his arms around her and murmured soothing words. This went on for a few minutes while Mycroft sat silently with his mouth open.

At last she pulled back and Greg handed her his handkerchief. "You dear, dear clever boy. You have no idea. I am going to powder my nose and call Father. He will be so relieved. This nearly killed him."

Greg patted her on the back and kissed her forehead kindly. "Just doing my job, Mrs. Holmes."

"You must call me Mummy. You are my son now, after all." She stood with a deep breath and went
to find the ladies.

Greg looked at Mycroft and he seemed a bit lost. "You alright?"

"I have only seen her cry five times in my life. When they took our sister away. When Grandmother died. When she saw Siger's face after the bombing in Baghdad. When I told her Sherlock was alive and not to believe the newspapers and just now."

"Everybody cries, Mycroft. It isn't actually a weakness. I try not to, but it comes with the job." Greg stood, and stretched. "It's half five. I'm going out for some real coffee. Could be a long day. Be back in a bit."

"I'll just stay here. You could bring your idiot husband one as well, if you've a mind to, that is?"

"Sure. Course that service ends if you make me disappear." Greg slung on his coat and strolled up the hall.

John and Sherlock stood in the waiting area with huge grins on their faces. Greg walked in with four spare coffees as well as his own. Mycroft stood and took the tray of beverages from Greg and passed each to the name on the cup. He rolled his eyes at the one marked, 'husband' but sipped it greedily nonetheless.

"Griger, he is here. I am an actual Dad! Molly's fine. He is perfect. A big strapping boy. He looks like me. He is going to be clever too, I can tell by the--"

"Does this future nightmare have a name?" Greg teased.

"Yes. Why would you call him a nightmare?"

"Because I know his Father. Can you tell me his name? Or did you forget it already?"

"Harry Hershel Hamish Holmes."


Sherlock pouted slightly, "It didn't come up in conversation. I named him after you, and John, and her father."

"And a serial killer," Greg added helpfully.

"Christ, Sherlock. She is going to kill you," John said, exasperated.

"Not if she doesn't notice," Sherlock replied.

Mycroft closed his eyes and shook his head. "You bugger all belief, brother mine."

"No. Just John, these days," Sherlock fired back.

"Shut up, Sherlock," John warned.

"All of you, hush and tell me when I can see my Grandson!"
Your comments and Kudos are so very much appreciated. My internet access is about to report for duty so posts will be catch as can. I think this is a great time to break so I can get you all over the hump of the last bit of angst and not leave you hanging on a cliff. Thanks for sticking it out to here and bless all who take the time to share your feelings about this story. See you soon.
Baby it's cold outside

Baby it's cold outside
I simply must go (Baby it's cold outside)
The answer is no (But baby it's cold outside)
The welcome has been (How lucky that you dropped in)
So nice and warm (Look out the window at that storm)
My sister will be suspicious (Gosh your lips look delicious!)
My brother will be there at the door (Waves upon a tropical shore)
My maiden aunt's mind is vicious (Gosh your lips are delicious!)
Well maybe just a cigarette more (Never such a blizzard before) (And I don't even smoke)

https://youtu.be/6bbuBubZ1yE

****
The next few months were spent in chaos as Lestrade closed dozens of old cases. He visited the families of victims and explained what he knew again and again. It was satisfying but also mentally exhausting. The Press picked up the story and BBC did an entire three part series. He got stopped in the street for an autograph.

He heard from Siger.

My dear friend,

Congratulations on successfully completing your task, Detective Inspector. You exceeded my expectations.

Sorry about the marriage thing. In retrospect, it was probably a bad call. My brother has expressed his avid wish for my head on a platter.

There may be a bounty. Well, I know there is one, I just have not traced it to him specifically. Mycroft and ISIL do have some similar markers, hard to tell where the money is coming from for certain.

Offer my brother my kindest hearts joy on his becoming a father. I cannot imagine it, but have been assured he is adequately competent in the care of infants.

We are basing in Tadmur, the ancient City. It is also known as Palmyra and we can see the castle from our camp. We have Wifi... if you run into my sister and her husband, do thank them for me until I can do it in person. We watched the broadcast of your case. It was bittersweet to know it is finally solved. I hope it has brought Mummy some peace. We may be here for a few weeks. The
head of this monster is dying but it is a Hydra. They have hidden cells all over the world and they have made chaos their life's work.

I await your word to begin the process of subterfuge to get you out of England. A mutual friend has agreed to kidnap you. Let me know when your affairs are in order and take your time with the wrap up of this case.

With regard,
Father S. Holmes

Summer was long in tooth and the air had turned crisp at night by the time Greg saw actual daylight. The broadcast had brought even more victims out into the light and even though he was growing tired of the case, he was a contented tired. It felt like he was going out on the top of his game. People had suggested he run for Mayor of London and he had laughed at them all. They felt he could somehow fix the moped crime and more importantly the knife crime. The current Mayor had decided banning cars would help and was now a laughing stock of the world.

Mycroft was not quite as standoffish as Greg had expected. The British Government was fond of Harry and was regularly seen at 221b when Molly brought the boy over, which was frequently. Little Bee was fascinated with her little brother and Greg could see Mycroft and Sherlock reborn. She was a natural protector and Harry a natural terror. At six months old, Harry ruled the adults of his world.

Molly was a surprisingly strict Mum. She made all his baby food and did not allow him sugar or processed foods. Greg knew that would not last. Though he himself had learned to eat in a similar fashion, he knew that once he went out to the child minder she had arranged for her return to work, that that would go out the window.

Sherlock and John seemed to revolve around the chaos of the little people as easily as they took apart a crime scene. Greg loved it there when both kids were home and Sherlock and John were still sickening in the best ways possible.

They had been to therapy and Greg found it a mixed blessing. They did not bicker so much, but they still did in a weird way. When they were actually angry, they seemed to have a contest on who could out do the other on awkwardly worded oversharing therapy buzz phrases. They mixed this up with passive aggressive patience and it was very entertaining to watch.

"Rosie, we have to clean up after ourself. Because there is only one of me and I need you to help me reinforce that I am not the house elf through demonstration."

"Mmmmm, whilst Daddy passive aggressively demonstrates, and we ignore his anal attention seeking, let us go over here and develop some identity markers in Maths?"

"Sherlock? I am trying to give her a sense of responsibility and I am giving my opinion that you are undermining it?"

"John, you are doing the washing up and projecting your desire for me to participate by shadow commenting to her rather than simply asking for what you need directly. It is making me feel annoyed and belittled so I am removing us both from the brewing conflict."

"Which is a convoying of an insulting assumption that I am your servant and that you are too good to wash a cup. That makes me feel unappreciated."
Sherlock whirled and took a step back toward the kitchen. "You are using her as a tool to vent your frustration. She is not even three yet. How much assistance do you expect her to competently provide?"

Greg watched this ridiculous psychobabble word vomit for twenty minutes as if he were at Wimbledon. It eventually led to Sherlock coolly announcing that he was taking Rosie to visit her brother and John barging out the door after him, leaving Greg sitting in their flat alone. He got up and did the dishes. It took less time than their convoluted therapy language.

John stomped up the stairs and went to the sink. Finding it empty he sheepishly peeked out from the kitchen arms crossed. "We must sound like idiots to you?"

Greg looked up and shrugged. "Nothing new there. It just takes longer now. How long is this going to go on? I prefer the sarcasm?"

"It is supposed to be a process. To help us say what we mean."

"Okay. Seems like 'Hey, Sherlock, your turn to do the dishes.' would be better, but I don't have any fancy degrees on my wall," Greg said with a twinkle in his eye.

John smiled reflectively as he nodded that Greg was right. He sighed. His shoulders dropped and he closed his eyes and held a deep breath and blew it slowly out. He opened his eyes and tried to regroup. "So, now that this monster of a case you fell into is wrapped up, what are your plans?"

Greg shrugged. "Working Bonfire Night, then I am doing that thing."

John's face clouded. "I thought you'd forgotten about that."

"I can't really say anything here. Sorry."

"Yeah, okay. " John swallowed. "Look... not my place but, if it matters, Sherlock is not in favour."

Greg crossed his arms and looked at the floor, "Yeah. Well... you're here and you'll keep an eye on him. Do me a lemon, and watch out for his idiot brother too?"

"Still your husband?" John asked with a smirk.

"Don't even start. Seems even himself couldn't cut the red tape. We have to wait a year just like everyone else."

Sherlock entered the kitchen but not shrugging out of his coat. "My brother is losing his touch in his dotage."

"Thought you were going to see Molly?" Greg asked.

"Can't. D I Donovan has a case for us. It is at least a seven. Five corpses all sporting terminal priapism ... possibly due to hanging but no ligature marks on their necks and all found seated naked in a car park in Fitzrovia."

John shrugged and said quietly, "Angel lust. Actually quite common. One in three deaths... among men. Possibly due to poisoning or head trauma..." John was moving and grabbing his keys, wallet and coat as he rattled off possibilities to Sherlock.

"Five of them? All naked in a busy car park and nobody noticed? " Sherlock chattered as they headed down the stairs.
Greg finished his cup of tea, rinsed his cup and with a sigh put his coat on. He was just switching off the kitchen lights when he heard a familiar tread on the stairs.

Mycroft entered the flat and he glanced around the room in confusion. "Oh. Are you... watching Miss Watson?"

"Nope. Was just leaving. Think she is down with Mrs. Hudson."

"I don't understand. Sherlock and I were going to dinner. I've made reservations."

"They just left. Case." Greg said, smiling that Sherlock was keeping his word about going to dinner with his brother.

"I see." Mycroft looked disappointed.

"Can't you reschedule?"

"Well, not for this place. It is a dinner theatre."

"Oh. Posh, I see. You always looked great in a tux, Super-spy."

"Yes, well. Waste of effort. Shame really too. They have an exceptional beef wellington."

Greg smiled and looked at Mycroft. "My favourite. You hate to dine alone. Are you asking?"

Mycroft cleared his throat, then mumbled a discontented, "I suppose that I am if you'd be obliged to put on that lovely tuxedo you have hardly worn. I can drop you at your flat. We would just have time."

"Haven't had anywhere to wear it. Would be tragic to let an opportunity to air it go to waste."

Mycroft smiled but was slightly uncomfortable. "After you then?"
**Last Christmas**

Last Christmas

Once bitten and twice shy  
I keep my distance  
But you still catch my eye  
Tell me, baby  
Do you recognize me?  
Well, it's been a year  
It doesn't surprise me  
(Merry Christmas!) I wrapped it up and sent it  
With a note saying, "I love you," I meant it  
Now, I know what a fool I've been  
But if you kissed me now  
I know you'd fool me again

https://youtu.be/E8gmARGvPlI

Dinner was both a delight and the most depressing thing Greg had done in ages. The meal and entertainment were fantastic as was the company. However, it was also so very easy to fall into the comfort of being with Mycroft and so hard to face that this was but a glitch and not going to lead anywhere.

The theatrical portion of the evening was over and very small thick coffees were served along with a petite dessert selection. Greg selected four of the same thing because it was his favourite.

Mycroft was conveying an amusing story of his interactions with the mayor and how he'd really felt about the baby Khan balloon, when Greg realised that he could no longer hear a word that Mycroft said. He continued to attempt to nod and smile in all the right places but his mind refused to follow the syllables to any meaningful thought.

Greg was too fascinated with his visions of wishes. He wished to go home with Mycroft. He wished they were properly married. He wished for quiet evenings at home in front of the fire with those sweet brandy ice cream things, and conversation and warmth in Mycroft's eyes, tucked away from the world. He wished to find his clothes laid out in the morning and to have someone to buy fussy puddings for.

Mycroft stopped speaking. He studied Lestrade for a moment and swallowed before placing his hand gently on top of Greg's. He was genuinely concerned. Mycroft's face slowly melted from mischievously amused to confused and finally stopped on shameful regret. "If it is of any interest to you at all, I find this difficult as well."

Greg worried his bottom lip between his tongue and teeth, then nodded. It was hard to catch his
breath. "Do your regrets change our future? Do they give us a second chance?"

Mycroft dropped his eyes then gave the smallest shake of his head.

Greg wiped his mouth with his serviette and pushed the Spotted Dick away. He took a very long deep breath and held it as he let his tongue sneak out to moisten the place he'd bitten on his bottom lip. Then, finally he spoke in a low gentle voice, never looking up to Mycroft's eyes. "If this were the last time we ever talk, and it probably will be, I just need to get this out. You don't have to do anything about it or say anything unless you want to, but please listen. Because I know that you think this is all broken because you think I cheated. I get that. But it isn't true and therefore it is just a way for you to get out of something that you never wanted in the first place. I accept it. But, I also want you to know that you are the love of my life and there is no possibility of me cheating on you because even now, I have tried to move on and it isn't working. I love you and I want to make sure you know that. I want what needs to be said, to be said, here, so there are no regrets."

"You think you are leaving, then?" Mycroft said with a slight sneer of surety that meant Greg was mistaken.

Greg did not rise to the snarky comment but did raise his eyes to meet Mycroft's. "Something is coming, My. I don't know how to explain. Something is winding down and I think it may be ... me. I just need you to, anything at all you want to say, to me, good or bad... I just want to make sure we have said those things."

"Why would you leave? Your career is at an all time high? You have been recommended for the position of Detective Chief Inspector and I have it on quite good authority that you have already been approved, to be announced in a matter of days. Why leave now?" Mycroft seemed both confused and annoyed which mask the slight fear in his eyes.

"You are not listening. Stop doing your deductions and probabilities and just hear this, please? I am leaving. You will try to stop me, but I will go to Eurus if I must. I can't beat you at all your games, but they can. They can. I am going. No, don't make a face. Listen. You can stop me. But only if you ask. Only if you want me. I can't stay, you see? You can stop me, but if... well, if there is no chance... if you can't let me be happy, you have to let me go."

Mycroft closed his eyes and sighed. His hand rose and his fingers massaged the bridge of his nose. "You will regret leaving. You know you will."

"Yeah, but I would regret not going more," Greg said with a soft almost shy tilt to his head.

"When you get to that point, when you have had your fill of this little adventure, don't hesitate to contact my office. I am no miracle worker, but I will do my best. There is talk you know? Talk of these people fighting this war on one side or the other for their own purposes, not being allowed back? I do care, very much, in fact, what will become of you. You may contact my office at any time."

Greg smiled and nodded. Without a word, they both got up to leave. Mycroft took his time with his coat and Greg memorised how he looked, all slim lines and formality.

As they exited and waited on the pavement for the car to pull around Greg added, "Hey, I know it was just dumb luck, but thanks for tonight. Most posh date I ever had, even with you."

One eyebrow raised and Mycroft smirked, "One should always take a bow at the top. I enjoyed our evening, as well. Most of it."
As they were about to pull up to Greg's flat, they had ridden in a thoughtful silence so far, Greg reached out and took Mycroft's hand. Mycroft didn't pull away but looked at their hands, then up at Lestrade with the obvious question in his face.

Greg had eyes swimming with tears and his throaty voice was almost gruff as he said, "If... um, if you regret this... me going, if... just if. You call me. I will come back. I'd come back if you asked. If you want me, yeah? I'd always come back to you, no matter how long it takes. I promise. You asked me why I'd leave but you know, so what you should ask is why I'd come back."

Mycroft looked like a fish in a bag, his mouth went slack and his eyes were popping as if his brain were misfiring. "I regret to inform you that is a fatalistic hope."

Greg got out, opening his own door and not waiting for the driver. He turned and leaned back into the car arm resting on the roof. "Yeah? Well I never figured you liked me because I am clever. What was it you called John? Can't remember word for word, but something about a scrap of ordinary for you to impress? You'll find another. Goodbye, Super-spy. I am glad I met you, even though it hurts like hell at the moment."

Greg didn't wait for any reply, he closed the door firmly and banged the top twice letting the chauffeur know to drive on.

He watched the tail lights until they made the corner and looked up and counted the CCTV cameras. Thirteen was not as overt as at his last flat, but he still knew that that was a significant number considering it was a nice neighbourhood in a 'just south of posh' borough.
Knocking on Heaven's door

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning. Gun violence. Depiction of modern day violence, nothing more graphic than the news. Major character involvement.

Knockin on heaven's door

Mama take this badge from me
I can't use it anymore
It's getting dark too dark to see
Feels like I'm knockin' on heaven's door
Knock-knock-knockin' on heaven's door
Knock-knock-knockin' on heaven's door

https://youtu.be/EBMRfkvfY3o

Chapter 35

Bonfire night gatherings did not stop Sherlock and John from running down a suspect through Wimbledon Park. The security, pop up food stalls and the cheers for the now low burning first bonfire did perhaps stop them from catching him as he slipped into a crowd of screaming cheering people. DCI Lestrade followed with little hope that they were going to find this needle in a haystack.

Sherlock and John were waved through the gate thanks to Greg, but they were on mission and had no problem taking off as soon as they entered. The milling people were not aware enough in their focused-on-fun minds to realise three men were running after a criminal. They did their best to not knock people over.

Greg was wheezing trying to keep up. He had two teams blocking the obvious exits and a third driving the crowded perimeter trying to get around the event and block the guy doing a runner from slipping out the other side, when Greg’s senses went on high alert.

Everything slowed as he stopped and spun in place. A Guy Fawkes mask lay abandoned on the
pavement and he impulsively picked it up. The wind gave odd gusts of churning cold, making stray leaves skitter and dance, but it also bit at his overheated lungs.

When he stood up, he saw just a flash of metal as three men in heavy winter coats dispersed. One stayed and seemed to be fixated on the thing inside his coat. Greg tilted his head as he took a step forward, observing with all his police instincts. He took note of his exact position and that was all the time he had before the man raised the object and chambered the first round. Greg grabbed his radio and gave clipped descriptions and directions to his location as his treacle laden feet moved toward the gunman. The first shots rang out and those hit, fell in utter confusion while everyone else seemed to think they heard the beginnings of the first fireworks display.

Greg did not think or fear for himself, he simply ran toward the trouble as he had been training all his life to do. The first display of fireworks gave their opening notes as Greg Lestrade used all his police and rugby skills to tackle the active shooter. He was vaguely aware that there were answering flashes of another weapon nearby, but he was determined to stop this one from firing into a group of families who had just seemed to realise that the screaming to their left did not involve joy.

He could see three bodies and the beginning of panic rippling through those nearby, as if a wave of terror moved the people like leaves in the bitter wind.

It seemed to take him forever to launch towards the man with a gun. Greg wondered how they got through security and if Mycroft had gone home yet to find his Parkin Cake Greg had had delivered to his home earlier that afternoon. He wondered if he felt a premonition and this was going to be his last act and if Mycroft would pull out all stops for the funeral. He saw the barrel of the rifle swing towards him, but even as he felt the sickening burning of a hit, it just fuelled his adrenaline and he knocked the weapon upwards as the man went down with him. He struggled for control of the rifle for what seemed to be a lifetime. Those standing by and those beginning to panic did not come to his aid. Just as he got a hold on the stock and barrel, the man relaxed and squeezed the trigger, blowing half of his own jaw and one eye away. He began to convulse and make a terrible sound. Greg pulled the weapon out of his hands and threw it ten or so feet, feeling sick and dizzy and distant from his own body. With great effort he managed to stand, confused and breathless. He knew he was shot, but didn't want to look for fear of knowing how bad the wound was would take away his will to stay on his feet.

He demanded someone call an ambulance. He turned to see one of the other men with a rifle aimed straight at him. He dove toward the weapon he'd tossed away but it did no good. His own service weapon was in the boot of his car. He felt another round strike his leg and the man walked closer before firing again. Greg rolled and in desperation tried to crawl away, but the man shot him again. Please, God, don't let him shoot me again!

But, the prayer was not answered and more pain flashed as the man moved right to him. Greg relaxed and looked into the eyes of the man as he raised the gun to point at his face. He wanted to close his eyes, but he was determined to stare the man in the face as well.

The man said something to him, Greg could not hear, or understand. The man smiled and spit on him, a halo of beautiful colours dancing in the sky behind him.

Suddenly the man got an odd look of confusion on his face and touched his cheek which sported a bloody hole, before dropping like a stone, legs and arms flopping as if his muscles were cut.

Greg coughed in relief but he hurt so much now that he could not even figure out where he was injured. His body screamed and he wanted to, but could not take a deep enough breath to do so.
Sherlock appeared over him and lifted his head and torso, which surprisingly helped him to swallow the blood rather than choke on it. He could breathe a bit this way. Sherlock kept saying his name.


"I know, I know. I will tell him. Just shut up. You are leaking everywhere. Shit. Shit. Fucking shit. John! Hurry!"

John appeared, looking grim faced and yet he managed a confident smile and told Greg, "Stay with me. It isn't as bad as it feels."

Greg could feel John's fingers searching and assessing. He saw that look pass from John to Sherlock. They were lying to him. He'd done it himself enough. He'd watched John lie to his wife when he knew she was dying.

John was talking to him again and the fireworks were so pretty. He was amused at how crisp his vision was. Each huge chrysanthemum of fire a perfect work of art.

"I have to stop the bleeding, bear with me. This is going to hurt a bit." John said as one of the fireworks exploded in his middle.

The most embarrassing part was honestly feeling the warmth of his bladder and bowels give way from the sheer pain. He coughed and groaned, which would have been a scream if he been capable. He didn't want to die crying like a baby, but it hurt so bad. God it hurt. Please make it stop. Just make it stop. He couldn't take it.

There was so much he wanted to say. He had to get it under control so he could say something. Last words were important. He was getting cold and shivering from both pain and blood loss.

"I'm sorry. I ..."

"Shhh. Please shut up. John will fix you, I promise."

Greg smiled. "Don't make promises you can't..."

He was so very tired. He just had to rest for a second.
Chapter 36

Not about Angels

We know full well there's just time
So is it wrong to toss this line?
If your heart was full of love
Could you give it up?
'Cause what about, what about angels?
They will come, they will go, make us special
Don't give me up
Don't give
Me up
How unfair, it's just our love
Found something real that's out of touch
But if you'd searched the whole wide world
Would you dare to let it go?
'Cause what about, what about angels?
They will…

https://youtu.be/kxVUee4WsoA

Siger Holmes stood alone in a dull grey room with one feature of interest. There was a very large flatscreen that seemed to be showing Greg's death from drone footage. Greg felt himself over and was relived to discover the pain was gone. Somehow he could still feel the cold, but it didn't seem to bother him as much here. Wherever here was.

Greg shoved his hands in his pockets and cleared his throat.

"Is this better? Hard to think when you are screaming. That looks like it must have been depressingly painful." Siger finally turned toward him and smiled, empathy and concern on his face.

"It was. At least it didn't last too long. I thought calling you the Angel of Death was a way of taking the piss? So, you really are... what? A reaper?"

Siger gave him a disapproving brow furrow as he rumbled, "You're not dead yet."

Greg took a couple of steps forward, saw John straddling what was left of him, performing CPR. Sherlock, face covered with blood, was breathing for him as they sang Baby Shark to coordinate. Greg smirked. "All but, and those two... thought they were supposed to use the BeeGees for this stuff. Now I will have that stuck in my head for eternity. Maybe that's fair warning that I am going to hell. You haven't shined me up lately. How are you here? Just for curiosity's sake? I am dead."
Siger shrugged. "I'm asleep. There is more to the aeons than our consciousness knows."

"Okay. Well, we best be off then."

"You seem awfully settled with dying."

Greg laughed. "Sorry. Yeah. Doesn't bother me like I thought it would. Glad he didn't shoot me in
the face. What happened to the other gunmen?"

"Watson happened to them. That's what took him so long to get to you. You saved many lives down
there. They will call you a hero."

"Someone recently told me we should bow out at the top of our game. I doubt I will ever beat this."
Greg bent close to the screen. Magically, just the thing he wanted to see moved closer like google
earth without the glitches and lag. "Cool. How many did they get? Why did they do this?"

"There are eleven injured, besides yourself and four victims and the three zealots of hate have died. It
would have been far worse if not for you. They planned carefully."

"Looks like we can count me as brown bread as well. So what's next? Wing fittings or brimstone?"

"If you had the choice to go back, would you take it?"

Greg watched an ambulance pull up. There were IVs and intubation done on the spot as John
demanded clamps and performed some painful and messy looking field surgery. As he shoved a
chest tube in Greg's body on the screen, Greg jolted slightly and had a coughing attack.

"You are still attached. The tether is weakening. Have you nothing to live for?" Siger asked with
cool nonjudgmental curiosity.

Greg shrugged. He could feel his body lifted like a ghost of something In memory, or the dusty scent
of a dry rose with pain instead of fragrance.

"What about your husband. He will be devastated. All my siblings will be affected by your loss. You
do realise that, don't you?"

"Mycroft will be fine. I'm not that important to him. Sherlock will be upset, but probably angry
efficient with me that it will keep him from being sad. I wouldn't have volunteered to go with you, if
there was so damned much for me to stick around for." Greg watched the ambulance pull away,
John had entered and Sherlock was desperate to get away but making statements to the officers on
scene. More ambulances had of course shown up just after his own. The fireworks were still going as
there was no way to stop the display once initiated. People huddled in groups and sat on the ground
with shock blankets. The gates were packed with those wanting to exit.

The screen followed along the ambulance route.

Greg watched as if it were someone else. "Will I know? When it is finished?"

"You don't have to die, Greg. Why are you?"

"It's as good of a time as any. Always liked fireworks. Going out with a bang." Greg said as if
making a doughnut joke.

"Ugh. You really intend to make me work, don't you. Alright then, you asked for it." Siger stretched
his arms above his head and something dark rose in the air. It took Greg several seconds to comprehend that there were enormous predominantly black with white tipped wings growing from his shoulder blades.

"What in the hell? How’d you do that... and.. Jeazuse Heavenly Christ!" Greg reached up to touch the feathers having lost all decorum.

Siger flapped his left wing, as if to slap the hand away. "You owe me two our fathers. They are more than just for show. You need to see Mycroft. He is about to be informed of your... adventures. Come."

Siger took hold of Lestrade's shoulder and the room melted as they stepped into the void and seemed to tumble straight into Mycroft's office. Mycroft was just hanging up the phone and tossed it on his desk with a curse. He rubbed his neck to try to soothe the tension.

"Mycroft?" Greg barely more than whispered.

Siger shook his head. "He cannot see you. Cannot hear you. He may never hear you again." Siger reached up and slapped Mycroft. There was no telltale thunk, his hand just stopped as if there was a magnetic barrier. "I can only interact with the dead here. The living don't notice me."

"You said I wasn't dead?"

Siger rolled his eyes and his wings gave a shivering flutter as they settled sleek to his back. "You are transitioning. Death is a process. I'm trying to keep you here."

Anthea entered without a knock. Mycroft looked up, stood, and straightened himself. "I don't care. I am going home. The foreign minister has just stepped on my last nerve. Wants me to travel to Baghdad, and he is an idiot. Whatever it is will have to wait until tomorrow!" Mycroft said in an annoyed but commanding tone.

"Oh, sir. This, can't wait. It will be on the news in one minute and thirty seconds. There has been an incident at the Wimbledon fireworks display. There is much more, but Greg Lestrade has been taken to Hospital with multiple gunshot wounds. I have a car waiting. I will brief you as we..."

"That cannot be. Explain? Now." Mycroft looked both furious and lost at the same time. His hands were shaking as he got his coat and umbrella. They walked quickly to the underground car park, Anthea briefing him on the evenings events. Quickly pulling CCTV of the shooting, she showed him what took place.

He watched stoically, only flinching each time Greg jerked at the trauma of the ballistic projectile entering his body. "My God," he said under his breath after he watched the footage twice.

"I'm in contact with the ambulance crew. They have sinus rhythm. Elevated heart rate but the fluid infusion has brought his volume up. They are monitoring and Dr. Watson says for you to... fuck off, he's very busy right now."

Greg and Siger stayed with them. Siger played with the valet light, flicking it to make it Blink off. After several rounds of Mycroft reaching up and growling, "bloody thing," Siger felt Greg stay his hand.

"Leave him be."

Siger gave a nod and a small smile.
Anthea continued to speak, pulling up backgrounds of the terrorists as someone on the other end of her phone fed the information to her. She ordered a car for Sherlock and held all traffic lights for the ambulance. "Reroute Queen Mary's to St. George's?

"Yes, of course. Contact..."

"Mister Burrside is on route, eta 17 minutes. I took the liberty to get Greg admitted as SIS critical. Ambulance is four minutes out, theatre seven on standby...we are 36 minutes out. It has an observational deck. Assuming you wish too..." she trailed off awaiting confirmation that he felt up to seeing the efforts to be made.

Mycroft closed his eyes and silently gave a single nod.

"Sending electronic verification and you need to sign the admittance. Listed as your husband."

Mycroft took the tablet and signed in the appropriate box. "I hope this is of any use to him. Do you think he will..." Mycroft drifted off and bit his lip.

"Doctor Watson is very competent and I am sure he is doing everything in his power."

"Yes. Quite right. This should not be happening. I have had him promoted. No DCI should be on the ground for this sort of thing. He should have been..."

"Wrong place at the right time, Sir." She set her phone in her lap and touched his arm in comfort. "He saved countless lives."

A dark look crossed Mycroft's face as he said, "Hang them all. I don't care how many inconsequential goldfish he may have prevented from meeting the end of their stupid little lives. Better every last one of them, than him."

Anthea dropped her eyes.

"My apologies, my dear. I am not myself at the moment. He must never know, of course, the things we have done. But that does not mean I am without a heart."

Anthea bit her lip. "I understand, sir. Though, I think you underestimate him, by vast measures."

"So you have advised. He is not part of our world and knowing nothing, they could not break him. It would be a horrible death. This kind of misfortune involving his own job, I can live with, most likely. Watching a video of one faction or the other snipping little pieces off of him until he expired, I would never sleep another moment until insanity took me."

"Agent Greyson signed up for this. We all did, sir. It was not your error."

"They are all my errors. Every bloody one I lose," Mycroft said with harsh gritted teeth. "It wasn't just Greyson," Mycroft murmured with less venom.

"It is a minuscule probability. You broke the man's heart. That will kill him faster. You should have left him to your brother if you were going to destroy him," Anthea said with quite calm honesty. "Watch him again. He knew the second he stood up. Do you see this frame? The micro expression. His eyes flicked toward us, the cameras? He considered taking cover then smirked. The greater good. Called in his location just as he made the choice."

"Your point?"
Anthea gave him a soft smile. "You gave him nothing to lose. He did this to impress you. The body language speaks for itself. As he is uselessly crawling away from the gunman... here... here... and there, just before he faces the man about to shoot him, he searches for cameras. Sherlock arrived and his only clear word was your name."

"I did the right thing. The difficult thing, of course, but the right thing. He wouldn't have understood and he would have resented the protocols. And me for forcing them upon him. How could he do his job with a security team? He would have been used to get to me. An unfortunate inevitability. He does not have the temperament to be a pampered spoiled pet. I probably couldn't have stomached his companionship if he did. This was for the best."

Anthea snorted her disapproval. "Never thought I would see this day. You should probably begin plans to retire."

Mycroft glared at her absolutely aghast at her suggestion. "I beg your pardon? What day?"

Anthea rolled her eyes and took a deep breath. "The Ice Man has lost his shit, Sir. You are afraid and it is destroying your effectiveness. Not just your personal life, but your ability to make the decisions you would not hesitate to make just a short time ago. I have given you time. Greyson was a difficult lesson to learn, admittedly. But, it just as easily could have been you."

"How dare you--"

"I do dare. I was head of operations a year and a half ago. My errors would have gotten you beheaded. I would have mourned you in a respectful way, then gotten on with it, just as you would have expected me to do. Just as you have groomed me relentlessly to do. Just as I have seen you do countless times. I know you and Greyson have history, but you have allowed stewing over his death to not only destroy your only hope of a happy relationship, you have let it compromise your work. The second I see that you are no longer Mycroft, the Mycroft Holmes, I will have you put to pasture. Just as you did your Uncle."

Mycroft sucked in a breath and with pure shock murmured, "You wouldn't... Anthea... Emma. I brought you in the service..."

"Something for which I am eternally grateful. For every minute, Sir. But, I have watched you slipping since this time last year. When you began your relationship with the DI, do you know what I saw? You were the best you have ever been. I have seen all your sides over the years. From quietly brilliant to smug mindreader to shameless show off to cow-towing schmoozer to inexplicably cruel to childishly petty to incandescently kind, but until you left your DI, I have never seen you indecisive and befuddled. It was an especially stark contrast considering your effectiveness since returning from Iraq." She shifted in the seat as she put her phone to balance on her knee to keep an eye on it but convey the importance she meant him to understand.

Mycroft looked down his nose at her as if she were a bug that had grown lobster's claws and a puppy head.

"I taught you everything..." he said with genuine hurt.

"Yes. You taught me to be just exactly like you. Rudy taught you to be exactly like him, but you retired him."

"I certainly did not. He died of a heart attack..."

"Don't. I have seen the records and made a deduction." She smiled at him, raised her eyebrows and
gave him a perfect Mycroft head tilt of skepticism.

"I see."

Anthea/Emma cleared her throat then continued, "Mycroft, when you were in a huff about your boyfriend and the jello, I thought it was hilarious. You had every right to read him the riot act and use it as fodder the rest of your lives. But, then Greyson happened just before you were to leave and then your Mum was off, being your Mum... and all that anger focused on the DI. All this fear for his safety is valid to a point, but, this awful thing that has happened tonight just proves that all you have done for him and yourself is wasted a year of your life. I will be honest, he may not make it and if he does, he will likely never be what he was again. And you blew it and you will know it, and I don't think you are going to be in the big game for much longer when all this hits you."

Mycroft looked ahead and with quiet acceptance asked, "How long have you decided to give me then? I hope you will allow me to set my affairs in order..."

"Your affairs are in impeccable order this minute! Christ... I am not going to kill you, idiot. I am giving you a wake up call. If this poor man lives, you better get this mess you made sorted. Do you hear me?"

"Well, they say the pupil becomes the master eventually." Mycroft refused to look her way. It meant he stared exactly were Greg sat.

"You never told me why? Why Greyson affected you so?" She said as almost a peace offering.

Mycroft traced the lines of his umbrella with his thumbnail. He spoke detached with little inflection, "We did our induction together. He was my only competition. He was probably my first true friend. He saved my life on three occasions, and I never repaid him. I failed him.

"I expected him to take the helm of your position. It was the natural order. He lasted a few months. He could not handle the social niceties and boring statesmanship. He went back into the field and I tried to help him, smooth over the occasional bit of bother. He helped me find Sherlock. He was our source. There were 96 hours of footage. I watched every minute of it. It was the least I could do. For him. They broke him. Horribly. Perhaps me as well to some degree. They would have broken me sooner. He was drugged and delirious with pain. He told them, about Greg and that was why I broke off all contact. I had to..." His face crumpled and he leaned forward resting his head on the pommel of his umbrella and silently sobbed.

Anthea blinked in confused silence for a moment. She started to speak several times but stopped. She reached out and placed her hand on his back. "I didn't know that. But, they are all taken care of, aren't they?"

Mycroft drew a handkerchief from his pocket and tried valiantly to regain his dignity. With a deep cleansing breath, he added, "They are in various institutions, none of which are terribly secure, apparently. You see my very admonition that caring is not an advantage has come to bite me. Prisoners have nothing to do, so they talk. If anyone ever did that to my Gregory, with my power base, scorched earth would seem like a holiday and I would welcome the consequences. I would have done anything to prevent being witness to this very scene you just played before my eyes. I have one single last bit of advice for you."

"What's that, Sir?"

"If he dies, you should reconsider my retirement."
She went back to her phone and said, "Mmmmmm. Probability?"

"Ninety-eight point two."

Anthea glanced at him amused again, "Point two. What's the off?"

"That Sherlock finds them first," he replied with cool surety. His mask restored, he returned his monogrammed handkerchief to his pocket after great care folding it. He sniffed, let out a breath and nodded his apologies to his assistant.

At this she finally smiled, faith in her boss restored.
Chapter 37

Wish you were Here

So, so you think you can tell
Heaven from hell
Blue skies from pain
Can you tell a green field
From a cold steel rail?
A smile from a veil?
Do you think you can tell?
Did they get you to trade
Your heroes for ghosts?
Hot ashes for trees?
Hot air for a cool breeze?
Cold comfort for change?
Did you exchange
A walk on part in the war
For a lead role in a cage?
How I wish, how I wish you were here
We're just two lost souls
Swimming in a fish bowl
Year after year
Running over the same old ground
And how we found
The same old fears
Wish you were here

https://youtu.be/DPL_SV3n7IU

Lestrade sat in silent fury. He turned to Siger and demanded, "Wait, that is why he dumped me? He said it was over the green jelly video! I embarrassed him."

Siger shrugged, "Well you should be embarrassed. It went viral. Had almost as many hits as Mrs. Hudson trying to run over the cameraman then turning over the valet cart. But, now you know the real story."

Greg glared at Mycroft. "You bastard. You let me grovel? And the whole time...you let me die...thinking..." Lestrade drifted off, realising he could not be heard by his target.
Siger offered calm comment, "If you'd like to give him a piece of your mind in person, might I suggest you leap back into your body?"

Greg sighed and shook his head no.

Siger rolled his eyes, annoyed. "I am going to wake up at some point and you will be on your own. I will be very cross with you if you expire whilst I am six thousand miles away and on the other plane."

Chaos would have been better in some ways, but the St George was an NHS hospital with an ugly 1970's period red brick blocky exterior and a slightly run down but stodgy interior that seemed to settle even the the most gruesome emergency with a calm stiff upper lip attitude. The largest trauma centre in London meant the physicians were efficient but calm. This was routine to them. The surgeon, Mister Burrside, walked in just a few minutes after they had Lestrade relatively stable. He did a quick consultation with John and finding out he was a former combat surgeon, allowed him the courtesy of observing from the deck above the theatre. That way Dr. Watson could update any family members as he felt necessary. He must not be aware that the British Government was already in the observation area, But, as a teaching hospital, they were probably used to it.

There were tests to run and X-rays to take. Whilst the wound packing had helped, the internal damage was still raging as Lestrade was pumped with units of blood and assessed. There was a quiet order to this place but they were working against the clock.

John was shown to the waiting area as Greg was rolled away on the trolley. He was given a set of scrubs to change into, because he was covered head to toe with his friend's blood and was a walking biohazard. He took a quick shower and sealed his bloody clothes in a garment bag usually meant for patients.

Sherlock arrived, near manic just as John finished with his clean up. Sherlock had wiped his own face, mostly just leaving smears from trying to do resuscitation breaths when Greg had coughed blood. John got him pointed to the shower and outfitted as well. "Before Mycroft gets here? At least have a rinse and get that shirt off."

"He's still?" Sherlock asked.

"Stable for the moment. Already in theatre."

"Is he going to live?"

John looked up at his husband and his mouth took on a hard line. "I honestly don't know. It will depend on the ballistic path. Only very high powered ones travel in relatively straight lines. Most tumble and bounce around. Depending on the ammo, there were no exit wounds, probably fragmented on impact. Kept him alive to get him here, in the golden hour, but now comes the hard part. Deciding what to leave, what to take out and how to fix the damage done.

"It will depend what internal organs and blood vessels are going to be involved. For the moment, yes, he will make it through surgery. But the thing with projectiles, as you know from experience, it isn't always the bits of metal that get you, but the bits of crap they drag into you setting up a delightful house party for bacterial infection. That is what nearly got me. They had repaired the damage, but it introduced something, probably a micron off my uniform and set me up for massive infections. It's bad, Sherlock. It could really go either way. We got him here. That is the important part. It is what it is."
"Don't lie to my brother, when he gets here, but a bit of sugar coating would not go amiss. Just, maybe ...". Sherlock shrugged as he trailed off.

"Yeah. Need to know. One step at a time. But, don't expect it to work on him. He was there when you went pear-shaped during your second admission. And, when you tried to skive off after saving him." John shifted his weight and bumped Sherlock in a comforting way.

Sherlock exhaled and blinked several times, turning to practical matters to shut off his emotions. "Mrs. Hudson. She and Molly will help Nanny deal with little Bee as long as we need them too. She heard it on the telly and text me."

"Yeah. That's good. Just be aware, this is going to be a long road at best."

Sherlock nodded and went to the shower to change.

Siger insisted Lestrade follow.

Lestrade was not on board. "This is some kind of invasion of privacy. Is this what ghosts do? Spy on people in the loo?"

Siger smirked. "Yes, of course. Don't be a ninny. You have seen his bits. I changed his nappy. You need the full effect. That was the public Sherlock. The strong for everyone else, Sherlock. This is my actual little brother."

Sherlock sat on the toilet weeping silently as if screaming with the sound off. It was visceral and ugly and a complete flip from a couple of moments ago.

Greg couldn't help it. He put his arms around Sherlock and spoke to him, even when Sherlock couldn't see him, feel him or hear him. "Oh, Sunshine. I'm sorry. Stop it. Don't worry about me. Come on. It's going to all be fine. Don't cry over me? I thought it was only for John that you...Shit. Is this what you do when you take hours in the loo?"

Siger answered for him, "Yes, and drugs from time to time. He is not what he allows people to see, he just doesn't trust anyone to show them this part of himself. Not even John. It has never been that he lacks emotional depth, simply that showing them has been tortured out of him. Mummy taught us in the beginning. It has been a lifetime skill. Quite useful, yet also somewhat destructive."

"Ya think?" Greg asked sarcastically.

Siger said in a near whisper, as if reciting holy text,"People will take advantage of you if you display a weakness for them to exploit. All people have the potential to betray you. All lives end. All hearts are broken. Caring is not an advantage. Disinterested emotional control always wins against the enemy. And who is the enemy? Everyone who is not your family. Alone protects you."

"Jeazuz. Who told you that load of bollucks?" Greg asked, both angry that he could not actually comfort Sherlock and feeling guilty that it was over him.

"Our dear sweet Mummy."

"Yeah? She cried when she found out Eurus didn't kill that little boy! So she is not immune to the concept."

"She is getting soft. She is in her seventies."

"She still works with Mycroft!" Greg said somewhat horrified.
"Only part time," Siger replied with a shrug.

"Your family is completely barking," Greg snapped back.

"Technically, we are your family as well," Siger replied with a smile.

The prep was done. The surgeon paused to nod acknowledgement to Mycroft and without request gave an in depth medical analysis of the patients condition.

Greg was both fascinated, horrified and embarrassed at what he perceived were his familiar features on a bloated corpse with a few drapes and a labyrinth of plastic tubing. He didn't like Mycroft staying up here observing.

Greg groaned. "Is the whole circus coming to town to have a booker at my insides?"

Siger smirked at him and with disapproval intoned, "Vanity. You owe me five Hail Marys"

"I'm not actually Catholic. You do know that? I just... I don't like him watching."

John Watson arrived freshly showered and wearing scrubs. He sat two chairs down from Mycroft and tilted his head one way then the other to relieve stress. "I am so very sorry," he said after a bit with a near sigh as he watched the three teams working on Greg down below.

"You got him here. Alive. You chose him when your skills could have been utilised on others. If you had helped anyone else, we would be... waiting for his body bag to arrive in a morgue instead. No matter the outcome, you and Sherlock gave him a chance and for that you have my eternal gratitude," Mycroft said in a slow measured voice.

"We had no idea. We were chasing a suspect. We were not there for this. I can't believe this happened. I just reacted. They are waiting to take my statement. Sherlock is here, but he's... bit not good." John frowned at some alarms going off and sat forward.

"What's happening?" Mycroft asked, voice calm yet terror in his eyes, blinking rapidly.

"Please. Don't let him watch me die?" Lestrade turned to Siger, his face begging.

Siger leaned slightly and placed his hand on John's shoulder. He spoke softly and John shivered, rubbing his arm as if he had a cramp.

"Pressure is dropping. There is a lot of damage. The anaesthetist caught it. That is going to keep happening. Look," John leaned forward in his most conservative doctor's voice explained, "I know you get your way on things, like this? Mmm? But there is a reason we normally don't let the families do this. Watch. It is mindlessly dull then becomes traumatic to them. He is out of the woods... mostly. That guy is good. Famously good, in fact. But people observing puts you off your game so out of respect, I mean give him every chance, yeah? Don't sit here? They will update you. You look like you could use a cuppa. You are doing nothing here." John looked to Anthea for help.

"Sir, I am afraid I have stalled the PM as long as possible and the Lord Mayor is frantic. "

Mycroft sighed. He shook his head. "Was my brother injured at all?"

"No. We were both fine. But, he doesn't know exactly where we are and you know he will..."
At that moment, Sherlock flounced his surgical garb covered head up and down in the window before doing a double-take and glaring at the occupants to let him in, looking fearfully to the left and rattling the door impatiently.

John responded and quickly let him in then stuck his head out to explain and smooth over things with the orderlies headed in Sherlock's direction.

Sherlock wearing an obviously stolen white lab coat over his high water scrubs and nothing but socks and paper booties on his feet rushed into the room in high dungeon. "I didn't know where anyone was and--" his eyes had strayed down and his gasp cut off his need to show off instantaneously. "How will they... put him back together? He looks like a crime scene down there..."

John stood up and ordered everyone out. "We are now a distraction and Yes, Sherlock, he is a crime scene or will be if that man down there cannot think! Hmmm? That is your equal down there and yet unlike you he has to solve it all with the clock ticking and the engine running, so we are going to go have tea, biscuits and a salmonella sandwich down at the cafeteria and then we are all going to wait for bloody hours like normal people. Hmmm? Out!"

Mycroft was on his phone the second they were out of the surgical ward and back in the spaces occupied by the public. There were statements to give and press secretary's briefs to approve and crap telly with garbled sound showing the same bits of Lestrade in his rugby tackle on the news and somehow the mortal world's chaos passed the time. Sherlock paced and texted. John brought more rubbish tea. Mycroft growled orders and glared at John for updates.

Lestrade watched his friends worry for him silently for hours. Siger finally said he was waking and that Greg needed to go back at once. He gave hurried instructions for Greg, "I am waking. I can't stop it. I will be back when I have opportunity. Dammit, you should have gone back. Don't follow the others, whatever you do. Stay? Please, just try not to die and if you are an idiot, I will be most cross with you when--"

Greg watched in horror as the winged priest just winked out and was gone. He felt the world tilt slightly and suddenly he was actually frightened. "When what? Don't leave? Hey, come back? I don't know what to do? I don't know how?"
Heroes and Villains

Chapter 38

Heroes and Villains

Heroes and villains
Just see what you've done
Stand or fall I know there
Shall be peace in the valley
And it's all an affair
Of my life with the heroes and villains

https://youtu.be/5gu-hzfhv10

It had been fine when Siger was there, but somehow it was not fine now. He felt lost and uncertain of anything. He should have asked more questions.

He tried to speak to everyone but they didn't hear him. He even tried touching them on the shoulder as he'd seen Siger do, but it didn't matter he didn't make a single goosebumps on any of them.

What finally sent him into frantic activity was when DI Donovan showed up, obviously exhausted and cheeks streaked with mascara. "I don't mean to disturb you it's just, we have all been waiting for word about Greg. They won't tell us. Policy bullshit, and the press keep showing...look, it's mad down there but the guys keep asking. Even his bloody Ex-wife is here now. Is he still..."

John agreed to go speak with everyone and Mycroft trusted him to offer them hopeful but discrete platitudes.

Greg followed. It was whilst he was trailing John that he bumped into a woman. It startled him. "Oh, sorry."

"You're going the wrong way. You should come with me?"

Greg frowned and looked where she was pointing and something in him stirred. He knew where he should be going. He needed to be there with a longing like beer and doughnuts and lust and joy all rolled into one of Sherlock's hits of heroine, called him. But, Donovan and John Watson were getting away and he turned away and followed them instead. "I'll catch up," he called over his shoulder.

She stared at him for a moment then tuned and walked on, trailing her long white sheet behind her. As they walked toward the now chaos of A & E, Greg realised there were others. They were mostly wandering the halls all headed to that place he could now feel calling to him.

On the way he saw Caleb Magraw, the very man Sherlock had been chasing. He sat on a gurney
Greg stopped again and looked carefully at the man. "You have more teeth than I remember."

The man grinned wide and delighted. "Grew back, they did. Fat lot of good they do me now. Smiled at twenty birds this last hour and not one looked my way, like! Guess our li'l chases is done for good. It were a fun time, it were. But, got no worries now. Just sit back and watch em rats run about, aye? All the time in the world now."

Greg sighed. "Sorry you died, man. You weren't a bad bloke. Not really. I think you are supposed to go that way?"

Caleb looked down the hall and smirked. "Naw. Not me. I'm good right here. Always wanted to be a ghost. Gonna learn my trade and get famous. One of those shows about the afterlife and such. Haunted London. Something. Mess with me friends and have a bit of fun, you know?"

"Yeah, okay. I will check back with you. I gotta go." Greg ran to catch up with John and Sally.

"They're calling you the big hero of the day! You and that Doctor fella."

Greg ignored him. They had shifted all the people waiting on news about Greg into a central waiting room. When John entered, they all clapped. John was embarrassed and coughed nervously. They quieted down and gathered to hear what he had to say. "I cannot tell you much and please if there are any members of the press?"

"Booted them to the kerb, mate. Just coppers, off duty here. Most of us, he’s our Guv, you know? The DCI, he keeps us in line. Be lost without ‘im."

"Okay then, well it is not good but we are 9 hours into an estimated 12 hour surgery and so far he is holding his own, for now. Long road and it is going to be touch and go. He lost a huge amount of blood, five penetrative trauma wounds and we lost him twice just on the way here. I don't want to sugarcoat the outcome, but pray or whatever you care to do, because he needs all the good thoughts he can get. He has some of the best of London in there and all I can say is he is still fighting."

That was remarkably easy and John smiled until he looked at Sally. "Need your statement as well, John. Sorry and if you could. Got to tell the vultures something. Already making it up as they go. Be better coming from a Doc and all."

John shook his head no. "I can't. That is the hospitals job. Protocol."

"Well, that was before himself told me to have you take care of it." She showed him a text from Anthea, obviously, but signed MH. John sighed and grumbled, but gathered his thoughts and walked out to the nightmare of flashes, keeping his eyes down and refusing to speak until the rabble settled and quit shouting questions. "I can't make any comments yet about the tragic circumstances that took place yesterday. I am only here to confirm that DCI Greg Lestrade is still in theatre and still fighting. He has one of the best surgical teams in the world with him and as the good man and hero that he is, I know he has the thoughts and the prayers of this country with him, as well. We will keep you updated as the day goes on. Thank you." John stepped back and turned from the shouted questions but one caught his ear and he returned to the podium.

"Greg and I were not there in any capacity. It was purely chance and we did what we were trained to do. That is all. We had no hint or prior knowledge. We were just there for the fireworks like everyone else. Sherlock was hoping to resolve another completely unrelated private case. We were
simply in the wrong place at the right time and did what we could. I know you like to embellish things, but this time, for Greg's sake, could you please, just get it right? That's all, just get it right. He isn't out of the woods and probably gave his life and certainly his career with the Yard to save those he could. You can't ask more than that of a man. Don't make the wrong people famous today. For once, tell the stories of the heroes and the victims. Let the villains be forgotten. Good morning."

"Was that alright?" John asked as Sally finished the interview and they got back to the safety of the quiet hospital.

"About bloody perfect, I suppose. Now you tell me the real deal. Cause I see it on your face."

John bit his lip. "It's not good. There is a lot of damage. He's lost part of his right lung, his liver was affected, a kidney, they are trying to save it. They are not even doing all the work, this is just to get him stable. Just stable. Just to keep him breathing. You know. Best outcome is a damned long road. Lots of surgical procedures in the future. He isn't Sherlock. He can't bounce and take off running. There is hope, and a bunch of men and women upstairs who know their craft. But, between you and me, he is challenging them every step of the way."

"And your husband? And his ... I do know about that. Bastard damn near broke him. Yet there he is now. Bit odd that, you asked me."

John shrugged. "As far as mine. He's Sherlock. He and Greg...have a lot of history. He's going to be a chocolate teapot. Then, he will get on point and track down the sick sadistic bastards who are behind this and then it will be up to the crown to make it stick. As for the other one. I have no idea. All I can do to keep track of my own Holmes. The other one is not my area."

"Okay. Fair enough. But, give that posh arse a word from me. I don't care who he thinks he is. If he sits up there soaking up sympathy and Greg pulls through and he isn't there for that part? Only God will know where I hide the freaking body. You tell big-brother freak that I will find him."

John smiled. "You and Sherlock are going to be on the same side on that one. A miracle like that calls for another. Let's hope Greg gets his, hmmm?"

"God's ears." She laughed but a flood of tears instantly followed. "I hate this. Jesus it is Greg. Best Guv a girl could have had coming up. I'd be nothing if he hadn't watched over me."

John put his arms around her as she cried for just a minute then she took a deep breath and forced the tears away.

"Sorry. Any port in a storm, ya know?" She laughed at herself and wiped her eyes with anger at showing weakness.

"I'm not such a horrible port. At least that's what I have been told. I do need to get back. Can we do my statement later? Once he's settled maybe?"

"Yeah. I'll be back on shift this evening. Stop by then, yeah? You did ballistics and all?"

"Yeah. They got me. It was too contaminated. But, they did it anyway."

"Look, I saw the raw footage. What you did, just in case nobody has told you. You really are fucking crazy, aren't you?" She giggled and spilled a few tears again which she ignored.

John laughed, throwing his head back. "Therapist says not, but she is a bit of a loon... so...."
Greg stood smiling fondly at Sally as John walked away. He hugged her as tight as he could and whispered in her ear, "You're a good cop, Sally D. I should have told you more often."
Headlong

Chapter 39
Headlong

Purely, brightly headstrong
Plunging, falling headlong
Like a fool always falls for the wrong one
Plunging, falling headlong
Ooh, you call it light
Because you're above my love
Ooh, if you could fall
You would fall headlong
It's easier to carry you, my love
When we are falling headlong

https://youtu.be/78Tt_bA5duc

Greg made his way slowly back to the little waiting room. He contemplated all he'd heard. He had not suspected that so many people actually cared for him like they did.

Every once in a while he would run across someone looking lost or confused. Some spoke to him, others were walking with someone and chatting away, seeming quite pleased to be strolling toward that thing that called him. He found himself enthralled with it as well. The pull was so strong and he could feel himself giving into the want. Giving in was calming and made him feel like pure joy.
Nothing worried him and that life he had been in wasn't feeling very real. It was just a glimpse of a movie from a long time ago. It felt good to give in.

He was stopped short when Mycroft literally stepped into his path holding his phone with his finger in one ear. "I can barely hear you, brother. How did you know?"

"I see. That is most unfortunate. He is still in theatre. John says they have stabilised him for the time being. He will be brought round to Intensive Care within the hour, if all goes well. Yes. It is good news. John says his condition is much improved now that he has survived thus far. No, we both know how unpredictable gun shot wounds are, but it is some small victory."

Greg stood blinking as if he were awakening. He had been headed somewhere important. He needed to go, but he was not quite a ghost yet and could not pass through Mycroft. They had not been this close in ages and he instinctively threw his arms around him and held on. The need to leave passed and he found he felt better when he was in physical contact with Mycroft.

"Don't be ridiculous. Yes you always say that but you do realise I don't believe in your imaginary Me in the sky."
Greg could almost smell a whiff of Mycroft's aftershave. He moved behind him catching snippets of the conversation whilst possessively hanging onto the man for dear life.

"He is livid .. Greyson ... speak to him. I can't get him to reanimate. You have to talk..."


Mycroft stood in the hall and stared at his phone. He cocked his head slightly and whispered, "Gregory? My love? Are you... here? I need to speak to you? If your amenable? Please?"

Mycroft sent a text. Anthea appeared after just a moment. Mycroft handed her his phone and when she looked confused he simply said, "I will need an hour of privacy. In the third floor chapel. My idiot brother is about to make a fool of me, I've no doubt. But I am too desperate to contemplate the existential value of his mumbo-jumbo. He is other and I have given him my word. I will be back in 60 minutes. Mind my incoming communications."

"Tracking, Sir." She didn't blink and simply began using one hand for her phone whilst holding his in the other. She was simultaneously typing on both before she took her seat.

Mycroft stood in the tiny chapel and looked at the central window glowing with a banality crimped into pretty coloured glass. He took a seat in the middle. And sighed dejectedly. This was utterly stupid but he cleared his throat.

"Hello God or whomever, this is Mycroft. We have not spoken for about 46 years because the probability of your existence is on the same level as Unicorns but my brother has paid for my disbelief at least twenty times over so I hope to negotiate a favour based on some of his good will rather than demand favourable magical outcome dependent upon my own good deeds. I have of course broken each of your commandments. The ones I enjoy repeatedly and those of necessity innumerable times. My brother on the other hand, well, you are to the universe what I am to England and her many interests, I suppose... so you know him. I am bollocks at this so, thank you and if you could see fit to allow Gregory to come from beyond the veil...."

Mycroft stopped and he looked up, tears formed in his eyes as he continued, "Gregory, if you can hear me, please God, don't leave. You promised me once that if I asked, you would come back. You promised. I know you don't understand why but if you could just forgive me a little. Nobody has ever actually forgiven me, I don't think, so if just this one time, if you hear this, if you could just stay a little longer. I need you. I didn't think you would go. Not really and not like this. I just need you to give me something I don't even deserve. I let John Watson mourn my brother for two years and I never had a moments compassion. I never saw...him. I deserve to lose you. I do, but you must know you never deserved how I treated you. I thought I was keeping you safe.

"I never told you. I could have pushed the divorce through. But, I lied. So I could pretend for just a little longer. I could call you my husband. I am a very wicked man. Without you, I fear greatly that I shall be no man at all.

"Please, God does not need you. Just live, for me?" The last words were nearly incomprehensible as Mycroft allowed a sob to shred his dignity.

He sat silently the rest of the time and closed his eyes waiting for any sign.

He finally roused himself before he fell asleep. No religious revelation had overcome his mind. He felt no different but perhaps slightly more peaceful, though that could be explained by a few
refreshing moments of solitude and a moment to sort his emotional rubbish. He took a deep breath and whispered "If any of you invisible people exist, save that man. He is better than a thousand of the rest of us."

Greg sat. He was getting tired. Siger startled him. "I can't believe he actually did it. I was almost sure he would faff it off. Still here I see."

"I am so tired". Greg admitted.

"You are weak. Leave your arms around Mycroft's neck. Let him be your anchor. Just float along like his human shaped cape."

Greg found this agreeable and actually it was fun. Mycroft didn't seem to notice and Greg felt grounded though his feet were floating down the hall like he was learning to swim.

"You are going to die if you don't reanimate. I have done all I can to convince you."

Greg thought for a minute then cocked his head. "Hang on. If you can do this, why were you so torn up about Sherlock when he almost died in the tent? Did you talk to him and just put on a show for us all?"

"Not at all. I was truly bereaved. I have met him here in the past. Actually his last three overdoses. But, that was the problem. I could not find him. Mary Watson did. She sent him back. Usually we hang about where we die or our corpse or something or someone we love until the calling becomes unbearable. Sherlock had gone all the way back to London. You were easy. I simply created a peaceful space and called you. I feared you would not be able to resist the light whilst I was gone. How did you?"

Lestrade looked around. "I didn't. He got in the way and you called. He spoke to me and it sort of pulled me out from losing my mind. For a minute there I couldn't have cared less about anything but, he was in the way. I don't think everyone feels it. I saw a guy I know, well, he was the suspect we were after actually. Guess he got killed in the shooting. He is staying right here. Wants to be a ghost."

"There are no ghosts."

"Then what are we?"

"Transitions. He won't be able to stay. Not indefinitely. He will fall asleep at some point and will be called. He will have no resistance then. It happens to anyone who can't or won't reanimate the transport."

"I almost let go."

"I know. It is why you are so weak now. It takes effort to resist."

"How do you stand it?" Lestrade reached out and petted a wing gently.

Siger fluttered his feathers in irritation and Lestrade snatched his hand away with a guilty grin. "Sorry."

"When I was near death, I could not find Mahmoud. I knew he would be there and he was not. I
tried to leave on purpose. I could not get through. Later I tried to drink enough to do the job. Slow and steady, kill my liver. Very painful but not effective. It was not pleasant, thinking he’d left me behind. I now know why. He was not there in the first place. He is my anchor and I can’t go with out him nor he without me."

"Then how can I go without Mycroft?"

"It works differently for everyone. Some have a welcoming party, others have anchors, others are not as dependent on others, such as Sherlock and John. I dread the day one leaves the other behind. The other will feel the call so strongly he will soon follow I imagine. But they are capable of existing separately. Few people have what Mahmoud and I do. It is pure."

"Because you don't have sex?"

"Because I am a damned priest."

"Sorry. A damned priest with big floofy wings?" Lestrade asked.

"No, not damned as a swear. Damned as a state of being. My soul is fallen as I'm damned to not know rest until the end of mankind. I told you this when we first met. My soul is both blessed and cursed by god's light. My sins can only be redeemed if I should fulfil my destiny as a chosen. I have known this since I was a child. In anger I rebelled. Mahmoud refracts my light. He is my moon. I cannot explain it to the living."

"So you really are something... other as Mycroft puts it?"

"Yes."

"How come you can't tell anyone?"

"It is forbidden. Their deductions are their own."

"Oh. I see. How is it, that you could tell me?"

"Because if you die, you cannot tell anyone. And if you live you won't remember any of this at all. So I can confess to you."

"Confess to the dead? Like Culverton Smith? That's creepy."

"Culverton read the old texts. But he didn't understand them. He dabbled in things he should have left alone and it destroyed him. He could buy anything, except he could not purchase God and that was his downfall."

"So you are kind of important in the big picture. Why are you bothering with me?"

"Every life is important"

"Nope. That is your priesty jargon. Too quick. I will forget it anyway, so tell me the real deal."

Siger sighed and seemed a bit put out. "You ask too many questions."

"Detective. Maybe it is my calling?"

Siger laughed. "Okay. Do you have any idea how many lives you have saved in your career?"

Greg frowned. "A few I suppose. Not nearly as many as I lost. Always too slow."
Siger snorted through his nose. "You are an idiot. You saved over two hundred just yesterday. You and John Watson. You can quit now, and you have fulfilled your destiny. But, if you stick around and work at it, you save more than you can imagine. You save my brother from himself, and indirectly you save millions."

"So I am like an investment?"

"Exactly. But also because you are my sister's favourite and she was worried. Either way you are worth my time."

"Good to know. See? That wasn't so hard. And now I know."

"And later you won't. Here we are. Now. You will have to walk. We have to get you back to your body. There is no more time for chatting about the aeons I'm afraid. See you next time."

Lestrade looked down at his body, and made a noise of disgust. "That is going to be horrible, isn't it."

"Yes. Now go."

"I don't know how."

"What do you mean you don't know how. Just jump in."

"You mean just squash myself in the bed?"

"For God's sake, no. Just think. Feel your body and you will snap right back."

Lestrade closed his eyes and diligently concentrated. "Nothing happened"

"Touch your body. Maybe that will help."

Lestrade put his hand on his own chest and tried again. Still nothing. He tried pushing in. "Okay. Next theory?"

"I don't know. I don't understand."

"Maybe if you bless me or something?"

Siger shook his head annoyed. "Has nothing to do with it. And there is the small complication of I'm not here. Try harder. Think of those you love. Really concentrate. Know why you want to go back and hold on to it."

Lestrade did as he was asked. He kept on, until he nearly felt he would pass out.

"Stop. Stop. It is weakening you further. I don't know what to do. I just came back to help pop you back in. I'm sorry. It may be too late. If you are this weak, you may be lost."

"So now that I want to go back, I am actually dead? But when I was fine with going on, then you wouldn't let me? What happens now. I just go to sleep and drift away?"

Siger looked stricken as he replied, "My deepest condolences, but that is the probable outcome. Yes."

"Then I won't sleep. How do we make me stronger?"
"I will pray."

Greg looked up at this winged man and nodded. "Great. That's nice. Do you think it will help?"

"No idea. Can't hurt." He lifted his wings dramatically and winked out without so much as a by your leave.
Breathin'

Feel my blood runnin', swear the sky's fallin'
How do I know if this shit's fabricated?
Time goes by and I can't control my mind
Don't know what else to try, but you tell me every time
Just keep breathin' and breathin' and breathin' and breathin'

https://youtu.be/3HAY7DNWP-k

Greg stayed in the room, waiting for Siger to return. He watched as Mycroft took his hand and spoke softly as he explained that he had to return to his duties because there was little he could do here. He promised to return soon and snuck a kiss on Greg's forehead. Greg felt his energy perk up a bit since at the time, he was holding his own hand.

He listened to Sherlock tell him how he needed to buck up and get back to work because Greg was going to miss all of the good cases. Sherlock had leaned over the bed and whispered softly, "You need to hurry. Mycroft is losing his mind. Our plan has finally worked a treat and here you are lying around like a sloth."

Sally came once. She just held his hand and mostly cried quietly. Greg felt bad and told her that he didn't know how to get back in and his stupid angel friend had left him hanging. He explained that he couldn't sleep or he might be pulled away, but she heard none of it.

John actually came the most often. He was the most fun because John talked to him like he was in the room. Greg was a bit lonely in truth so he pretended that they were having a conversation.

"Hello, mate. Let's see what you have been up to today, shall we?" John greeted. He tapped into the computer and pulled up Greg's chart. He had no official capacity as Greg's doctor, but he was given some poncy official title as liaison to something or other and what it amounted to was he had privileges to monitor Greg and update Mycroft every few hours.

(Not much. Watched telly. Looked out the window and watched the storm last night )

"You missed a heck of a downpour last night. We've got a bit of flooding. Mrs Hudson is having to have 221 C pumped out. She is not best pleased about that, let me tell you."

(I bet not. The boilers down there isn't it?)
"The heat to the whole building is in the basement and we are making due with the fireplace and an electric radiator Sherlock scared up from somewhere. You know what that will do to the electric bill."

(I wish I could have some of her savoury scones. God I miss food. I miss coffee and steak pies. Not missing sweets so much, but I am starving for salties, yeah? Pork scratchings and bacon. Fish and chips with vinegar not sauce...)

"We have stepped down your medication. We are trying to wake you up. But, so far you are being a lazy bones." John left the computer and washed his hands and gloved up, chatting as he scrubbed with practiced ease. "Rest is great and all but the downside is you are missing my pretty face and that hurts me..." John pulled on gloves.

(Maybe your pocky mug is what is scaring me away. Maybe I prefer the pretty nurses!)

"I'd say you were holding out for a pretty nurse, but you have not seen the selection of this wings rotation and never have I seen a more sorry lot." John used his light to check Greg's pupils and fiddled with his IV.

(They seem nice enough to me. Bit on the older plumper side but they are nice ladies)

John continued his routine exam, checking his bandages. "Not a one of them under fifty. Two of them were RAMC nurses about twenty years before my time. Perfectly competent, mind you but, not a bit of eye candy amongst the lot."

(Well, we can't all pull assassins and Sherlocks you know? And Clarence isn't so bad.)

"There is one guy who is at least not in queue for the pensioner plate but he's a bit stand offish. Totally straight and terrified every one of us wants in his pants. I had not seen a real homophobic in so long, it is almost funny. He has no idea that every time he opens his gob, it is a major turn off. Ugh, that accent. Grating. So, dear man. I am the best of a bad lot and I need you to try to wake up any time. No rush but immediately would do."

(Our brother in law has been trying to help. You know the one with the priest collar and bloody wings? But he says something is blocking me. I hate this, you know. You all going to all this trouble for me. I think he's even given up, see? He didn't come last night at all. He usually checks in, you know.)

"Greg? Greg? Can you hear me? We need you to open your eyes." John grabbed his hand and squeezed hard. This routine had happened regularly since last night.

(I am awake. I just can't get back in. I'm so bloody tired, John. I just want a nap, but if I go to sleep... I won't get to come back.)

John was doing something underneath the blankets to the wound on his thigh. Greg was bored. The bloody nurses kept switching off his telly. Greg reached up and flipped it on.

John Watson froze and spun, on alert.

(Sorry about that. Didn't mean to frighten you.)

John held his breath and listened carefully then quietly strolled to the television and gave it a curious glance. He reached up and turned it off.

Greg felt anger. It took energy to manipulate the world. (Oh don't you bloody start too). Greg
reached up and switched it back on.

John paled slightly and said an awkward, "Okay then. Back in a few hours. ". He efficiently pulled his gloves off and balled them up before lobbing them into the bin. He tapped out of the computer and exited. Greg followed. John was walking swiftly down the hallway.

The chaos of other people was overwhelming and he was almost immediately knocked down by a woman carrying a stack of files. She knocked him down easily but somehow tripped over him too. The X-rays and papers went everywhere. John turned around and stopped, watching the proceeding until the woman was helped up, then turned and kept going.

It startled Greg when he realised John was heading straight toward the other place. He watched John all the way to the lift and was hit with a shudder of revulsion at what would have happened if he had trotted along to follow. It gave him a hard pause. He could just let go and save a lot of people a great deal of trouble. That was the easy thing to do.

He stood there for a long time, considering it. It would be lovely to rest. Finally he turned back to his room and held his own hand, sitting on the bed. It was a form of self comfort he supposed, he was too tired to care and the next thing he knew, he was being shaken awake by an angry Holmes.

"What are you doing? I told you not to sleep!"

Greg opened his eyes. Siger was back. "I thought you forgot me."

"Hardly, I am currently on a plane set to land in Gatwick in two hours." He winked out for a second then was back. "This is hard enough when I leave my transport in one spot, but try it in a tin tube darting across the ocean!" He winked out again.

"What's that. What's happening to you."

"Just bloody turbulence. Anyway. Stay here. Do not sleep. I am coming to help as fast as I can."

"Have you figured something out?"

Siger smiled and his eyes twinkled. "Maybe." He turned his head, "Oh for God's sake, they are serving food again. Gotta go. "

Greg laughed. It just struck him as funny. He was having a lovely time except for the near death part.

John was back for afternoon rounds. He came in at least three times a day whilst Sherlock stayed with Rosie. He gave a wary glance toward the television then went to the computer. He didn't speak right away and tapped on the computer while frowning. He went to the sink to wash his hands.

"Well, your numbers are off. Could be an anomaly but I am going to have a look see. You are going to get moved around a bit. There is every possibility that we have an infection brewing. That's normal but still not good. You should have woke by now, at least for a bit. Oh and Sherlock is picking up Siger from the airport. In Mrs Hudson's car... that should be a treat, so I just thought I'd hang out with you. You are welcome to object."

(I can tell you are worried. I wish you would tell me how Mycroft is. He doesn't talk anymore. He just stands there and stares at me. I know it is the rules, fifteen minutes at a time and all, but I miss him.)

"Your husband is turning the country upside down for a terrorist's cell he and Eurus have determined were behind the attack. She's here. In London. Acting as some sort of consultant. I don't know how that works exactly but she is going to have a baby. How's that for mad? Can you even imagine, the
nightmare heir that bloodline will create? I am genuinely frightened for humanity."

Lestrade smiled and joked, (She will be fine. I feel sorry for her cousins. Play dates may not be the best plan, unless you want Rosie and Harry to grow up thinking they are zebras or something, but I think after all she was put through that she deserves a little happiness.)

"I don't know. You proved quite conclusively that she was not a child who murdered a little boy. It is so ingrained that it is hard to reorder who she is in my head. I did watch her murder five people in cold blood within a few hours time, just to prove a point. No worse than things I have done, felt I had to do."

(She genuinely loves Rosie. I don't think you should be afraid of her. Sherlock says she adores Harry. She isn't that institutionalised zombie we first met. Not now. Jim takes care of her, in his own weird way.)

"I murdered the cabbie, you know? I think you have suspected all along. Wake your arse up and arrest me?"

(I always knew. Well, not that night of course. But, it didn't take long. He gave me all the clues and as time went on, I knew you fit them all. )

"Sherlock says, when a doctor goes bad, that we are the worst sort. We have the knowledge and the means and the grit to do things that other humans cannot. That may be true, honestly. A few people in my profession have honest guilt when they know they have made an error. And we all do, never think we don't. But here in this day, we hide it. It takes a certifiable psychopath to hide what is basically manslaughter by negligence. And we help each other do it. Maybe you have too? I imagine it happens in your line as well."

(Yeah. Not as much as the media would have you believe. Good cops always hate bad cops. But, good ones do make mistakes as well, so, it happens. I have been on the end of that. When Sherlock died, those who didn't hate me for associating with him hated me for contributing to his death. It was weird dynamics)

"I remember," John froze. He looked around the room suddenly as if aware. He cleared his throat and frowned as he cursed under his breath and pushed the call button.

Lestrade stood by the door as he was prepped for a trip back to theatre. He listened to John explain a long convoluted reason as Siger,Sherlock and Mycroft nodded and looked aggrieved. Greg was too tired to follow what exactly was happening but he was sure he could not stay with his body if they were going to walk him down that long hallway.

He had been so happy to see Siger, even without his wings, (which Lestrade had gotten used to) until he'd realised Siger couldn't see him. He was finally here and now Greg was still alone and invisible.

Finally as they wheeled his body out toward the theatre, Siger turned to the room. "I can't see you or hear you, but tether to me, I can feel the ice of your fear. We will sort this. Just need a bit of time."

Greg had done as he asked.

Siger actually dragged him down the hallway that frightened him and around to the outside. Greg was a bit worried but also a bit fascinated by a day in the life of a priest-Angel-djinn-Holmes-reaper. It was better than sitting in the waiting room to watch people mope over him.

"If you are here, stand over there! I have to use the toilets." Was his first instruction.
After that embarrassing bit they went to visit several people in various churches all over the city. Evidently one was Siger's Guv and not best pleased with him. Siger submitted to his tirade but Greg was shocked a man of his advanced years and of the cloth knew so many inventive swear words. Then they had tea, after all that screaming. Lestrade saw a different side of Siger there, for this one was not the convivial calm placid man or the mysterious warrior. This was Mycroft's brother with a bit of manipulative Eurus thrown in. Before the end of the meeting, the Cardinal had agreed to almost everything he had chastised Siger for doing. Greg didn't understand it all, but he would never again doubt that Siger was all Holmes.

Finally they made their way to Siger's rooms. The boy priest Greg had met long ago greeted him with a face of horror. He sputtered and balked as Siger made his way into the Immaculate Conception on Farm Street. Greg suspected that he was about to be turned away, but he stopped and glared at the blond boy and whatever objections the other priest had were wiped away. "Brother Abraham, you look hale and fair, but I am old and disagreeable and extraordinarily weary. Are my rooms still my own?"

"Well, yes, they have not been touched. But it has been almost two years, they have not been... prepared, and it is quite irregular for you to just... pop in..."

"Yes, well. Conversation over. I won't be here to disturb your... doings. Sneak her out the back and we shall speak of it no more. I will hear your confession at your leisure, but do see I am undisturbed for the rest of the night."

The rooms had been chaos before. They were slightly greyed chaos now, cold and full of dust and spiders. Siger took no note of it and dusted some cobweb from his chair. "I will speak with you in a few moments." He said, low and full of surety. His phone bleeped just then. "Ahhh, you have made it through the procedure. You are still with us." With that he closed his eyes and released a lever to kick up his footrest and Siger settled down for a nap.

Greg watched the man fall asleep. He was very interested in how this worked. He expected to see him step out of his body and hoped to use it to help him get back in his own, but Siger simply winked into existence at two places at once.

"Ahh. Good. You have been with me all day then. I thought so but couldn't be certain."

"I did my best," Greg replied. "So, you must have found something to help if you physically came all this way just for me. What about the war?"

"Have you not kept up? That is almost over. A few skirmishes now. We have spent the last two months chasing rumours of rumours. What happened to you, is connected. They are franchising now. Trojan Horses in every major city in the western world."

"Your not allowed to say that these days. It's racist."

"Religious abominations are hardly a race. Don't be ridiculous. Catholic is no more a race than Islam. Evil warps them, not faith."

"Still, out there in the real world, you have to be very careful what you say. Everything is a hate crime these days. Except actual hate crimes and those are written off as normal. We've passed New York in murder now. I'm getting too old and cynical to deal with the mess of it all I think. It's not my London any more," Greg said as if a bit lost.

"We can continue that discussion once we have you on your feet again. Mycroft is pushing for a knighthood you realise? People love you. Talk of making you the next Lord Mayor?"
Greg laughed and shook his head, "No, none of that for me. I don't have the poncy background for all of that."

"Technically you do. You married my brother, which makes you the Countess of Powys, a landless but very old and quiet title. Came down from Rudy, he was the sixth so Mycroft became the seventh Earl. I guess Harry will be the eighth if that sort of thing still exists in his day. I don't think the peerage will survive the willy-nilly of future marriage complexity. But, your marriage, such as it is, affords you slightly focused and dull opportunity to be a doddering old snob, if the drink doesn't get you first."

"It should have been your title. You're the elder."

"My title far exceeds that of a mere earthly Lord of a rainy cold island." His wing feathers raised and shiver then settled.

Greg snickered and nodded. "Yeah, okay, point taken. So, how do we fix me?"

Siger grinned and teased, "Mumbo-Jumbo and a bit of luck."
Siger took a deep breath. "Well, first we must be honest and face facts. You are blatantly in a coma, though they have chosen not to name it that just yet. Because giving patients time is standard procedure, and you have been medicated which everyone reacts to in different ways. But, having been in one, and having had a very similar experience to what is occurring with you, perhaps we can figure this out. I did not have the will to become flesh again. I was terrified, in fact."

"But, I want to. So that isn't the same."

Sigerson shook his head. "No. In your head, you want to, but that is not the part of you that is in charge. Your heart will always overrule your head, no matter how you fight it, no matter what my brothers have to say on the matter. They are idiots. So, we have to find a way to figure out your heart."

"Sounds a bit like supernatural therapy," Greg joked uncomfortably.

"Are you opposed to it? Bit telling, that."

"I won't be very good at it, except for guessing the right thing to say and faking the appropriate body language to convince you I am not lying. It is forced on us by the powers that be. Not to help us, mind. After incidents. Say the wrong word and they get rid of you. Not very conducive to the idea of opening up. I don't know if I can, properly."

"Do you consider me your friend?"

Greg furrowed his brow in confusion then said kindly, "You flew all the way here just to help me. What do you think? Of course I consider you my friend."

"Then that is a place to begin. When was the last time you contemplated suicide before the incident?"
"I don't know, friend, how bout you start? When was the last time you had had all you could take?"

Greg was angry at being called out. He didn't like talking about his problems. He never saw that it did much good for him, though other people loved to ramble on about themselves. He was really better at listening.

"Easy answer. The night we met. You and your one ridiculous shoe. Do you remember? You interrupted. You. Interrupted." Sigerson repeated the last bit for emphasis and his voice was a dry husk.

"I don't know what to say... I had no... " Lestrade fell silent in disbelief.

"You had no reason to suspect. You'd barely met me. Yet if you could have seen me in this form, you would have understood. You see I am a normal man who has simply gained an awareness of the parallels and that is what has both blessed me and cursed me. It is far too long of a story to get into detail about but suffice to say, that on this plane of spirit, you see my altered appearance?"

"The wings are a bit noticeable, yeah. I wish I could draw or paint. It is really something to see. I wonder what John would make of the anatomy? Six appendages. Where I come from, it means you are a bug. They should be attached to your arms. Like a bat or something. But, it is beautiful, like really. Can you fly? I mean, do they..."

Siger squirmed and stretched one towards Greg, offering to let him examine it. "They are not merely decorative. I can fly, here. If my physical form is secure. I couldn't for a very, very long time. But, yes, they are again functional. You may touch them. Just to get it out of your system. No, they have no erotic value or anything of that nature and yet it is irritating for others on this plane to touch them without invitation. It feels like needles and pins. The feathers conduct information though they themselves have no nerve endings. They are much like flesh on the other side. Spiritual injury is possible and quite painful to them."

Lestrade stood and ran his hand gently along the broad wing and under to feel the musculoskeletal workings under the outer feathers. "It is amazing. It feels so real. Like a painting of angels come to life. People have to have seen something like you before, because artists have been obsessed with Angels for hundreds of years. Even people who are against religion like Angels. I hate that I am going to forget this."

Siger tugged his wing back softly, letting Greg know that his time for feather petting was over. "They are mostly an annoyance, honestly. They also cause me the sin of pride. I cannot bear to be without them. You see, for me, they are always a part of me. In other words, they exist in the waking man you see, as well as here. But, the night you met me, you would not have found them beautiful. You would have found them horrifying. I found them to be, no longer bearable.

"When I awoke in hospital, I was very damaged. They healed my physical form as best they could, but these? Well, they were beyond recognition. The left had been burned through in places and was a raw weeping sore, but the right had been crushed and I couldn't even lift it. It was broken and dropped, effectively it dragged behind me, useless and in constant agony. I fought coming back, fearing the broken wreckage before me. I had known what I faced. But, the reality was another story. I lived that way. There was nothing anyone could do. I had once been something to behold for those with eyes to see. I had become nothing more than a monster. So I hid away. Here. I prayed and I begged for healing. I lost my faith, found it again, cursed the world and studied until my eyes swam, but nothing helped.

"No pain medication had any effect. Well, drinking eased my ability to tune in this world. It was a destructive solace, but time and again I tried to accept and I simply couldn't. My face, didn't bother me any longer. Let them all look. Let them see. My vanity was beyond caring. I had nothing that
mattered and had wished from the moment I awakened that I had not bothered. I had come back for Mahmoud and he was lost to me. I could not find him. My wings were gone and I couldn't fly. I couldn't search or reach him. Mycroft told me he was thought to be dead. I did all I could to reach him there. Four suicide attempts that remain unconfessed and unforgiven to this day. They sent me to retreats and eventually I managed to make myself a small life of quiet usefulness, here.

"For ages, I was left alone mostly, provided I didn't make too much trouble. But, my work was coming to an end. I barely slept at all anymore because it is far worse here. One night I had simply decided that enough was enough and that decided, it had enabled me the will to lose all. I prayed, but felt no voice and was sure the light of god had abandoned me. I had prepared as best I could. If my master had no purpose for me, then I would return to him on my own terms."

Siger was silent so long that Greg prompted him, "So, what happened."

"He sent me you."

"Anthea sent me here. And your sister. Not God."

"Oh but he did. You cannot see all the loose threads but God sent you to me as assuredly as he put you in the paths of all those who would have died at Wimbledon. You think you are not important, Greg Lestrade, but you have already changed the world. You made a bumbling confession that night and by the time we had entered this room, my wings were singing in relief. You were the conduit to my salvation from the path of selfish destruction. You handed me back my entire destiny, and you had no idea God was with you. I didn't know it at that time either. I only knew that in your presence, the pain was gone. I had healed and within hours, I was hearing that beloved guiding voice again. Don't you see? It is so simple? He made you find all those families and ease their burdens. You gave them an answer."

"Not one they wanted. It didn't bring a single kid back? What I managed didn't matter in the big picture. I didn't ease anything, not really. I just mopped up some sorrows and handed them a handkerchief. I did that for you. You asked me to." Greg sighed defensively.

"It rather mattered to Eurus, don't you think? Between you and Jim, you have healed the most tortured soul on the planet. She's to be a mother soon, you know? She is so full of joy? You gave her that. It counts, Greg. You cannot earn heaven through good deeds alone, but they do count."

"It's nice of you to say these things, but it still doesn't send me back, does it. Because, I know you are right, Siger. I don't want to go. You hit the nail on the head. I don't want the pain. I wasn't much to begin with. I will just be a burden now. What is the point in suffering for nothing? I didn't want to survive. All those people who died, why me? Why do I have to face that sort of ... knowledge of evil? I don't understand it. I never have." Greg turned away as he continued.

"I have been with the Met so long. Seen it all you know? I get how you can feel that hate toward an individual who has done something to you. Jealousy, greed, anger, people murder each other over it all the time. I get that. I even get protective killers like John, who has some warped but reasonable moral gauge. I know your brothers have killed as well, though Mycroft, shocked me a little. But there is some order to it. Some balance. Even bloody serial killers have a reason. But Mullins? He preyed on kids. And the men who shot me, I looked in their eyes, Siger. I looked in there eyes, and it changed the whole world for me."

Siger sat quietly, his eyes shown with tears. "I have seen them too. Their souls are gone. There is nothing in there."

"Yes."
"There is more? Tell me?" Siger whispered.

"I don't." He paused, struggling to find the words. "Your brother. I love him, more than anything I have ever known, but sometimes... he's that way too. Says he loves me. Cried even. I can't... I can't believe him. He asked me to come back, and I really do want to. I do. But, it is like there are two of him. I see him, then he just blinks and everything I love is gone and he is like ... them. Empty."

Siger folded his hands and contemplated what he wanted to say next. "I cannot even deny what you say. There is an old saying, that when one stares into the abyss, sometimes the abyss stares back. Bit by bit, I think he has had some vital things chipped away. He was always a bit of a dick, obviously. Perhaps we are the bringers of the apocalypse, we four. I have wondered it most of my life, thought I had proved it to be the truth a couple of times. But, I know better. All the universe and its truths and falsehoods are not written in stone, you see? They are written in darkness and light."

Greg looked up, he sat in the chair cross legged and leaned forward, trembling with anxiety and desire to understand. "But, what does that mean?"

"Here is the simplest way to look at it. If all the texts I attribute to myself are to be believed, then the four of us have the capacity to destroy the world. The thing of it is, we also have the capacity to save it. Look at us? The four of us have been cast on dark paths. For years we have each been tortured souls.

"Then Sherlock met you, and somehow, somehow it changed his path, you see? You kept him grounded until he met John. John gave him his light. That led to you meeting Mycroft. Which led you to both my sister and myself. You touched my life and it set me on the path back to my own salvation and then you redeemed my sister as well. From this perspective, perhaps you are meant to finish the job you began and redeem every one of us? Perhaps Mycroft, with all his power and influence on the world is your greatest purpose of all? Keeping him in the light? Saving the world, even if you never had any accolades for it? Would be worth the effort of going back and fighting the good fight, don't you think?" Siger popped the K, quite self satisfied with his own prowess at connecting hidden trails of foresight.

Greg laughed then said with a measure of snark, "I'd take that as a compliment, but you like Daniel and he is mad as a hatter."

"Is he? Do you know why I took on our favourite arsonist? Any idea?"

Greg shrugged. "Because you're mad too?"

Siger raised his chin and said softly, "Because Daniel can see me when he is awake. In this form. Don't you find that rather exceptional?"

"You mean..."

"Oh yes. He could walk in here now and converse with us. He has been far more use to me than trouble. Consider, that he also sees others. He sets fires to frighten away those that are, let's call it, not friendly?"

"So he isn't really mad then? He just..."

"He's a bit mad. But who wouldn't be if all the aeons were forever in sight? And you had no preparation or explanation for the things you saw, that everyone around you denied?"

"What about Eurus? Can she..."
"In a way. Sometimes. With her it is more of a reflex, she doesn't have the confidence or the control
that I do. Mycroft doesn't have the patience because he feels it is a useless pursuit. Sherlock does it,
but he calls it his mind palace, which is an impenetrable fortress that he has structured specifically to
keep all entities on this plane out. Even me."

"Sounds like you have tried?"

"Yes. Quite unsuccessfully."

"Surprised he hasn't badgered you to death and demanded a set of wings of his own. They'd be
useful for chasing down criminals."

"He has not thought of it, and please don't suggest it to him."

Lestrade yawned. "Sorry. I don't have a body. But I am hungry and so tired."

"We still have work to do. If you went back, what would you want most of all? Describe what you
see if you could have a perfect life?"

"I don't know. I mean I always wanted kids. I thought for a while, Sherlock and I would have Rosie.
I don't resent how that worked out, you know, I really don't. But then, Harry came along too and I
am incredibly happy for Sherlock, just can't help but feel a tiny bit sorry for myself, as well. If it had
worked out with My, would have been okay, but, now, I don't... I don't want him to love me out of
guilt or some misguided... He likes to fix things, and I don't want to be his project. I took two bullets
to the back. One in the lung. One in the leg and another somewhere to the chest. The reality is, I
could spend the rest of my life in a wheelchair or with a colostomy bag or diapers. Who knows? Not
really dad material now, much less husband material. No job, so watching telly and collecting
benefits may be as good as it gets. Doesn't give someone like me much to look forward to. Rather be
dead than live like that."

"And there we are. There is our real problem."

"Yeah. Could be." Greg shrugged to convey he had no idea how to fix it.

"Well, now we have a starting place. Time for me to wake up. Tether on."

"Why? Where are we going? I sort of like it here. I don't feel that need to leave so badly here," Greg
grumbled.

"You are going to be with a priest. Make a deduction."

Greg smirked and asked, "What, are we going to hear confessions? Won't that be a bit frowned on?"

"People confess to priests outside the bounds of my sacrament. How am I supposed to ban
unchained spirits from banging around? Come on, you always loved to eavesdrop."

"I didn't love it! Not exactly. I was just rather good at it."
Magic Carpet Ride

Chapter 42

Magic carpet ride

I like to dream, yes, yes
Right between the sound machine
On a cloud of sound I drift in the night
Any place it goes is right
Goes far, flies near
To the stars away from here
Well, you don't know what
We can find
Why don't you come with me little girl
On a magic carpet ride

Floating up the stairs to Baker Street was a bit surreal. There were two kids screaming while Molly attempted to breastfeed one and the other was leading John on a chase whilst the doctor tried to give her a spoon full of something purple.

The chase ended when Rosie came up short and stared up at the tall red-headed Uncle she'd only met once in the chaos of Christmas guests. She came to a halt, mouth falling open as she tried to look all the way to the top of the man in the door. John used her startled pose to his advantage and popped her mouth full of the medicine.

She swallowed and demanded, "Da, an angel."

John laughed and swept her up into his arms. "Not quite, darling. This is Otter's and My-no-no's other brother, your Uncle Sigerson. Can you say hello? Properly?"

"Hello, angel," She said solemnly.

John smirked and shrugged before saying, "Sorry, it must be the cassock. She has names for everyone. Mycroft is My-no-no."

"It is quite alright. May I?" He asked holding out his arms.

Rosie gleefully leaned out to be received. Siger lifted her gently and gave her a soft smile before speaking softly and using his thumb to reverently make the sign of the cross on her little forehead, "Benedictio Dei omnipotentis, Patris, et Fili, et Spiritus Sancti, descendat super vos, et maneat semper."

Greg watched where he touched her glow for a moment then absorb into her skin. He laughed that Rosie was determined to climb Siger and grab a handful of the feathers she could evidently see. "Da, look?" She pointed at Lestrade, which appeared to be the space occupied by the doorframe.

John took little Bee out of Siger's arms because Molly was done nursing and had gathered her bundle of Harry up. Siger took a quick seat in Sherlock's chair and said, "This must be my illustrious nephew? Hello, Harry. What a bonny wee lad you are. You look very much like your father."
Harry scowled at him.

Siger repeated his blessing on the child. Harry let out gas and then a resounding belch.

Sherlock smirked and said with great pride, "Obviously, Harry. My sentiments exactly about Uncle Sig's superstitious nonsense. Clever boy."

Mrs. Hudson arrived shortly with a plate of biscuits, still warm from the oven. Sherlock reached and she slapped his hand. Sherlock looked as if she had sent him an eviction. "Not these. Yours are downstairs. Get them yourself." She set the plate next to Siger. "Oh, Father Holmes, I heard you were in town, just popped a few in the oven. Thought you could use some feeding up after your time in the war. You make Sherlock look pudgy, tsk, tsk. I'll just make you a nice cuppa, you sit right there and get to know little Harry."

Sherlock looked at her with utter horror. "I am not pudgy. Dementia is such a sad fate."

"As is denial of that honeymoon stone," She immediately mumbled, but loudly.

Sherlock followed her, "What did you expect when someone is shoving a jam tart under my nose every quarter-hour, demanding 'eat Sherlock' and now you say that I'm fat?"

"That's not what I said. And you come in my back door specifically to raid my fridge. You better slow down or you will give yourself a heart condition, you know. You aren't as young as you used to be. A nice veg every once in a while wouldn't go amiss." The bickering continued but more quietly.

John sat in his own chair and nicked a biscuit off Siger's plate, casting his eyes backward to make sure Mrs. Hudson didn't catch him.

"So, how does it feel to be back, then?" John asked politely.

"Odd and not for the happiest circumstances." Siger said as he made faces at Harry trying to get a reaction. Harry just narrowed his eyes and glanced to his mother, then back at Siger.

"Yeah. All around cock up. He was really looking forward to... helping you. Supposed to be his last day. But not like that," John said with obvious sincerity.

"He hasn't woken up," Siger stated.

John cleared his throat. "Um. No. It happens sometimes. Technically he is classified as comatose, but today was the first time we tried to reverse the sedative actively. He had been stepped down, but with the fever, it is perfectly normal. Nothing to be overly concerned with just yet. He is breathing on his own now. That is quite hopeful, of course."

"What does he face when he awakes? I heard he was shot in the back?"

"Unknown. We saw no spinal damage but his core was pretty shredded. We will know more as time goes by. It will be a challenge just for him to sit up for a while. You have no idea how much you use your core muscles until they are compromised. He lost part of his liver, couldn't save his kidney and a lobe of his lung, but he is still here and that is what is important," John said candidly but quietly.

"Can he work again?"

"I don't see why not. Not in the way he did, maybe, but Sherlock says Mycroft is pushing for him to be promoted to Chief Super so that won't be as physically demanding. I have seen lots of guys in
worse shape make 75 to 90 percent full recovery. Depends on his overall motive. He isn't as young as they were but he is no slouch, so yeah, he could do quite well. Or, not. Just very unpredictable at this stage. I wasn't really lucid for nearly three months when I was hit, I thought life was over and really, it had just begun. It is what it is. How was your trip?"

Siger made boring small talk with John about turbulence and London fog feeling like heaven when it touched his face. He complained of what the sun did to his burned skin in the desert. Molly left and took the peacefully sleeping Harry from Siger's arms. Siger ate two biscuits while John ate three and Sherlock magically nicked one, but got caught.

"John, might I borrow my little brother? I'd like a stroll in the park. The boating lake has been on my mind since arrival," Siger smoothly confessed, leaving no notion it was not an order.

They walked up Baker Street and crossed Park Road to the Outer Circle, making their way to the York Bridge entrance. Neither would open the conversation.

"How are you, brother?"

"You were just at my flat for three hours, surely you can deduce the state of my life. Get to it and don't bore me with platitudes and weather."

"Mycroft."

"Ahh. Yes, well, he is half round the twist of course. You should go see him."

"I intend to. I wanted your advice first."

"He had me made his executor. What do you deduce from that?" Sherlock stopped on York Bridge and lit a cigarette.

"That he's finally lost his mind?"

Sherlock huffed a chuckle and blew smoke into the night air. "Why are you here, brother? You left your best friend and your favourite occupation for someone you know in passing. You were in the same city and never visited me any time I was in hospital. You didn't fly all this way to mumble Latin at my children and sit vigil. Explain?"

Siger looked out to the dark water. "I have things it is time you understand. Go to your mind palace tonight and this time when I knock, let me in?"

"Just tell me here."

"No boiling oil this time?"

Sherlock chuckled with meanness. "You are such a spoilsport."

"Let me in."

Later back at Farm Street Siger slept only to discover that Lestrade was holding on to him still and yet snoring in his ear. He allowed him to rest for a time and rested his hand on the man's back, allowing the tether between them to keep him safe.

Greg woke and looked around. "Fell asleep. Sorry. Couldn't help it."

"I watched over you. I would not let you slip away. We need to go before Rosie requires his attention."
"How do we find him?" Greg asked.

"Take a guess."

When they arrived in Baker Street, Siger pointed up. Above the building in Baker Street was a huge churning tornado.

"What the bloody hell is that?"

"The consulting detective is IN. Hold on tight, we have to fly through that to get to him."

"Jeezzuse... I hate tornados," Lestrade complained.

Lestrade felt like he was being pulled apart as they flew straight into the maelstrom that was Sherlock's mind. Lestrade could see faces of corpses and wads of case files flitting by and seeing it, finally made him understand that this was what Sherlock experienced all the time.

From the gloom arose an imposing labyrinth, part Kensington and part Colditz Castle. It stretched as far as the eye could see in both directions. There was a narrow white stone bridge that marked the entrance but not in a friendly way. It had no railing and the sides appeared to crumble ominously as they plunged into a lake of lava. There was one decorative element. Mycroft's rotting head was impaled on a medieval pike.

Siger did not give it all a second glance. Greg winced at the man he loved represented like that. The head animated and smiled at him just as he passed under it. Greg screamed. He couldn't help it. He knew in theory it was not real, but this place gave him chills. He did not like Sherlock's mind palace.

Siger rolled his eyes and knocked on the door, which was painted in blood "keep out" and covered in crime scene tape. The knocker was exactly like the one on the door to 221B but cocked to the side.

The door swung open, rusty hinges screeching. Sherlock peeked out and caught his breath at seeing Lestrade. They entered, relieved to be out of the wind.

"What the hell is he doing here? Oohhhhh! Oh. Sorry about the Mycroft. Been there for years. Useful for frightening off... erm, Mycrofts? And birds. Lestrade ? I don't understand?"

Sherlock waved his hand and the door screeched and slammed shut, the interior was silent and calm, save the echoing sound of a violin.

The interior was full of soaring stone arches and reminded Lestrade of a cathedral but to the left sat a life size pirate ship, just the bow with a merman that resembled John could be seen rising above them well lit and the tall rigging and aft hidden in shadows of the deep interior.

Just off the entrance in an alcove formed by the soaring pinnacle of these stone arch supports, stood a large inviting living room, complete with a sofa and two enormous wing backed chairs surrounding a fireplace with a picturesque roaring fire.

Lestrade turned loose of his death grip on Siger. He raked his fingers through his hair and took a deep breath. "Neither do I? I don't understand any of this. I was dying peacefully then he showed up and talked me out of it. But I can't get back in and at any moment there is a bright place trying to suck me away and I am starving and exhausted but if I sleep, it could kill me, so I have been dragging along on his back all day and Mycroft's head is in your lava garden on a pike. Don't look at me to explain any of it, ask-"
At this time, a John Watson dressed in tweed with an unbelievably large moustache poked his head around a wingback chair and asked, "Sherlock Holmes, where are your manners? Did you offer the gentlemen a drink? Come over here and sit by the fire. I'll get you one."

Greg walked across the room toward John. "Does he drag you here too?"

"Of course not, I live here," this strange John replied in a overtly kind but formal way that raised Greg's hackles more than it set him at ease. "Here, steady your nerves." John handed Greg a tumbler of amber liquid and Greg took a small sip and when he realised he could actually taste it, he gulped the rest and held the glass out for more.

John obliged with a good natured snort. "Have a seat, dear man, and calm yourself. Have you brought us a case? We haven't had a good case in an age, have we Holmes?"

Sherlock blushed. "I told you to stay out of sight, Watson. You don't listen any better than the real one."

At this Lestrade looked John over more carefully. It dawned on him slowly that Sherlock had a John of his own, copied and captive in his own mind.

"You look like you have had a terrible fright, my good fellow. Let me get Mrs. Hudson to bring us some tea. Mrs. Hudson? Mrs. Hudson?" John stood up again and grumbled, "confounded woman. Mrs Hudson. "

As soon as John was out of earshot Greg looked at Sherlock and accused, "That is not John!"

"Yes, he is. Well, a version of him. There are several running about. Make yourself at home. Oh, but do watch out for the dragon in the basement. And don't do anything threatening around the suits of armour. They tend to attack if you don't keep a respectable distance. " Sherlock shoved his hands in his pockets and turned his attention back to his brother.

The wings were a point of instant bickering.

Greg sighed and reached toward the fire. The warmth was delicious and the whiskey made him feel soothed and fuzzy. He stood and helped himself to more whiskey and then followed John down the hallway to the right of the fireplace. He came to a kitchen and found Watson digging through an old ice box, assembling sandwiches. The not-John looked up and smiled. "You said you were hungry, I made you some nibbles. Mrs. Hudson seems to have retired for the evening."

Lestrade reached out and poked at the food then lifted the sandwich to his mouth and scarfed it down like a starving prisoner of war. The bread was dry but it stuck to his teeth as he chewed. It was as horrid as a machine sandwich from Newer Scotland Yard. He was too ravenous to complain much but it honestly was the worst sandwich he'd had in ages.

He grabbed the other one and made short work of that one as well. John watched him with a sort of horrified amusement. Lestrade took the cup of tea and added milk and sugar and groaned at the sensation of warm liquid on his throat.

"You should take better care of yourself, Lestrade. It must be an exciting case if you have supplanted case work for nourishment. Holmes must be rubbing off on you?"

Lestrade was too occupied with chewing to respond so John politely filled in the time with one-sided conversation. "Have you heard about the terrible business in America then? The murder hotel they are calling it? Terrible, terrible business there. Preyed on fair goers, they say," John said as he offered Greg a slice of pie.
"No, I have been... ill. Say, what year is it?" Greg asked.

Doctor Watson looked taken aback. "It's January 6th, year of our Lord, Eighteen hundred and ninety-five. I didn't realise you were here to see me in a professional capacity. Finish your pie, and we will go to my office for a proper examination. I have warned you before of the dangers your profession exposes you to. Night air and wet feet lead to consumption. I have seen it time and again. The miasmas down by that river are ever so foul."

Greg sat there for a moment chewing slowly. He could taste the pie and yet, the flavour was odd. There was too much cinnamon and it overpowered everything else. He frowned. "So, how did you get here?"

John told him the story of how in 1878 he'd taken his degree of Doctor of Medicine at the University of London and proceeded on to Netley to go through the course prescribed for surgeons in the Army. He told Greg a fanciful tale of being removed from his brigade and being struck by something he called a Jezail bullet whilst fighting at the battle of Maiwand. He spoke of being struck down by some disease common amongst "our Indian possessions" called entrinic fever. Greg listened enraptured. It was something like a story book from a hundred and fifty years ago come to life.

John told him in detail the trials and horrors of his month long sea voyage on a troop ship named "Orontes" and how relieved he felt when it finally made dock in the Portsmouth jetty. He explained that he'd made his way to London and having nobody to turn to for help, how he'd been embarrassed by his meagre income of eleven shillings and sixpence a day. There were more stories of him standing in the Criterion bar and meeting his old dresser from Barts, who introduced him to Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

He went on and on about his initial intrigue for discovering what it was that his new companion did that encompassed his list of occupations.

Lestrade interrupted, "Did you shoot the cabbie too then?"

John seemed at first astonished, but then he angered. "To what do you refer, sir?"

"The cabbie, Jeff Hope, who poisoned people. Did you shoot him?"

John sputtered and his face darkened with confused outrage, "You know perfectly well I did not. You and Gregson apprehended him for goodness sake and he died of aneurysm whilst in your custody. Never even made it to the magistrates. You truly are not well, Lestrade or you have lost all abilities to hold your drink."

"You wrote it up as a Study in Pink." Greg ate another bite of pie.

John looked sad and worried as he felt Greg's head and took his pulse. "It was A Study in Scarlett. But that doesn't matter, old sport, getting you well is our focus now, humph?"

"I'm fine. Well, obviously not fine. I'm tucked up in Sherlock's brain somehow, but on the upside there is pie. I'm a lot better than I was a few hours ago. So, no offence, Dr. Watson but I don't need to be bled or any leeches." Greg stood and opened the ice box. He found a plate of biscuits and some kind of stew.

"Of course not, we are at the cusp of the twentieth century. The age of science, man? You insult my profession in this modern age."

"I wonder if we all are as enthusiastic about the ensuing advancements." Greg stated more than asked, not really expecting an answer.
Toward the back of the box was a familiar carton of yogurt, exactly like those he had purchased for Sherlock when they had returned from Iraq. He decided to test a theory. He was in Sherlock's head and all the food here tasted familiar but odd. If his theory was right, he would know. Finding a spoon, he took a bite. The camel's milk yogurt was no longer salty and disgusting as he had remembered it from his attempt to choke it down. It was delicate and the cream exploded on his tongue with just a hint of earthy undertone. He groaned in appreciation.

Watson stared at him in disgust. "I'd steer clear of that, if I were you. I'm not sure from where Holmes obtains it but I can say it is dodgy at best, having once mistakenly used it in place of the clotted cream. I have chastised him repeatedly about bringing food home from places rife with dysentery."

Greg ate another spoonful and with confirmation he set it back in the cooler. "I get it? Don't you see? I am in his head? No wonder he is so picky, this is what food tastes like to him. It is his mind food. I can only taste what he knows?"

Greg proceeded to eat a bite of everything and laughed at how completely different Sherlock's tastebuds were from his own.

Sherlock entered the kitchen, "Gillian, what the hell are you doing?"

Greg looked up, and with his mouth full of ginger nuts he explained, "This is all in your head. The food tastes funny, because it replicates what you experience! Don't you see, it is why you like the camel yogurt. It tastes completely different to you."

Sherlock sighed and gave him a dubious look. "Yes, fine. Moving on. You are to stay here and Sig and I are heading to Mycroft's. He is too stupid and lazy to come here."

"But wait, what happens to me in here when you wake up? Won't it all disappear?"

"No. My mind palace is always here. I don't have to be asleep. You will be perfectly safe," Sherlock said then looked up and frowned rocking his head with mild concern. "Just, do mind the armour, keep off my ship and take a nap or something. Nothing can get in or out of here unless I allow it. Stick with Watson. He can keep you out of trouble. Mmmm...mostly."

"Shouldn't I come with you?"

Siger entered just in time to hear. "Not this time. I think you will be safer here. It is stressful when you are tethered. I would have no idea if you floated away or got left behind in a taxi or something."

Greg shrugged and acquiesced, though he very plainly didn't agree. "If you're sure then."

"Close your eyes. Do you feel any call to leave?"

Greg did it and took a deep breath in relief as he relaxed. "No. I feel fine. Good actually."

Sigerson looked at his brother and said, "Who knew your pig-headed stubborn streak had such purpose. I will be back soon. Don't be afraid. Get some rest. You are building strength here. You may need it."

Greg followed them out to the door.

"Try not to eat the entire kitchen?" Sherlock said as he put on his signature coat and opened the door. Sherlock flipped a switch and outside the tornado slowly wound down.
Sig was furious. "You knew I was coming and you could shut it off? You made us fly through that?"

"There's always an off switch."

"You are an utter cock."

"Language, big brother. You have those fancy wings... may as well--"

The door swung shut with a clang.

Doctor Watson appeared behind him. "Don't you worry. We will get you sorted. Now if you could just provide me with a stool sample?" Mustachios-John asked holding out a canning jar to Lestrade.
I'll see you in my dreams
Chapter 43

I'll see you in my dreams
And then I'll hold you in my dreams
Someone took you right out of my arms
Still I feel the thrill of your charms
Lips that once were mine
Tender eyes that shine
They will light my way tonight
I'll see you in my dreams

https://youtu.be/jKyCqZWdwHM

Greg turned and looked at John and at the jar he held forth and then he burst out laughing. "I am so sorry, but no."

"I understand it is unpleasant, but I assure you it is vital to my diagnosis." John wiggled it, expecting the other man to follow his orders.

"Not happening. Not ever. New subject, so this is all Sherlock? How is this place organised?"
Lestrade looked up and down the central pirate ship room. It seemed to go on for miles.

From above he heard a voice that sounded like John. "I can tell you." Lestrade looked up and watched a much more hard and fit John Watson repel down the stone wall. He wore traditional army fatigues and his face was brown and his eyes hard. He alighted and disconnected from his harnesses before strolling over and offering his hand. "Major John Watson. I guess you must be Lestrade?"

He looked at this new John and noted he carried himself differently. There was no roll to his gait to compensate for his leg and his shoulders were firm and symmetrical.

'Major? I thought you were a Captain when you left the service?"

"When I what? I never left the service. Why would I?" John asked as he stowed his gear carefully in his rucksack.

"Because you got shot?"

John snorted and shook his head still winding up his rope. "Must have me confused, mate. I have had some close calls, but never been shot. So far. Never will have a chance if I can't find the way out. But, if you want to know how this place works, keep up. I'm not your babysitter"
Mustachios-John interrupted, "This is highly irregular. This man is my patient and I will not have
him exerting himself on behalf of your obsession to escape--"

Soldier Watson moved into the Time-Warp John's face and ordered in a low and dangerous voice,
"Stand down old man."

Tweed Watson looked like he was about to challenge Soldier Watson to a duel.

"Look, go back to your fire, Doctor. I am going to have a gander around, but if I start to feel sick,
then I will come right back here. Deal?" Greg said kindly. He didn't want to hurt this figments
feelings but the other figment of Sherlock's psyche seemed to have a plan.

He was booking it double time right down the passage of silver studded knights who were swinging
their axes and beginning to stir.

Soldier John sounded off a barely understandable "Aaaah tennnnnn SHUN!"

As one, the armour stood smartly and didn't move a visor.

"STAnAaat eeeeze." John said as he passed the first row, Greg hot on his heals. The movement of
hundreds of steel clad men sounded like thunder in the echoing endless chamber.

John slowed slightly when Greg caught up dropping to a fast walk. "You can call that reception.
Area One." He cut left and followed another hallway. "Central processing is in the basement but you
have to deal with the damned dragon and there is no way out that way so that is effectively useless to
us. The bunker below that is an unknown. You have seen the mess, there are other places to find
needed calories, but they are few, so stock up when you are near. In this wing we have Hall of
Records ground floor, first and second floor is taken up by the war room, and third floor is files.
Now we are headed to the tower though the section Two skyway. The Tower, which is the central
structure, has to be the key. I have reconed every other inch. The building itself is shaped like a
hexagonal run of concentric rings, something like the American Pentagon,"

"But with six sides, because he likes Bees," Greg added helpfully.

John stopped walking. "Exactly, how do you know that?"

"I know him. Tell me why you want to escape? What do you think will happen if you do get out
there?"

"I'll go back to my unit. Forget all about this. I don't know any Sherlock Holmes and I don't want to.
I just want my life back. I want to go home."

"Where's home?"

"Wherever the army sends me. That is my family. They need me. I don't belong here. There are
others here who look like me and sound like me, but I am not them. " John lets his pack hit the floor
with a thud. It must weigh a ton. He pulls his left shoulder out of his shirt and shows Greg the
ublemished skin covering his impressively cut deltoids and pectorals. "You see? They feel
something for him. They don't mind being trapped here. I have a bloody life and it is out there. My
life is Not playing second fiddle to some poncy aging twink with a cocaine habit."

"Major? What if you don't exist out there? What if none of what you believe is real? What if this is
all there is?" Greg asked carefully.

"You sound like him. I'll tell you the same thing that I did him. Fuck you. I'd rather bleed out in the
Kandahar sand then be safe and trapped here. You are wrong and he is wrong, and I will get out."

"What if the war is almost over?"

John laughed as if Greg were having him on, "The world sucks. Do like I do and embrace the suck. Peace on earth? Last time I checked, that only happens after the apocalypse. My job is to mop up the bloody, and boys are dying out there because I can't get to them."

"Can I ask you one more thing? If you never met Sherlock, how did you know me?"

John glared at him then took a deep breath and blew it out. "I suppose you ought to know. Out in the barracks, section 4, there is a room. Has your name on it. Ground floor. It is a big room."

"What else is out there?"

"Every person he's ever met. Go on. See for yourself."

"I'll check it out."

John straightened his shirt and lifted his pack. "Stay frosty, mate"

"Yeah. I hope you find what you're looking for?"

Greg just watched him go and decided to wander on his own. He wasn't sure he liked Sherlock's John Watsons.

Searching Sherlock's mind palace was something like walking into the National to look at a floor tile. More interesting things kept distracting him.

After snooping through a room that had displays of crime scenes that showed inventive ways to get away with murder and peeking into the hall of nightmares to find rolling meadows and farm houses, he stopped to rest on a stone bench that sat in front of a window that had a sunny day and a lovely English Garden. The bench was labeled Rehab One.

He sat down and wished for a pretty day like he could see outside the window. This would be a great day to take his motorbike out and just enjoy the wind. Blue skies and fluffy clouds, it was a perfect summer day.

"Hello, mind if I Join you?"

"Mary?"

"Yeah. I know. I'm dead where you come from."

"Weird that you are aware of it. I suppose there is more than one of you, as well."

"Yup. I have met five of you so far. The one without grey hair is on the Soho mezzanine at the pub right now." She bumped his shoulder with her own offering a bashful smile.

"So, which Mary are you?"

"I don't know. I call myself the one who liked him," Mary says as she rubs her hands nervously on her trouser legs.

"I was there. I knew the real Mary, though I didn't know all sides of her, she loved John and she loved Sherlock. She was not always perfect, and yes, I know she shot him, but she was also pretty
spectacular whoever she may have been. I liked her and she died bravely. I know you are not real, but you should know that you were amazing," Greg said without caring about his words. It felt good to just blurt out anything he thought without having to gauge how it would come across.

"What is real? Who is to say that we are not just as real as you are? I feel real. You think you are real. Maybe that is good enough."

"Well, just in case, John misses you. And Rosie is beautiful."

"Thank you. I get to see the pictures. She is lovely, isn't she? I don't miss John here because there are too many of them. Don't trust them all, by the way. There are a couple of them here who are...very dark. Full of rage. I don't know why he lets them stay."

Lestrade looked at her. "You know why. They are part of him. John is not Mr. Cuddles any more than you were a helpless innocent lass. Sherlock sees our demons."

"Yes. It could be we are all real. Maybe we have just lost our place in our quantum foam and he protects us? Gathers us here until our worlds wink back into existence?"

"That's a nice thought. Really. If I die over there, maybe there is a Mycroft here for me? Maybe this is enough." Greg fished in his pockets looking for a cigarette he knew would not be there. But, his hand closed on a pack and there were three left. He offered one to Mary and she took it.

"There is a Mary and John here who exist but Sherlock never came back. They have a whole world in their room. He comes here and he watches their life. He never allows them to see him. He calls it an experiment, but I think he is trying to prove to himself that he shouldn't have come home at all. He doesn't come as much anymore."

"Really? How'd that work out? Are they happy?" Greg was curious.

"Not at all. Sherlock never came back. They got married and John flinches every time he sees someone who resembles Sherlock. That Mary has grown tired of the boring Doctor. He is tired of her disapproval. Her past never caught up with her, but it has in a different way. She misses it. She never ran across CAM because she had no value. No connection to Sherlock so none to Mycroft. They have three kids, are drowning in normal. John cheats on her. I know her. Well, I can't interact with that one, sealed environment for control. She will murder John when she finds out. He is gambling too. Sherlock expected it to be happiness in a bottle. I am alive in that life, but he can't see how ...it is no life. Sometimes it is the tragedies that make the good parts more precious."

"Could go either way. I didn't kill Linda. She cheated. I forgave her the first time and mostly the second time. After that, I just couldn't be arsed. Won't deny I didn't think about it a bit. She just wasn't worth the effort. I knew when I married her I was settling. But, I thought I could fix her. Shitty childhood, shitty parents and a shitty system spit her out. I seemed rich to her in the beginning. Viewed from where she came from. But, it wasn't long before she got other ideas. Put her through college. Once she became a teacher, she was so proud. I was proud of her too. But, there were parents who were far more bank than we could ever be. Didn't take long before we were not enough. She found out she couldn't have children. After that, she just drifted away. God, she hated Sherlock." Greg laughed at his own memory.

"One person's heaven is another person's hell," Mary said kindly.

"Yeah. So there is supposed to be a great big room with my name on it. Care to join me for some self discovery?"
They arrived at the G. Lestrade room. They both went in. It was set up like the underground car park at the old New Scotland Yard. The place Sherlock came back to him was there. The scenes played on repeat in 3D snippets of life.

Sherlock in his house, coming down from a near overdose as Linda spits in his tea.

"Wow. I had no idea about that. He never said a word."

They tour the room. There are dozens of times that they are at crime scenes. He paused at one in which Sally is ranting about "that freak!". The Lestrade in the scene smirks but doesn't intervene in any way. This theme is repeated often.

"Shit."

"Not so nice from someone else's eyes?" Mary asks kindly. "You should see my room?"

They come to the first time Sherlock and Greg were together. Lestrade is embarrassed.

"You are snooping in the private thoughts of someone else. They are not all going to be PG rated. At least he gives you a darling arse. Very nice" Mary says with wide eyed admiration.

"Uhem. No, that's my arse. I just have more chins back then. Thank you Sherlock for the flattery. Moving on."

They reach the Jelly wrestling memory. Mary laughs until she is in tears. When John throws his fit, this time it is actually funny.

"My head hurts just thinking of that morning."

"What's this?" Mary asks as he cuffs Sherlock.

"Ahh, when I arrested him. God, less than twelve hours later, he was dead. I thought... I blamed myself for not taking up for him."

The next diorama of life made him cock his head. There was a man with a knife waiting for someone. Greg came up the road from his local, completely cabbaged. He is singing a tuneless version of "Paparazzi" and weaving heavily. It is obvious he is about to be robbed. Suddenly there is a little cut off yelp and the man disappeared. The scene showed Sherlock beating the man to a pulp, taking his knife and catching up to Lestrade. Greg puked all over him and he still took him to his flat and stayed with him til just before he awoke.

"He watched over me?"

"It would seem so," Mary agreed.

He looked around and sighed, "I think I have seen enough for now. I may come back later, but first I want to meet another Greg. Because, you know, I am not quite freaked out enough."

"Young or old?" Mary asked.

"I don't know?"

Mary smiled and nodded. "I know just the one."

She went down the row and opened a door. Greg followed and stepped onto the barren shores of Lake Tharthar. In the distance was a man in white robes, standing in the wind, fishing. Greg opened
his arms to the sun and hot orange wind and laughed. "Oh yes. This is Perfect, Mary. This was me... happy. I was happy here. Marhabaan! Marhabaan!"

The other Greg turned and waved, he smiled and strolled toward his visitors.

"Hey. I wondered if you would come. Let's get out of the wind." He led them to a tent, pitched by the shore.

They all entered and sat on the threadbare rugs covering the ground. Mary started scratching almost at once. "Well, this is ... cozy?"

The robed Greg smiled and said, "Yeah, it's not much. I know. But this was where I was happiest and it is enough."

"I planned to come back."

"Yeah. Some of you never left."

"I think that is true."

"So why have you come? What do you wish to ask of yourself?"

"I don't know for sure. I wanted to know what Sherlock saw of me."

"How's Mycroft?" Greg asked, gathering his robes and sitting gracefully.

"I don't know. We didn't really work out so well."

"We came all this way to save him. Will you let him slip away so easily?"

"I will fight for him, but I am not in a place that I can fight. He doesn't seem to know how to do this."

"You forgot, didn't you? How sick he was here, but he didn't show his pain. He is like that on everything. When you love a great man, you cannot lose sight that he is a great man with great burdens."

"I am trying to figure out how to get back."

"Blues and twos. Running code. You were never a coward before."

"It isn't that easy."

"Yes. It is. You live or die, has nothing to do with me. I will still be here."

Greg decides that Mr. Peaceful happy him is a bit of a dick. "Yeah okay. Not like you have a choice so, hey, enjoy." He stands to leave.

"Don't forget your Shell." The other stands and takes his own off and puts it around Greg's neck. "And what it meant."

Greg touches the little shell he'd made. It brings tears to his eyes and he cannot speak. He storms out of the tent. Mary following silently except for the scratching.

They go back to the long hallway full of doors and Lestrade kicks a wall. "Well, that didn't make me as full of joy as I expected."
"Are these fleas?" Mary asks squishing something between her thumbnails.

"Yeah, sorry. Hey you mentioned a pub. Don't suppose it has real beer there does it?"

"My shout?" She puts her arm through his and guides him up two flights of stairs. He finds himself in Soho. They enter the Blue Dragon and have just spotted Younger Greg when Mary sighed. "Sorry. Rain check? That poor sod in the corner is my John. I need to get him home."

Greg looks over and sees John from just after Mary's death. He is sloppy drunk. "Oh god. You're actual Ghost Mary?"

"That's me. You probably don't want to see this. There will be some tears, and a scene if things go as normal. Maybe I will see you later. Sorry."

"Oh Mary, I'm so very sorry."

She grinned. "I know. It's fine."

She walked over to John and put her hand on his shoulder. He looked up as if seeing her for the first time. "Mary?" He whispers in pure wonder.

"I'm not actually here, John, but let's get you home."

"But I see you! You're alive!" He begins to cry. People stare as she guides Heartbroken John out and into the night.

Lestrade takes a seat at the bar next to himself and orders two pints. The landlord serves them up and Greg takes a long drink. "If it's any conciliation, I wish I could save you the next fifteen years. She wasn't worth it. Never was."

"Yeah. And you knew it then. Why? Why did you stay?"

Greg shrugged. "Stupid hope. Or maybe I just gave up and couldn't be a divorced loser. I don't know, looking back. But the good news is that one day we win a Harley and end up in the papers and she regrets being such a slag."

"Doesn't help much."

"No. Not that much. I am really sorry for doing this to you."

"Yeah. Well, cheers." Young-Greg's pager went off. He looked at it, groaned and threw two fivers (which were no longer in use) on the bar and headed to the back for the payphone.

Greg sat and drank five more pints before leaving. Greg was tired and there was a hotel across the street. He checked in, took a shower, washed his clothes in the tub and hung them up to dry. He collapsed on the bed and didn't care how long he slept.

When he woke, he was not alone. Sherlock sat watching him from a chair in the corner. "Oh hello. Are you the real one or just a figment?"

"There is only one of me here. It is my mind palace. What the hell do you think you are doing? You were supposed to stay with 1895Watson. I thought you'd drink tea, play chess, raid my liquor cabinet and have a jolly chat, not snoop around and invade my privacy."

"Sorry. Didn't see any harm really. Siger said I'd forget all of this anyway. Where is he?"
"He went to check on Mahmoud and he is exhausted. Needs actual sleep."

"Mycroft? Did you see him? Is he okay?"

"He's Mycroft. Still annoying as ever."

"Look, this place is... well completely mad... but it is pretty brilliant as well. I have learned things."

"Be very careful here. There are things here, I swear to you, that you don't want to know. My Watson was meant to be your guide. You are fine in this neighbourhood. I won't forbid you, this is not a prison and you won't remember anyway, so no point, but just be forewarned that some of what you learn may become... part of you."

"I saw you watch over me. When Linda left before. I had no idea. I hope I remember stuff like that. If I had a mind palace, I'd let you come see too."

"Really? Wake up and I will teach you. It isn't hard. Something for you to do whilst you're convalescing."

"You'll have to remind me you said that."

Sherlock laughed. "Not sure how the lead in to the conversation will work. Oh, Gary, remember when you were invading my privacy and snooping through my mind palace?"

Greg snickered too trying to imagine. "None of this exists?"

"Complicated. If it didn't exist, how does it keep you safe? Quite the paradox, isn't it?"

"Major Watson?"

"Ahh. He's fascinating, isn't he? Rather recent edition."

"How recent?" Lestrade opened the drawer on his side table and found a room service menu.

"Showed up when I was off my tits, wishing John had never met me. There was another at that time, but he ate the very bullet that killed Jeff Hope. It was incredibly unpleasant. The room still exists, but I advise against satisfying your curiosity. Might put you off your breakfast." Sherlock looked away, uncomfortably.

"Who are they, Sherlock? How do you keep all this going? Some seem to have almost, well, lives here. Even when you aren't here. 1895 has his whole life history and its like the Winchester Mystery House on steroids. I mean you have half of Soho marked up here, there is a hotel, with sheets and hot water and room service?" Greg opens the menu and holds it up.

"They are just Ghosts in the Machine. I set the parameters and the subconscious runs The programs. They are... my friends, well companions. When I die, I think this will still exist. At least bird-brains seems to believe it. Maybe he's right?" Sherlock makes a motion as if waving the subject away. "On a happier note--"

"Hold on. Why have I not met a Mycroft?"

"Why would you expect to... Oh yuck. Not in my mind palace you don't! System override, all Mycroft's are on lockdown, grade 3. Now." Sherlock stated to the air.

A whirling noise could be heard then in the same voice as "mind the gap" an announcement was made, "Lockdown active."
Lestrade rolled his eyes and heaved a sigh. In his exasperated but fatherly voice he used with Sherlock and detective constables he said, "Sherlock, that is not why I asked, you don't need to lock the poor sods up--"

Clearly the sound of Rosie whining loudly could be heard emanating from Sherlock's pocket. He dug his phone out and looked at it as he distractedly said, "Not to worry, Detective Chief Inspector, they are quite used to it. As you can hear, m'lady requires me. Laterz."

Sherlock was vanished with a soft pop.

Greg ordered a full English, coffee and a cheese board as well as a jar of marmite and brown sauce. Then he called back down for a pastry tray. If his theory was correct, these were not real calories either.
Chapter 44

Upon a secret journey
I met a holy man
His blindness was his wisdom
I'm such a lonely man

And as the world was turning
It rolled itself in pain
This does not seem to touch you
He pointed to the rain
You will see light in the darkness
You will make some sense of this
And when you've made your secret journey
You will find this love you miss

And on the days that followed
I listened to his words
I strained to understand him
I chased his thoughts like birds

https://youtu.be/wJi8N8UxTTw

It was strange to realise that something so fantastical could quickly become normality. Greg was living in Sherlock's head and yet, even here in the enormous hive of another human being's mind, he had developed routines.

Time didn't exist here. In Soho, it was always early evening, just at that point of dark where the streets were filled with people and the shops and restaurants glowed with invitation and promise of
good company.

In Baker Street it was afternoon with Rosie sweet and never in a fuss.

He'd been to Mycroft's house, but it was always morning there and the owner seemed to have already left for the office, the coffee still warm and the scent of his aftershave lingering. Greg had slept there once, but it just made him long for Mycroft more.

He visited 1895 Watson often, playing chess and sipping whiskey by the fire as the wind howled outside the door. He listened to this John's endless stories about Mormons and Vampires and a weird trip to South America where he assured Greg that Dinosaurs still existed. (Greg thought it sounded suspiciously like Jurassic Park).

Greg was far from bored, because there was always something fun to do. Things to do helped keep the madness away.

He ate ridiculous portions of everything from Curry to pizza to steak, sometimes taking in five or six dinner menus one right after the next at places far too spendy for his normal wallet constraints. He should have been as big as a house, but he didn't even manage a proper case of indigestion.

His hotel room was furnished with all sorts of silly things he had acquired in his exploration. He now owned a drum set, which he was horrible at, but he found entertaining, especially when he discovered that Sherlock called him, his Migraine. There were things he found that reminded him of his real life, and he dragged them back to this hotel to remind him, that this was just a shadowy flicker and he had a life to find his way back to at some point.

A pair of binoculars, a British flag, someone's old rugby trophy, a lucky cat, a dish of shells, candles in jars that were scented like lemons and cream, an old bobby helmet, were some of the things he displayed in his makeshift home.

He had twenty or so new suits which Sherlock never failed to comment on and critique when he visited.

Sherlock even brought him a case, complete with walk in crime scene photos. He'd managed to make some contributions and Sherlock had had his Ahh-ha moment and left him standing alone.

Siger came round as well but, he was strictly forbidden from wandering around, so he didn't stay long.

They really didn't have much to tell him about his condition. He was healing up well, but not awake.

Mycroft was busy and carrying on.

They assured him that resting here was doing him wonders and that the solution was just around the corner.

Greg tried not to worry. He did worry that he was becoming a ghost in the machine like the others he saw around him, but he couldn't complain really because he had a multitude of interesting distractions here.

There was telly, but it was hit and miss. Movies consisted of the first fifteen minutes or so then jumped straight to the resolution and the credits. Doctor Who was on, but mostly the seventh Doctor was all that was playing and the news. There were no political updates, no Great British Bake off and no Eastenders. There were panel discussions on the increasing complaints of moped crime, serial killer documentaries, and strangely a variety of shows about dogs.
He had even ventured downstairs once and met the gargantuan steam engine black dragon. Well, he’d cowered in the stairwell as it scrambled by like a freight train past him, stolen a pretty rock, he suspected was an uncut emerald, and rushed back up the stairs before the dragon could notice him.

It was a six mile jog around the outside ring and he often did it when he woke up from a nap and called it morning in his mind, though he had no idea what time of day it might be in reality.

He had loved to run once, and now that that was probably taken away from him when he went back, he did it just for the joy that he could. It made him feel winded and yet strong. It was actually easy here because he didn't pull muscles or feel his creaking knees complaining at every impact.

It was also great fun to run the armour gauntlet. They were all pretty scary, yes, and they didn't come to attention for him like he'd seen them do for Soldier-John, but they were also pretty slow and he could make the quarter mile at a sprint and be out of their range before they managed any real damage.

He usually had second breakfast with 1895Watson after his jog. This version of John seemed to think it was his job to guard the front door against invaders, though he admitted that nobody had ever tried more than knocking on the door and yelling for Sherlock, and only that when Holmes himself was here. The tornado seemed to put most of whatever dangers lurked in the beyond, off.

He had managed a time or two to get Watson to join him in Soho for a nice meal, but John was uncomfortable with the modern city. Lestrade had joined Watson in an 1895 version of London, and while it was immensely fascinating to see Victorian London brought to life, the stench had been so overwhelming and the smoke so heavy that he had not found it as charming as he'd expected. It was also so cold that he could only stand to be there for a few hours. Watson assured him it was the coldest winter on record. It was always, January sixth there.

He had delighted in the novelty of riding in a Hansom cab however He also had not been overly delighted with sloshing through horse poop and rotting food before it became frozen lumps of debris. It was disgusting and all the ladies long skirts were actually quite filthy. The sooner he could forget the butcher shop and the tannery, the better.

"You find my London disturbing, but do not see the faults of your own. To the eye it is clean, but the nose is instantly clogged with the belchings of the horseless carriages. The ears are filled with an assault of motors and sirens and high pitched whines of all the everyday tools of your electric life. Your food, though brought forth in infinite variety, is so salty it is inedible and why must everything be such obnoxious colours? Hair, sweets, clothing, advertisements, all seem to be chosen with the express purpose of giving each other headaches. I could not in good conscience as a gentleman comment on the naked clown ladies who no longer have faces at all, but layers of gaudy paint in face shapes. While I admit the constant burning of coal in my city has painted its every surface grey, I will take my horse droppings laden cobblestones and leave your oily smooth streets to you."

Lestrade laughed and agreed that old London did have its charm and character. After that they just prepared their own nibbles in the kitchen.

Mrs. Hudson's figment usually left them plates of baked goods and the occasional meal. This version was far younger than the Mrs. Hudson Lestrade knew, and he found it quite sweet that Sherlock saw her as a beautiful mature woman and not just a convenient old lady. This Mrs. Hudson, in her late fifties perhaps, would have been in Greg's dating range which was a very odd realisation to him, that age was such a barrier to how you viewed someone. 1895Watson was often quite charming and flirty with her. She must have been quite dishy during the sixties and seventies.
Some places were just rooms filled with snips and clips of memories but others were entire worlds recreated from memories. Greg had taken advantage of some of Sherlock’s vacation memories. He’d gone snow skiing in the Alps, sunbathing on a Florida beach and bask in a mineral spa somewhere French.

He could find his way around quite well by now. He was far more cautious in his explorations, however. Sherlock had warned him. There were things that he didn’t really want to know. He had not listened at first but that had been a mistake. He had known in theory some of what had happened to Sherlock during his time away, but the reality had been much more visceral.

It was not strictly what had happened to Sherlock that had affected Greg, but things he saw Sherlock do. The way he could dispatch people with no remorse had not been on Lestrade’s radar at all. It was impossible to reconcile with the man he knew and the numbers were staggering. Sally would have felt vindicated but Lestrade was gutted.

There were even murders in London, still on the books, that Lestrade could now solve. Technically by definition, Sherlock was a multinational vigilante serial killer. Magnusson was not his first. The problem was that every single time, Sherlock had saved someone. The people he had killed had been criminal and violent. In one case, he had saved a fifteen year old boy from dying in place of the father who owed money. Greg had called Sherlock but Sherlock had said the three corpses in a locked room was too boring.

D I Messr was working a case in which nine human traffickers who specialised in very young children had all been found clogging up the sewers in Whitechapel. The flusher crew had assumed it was another ‘fatberg’ but had made a horrific discovery of nine corpses instead.

There were others that were simply classified as missing. Sherlock was actually using his mind palace "how to get away with murder" room to practice this craft, and Mycroft not only knew, but had repeatedly sent cleaners to assist.

The things that had happened during his two years away, were out of Greg’s jurisdiction, but not the ones in London. Some had Mycroft involved as the person behind the victims coming to the consulting detective’s attention. So far, John was not involved as far as Greg could tell. But, Mary had been. They had had a mutual bolt hole in a condemned church and they researched people who had repeatedly slipped through the system on technicalities. They had strict criteria for a target.

Sherlock had been right, there had been things Greg just didn't want to know. His only solace was that he was destined to forget them.

The next time he'd spoken to Sherlock had been tense and uncomfortable. Sherlock had been waiting for him in his hotel room.

"Did you find out what you wished to know?" Sherlock had asked softly and without any inflection. Greg’s hackles had come to full alert, but he tried not to show it. "I haven’t really processed it all yet. Bit in shock, honestly."

"You have questions."

"What if I remember and decide to arrest you?"

Sherlock’s lips pulled down. His voice was velvet, "Then you would have the pleasure of living with your own conscious."

"No special experiment laid out to dispatch me and get away with it?" Greg saw the comment land
and the millisecond of hurt, but he waited to hear the answer anyway.

"Why would I? If that is how you view me now, I don't have to do a thing. I could lock you in here or worse, drag you out, wait for you to just give in to the need to move on and stand over your corpse, no one the wiser. If that is what you think me capable of, you have never understood me at all." Sherlock was disgusted with him.

"Why did you let me see that?"

"I did warn you."

Greg cocked his head and studied Sherlock. "You've made a mistake."

Sherlock's eyes locked to Greg's. "I'm sorry you feel that way. Not much cop in this trusting people lark, it seems."

"Not what I mean. You've made a mistake and you know I am going to see it. You wanted me to know all of it with my own eyes. Before you are caught. You wanted to keep me from jumping to the wrong conclusions. You would not have let me see it if you didn't hope I wouldn't lose faith in you. What is it? How did you give yourself away? I will do what I can."

Sherlock's operating system ground as he shifted gears, "You mean..."

"Oh, Sunshine. I hate what it has done to you. I mean it explains some things about how you and Mary were so, involved without being ..., involved romantically. How you could forgive her so. Quickly. I see it now. Common ground. Mycroft obviously knows. Does John?"

A single tear fell as Sherlock tried to speak. He gave up and shook his head.

"Okay. It's alright." Greg put his arms around Sherlock and held him. Sherlock put his head on Greg's shoulder and sighed.

"It isn't. You won't remember. Or if you do, there is no guarantee you will remember the right parts. I know how he will react if he finds out. He didn't speak to Mary for six months and she was pregnant." Sherlock broke away and flopped into the only chair in the room.

"She'd also just shot you. So there is that. And I am not okay with this, just to be clear. I see why. I do. But, Sherlock, you have too much to lose now. This can't continue. Tell me that you have not turned into Dexter?"

Sherlock frowned and looked at him. "Who?"

Greg huffed and sat on the edge if his bed. "Do you like it?"

"Oh. No. But, I have to weigh an innocent persons life against the probability of the police being able to act, Lestrade. Imminent danger."

"Yeah. So, explain to me what you cocked up so badly you think even I can solve it?" Greg grabbed a pillow and partially reclined on it, trying to get comfortable for this conversation.

Sherlock sighed and winced. "D I Cook has the case. He won't find it, but you would. A button from my coat. I didn't notice. It was in his hand. I have replaced all the buttons on my coat with used ones, bought for cash, of course. New buttons on an old coat, bit obvious. But, you will notice. When you see it, I know you. You will dig and dig and dig, and it will tear everything apart."
"Mary was helping you."

"After having the baby, until she ran, yes. She was barely home two weeks before Norbery."

Greg sighed. "What do you do with those that don't meet the standards?"

"Nothing. I update and monitor from time to time. But, I am not Culverton Smith. I enjoy the chase but not... I don't like the act of killing, if that is where you are going. I am honestly more pleased when I can eliminate them from my list of monsters and downgrade them to simple rats. There have been many occasions when they have committed crimes I could simply let the law handle."

Greg chuckled with pure relief. "How does Jim reconcile on your list?"

"I spent two years chasing that business, only to discover that he was more rat than monster. Don't forget, he was using me the whole time to eliminate the actual monsters he'd acquired. The irony?" Sherlock said with a soft smile.

"It is, that. Look, I know how careful you probably are, but the real problem with vigilantes is that you could be wrong. DNA has taught us that lesson. Wrongly convicted men have paid for our arrogance."

Sherlock worried his bottom lip before speaking. "I am not killing petty criminals and pickpockets. If you remember this, I can show you the files and then you can decide if you would have let them continue."

"If I ever do get out. Which one are you again? Of the horsemen?"

Sherlock smirked. "There is more than one interpretation. The most common is that of famine, because he sets the price of grain. But he also is interpreted as the Lord of Law and Order and that the scales he carries are those of Justice."

Greg felt a shiver come upon him. "It's really sort of creepy when I think of it. Mycroft with a sword, it just happens to be hidden in an umbrella. You being a detective. That means Eurus would be plague, right? At least that one doesn't fit, thank goodness."

"The rider of the white horse is also known as Conquest and is seen to carry a bow. Considering how she can take control of people when she chooses to do so, I would say we each fit the standards far more closely than you might imagine. It's all a bunch of tosh, of course. But she does technically carry a bow, just not the sort that shoots arrows."

"Holy shit. Now I am thoroughly freaking out. What if it is real?" Greg collapsed back on the bed. "I mean until this, I would have never believed in a man with wings or any of this?"

"Hmpft. Reality is merely a concept."

"Major Watson, thinks he is real. They all do, you know? Everyone here thinks they are real. What if I am... like them and just a figment of your brain?"

"Do stop this existential nonsense. You are in hospital and that is the reality. Do not lose your mind in here Lestrade. This is temporary."

"If I can't get out of here, just promise me that you won't leave me alone. Make me a Mycroft that I can keep and put us in one of the rooms you make for experiments, so that I can forget that I am alone in here with a thousand versions of you."
"For God's sake, we have to find a way to get you out of my head. You are much less barmy out there." Sherlock stood and popped out of the room.

Greg had lain in the same position, just thinking it all through for a very long time. After that he was far more conservative about snooping.

~~~~~~~~~~author side notes~~~~~~~~~~~~~

You don't need to read any of this to understand the story, but for anyone interested in the back story or old traditions with which the Holmes siblings make reference, these will get you started with the basics.

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghost_in_the_machine

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Horsemen_of_the_Apocalypse

"In Islam, the mentioned archangels in the Qur'an include:
* Gabriel (Jibrail or Jibril in Arabic). Gabriel is said to be the archangel responsible for transmitting God's revelations to all prophets, including revealing the Quran to Muhammad and inducing him to recite it. Various hadiths (traditions) mention his role in delivering messages from "God the Almighty" to the prophets.
* Michael (Mikail in Arabic). Michael is often depicted as the archangel of mercy who is responsible for bringing rain and thunder to Earth.[37]
* Raphael (Israfil in Arabic). Mentioned in the Qur'an as the angel of the trumpet responsible for signaling the coming of Judgment Day.[38]
* Azrael (malik almawt in Arabic). Mentioned in the Qur'an as the angel of death."

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anemoi

Anemoi is a referenced word on TFP

"Eurus was the name of Sherlock Holmes's sister in the BBC adaptation. Red letters interspersed in the credits at the end of the Sherlock episode "The Final Problem" spelled out Anemoi."
Chapter 45

Restless Wind

https://youtu.be/g6DznkBf4V0

From Northumberland's hills, Yorkshire and her moors
The mountains of North Wales to the Cornish Shores
As long as you are mine, I'll be yours
I'll go with you where you've got to go
We'll leave England's green, her old country lanes
Over the yellow fields of France, to the beaches of Spain
As long as you promise to take me home again
I'll go with you where you've got to go
Ooh I don't mind where it is we go

---

Greg stood over his hospital bed. He and Siger had made a last ditch effort to stuff him back inside. It had not worked and now they both were frustrated. It was December 11th. He had been here for five weeks and Christmas was just around the corner. This time last year he was riding a false high of happiness. He was about to be married and it had all slipped away.
They were about to leave, when an unexpected visitor arrived. Greg crowded close to him with thirst and concern. He couldn’t be seen, so the constraints of public affection were not valid and Greg missed this man so much.

Mycroft was perfectly put together as always and sighed as he stood at the foot of the bed. He also had the grey pallor of the overworked tired man he was.

“Talk to me? Please just say something. Don’t just stare at me.” Greg said, wanting more than anything to hear Mycroft’s voice.

Mycroft cleared his throat. “I have slain all the dragons, my dear. Those who did this as well as their masters have been found and charged.” Mycroft tapped his umbrella on the floor and said softly, “You must wake up soon, dear prince, or you will miss all your awards ceremonies. Rather rude.”

He peeked around and went to the door and closed it. This time he came straight to the side of the bed, leaning his umbrella to the side and lifting Greg’s hand into his own. “This is completely inappropriate and I am aware of the fact, however it is no more so than how it occurred in the first place. This is my promise. I will watch over you, for as long as it takes.”

Mycroft produced a small velvet box from his pocket and slipped the simple but fat gold band on Greg’s left hand. “A simple token. Silly, I suppose. But, you are my husband and shall remain so until you decide to remove this from your finger. I know I have been a fool, but... you promised. I know you are a man of your word. Come back. To me. I am asking. I cannot fathom that you have lasted this long to no purpose. I take thee, Gregory Lestrade.”

Mycroft bent to the hand he’d placed the ring on and gently kissed it before returning it to the bed and fussing about the blankets for a moment.

Just as Mycroft kissed the ring, Greg’s hand felt warm and he looked down to find he too wore a wedding band now.

Mycroft patted Greg’s hand once more and straightened. He took a deep breath and slowly released it, then reached for his umbrella and turned to leave. Greg grabbed him and kissed him. Mycroft paused with a frown as if he felt something odd. He looked back at the bed, but shook his head and slipped out the door.

“He isn’t angry with me any more,” Greg said, dumbfounded.
Siger had watched the whole thing silently and agreed, “No. Now, try again.”

Greg had returned to the mind palace and sobbed. It was hopeless.

The next thing he knew, Sherlock was shaking him.

“What? What is... Sherlock?”

“I cannot take it any longer. You moping over him in my head whilst he mopes in my ear over you!”

“What? I don’t.”

“You are in my head. I can hear you? You spent several hours last night saying his name. Though I do feel empathy to your plight, the weeping is driving me insane! He texted me over and over and called twice. I spent part of the night on his sofa listening to him drone on and on about private facilities for long term care. No. Not happening. Unacceptable!”

“I don’t understand. What are you talking about...”

“Eviction!”

Greg woke up at that. “But... oh...”

“Get yourself sorted, box up this rubbish. We are building you a mind palace. Of your own! Right now.”

“I have no idea how to do that!” Greg got out of bed and put on the nearest trousers and stuck his arm through the sleeves of a shirt, getting angry at this turn of events.

“And thus, I am here to teach you. Properly.”
A time later, they stood in an empty room with a huge bay door on one side. Sherlock instructed Greg to think of a place he was familiar with that made him happy. He was told to picture it in detail, to close his eyes and feel its dimensions around him and just relax into knowing that it existed exactly as he remembered.

A lose blob of grey matter appeared.

“There you go. That is not bad for the first effort. Now do it again. Let it flow as if you were walking into it just now. See it. Really see it. It is there, right now. Just waiting... that’s it.”

The rubble came to life and formed walls and a blob in the middle. Greg opened his eyes and sighed with frustration.

“You are almost there. Just picture it. Just hold it right there and see it.” Sherlock tapped on Greg’s forehead.

Greg’s office at old New Scotland Yard crept into being.

“Good. Good, now hold it.” Sherlock slowly guided Greg’s hand to his familiar desk and set it on his drawer. Greg reached in and fumbled around before grinning and holding up his car keys. He backed up a step and his legs bumped into a sagging office chair on wheels.

He sank down cautiously and heaved a sigh, “God, I miss this chair.”

“Open your eyes.”

Greg did so and looked around. It was just a little cluttered box in the old building, with two mismatched chairs, a monstrosity of a green sofa with cracked cushions, a desk and wheeled chair surrounded with filing cabinets and the litter of a cops life everywhere.

“Wouldn’t have been my first choice, but excellent work.”
“Okay, now what?” Greg asked, quite pleased with his creation.

“Now you learn to hold it. You are safe here. Until you get control of it. Then, and only then will I open the bay door and shove you out on your own. When you get good at holding this. You can add on at will. But, we got much farther than I expected. I am truly impressed.”

“Not much, compared to yours, is it?”

Sherlock laughed. “Mine began as a tree house. That morphed into the ship. Eventually. I have been adding on for thirty years. Well done.”

At that moment one wall began to melt.

“Concentrate. It is like your motorbike. It takes a bit of practice. Good. Now see if you can give it a ceiling. Oh. The pencils hanging up there are a nice touch. I remember them.”

“You stuck some of them.” Greg said looking up.

There were a few more slight wobbles but soon, Greg could talk and keep it in basic stability. Sherlock had him practice going out and keeping it in one piece. From the outside it didn’t look like much, just a greyish silver box.

“Don’t worry about that. You can decorate after you can keep the space available for your use. Now, keep it up and I will check on you in a few hours. You might try moving your things into your mind yard. One at a time. Place them and let them sit for a bit, then choose the next item. Repeat.”

Greg did as instructed. It was odd but with each trip out to move an item he grew in confidence. He settled in his old chair and looked around.

Before long he was digging through old cases, just like he had for years. Without thinking, he flopped down on his old green sofa and began rereading a file. It was not an important file, just a stabbing that didn’t quite link up to a post code war as everybody assumed. He was dozing when he realized what they missed. It was not about drugs or turf. It was jealousy. It was so simple. The older step-brother had not inherited any money.
The older step-brother had used his job as an alibi and yet, if you plotted the cash point use, against his breaks, it was plain as day. There it all was. Five minute walk from his job, and a fifteen minute break every four hours. The lunch break one had thrown them off. There was a limit of 800 £ per cashpoint. It was two days before the family had thought to check and have his cards canceled. The murder had taken place while the older brother was opening the family restaurant. He’d been alone but clocked into his job. Lestrade grinned at himself. This mind palace business was actually useful. He wasn’t sure it was any actual use at this time, but he could tell Sherlock and nobody would question it.

By the time Sherlock came to check back with him, He had to walk all the way from the lift door. Greg had expanded. Sherlock took his time walking through the familiar halls. The furniture was all there, but the Nick was empty of people. The vending machines were functional and full, the telephones blinked with calls in queue.

“Outstanding. You are a fast learner. What are you doing, exactly?”

“Case. Take a look and see if I am right.” He gave Sherlock the rundown.

“I am beyond words. I always thought you were adequately intelligent. You have a knack for this.”

“I have spent the last five weeks studying yours. I think it gave me a bit of a head start. I just expected it all to be there and opened the door and it was. Just the one floor, for now, but I missed this place.”

“Oh... Oh!” Sherlock said with sudden inspiration.

“What is it?”

“Practice for a bit longer. I have an idea. Get some rest. See if it stays stable. Then I am kicking you out. Once this is free, you will be attached again. You can just take the lift down to consciousness.”

Greg choked on his coffee. “Are you serious?”
“Yep. Pretty sure. Let me get to the hospital and we will try it.”

“If it doesn’t work... hey...”

“It will. And if not, I will be near to retrieve you.”

“How, if this crashes it is too big for you to do anything.”

“Don’t be silly. That’s why I have a dragon.”

“Of course. Should have known that he wasn’t just a pet.”

“Sleep. And hope. But mostly... sleep.”

Greg was pleased to see his place had stuck while he slept. He was incredibly nervous as the doors to the bay clinked and tumbled as they rose. 1895 had come to send him off, bringing gifts of Mrs. Hudson’s baked goods. He set them proudly on his desk and returned to the lift. Watson nodded at him as the doors closed.

He returned to his office. Then slowly out the window of his office he watched the mind yard creep towards the abyss. A dark shape flew past and he just glimpsed the black wings and shining scales of the dragon. He caught another glimpse of it just as the world tilted. The whole building seemed to collapse and be in free fall.

Greg was stunned in terror for a second before he imagined it righting itself and suddenly after two slight dips of buoyancy, it hung in the sky as stable as any structure. He looked out the window and London, his London, peaked at him through the smoke. Sherlock and the dragon did a flip and a barrel role in celebration. Greg waved and Sherlock pulled the dragon up and raised his arm to Greg. The view was so spectacular that he almost forgot that he could go home.

He paused for a moment then ran toward the lift, pushing the button repeatedly.

The doors opened and he stepped in and pushed the button labeled ‘home’ and waited as he closed his eyes and touched the ring on his finger.
His first sensation was pain, horrible cotton mouth and that nothing he owned, worked. Someone pried his eyelid open and shown a light in his eye bright enough to sear his brain. He flinched away.

“Greg? Greg, can you open your eyes? Can you hear me. Squeeze my hand if you can hear me.”

Greg squeezed as hard as he could and tried to say, “Get Sherlock and tell him it worked.”

What came out was a moan and a scratching hissed noise.

“Oh my God! Stay with me, mate! Don’t be afraid, don’t try to talk yet. Here let me swab your—“

Something cool and wet was stuck in his mouth and He groaned again.

“So, did Gideon of the yard make it home?” Sherlock asked with cool surety.

“He’s awake Sherlock! He is awake! Just now while you were flitting off to your mind palace, he came back! Call your brother.”

It took several hours of frustration and tests and gobbledygook before he managed the first semblances of words. “Sherlock. We did it. It worked.”

John smiled brightly and explained to Mycroft, who sat holding Greg’s hand, that Greg may not be totally on line for a few days yet, which was perfectly normal.

Sherlock nodded with an eminently concerned frown. He studied Lestrade and agreed, “Yes. So it seems.”

Greg sighed contented and mumbled, “I liked your dragon. Should have asked for a ride.”

Sherlock blinked several times and looked at John fearfully.
“Don’t worry. It is mostly gibberish for a bit. It isn’t like on Telly,” the doctor assured them again.

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For the Gideon of the Yard reference

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/gideons_day
Oh, how I imagine the day we met
And those tingles from those little butterflies
Reminiscing, I get so happy
I just break down and cry
Candlelight burning bright
Underneath a cool, starry night
You and me, endlessly, it's the greatest gift
That love could give to me
On this day, snowy day
Let me thank you for the joy you've given to me
I'm so happy
To have snowflakes of love smiling down on me, me, yeah

https://youtu.be/w7hoUuWCC_U

Lestrade improved rapidly. His schedule was hectic with speech therapy, physical therapy and a constant run of visitors. Mycroft was there as often as he could be but he didn’t push for an emotional conversation and simply proved to be the steady and warm man Greg had moved in with after Iraq.

Greg certainly still had his doubts that this was more than temporary, but he had come so close to never seeing Mycroft again that he was simply content to accept his plight and consider each kindness a gift. He’d learned how to store moments in his Mind Office now, and knew he could relive these gentle words and looks embedded with love filled eyes any time he would need them in his future.
He tried several times to speak with Sherlock and Siger about what had happened but they both maintained that Greg had simply had delusions whilst he was in a coma. This was also backed up by Doctor Watson and everyone else. They explained that these vivid but obviously crazy dreams were a perfectly normal occurrence in those experiencing the state of Coma. John even earnestly told him he’d seen men who had such terrible inescapable nightmares that they had PTSD over the false memories and required therapy.

Greg stood in his mind office late one night and sighed. If he had dreamed it all, this could not exist. He made his way to the lift and concentrated. He pushed a new button on the panel that had a large yellow bumblebee on it. The back of the lift opened and a long bridge made of iron and stone, much like Westminster bridge, also known as ‘the dick bridge’ for the penis-like shadows created on some afternoons, jutted forth before him.

The far end landed with a clank upon a simple stone bridge that appeared to be crumbling unsteadily into a river of lava below. He took a tentative step out and was relieved to find his created drawbridge seemed stable.

Greg looked up and on the end of a pike above his head sat another head that seemed to be covered in corruption yet still animated. “Hello, Mycroft. How’s the weather up there?” Greg asked as it grinned at him and snapped it’s teeth as if willing to bite him if the pike were not holding it back.

He used the crooked knocker and after several moments, the door opened. John Watson and his tediously excessive 1895 moustache opened the door with a cocked revolver and a puzzled look. “Mr. Lestrade? I don’t understand. Thought you had recovered, my boy? “

“Oh, I am doing much better. Just here for a social call. Mind if I come in? Not a huge fan of lava.”

John peeked outside as if assuring himself this was no trick attack. Then stood aside.

“I must admit, I didn’t expect to have the pleasure of your company again. I tried to strike up a friendship with the soldier version of myself but he made it rather plain that he considered me to be beneath his contempt. I had grown quite accustomed to our frequent intercourse.”

Greg raised his eyebrows at the word choice, but followed 1895Watson to the fireside wingback chairs and sat in the one he usually did as Watson went to the drinks trolley and busied himself with Greg’s usual.
He handed him his glass and took the other chair, “So, how may I help you, my good man. I trust your medical needs are well met? Holmes has brought me several medical textbooks related to your time. Miraculous advances, though I admit reticence toward their seemingly cold and heartless delivery. Medicine will always be an art, and it pains me greatly to know that in a blink, my craft will be relegated to impersonal factory millwork.”

“It has its downside. But, I will sure take a dentist over having a tooth pulled out by a barber.” Greg sipped the aged whiskey and sighed.

John nodded and smiled, waiting for Greg to come around to the reason for his visit in his own time.

“Sherlock won’t talk to me. About all this. At all. Says I made it up. Thought maybe he’d chat with me here?”

“He comes and goes as he pleases.” John sighed as if he found that regretful.

“Do you get...lonely? In here?”

John looked at the fire, gathering his thoughts. “Not lonely precisely. I have multitudes of discourse with the various factions. But, you must understand that we are all... him. We are a part of him and I came to be during a time in which he was parted from... the one you know? So now that I am less useful, there is a certain melancholic factor. It is always his birthday to me. And I know factually that is queer, yet each day begins on January sixth of eighteen hundred and ninety-five. My memories of life exist, yet that day is somehow all.

“I remember my time here and if I only had those days, I would be nearly two thousand years old, you see? I have stood by him as he begged for death and seen him through illness. I have held him as he was tortured in a dungeon. We have fought Moriarty countless times. I have watched him weep in misery as he read a very sad note telling him, that I was essentially all he had left of me. I have comforted him and been his conductor of light when he was lost. I have my amusements, of course. My London is at my disposal. I have been banished there and found my door back here locked because he had lost all his Watsons. I have even been out there, you see? To your world? You were there in fact, though you could not see me. I wrote that case up, changing the details. You probably remember the skeleton pretending to be our Jack?

“I have had to rescue him, when there was no one left to care. Now, I mostly mind the door, though
recently I had the honour of seeing to a very important guest.” Watson’s eyes twinkled at Greg with fondness and a kind mirth.

“I don’t know when or if I will be needed again. So, there are times, I feel like nothing happens to me, but I am also contented to know that as long as he exists, that so too, do I. Living within someone is quite intimate. How could I describe myself as truly lonely when I know such a gift?”

“I never thought of it like that. You have thought this out. Can I just say that in my mind, you are the best of the one I know? You are him, without all the... baggage?”

“I don’t understand. You mean like trunks?”

“John Watson, is a very good man. But he has issues?”

“Oh, as in The Strand?”

“No. No. He... what I mean is, if that man could always be who he wants to be, mature, kind, thoughtful... The man who does not lash out or have a wandering eye or any of his faults, he would be you. You are a better John, than the one out there. Sherlock made you who he could see, rather than who he met?”

Watson smiled and cleared his throat. “You flatter me, sir.”

“All I am saying is, I think you will always be of use, because everything Sherlock sees in John, he gave you. Does that make sense?”

“It does. But, maybe I have a privilege not afforded to your own. You see, I can never lose him. If we go on, we go on together and if life’s end is an abyssal endless darkness then even unto that we go together. I have never had to grieve for him, nor shall I ever. For that comfort and surety, I would not trade my world for the one you inhabit.”

“I can see your point.”

John Watson cocked his head and nodded. “Here he comes now.”
No magic circle opened and no earthquake heralded Sherlock’s presence. With a soft pop, he was simply there. Watson stood so Greg stood as well. Sherlock appeared to simply exist in mid stride and he looked rather annoyed. "What the hell are you doing here?"

"Satisfying my curiosity. All a dream, was it?" Greg stated more than asked.

Sherlock sighed and twirled, turning his back in frustration. "Fine, I lied. That doesn’t mean you can just barge in here any time you’d like to amuse yourself in my private thoughts. It was an emergency, not an open invitation!"

"Then don’t treat me like a numpty! If my mind office was still there, then it only stood to reason that yours might be as well."


"Not so fast, Sunshine. This is a whole new ball of wax, this is. Do you realise what this means? We can talk, anytime, for one thing. Wireless communication has nothing on this. Think about it? You get kidnapped and we just meet here and Bob’s your Uncle! Rescue."

Sherlock stopped his pacing and spun back toward Greg, his face an ecstasy of astonishment. "Ohhh.. you’re a genius! I knew Siger and Mahmoud ... but, of course... we will have thousands of experiments... this changes everything."

Sherlock could not contain his delight. He excitedly whipped up a chart of things they should try, from distance to ability to alert the other. He was a whirlwind of gibberish as Greg smiled.

Greg didn’t mind keeping this new revelation secret, provided he knew he was not insane. He was feeling quite smug at figuring out something before Sherlock had thought of it. This also meant at some point, there would be a virtual dragon ride.

Back in his hospital room, feeling much more confident and contented, he made phone calls and plans of his own. He sent Sherlock on errands and recruited a great deal of assistance from Anthea.
Siger had visited and was still in Farm Street. Mahmoud had now joined him in London, staying with the nephew and his Mum, who were both on their school breaks between Michaelmas and Hilary terms. She had been kind enough to send him small homemade treats from her kitchen and Lestrade was delighted with her delicious cooking even though he had no idea what most of it was called.

He had been most shocked when MPS career assessment showed up to chat with him about possible new roles within his ability, hours before he was to be dismissed from hospital.

He had been promoted to Detective Superintendent for his heroism and service. It was not normal for a DCI to be stepping up again after such a recent promotion, but it was good publicity. She also wanted to be clear that if he were to be wheelchair bound then there were other options within the 14,000 staff positions. If he were interested.

He was actually a bit shocked, but he assumed Mycroft was behind it. She didn’t even know who his husband was. She assured him that it was the interview with Dr. John Watson who had created something of a public relations nightmare. The deputy commissioner wanted to be able to assure the public that the Met took care of their heroes. It had been weeks of managing calls after Watson had said Greg’s actions had cost him his career. That was turning into a nightmare for recruitment and they wanted very badly to tempt him into staying on in some capacity.

He had to lie back and grin when she’d left. Detective Superintendent was more than he’d ever dreamed of, but he definitely would have to be able to walk again to take the job. He could manage a few steps on a Zimmerman frame, but there was nerve damage to his leg and so any long distance meant he needed his chair.

He would not need to run down criminals any longer but being in charge of the guidance of several teams of DI’s and their many Detective Sergeants and Detective Constables, was still a mentally challenging job. He would no longer be on the front lines but he certainly was not going to be a total desk jockey either. Not if he could help it and this possibility had an exceptionally spirit lifting effect on his mood.

When Mycroft had arrived, Greg had excitedly explained all he’d found out,

“I see. That is not exactly where I have made suggestions. I think a Chief Superintendent or perhaps Assistant Deputy Director is more appropriate. But we have time to sort that later.”

Greg narrowed his eyes and shook his head, “I don’t want you to push for that.”
“Why not. You would be quite good in managing a division.”

“No, not really. I am not good at that stuff and it is mostly shuffling papers and shouting at people and getting shouted at. I just want what I earn on my own merit and once I can walk again, I can still step into the game from time to time. It is in the middle. I still can oversee investigation but without all the legwork and donkey work. I appreciate what you were trying to do, but you don’t need to manage my career and give me something that I don’t want to do in the first place. I am going to walk again. May need a cane, but this is not forever.”

“You never need work again if you don’t choose to. You don’t need the job.” Mycroft fidgeted with his cuffs.

“Yeah, I really do. I need somewhere to land when you...”

“When I What?”

Greg looked down at his wedding band, “When you decide to leave me again.”

Mycroft sat gently on the edge of the bed. “I have moved all your possession back to my home. And we decided that...”

“I know, but it takes your minions just hours to move me right back out the next time you have a crisis and take it out on me.”

Mycroft sucked in a breath and held it.

“You asked me to come back and I did. I heard you. But, I also have to be prepared that I am just a project. Once I am better, you will scramble for cover again. Also, where is my bike? Did you move her as well?”

“You may wish to consider selling it. It is in my garage.”
“No. I am going to consider riding it again.”

“Don’t be... stubborn. I don’t wish to quarrel. If you can manage it, at some point, we can have our row then. The contraption is safe for now and for as long as you wish it to be stored.”

“I know you have good intentions, My. I do. But...”

“There are no buts. Well, that isn’t true. There are things we need to talk about at some juncture. But they simply don’t matter at this point in time. Getting you home and settled is our only concern for the day. That is our focus because I won’t have you stuck in here for Christmas.”

Lestrade laughed and said, “You hate Christmas.”

“Yes. But you do not. I insist on doing better this year.”

Greg swallowed and decided to give Mycroft his first test. “Jim and Eurus have invited us. And we are going. Well, at least I am. I hope you will...”

“Are you insane?”

Greg grinned with a cheeky pride, “It has been mentioned. Usually when I am bragging about my delightful husband. Who would do anything to make me happy. And this is one of those things you have an opportunity to—“

“Oh sure, is he running low on stolen helicopters? Have you any idea the inconveniences that caused me last time? I cannot be seen accepting transport from him on his dodgy stolen fleet and I certainly won’t make the mistake of taking mine again. Besides the fact that you cannot possibly make the trip—“

Greg interrupted and said in an authoritarian voice he’d never used on Mycroft before, “Jim has hired a medical transport flight. Completely legitimate. On top of that, due to the cramped conditions last year, he had a block of terraced guest flats built. They are wheelchair accessible. Everyone is going, you know. Even your parents, and Molly is taking Harry. Sherlock is even going as are John and Rosie, and Siger and his entourage. I have been on line, ordered my prezzies delivered. It’s all set.”
Mycroft stared at Greg, gap-jawed and completely flummoxed. “Very thorough. And if I refuse?”

“Then you will miss all the fun. You see, I plan to get married.” Greg reached under the covers and withdrew a small box. “We seem to keep missing each other for the ceremony. I hoped we could fix that.” He opened the box and held it out for Mycroft to see.

“Ahh. I see. This explains it.”

“Explains what?” Greg asked, confused.

“Why my sister has been so incredibly smug.” He dialed a key on his phone and brought it to his ear. “Did you know about this...plan? Well, I am delighted to know you have been scheming behind my back. If you have made plans for the week, I suppose you will need to cancel them. No, but I will be needing a best man, and your number is the first on my phone. No, my dear, I don’t wish for you to arrange one. I am asking you to be my best man... woman, whatever the current vogue term is.”

Mycroft listened for a moment, then blanched. He held the phone to his chest. “I am to give a definitively affirmative answer and reciprocate a sentiment of suitable affection.”

Greg laughed. “Is that a yes?”

Mycroft held out his left hand. Greg placed the ring on his finger. Mycroft took a photo of it and sent it to Anthea. “You will have to keep me out of the hands of the enemy now, because they will have to cut the finger off for me to give that up.”

Greg laughed.

Mycroft said into the phone. “What do you mean that isn’t romantic? Of course it is. Well, he knows I place great value on them. They come in particularly useful when playing the piano.”

Greg added, “Which he has agreed to do for me as often as I want. So that is kind of romantic, to me.”
Mycroft listened and then asked as if spitting out hairy chewing gum, “I am being forced to request the particulars of our... colour scheme.”

“Oh, tell her, I am taking Sherlock’s advice and matchy-match is cliché so we are going with rustic elegance. Tweeds, and understated vintage hunt type things. No riding crops or jackets, more down at the heals country squire.”

“Should I plan to have my wellies polished?” Mycroft grumbled.

“If you are going to complain, we can cancel or you can just plan it yourself. I am keeping it simple. Didn’t even know if you’d bother to show up. Had some leftover expensive but useless clothing last time. Didn’t want to repeat that mistake.”

“We could just wear those suits?”

“No. They brought us bad luck. I may have also consulted Daniel when you didn’t show,” Greg said.

“You set them on fire? You set a 5000£ suit on fire?”

“Technically, I didn’t. He was trying to make me feel better.” Greg shrugged. “Got him out of the brig. He wanted to reciprocate the good will.”

“I suppose he is going to be your best man, then?” Mycroft asked, having a miniature snit.

“No. He’s doing the fireworks. Sherlock is playing the processional, because we can’t exactly dance. I asked Sally, actually. She likes you... well mostly. Probably should expect the speech to be interspersed with a few less than veiled threats if you leave me again.”

“When have you had time for all of this?” Mycroft asked.

“Anthea and Sherlock helped. If the consulting detective thing doesn’t work out, he has a back up
plan at least. Wedding planner to the Royals. He’s quite keen that he could pull it off.”

“Dear Lord, that thought will give me nightmares, undoubtedly...You saw the last one. Thank the heavens and all that is Holy that is the end of them for my career.” Mycroft shuddered with revulsion. “Americans.”

“So... you really are going to...” Greg drifted off and looked pointedly at Mycroft’s hand then back up at his eyes, as if pleading with him to not tease him with hope again.

“Before you allow your doubts to intrude upon our happy announcement, do keep in mind that I have done things that I have never considered before despite my brother’s conviction. I sat in an empty room with coloured glass, in this very hospital, and spoke to that empty space for intervention on your behalf.”

“Maybe it wasn’t quite as empty as you thought?” Greg stated carefully.
Sleigh Ride

Chapter 47

Sleigh ride

Our cheeks are nice and rosy
And comfy cozy are we
We're snuggled up together like two
Birds of a feather would be

Let's take the road before us
And sing a chorus or two
Come on, it's lovely weather
For a sleigh ride together with you

https://youtu.be/OtUbEHXWyz0

Without doubt, the journey to St. James was exhausting for Greg. Fortunately, the ride was a tiny nine seater jet and not a helicopter. He was perfectly comfortable and yet, just getting out of hospital and flying out two days later, he really had bitten off a bit more than he should have. But, he was determined that he would not give in and admit to Mycroft that he’d been right.

It didn’t matter. He was getting married. It was planned for the eve of Christmas Eve and Greg was
determined to break his terrible Christmas luck.

Sally was dressed up and actually being very sweet to everyone, a bit nervous and taken aback to suddenly be thrust into the dynamics that was Greg’s family situation now, with private jets off on Christmas Holidays, private islands full of expected criminals and casual MI6 acquaintances.

John Watson was telling the very amusing story of Greg’s ex-wife, Linda, at the hospital. Mycroft was interjecting his deductions about Linda, and of course Greg had not given her a thought because he was in a coma.

“She was on all the Tabloids, of course. Playing the grieving widow. She’d hoped to cash in because it seems she has moved somewhat downwards in her financial situation.” Mycroft polishes his fingernails innocently.

“So the nurses keep telling me that Greg’s spouse is demanding to speak to his doctor. Well, I keep going immediately to the Diogenes Club, and Mycroft has no idea what I am talking about...”

“But, I was always so incredibly hungry for updates, that I politely pretended to know what he meant. After all, I can read him in person, but texts updates are nebulous.”

“So I would show up, and give my opinion.” John continued.

Anthea whose real name was Emma, added, “But, the rest of the story was that every time John showed up unannounced like this, Mycroft nearly had a myocardial infarction. He thought I had changed my mind about retirement, what with giving him no prior warning.”

Mycroft blushed and admitted, “I also assumed each time John showed up that it was to tell me the worst of news, in person, as a kindness. After all, he and I have a working tradition.”

“You kidnap me?”

“Which I was not doing and should have alerted us both that there was miscommunication somewhere. It was only after several of these occasions and after questioning John, that my suspicion turned to my ... loyal second in command.”
“Which after our conversation and two other incidents in recent memory in which there have been compromised loyalty, I forgive you for, Implicitly…” Emma added. She did not have her nose in a phone for once in her life.

John jumps back in. “Finally, the three of us get our heads together and realise that there could be a security issue going on. Greg is a hotly debated topic on the news channels and it could easily lead to the kind of attention that—”

“That I spend a horrendous about of money trying to avoid!” Mycroft interrupted.

“So the three of us go to hospital and just as we arrive, there is a psychopathic woman screaming bloody hell at the nurses desk and making such a scene that Mycroft orders her restrained. After a few minutes inquiry, we discovered she was trying to talk her way into Greg’s room. So what were we to think? Of course I have never met her and I don’t know her from Adam. She very pompously demands to see her husband and threatens to sue the agents restraining her and the hospital staff and suddenly she realises who I am and screams ‘And I demand you keep that degenerate Doctor Watson away from him as well!’ So at this point Mycroft smiles pleasantly and steps up to her. And he gives her a look that could melt titanium and purrs.. “ John motions to Mycroft to say his peace.

“I said, Madam if you could manage to stop the banshee imitation, perhaps we can be of assistance, and if you cannot manage it, I assure you, if I so choose, I can have these gentleman obtain medical grade glue and have your flapping jaws fused together which would obviously improve the lot of humanity to silence your tiresome ululating.” This was delivered in Mycroft’s most pompous Received Pronunciation with a Hollywood British villain stacked in for effect.

Everyone laughed merrily.

Sally was the first to recover. “So, what did she do?”

John cleared his throat and tried to speak, but every time he started, he lost it again. He finally squeezed out a croaked “Wet herself. Right there on the Lino.”

Emma added. “The poor thing was mortified. We shouldn’t laugh. Mycroft can be a daunting menace to the little fish.” Which made everyone laugh more because she could also be a daunting menace when she wanted to be, and everyone on the plane had experienced it.
John had recovered slightly and said, “But wait, that isn’t the best part. There is more. The agents faces as the puddle spreads to their shoes...and about that time Sherlock strolled up and said...” John waves for Sherlock to pick up the story.

Sherlock takes a breath and modulating his voice to its deepest rumble adds, “Oh, Hello. The former Mrs. Lestrade seems to be having a small bladder control problem. Linda, you remember my Brother, the current Mrs. Lestrade?”

At that everyone erupted again as Sherlock continued his diatribe. Mycroft rolled his eyes but honestly had liked the introduction rather immensely. He conveyed his amusement to Greg who was laughing but also a bit horrified.

“Mycroft, May I present the idiot woman who allowed you to marry the love of your life. She is broke, selling her bag of potions and lies to the tabloids and is sniffing around New Scotland Yard, hoping for a ginormous payoff, for pain and suffering that Greg is currently experiencing. The barristers you have hired are wanting to get a leg over, not take your case. Which says very little for their skill set in civil suits as well as their taste in slag. Run along, my dear. The Gregory well had run dry long before you gift wrapped those divorce papers.

“She would not believe at first that Greg had remarried. But, I threatened to expose her little known addiction to illegal Adderall to her school and asked her exactly what she would do if she lost her job as well. They always cry... as if water seeping from their eyes excuses how they have treated everyone else in their vicinity for the past two decades. We let her go. But, it wasn’t because of the tears. It was because she smelled of urine and was not worth the effort.”

Everyone turned to Greg to see what his reaction would be, forgetting that this was a woman he was once married to. Greg grinned. “Well, while that was truly a bit not good. It isn’t any worse than getting my hopes up for a bit of Christmas cheer only to open the pretty box and get dumped just before Christmas. ?”

“Don’t look at me. Always hated her,” Sally said with conviction.

The new flats sat down near the Village of the Damned. They are named the Loftus Hall Villas.

“Someone’s sense of humour, though obscure, is certainly dependable,” Mycroft said with a smirk as he was shown to the rooms meant for he and Greg to share. “This is actually, remarkably pleasant.”
“He spares no expense. Look at that view?” Greg wheeled his chair across the modern grey washed wood flooring that made his chair glide smoothly and almost effortlessly, to look out at the sea, from a large picture window lowered to the perfect height of someone sitting down. Mycroft had joined him and they were enjoying the spectacular view watching a ship when they realised they had company.

“Glad you approve. This is the honeymoon suite. I thought my wife was daft for suggesting it. But, it seems we already have several bookings for the year ahead. Everyone is getting married. She has plans for a little schoolhouse next. Says our boy shouldn’t be the only child out here and some of the men want to bring their families. Build houses and move out of the barracks. Going to have my own little town out here before long. “

Jim left his pose, leaning dramatically against the doorframe, and strolled into the room, hands shoved in his pockets. “Thought you were a gonner, old friend. Eurus went to London... to help. She didn’t see it coming. Pregnancy has put her off her game.”

“Congratulations, by the way. I am so happy for you two,” Greg replied.

Jim looked at the floor as he blushed slightly, “Not quite as immune to such things as I thought. Sebby... left us. I miss him. He said I was going soft and then he just... but he might come home for the Holidays.” Jim grinned manic as ever and skipped to the fridge in the kitchen. He opened the door and showed off a full to bursting refrigerator. “I didn’t know if the two of you would even want to come out for the parties, but if not... everything you could want is already here. I’m glad you decided to come... both of you. No hard feelings, Mycroft. I only did the thing last year because you were a bit of a knob, you know? Anyway, I’m off. “ He strolled out and turned just as he got to the door and addressed Greg. “Hope you will come to the awards ceremony. Big hero award for you, you know.”

“Jim, I don’t need anything. You invited us and that is more than generous and all I need. Thanks for all of this,” Greg said earnestly.

Jim smirked and rolled his eyes. “My wife. You know better than to argue with her.”

Jim explained that Sherlock and John were next door and Mycroft’s special goons were upstairs. Sally was up on the third floor as was Emma. People would be arriving by various means over the next several days but many of the cottages and flats were already occupied.

Mycroft had not uttered a sound while Jim was there.
Mycroft closed the door behind Jim and studied Greg.

“You are tired. Let’s find the bedroom and you can have a nap while I get us settled in?”

Greg was earnestly so tired he thought he could sleep in the wheelchair. Mycroft helped him into bed and said softly, “I’ll wake you when dinner is ready.”

Greg grunted his affirmative, already nearly asleep.

When he woke up. He forgot for a minute that his leg was bad. He tried to hop out of bed for the loo and took a painful tumble. He was not hurt but the jostling hurt a lot. Mycroft rushed into the room and helped him up and into the ensuite.

There was a giant oval tub in the room and he grinned, dreaming of a long hot soak. Mycroft obliged and ran him a bath.

Mycroft helped Greg sit on the side and swing his bum leg over the bath. He’d had showers of course, but he still smelled of hospital to himself. He reached to the middle and turned the cold tap off and the water began to steam. It felt heavenly. Mycroft opened several tiny bottles of various bath oils and added a bit of this and that until the water was scented of vanilla, nuts, myrrh and sandalwood.

The sun was going down and the sky lit the room pinks and melons from the arched frosted glass panel light centred on the tub.

“Join me?” Greg asked.

Mycroft looked as though he would decline, then unexpectedly he simply began to disrobe. Greg drank in the sight of his long legs. He was so pale and unexpectedly hairless that he looked as if he were made of marble.

Mycroft raised his brows in surprise. “I hope the disappointing view doesn’t change your mind.”
“You are mad. You’re beautiful. Not sure what you could possibly want with a mutilated wreck like me. Get in here. I need a cuddle,” Greg said with a soft smile and happiness shining in his eyes.

Mycroft stepped into the tub and winced at the heat. “Are we cooking ourselves or bathing? Good lord.”

“It’s good for me. Gets the blood circulation going and helps the muscles relax.” Greg sunk up to his neck and sighed.

“And sloughs the skin off, third degree burn style,” Mycroft added, sinking carefully up to his own neck, facing Greg from the other side of the tub. Their legs entangled and Mycroft lifted Greg’s foot and began to gently massage his damaged leg.

“God, that’s brilliant,” Greg groaned with pleasure.

“I don’t wish to destroy the mood, but I need to let you know some things. Before we make this public spectacle of ourselves. First of all, I need to explain something. About what happened last year. The jelly video was an embarrassment, but I was so angry because it was devastating to me that such silliness could even occur when the world had washed my soul with bleakness. I lost a man, a year ago last week. “

“When you and your Mum went, uhem... Shopping?” Greg asked.

“No, just before. Her original objective was routine and unrelated, but this incident compromised her. I panicked and went to her recall, myself. She evaded me and it all turned out fine, but was a debacle at best. Mummy loves her games and she was quite unaware of the true reason for my interference. Once she allowed me to explain, she agreed.”

“So, this man was killed? Line of duty?” Greg prompted.

Mycroft nodded and lowered his eyes as he spoke, as if needing to concentrate on Greg’s foot. “He was the closest thing I had to a lifelong friend. We didn’t go to the local and watch the footie or anything, but we played chess and had been casual lovers for many years when convenience presented opportunity. In our line of work, there can be tragic endings. There could be nothing more tragic than how I lost him. It... affected me... greatly.”
“You blame yourself.”

“Yes. I cannot explain how deeply I grieved for him.”

“Were you in love with him?”

Mycroft shook his head. “No. I cared for him very much. I was insanely attracted to him. But, I could not quite... he mattered very much, but both of us knew, while quite good, it was not forever. We were too competitive and far too much alike. He worked directly under me for about six months and it nearly broke our friendship entirely. “

“Sounds complicated. I am so sorry for your loss. You never said a word.”

“I couldn’t speak of it. The thought of celebrating and any kind of frivolity made me physically ill. The thing is, there was footage of his death and all I could see was you. He knew of you, by the way. He was looking so forward to meeting you. He was supposed to be here. For our wedding. But, that did not happen.”

Mycroft blew a deep breath out slowly to steady himself then continued. “In the end, he told them anything... you cannot fathom what it took to get it, but he told them about every mission he’d ever heard of and devastation on top of pure anguish, he also told them about you. That is as detailed as I can get. I have made enemies in my career, Gregory. Enemies beyond your imagination. There are three separate governments who have a half billion pound price on my capture alive. It was only dumb luck that I was not identified in Iraq.”

“That explains why you were not taking liquids, I suppose.” Greg sat up and reached for the controller but seconds after it switched on the bubble jets, he realised it was too loud to talk over and killed it again.

“That narrow escape of mine. But he was not afforded the same luck. I am hopelessly infatuated and in love with you. That makes you a liability, that I could not live to see converted to collateral damage. You cannot imagine what people will do for money, that kind of money... even with what you see in your line of work. Visiting Jim and My sister, is not a romping good time. Not for me. Never forget they are both ... incredibly unpredictable and dangerous. Sherlock is also a liability as is Dr. Watson, and now Molly and Harry, my parents. Especially Mummy who has had many a
contract on her in her life, though she has outlived most of them. We children made her vulnerable. Caring is a vicious circle. I thought at the time, that I was doing the right thing.”

Greg had listened carefully and yet, he could not help but counter. “You could have talked to me. You had a whole year. I am a bit gutted that you let me think, let me die thinking that I was not good enough. That it was my fault. You do get how easy you made it for me to do what I did. It was nothing. Blaze of Glory and the really hard part is coming back from that and facing...” he sat up and looked down at himself and gestured to his torso, “… all of this.”

Mycroft narrowed his eyes. “You would not have done it differently. I have watched the footage repeatedly. That is who you are, Gregory. Caution would have gotten your head blown off, rather than the gunman. I cannot change the past, but, I also admit, that I should have done better.”

Greg reached out and took Mycroft’s hand. “We will. From here on. I understand the danger now and I will try to deal with the whatever you have in mind to keep us safe-ish. I truly am sorry about your friend.”

Mycroft nodded. “There will always be security, you understand? There will be monitoring and check ins, and I know there will be times in which you will have much more discrete company than you can stand. We have it now in fact. There are Royal Navy ships nearby performing training manoeuvres and HMS Magpie is surveying within sight. You could have waved at them earlier. I don’t have confidence that I can keep you safe. Even if you wish to cooperate. It is a wearing lack of privacy after a very short time.”

“You know I am surrounded by police officers, at my job, right?” Greg asked with a smirk.

“Really? How many of them have been assassins in disguise?”

“Fair point. Hopefully just the one?”

“Incorrect. Three unfriendly actors and two of mine at various times. I would not blame you if you wanted to cancel, now that you have a clearer picture,” Mycroft said neutrally as he fidgeted with a little bottle of oil, rolling it back and forth between his fingers.

“Naw. I’m keeping you. May need therapy to deal with you. But I am a glutton for punishment. Look, we all have our secrets Mycroft. You keep yours and I will keep mine?”
“You don’t have any secrets,” Mycroft threw out the comment thoughtlessly.

“If you knew about them, they wouldn’t be secret. Now shift around behind me and rub my neck a bit.”

Mycroft obliged but was soon sporting a more overt interest in the proceedings.

“My apologies.”

Greg shifted. “You are sorry you want me?”

“Well, considering your present condition, in which you can do nothing about it. Yes. “

“I didn’t get shot in the dangley bits. Thank Christ.” Greg took Mycroft’s hand and proved that he could actually do something about it. “I maybe can’t ravage you just yet. But we can certainly do a bit of looting?”

“What about the ceremony? Shouldn’t we wait?” Mycroft purred in his ear, now stroking Greg slow and delicately, just a tease and not intending satisfaction but heightened arousal.

“Why? Why not now? We wasted a year and it very nearly was our last. I don’t think we should waste lovely moments like this ever again. We will blink our eyes and realise we wasted them all and can’t get them back.”

Mycroft purred in his ear. “I never for a second stopped wanting you. I only wanted you to be safe. It was torture for me as well. When I saw the footage, how much damage...I thought I was watching you die before my eyes. All that sorrow I had put myself and you through, and it only had only bought us eleven months. I have nearly gone mad with the want of you.”

Mycroft’s strokes became more sure and purposeful as he softly continued to speak. “You are a fool if you think you are not more beautiful to me than ever. I didn’t marry an ordinary man. I married a man who has the proof of his convictions all over his body. Five times they could have taken you from me. Any shot can prove fatal. I lost a man once when he was shot in the elbow, the bullet traveled along his Humerus and straight into his heart. Freak shot. You were shot five times and yet you still could not be beaten. That is the singular most sexy thing I have ever encountered. You are my greatest blessing in this life and you will grow weary of the intensity with which I wish to
debauch you. Debase you. Corrupt you. Lead you into depravity in inappropriate places. Vitiate your work day for the sin of it.

“I am going to wear this delicious appendage of yours out, I intend to partake of it so thoroughly and so often...”

Greg could not last a second longer. The promise of Mycroft’s words undid him more than any candles or wine could hope to accomplish. He spent a cloud of white into the water as his back spasmed and arched into Mycroft. His vision grew red then white and for just a second he was in the light of that doorway he’d feared and nothing mattered but the golden pleasure. The sound he made was a choked grunt trying to hold the sound in, before it gushed out in an embarrassing groan of all encompassing loss of control. He sounded like a man who had just taken a cheap shot to the diaphragm. It was a good thing Mycroft supported him, because he would have sunk beneath the waves. Only as he began to come down and be able to breathe again did he realise that Mycroft had grown silent and was desperately finding friction in the cleft of his arse. Greg increased the rhythm and clenched his muscles and Mycroft let out a nasal whimper as he began to shudder against Greg.

Both of them only had energy for breath for a few moments.

“You’re just like her you know?” Greg observed randomly.

“Just like whom?” Mycroft asked, lazy and ready to sleep.

“Eurus. You get in my head. All that stuff you said. This was just a bit of fooling around and it was the most intense thing I have ever...”

Mycroft smirked and kissed the side of Greg’s sweat covered forehead. “Thank you, but do keep in mind, prolonged celibacy combined with survival of a near death encounter has traditionally led to intensity of dopamine rush during orgasm. Happens to soldiers all the time. Ask John.”

“You are such a bastard and you know it. You didn’t even say a dirty word and it was the hottest thing anyone ever said to me. Jesus. I should not have given up so easily. I should have pushed until your security goons dragged me away... hopefully to your dungeon. Do you have a dungeon?”

Mycroft wrinkled his forehead, “You probably don’t actually wish to know the answer to that, but
yes. Several.”

Greg sighed and said simply, “Okay. Cool. And now I am getting hard again.”

Loftus Hall

https://youtu.be/soF8eiq_Ezk

HMS Magpie a survey ship

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Magpie_(H130)
You make it feel like Christmas

Chapter 48

You make it feel like Christmas.

Thought I was done for, thought that love had died
But you came along I swear you saved my life
And I wanna thank you, baby
You make it feel like Christmas
Sweet gingerbread made with molasses
My heart skipped and I reacted
Can't believe that this is happening
Like a present sent from God
Sleigh bells singing hallelujah
Stars are shining on us, too
I wanna thank you, baby
You make it feel like Christmas

https://youtu.be/uA4STm4hx7Q

The morning light brought blushes and sighs. Greg and Mycroft had napped and partaken of each other’s charms the entire night as if sex were a new toy. They had certainly had to be gentle but the things Mycroft put in Greg’s head as they enjoyed their privacy had essentially completely ruined Greg for any other human.

Greg had never known that the physical act could be so cerebral. Each time he thought he was done, Mycroft spoke and he could not imagine not responding. He had never known Mycroft to be so vocal and yet, he had heard him speak more in the last twelve hours than he’d heard in the last
The only time he shut up during sex was when his mouth was otherwise occupied and for his skill in that department, there were no words. Greg wondered what sex would have been like before his injury.

“I am so angry with you,” Greg said with good humour.

“No you’re not and even so, I know how to make you forget. Why would you be angry on this glorious morning, in this enormous bed, when we can lie here and watch the sea between bliss?”

“I have known you for over a decade and there never was a hint that you could do the things you do to me? You withheld this from me. I think I could get off just from what you say. God, I was terrified you had some unknown kink and that was why you wanted to wait. I searched the house once, looking for horse tail butt plugs or poo-porn.”

Mycroft chuckled, “Too bad I didn’t know of your fear, I could have had great fun with planting bizarre contraptions and waiting for you to have the courage to confront me. Communication does work both ways. You could have simply been forthcoming with your fears?”

“I did try. I was too afraid of losing you.”

Mycroft smirked and replied, “What are you afraid of now, husband?”

Greg got a serious look on his face. “Only that you could die first. Other than that, nothing out there is that scary any longer. Sad, yes, but it has been a strange year and I am not the same anymore.”

Mycroft dropped his eyes as he spoke, “Don’t take this wrong, but in my eyes you are better.”

“Let’s be real. I am physically a shambles and I wish I could have had you before, when I could have driven you into the headboard.”

“Then I suggest you let me arrange a more diligent physical therapist. We keep them on retainer at Legoland and they have military backgrounds. They are brutal, but effective.”
“You are going to employ super-spy resources? So we can have better sex? “ Greg asked with pure amusement.

“I have needs, Gregory. Keeping my mind fully functioning is a national priority. The task has fallen to you, should you choose to accept this mission,” Mycroft said with all deadpanned sincerity.

“I wish I could know what you really are. I know I can’t, but you have a lot of... there are ships out there, just to protect you. It blows my mind.”

“You won’t be impressed by my Job title, I assure you. But, I am The Traffic Coordinator. Should you ever need to ask for me at my actual office. Also, you can drop an envelope anywhere in the world, in any post and it will reach me. Eventually. Every agent-in-place along the route will attempt to read it, fair warning, but, we can develop a code, just for us, if you like. In case of unthinkable emergency should your babysitters ever be blown.”

“Wow. You know that’s sexy, right?”

“You have a tiny spy kink, Don’t you. Surprised I didn’t spot it years ago. Just to be clear, your reaction to me has not always been my experience. There are those who have expressed a preference for silence during active copulation. You are an exception rather than the standard. “

“Oh no. They were just too stupid to appreciate it. Talk to me some more?” Greg requested, pulling Mycroft down to kiss him.

“You make me understand Sherlock’s fascination with cocaine. You are my drug and I am an addict, not a user. You are reprogramming my entire being. I shall want you and need you, all the days of my life. If there is a God, you are My conduit to eternity. Your rod is my idol. I will worship you and cherish you, knowing how to make your nerves sing and your very cells vibrate to the call of this. Your body will be my faith and dragging illicit sounds from it my prayer,” Mycroft murmured as he kissed and licked both damaged and whole flesh.

An hour later they were up and searching the fridge for sustenance. Greg had found the juicer and it was currently on the counter pulsing forth it’s healing elixir. Mycroft was making Toast, eggs and bangers.

Tonight was the infamous party. Tomorrow their ceremony. The next night would be the
Christmas Eve dinner. Then, Christmas Day in which only family activity was planned and last of all, the Boxing Day awards ceremony. Christmas was a busy time here. Yet without all the stresses of their normal jobs, this chaos revolving around them was lovely and Greg had probably never looked so forward to any week of his life as he did to this one.

Sally was at the door and joined them for breakfast. She’d evidently come to like Mycroft quite a lot during Greg’s absence off in Sherlock’s mind palace. She busied herself making coffee, after making a face at his offered glass of green juice. Greg noted that she sat Mycroft’s coffee down in front of him without so much as asking how he took it. Mycroft took milk and no sugar which was unusual.

“Thank you, Sally,” Mycroft replied after taking a sip. That was very casual for him. Sally, not Detective Inspector, not Miss Donovan, and not simply her last name as his public school education most often standardised out of habit. Mycroft used her given name, which for him, denoted familiarity.

Sally simply grunted a response. She flopped down at the low counter before a plate Mycroft had served her. She was both oblivious to Greg’s scrutiny and completely comfortable with his husband. It was fine, he loved that they seemed to be easy with the other, it was just unexpected and a curiosity to occupy his mind.

“Anthea is up too. Told her to have a lie in. I’d check on you. Alert her if anything blew up. But she said she’d like to do some wrapping and reading if you didn’t mind,” Sally told Mycroft with a shrug.

“We can all do as we please. It is our holiday. I did tell her she was here strictly in a ceremonial capacity and not on duty,” Mycroft returned.

“Habit. Same way with me and himself.” She tilted her head toward Greg. “That line where work mates become actual friends. Weirder for the subordinate.”

“I suppose. In my experience it doesn’t work the other way. Friends to superior and underling. They resent that there are times you must ask them to follow, especially when they too have the knowledge and capacity to best you from time to time.” Mycroft stared into space for a moment, looking very heartbroken.

Softly and kindly, Greg asked, “Did you ever repair your friendship?”
Mycroft took a deep breath and blinked a few times. “Eventually. Not for almost a year. Then one day he walked in my office and threw a water balloon at me. I chased him all over the halls of the Circus. It was the year before we moved to the new building. It was a very long time ago.” Mycroft smiled and stabbed a bite of eggs.

“So, are you still friends?” Sally asked.

“We were. He passed last year.”

“Oh. Very sorry.” She let her fork drop and gave him a sympathetic look. “I can imagine that was ... well, I mean, it was brutal to me when... I can’t imagine what it must have been for you. I don’t mean to be sappy or anything but, I cried every day for weeks. The nick just didn’t feel right without Greg. How did you get through it?”

“It is debatable that I have, in truth. I’m not actually as cold as I am reputed to be. Needless to say, two such tragedies in less than a year, unbalanced me, shall we say. I agree wholeheartedly, though. The world would indeed be a terrible place if Gregory were removed from it. The glimpse alone was enough to show me what I could become. I was not a very nice man.” He blushed slightly and smirked.

“No. But, you were spectacular at it. Don’t mind saying that I was glad I got to see you work.”

“You’re Assistance was invaluable,” Mycroft demurred.

Greg finally piped in, “So you two, worked together? Am I hearing right?“

“Yeah? Why not? You and he have passed leads to each other for years. I just stepped into your shoes a little.”

“Don’t sugar coat your roll. You are very skilled. We would never have linked the Swedish cell without your input,” Mycroft complimented.

“Sad that people like that have to, feed the bigots. I know dozens of Muslim families and all of them are good people and so thankful to be here. But then something like this...” Sally trailed off.
“It is a complex Pandora’s box. Suffice to say, I feel there have been grave errors in reporting atrocities across Europe. By suppressing facts, in the hope to keep the copycats at bay, we have introduced an avalanche of suspicion upon the innocents and failed to hold the guilty accountable. I cautioned against mass influx with no ability to monitor who we attracted. There are so many deserving individuals who have been turned away, whilst obvious high risk people are waved through with nary a look. For example, the young man who you stopped, Gregory, did not do this because he was evil. He sacrificed himself for his family. He knew he would die or spend the rest of his life in prison. But, his family were promised what must have seemed vast wealth to them. Evil always has its justifications and brings a big wallet along with sorrow.”

“I don’t remember what he even looked like. I couldn’t pick him out of a line. All I saw were his empty eyes. I know that empty when I see it. There is... once you know it, you see it everywhere.” Greg sipped his coffee and cleared his throat, hiding that he had seen it before, much closer than he cared to admit.

“The shooters were nobodies. It was the shadows behind them that I wanted. Sally helped. You trained her well. If the police work gets too boring...” Mycroft teased with a smile.

“I do still have your card. Anthea keeps chatting me up as well. I don’t know, your world is... a lot darker than mine. You guys see stuff every day that I am not sure I want to know, much less deal with,” the DI admitted but was still flattered.

They had a houseful of visitors coming and going for most of the day. The airport was a beehive of activity, bringing the Klan Holmes, including Molly and Harry as well as Mrs. Hudson, Mummy and Daddy brought Rosie, Siger and Company, Major Sholto whom John had invited on a whim and was shocked to discover he’d accepted.

The honeymoon flat buzzed with well wishers. Everyone was eager to greet Greg. Mycroft played the perfect host and Greg felt his heart swell at the clear pride he saw in his husband’s eyes as people expressed his brave deeds with sincere appreciation. He understood that he and John were a bit famous now, but the shooting was honestly a day he was ready to forget.

The rough house sand Babies had all visited at once, giving a hard time and taking the piss about asking Greg to dance later.

Mrs Holmes had hugged him and then informed him that he should have a care about strenuous activity in the bedroom and promised to have a chat with her son about precisely what could and could not be expected of a man in his condition in the near future.
Mycroft had handed him a tumbler of whiskey without a word. Greg needed it, all the people were beginning to wear on his nerves, though he didn’t want them to leave either.

Eurus came by and sat holding his hand for a long bit before speaking.

Greg finally broke the ice and told her that when his packages arrived there was something for the bun, separate from Christmas. She grinned and with a mischievous shrug she admitted that she’d opened the rocking chair two days ago.

“I hope it is Okay. I know you can afford much better, but...”

“It was your mother’s.”

“Yeah.” Greg was glad she already knew.

“Where has it been all this time?” She asked. “Not with you.”

“Linda, my ex, took it in the divorce. She was hard up for money and sold it to her sister, a couple years ago. I called Maude and asked if she still had it and I guess she felt bad. I didn’t even know about the tabloids stuff. She kept apologising, I thought she meant about when I got shot. Anyway, it didn’t have any sentimental value to her. So she let me buy it. I wanted you to have something that was... I was rocked in it and so was my Mum, when she was little.”

“It is ... you are my friend?”

“Course. And I am happy you are going to be a Mum.”

Eurus leaned over, “You know some people have said it will be a monster, like me?”

“I proved that isn’t really true though. I don’t think you are a monster.”

“I can be.”
“So can your brothers. All three of them.”

Eurus focused on him again at that. She sat back and smiled. “You are like us now? Other. Fascinating. Can you see him too? Siger?”

Greg smiled and gave a tiny nod.

“It’s a secret. They were ugly for so long. Did you see them then?”

He shook his head. “They healed before I could... see them.”

She sucked in her breath and let out a very Sherlock-like, “Ohhh.”

Her eyes flashed understanding. “You have fixed three. Only one to go.” Her eyes darted to Mycroft and back to Greg. “He will be either the easiest or the hardest of all. I don’t understand sentiment the way you do, but the rocker will always be a great prize to me. Thank you for all you did.”

“It was just my job.” Greg wanted to say so much more, to tell her how sorry he was that it took so long and how he wished she had not been put through what she had been.

She stood and reached out and touched his face, as if reading the brail version of his life with her fingertips. “No. It wasn’t your job. It was someone else’s, from long ago. But you took on the burden in that freakishly large heart of yours. Every time I rock him, I’ll know, he has your protection. You will be expected to visit, often. That’s what Godfathers do.”

She didn’t give him time to process this statement or even react. She just walked away leaving him stunned.

Little Bee was running by him, Sherlock close on her heels. She was not causing trouble but simply enjoying the freedom and the attention and the chase. She stopped in her tracks and looked up at him before scrambling into his lap.
“Be careful, Uncle Greg has ouches. Sorry—“ Sherlock admonished.

“She’s Fine. Sit.”

Sherlock flopped into the chair his sister had just vacated. “You look well shagged. About bloody time.”

“Sherlock! Little Ears?”

“Oh please. She was kicked out of the child minders, John thought would socialise her, other children blah, blah, for calling the head teacher a stupid dyke. She was trying to say Troglodyte, an accurate assessment in my opinion, but the old cow fart wouldn’t listen. I even tried to be charming, losing my touch. Doesn’t matter. She picks up everything anyway and her enunciation is so atrocious that it obviously doesn’t matter if we mind our words or not.”

Greg looked down at Rosie. “Did you do that?”

“Yes. Your breath stinks,” she informed him with no shame.

“You still haven’t seen to that tooth? Have you?”

“No, but it may be the whiskey I just drank.” Greg offered his now mostly empty glass to Rosie to sniff.

“Yuck,” she proclaimed.

“Did you hear? There is no jelly wrestling this year. Spoil sports. They are having a skinny dip at the pool tonight, but Jim’s Grand and Mrs. Hudson have apparently already ruined that for most everyone.”

“Dear Lord. Can you imagine John and Mycroft at this do? I will lay odds that John will be round the twist at least twenty minutes before Mycroft goes pear shaped,” Greg bet.
“Hmmm. stakes?”

Greg thought for a second. “My door prize against yours. No coaching either.”

“Last year you got a motorbike, which you never let me ride, and I got a stupid pearl, which Mycroft confiscated!”

“You got a pearl? I have no memory of that. John got a caravan but I didn’t remember you got anything.”

“Stupid black pearl thing. I did get credit for finding it, but still. What if you get a good prize and mine stinks again?”

“Chance we will have to take. Mine could be something stupid this year just as easily as yours. Membership to the London opera.”

“What’s the matter with that? At least it is useful?” Sherlock asked with annoyance. “I’ll probably get a stupid cruise to someplace I have been tortured in the past. Yeah Okay. I have every confidence in John. First spouse who demands to leave loses?”

“You’re on. But no coaching.”

“Fair warning, I also intend to spike their drinks. Serve Mycroft right to have the mother of all hangovers for his big day after last year. Come on Rosie, time for your party. Auntie Eurus has all sorts of fun things planned for the little people.” Sherlock smirked and lifted her out of Greg’s lap.

“Never let it be said that you are not the most wrathfully vindictive of the horsemen?”

“Mmmmmhhhhph, thank you? But I think you will find that not to be the case. That honour goes to the one you call mushy-bear or something equally inane.”

“Gosh, I wonder where Rosie gets it from?” Greg said. “Have fun at your party, little Bee.”
So I turned my head a second and the man had gone
But he left his driver's wallet smack dead on the lawn
I picked the wallet up then I took a pause
Took out the license and it cold said "Santa Claus"
A million dollars in it, cold hundreds of g's
Enough to buy a boat and matching car with ease
But I'd never steal from Santa, cause that ain't right
So I'm going home to mail it back to him that night
But when I got home I bugged, cause under the tree
Was a letter from Santa and all the dough was for me

https://youtu.be/OR07r0ZMFb8

Mycroft did everything in his power to tempt Greg into not attending the big party at all. They were therefore forty five minutes late.

Mrs Hudson and Gran Moriarty were already up a hight and mortal, having started six hours early, hair ravaged by pool water, and giggling like twelve year olds. They had lost all of their chips in a savage poker game, and yet were working the room, begging for another stake to win back their
losses.

Greg and Mycroft signed for their chips at the door and Greg, against his better judgement, gave the two women half of his chips for them to split if they promised to not do the Mardi Gras thing again... ever.

Mycroft was traumatised. “I didn’t know breasts could look like that,” he kept saying over and over.

“Mrs. Hudson’s weren’t so bad, but I will never look at big breasts the same again, that’s for certain,” Greg agreed. He directed his husband to push him to the liquor and handed Mycroft a drink to steady his nerves. Then two more for good measure.

Anthea was sitting behind an enormous pile of chips at her poker table.

“Ahh, So you are responsible! For God’s sake give those old bats back their chips before I lose my eyesight entirely.” Mycroft growled in her ear. “And stop counting cards. You know who these people are, I don’t have enough bullets if they catch on!”

Anthea offered her apologies to the table, shoved all her winnings in a bin liner and took off for the gift shop.

“This is heinous. How long am I obligated to endure this?” Mycroft demanded.

“We just got here!” Greg reminded him.

Mycroft sighed. “I will require more liquor. Immediately.”

Greg caught Sherlock’s eye and the scowling expression on John’s face. He waved and Sherlock looked guilty and annoyed. Greg tilted his head toward the hookah lounge and raised his eyebrows. Sherlock nodded.

“Where are we going now?” Mycroft whinged.
“Someplace more quiet where we can sit,” Greg said evasively.

Sherlock and John met them at the door of the hookah lounge. “You cheated. Showing up late. I have already lost.”

“Yeah? Well, Mrs. Hudson showed me her baps, so cry me a river,” Greg responded.

“How many chips did it cost you?” Sherlock asked with a crooked smile.

“Two-hundred and fifty. But the other one got the same, not to do it again.”

Sherlock counted his remains and cursed.

“You’re not serious? You are a sick dog. Gift shop. Go see Anthea, Mycroft ordered her to return some. Anthea is a card sharp.”

“I need a trip to the loo,” Sherlock announced, then headed straight for the gift shop.

That left Greg to introduce the concept of the room to Mycroft and John. Much grumbling and shocked fury later, the three of them were seated at the table. Greg lit the little charcoal and listened to Mycroft explain that such things were a waste of time and had no effect on him. John just sat and glared.

Sherlock did not return for almost thirty minutes and by that time, Mycroft was giggling and John was happily blowing smoke rings. Greg stopped hurting for the first time since he had woken in hospital.

“Dear lord, brother mine. What the hell have you done?” Sherlock mocked horror.

“There is my baby brother. My Sherly whirly sweet feets. Locky docky wet pants. Come sit by me.” Mycroft patted the seat next to him.
“You broke him!” Sherlock accused. “What the hell did you buy? Ghost Train Haze? Are you insane? He’s a novice!”

Mycroft smiled and announced, “I can’t feel my face. Or my arms. Or my feet. Or anything, actually.”

Greg just sighed with contentment and handed Sherlock his hose and mouthpiece. Sherlock took a seat in the curved Naugahyde booth, not by Mycroft, and inhaled deeply.

Greg leaned over and could barely contain himself as he asked Sherlock, “Well? How was it?”

Sherlock rolled his eyes and coughed, nearly choking. He sighed at last and whispered, “Curiosity killed the cat. Jim’s Grandmother is a menace. I am honestly gayer than I have ever been in my life. And I was never overly straight.”

“Really? Then explain Harry?”

“I... I was... sad. And Molly is an exemption. Exception. This is ... I am getting some of this shit for Mrs. Hudson.” Sherlock shook his head from side to side trying to see properly.

John blew a large smoke ring and interjected, “No, you’re not.” John sat up and eyes going a bit red, but still quite sober. “This’ll put her out of commission for a week and we will starve. Is there anything to eat around here?”

“I’m hungry,” Mycroft agreed.

Sherlock knew the voice at once. “Well, isn’t this a coincidence. Shove over. Hear your a married man these days. Might wanna give your Mrs. H a heads up. You can never beat a card counter at poker,” Janine Hawkins said with her friendly lilt.

“Scratch that, None of this for Hudders. Ghost train haze, calls ghosts of your past.” Sherlock said the smoke puffing out in curling tendrils with every word, pitching his voice higher than normal.

“Now, Sherl, Don’t be that way. No hard feelings. Gimme a snort,” she took the tube from
Sherlock and took a deep hit. “So you going to dance with me later or are you going to sneak off again.”

“You leave me no options,” Sherlock evaded.

“Oh, hey Myc. And John? How’s married life the second time around?”

“Never better. How’s the tabloids?”

“You’d know better than I would. Talk of the town you and the DI here.”

“Detective Superintendent, got promoted,” Greg said.

“I bet you did. How are you feeling?” Janine asked.

“No pain right now, so pretty good. Yourself?” Greg asked out of politeness.

“Can’t complain. Congratulations on your nuptials tomorrow.”

“We are already married.” Mycroft offered his hand as proof. “Two, no three and a half months before I knew about it.” He found it hilarious.

Janine made an impressed face then jibed, “Good thing they let you run the Government, then. Nobody will notice.”

“What the Hell are you doing here?” Sherlock challenged.

She shrugged. “You can’t pick your family. My wee brother invited me.”

Sherlock frowned. “Jim is your brother?”
“God no. I wish. Money rolling out his arse, that’un. No, he works for ‘im. Makes bank at it too. Told ‘im scallywags and Mickey Dazzlers was not my normal pool in my search for true love, but he pointed out that if I survived working for Gus Magnussen then how bad could his friends be.” Janine shrugged, and grinned. “Wouldn’t mind a bit of your magic, Sherl, to help me avoid the cannibals and such. Come on, help a girl out?”

“God no. How would you be sure I didn’t deliberately serve you up for...dinner?”

Janine held another sip of smoke for a moment with a grin, studying Sherlock. Then she relaxed, bumped his shoulder, blew out her smoke and demurely replied, “Because you are just pretending you hate me, just like you do with Myc. It’s your way of showing affection. I still know what kind of man you are. Besides, you’d hate to have to solve my murder. So give me a list of prospects?”

Sherlock seemed to weigh her words in a matter of seconds as if the entire argument with himself was taking place on one hundred times normal speed. His eyes clicked back and forth as if he were doing a sobriety test, then they stopped and he exhaled. “Yeah, Okay.” He concluded, “Only because you are an idiot and would hook up with Lamont Francisco.”

“Is he the one with the stonking big yacht out in the bay? He seemed really great.”

“Oh, he’s a dandy! Happens to have murdered his last six wives. He’s very attractive and charming, falls madly in love, sweeps them off their feet then gets insecure about his adequacy in the bedroom, leaps to the conclusion they married him for his money and throws them off his boat. Whilst in the open sea, under power.”

“Nice. Think I will pass on that happily ever after. What about him, in the hat? Noticed him as soon as I walked in. Nice smile, dresses well?”

“Cannibal, you are actually really bad at this.”

“There just aren’t any good men left, I think. Nice for a bit, then they eat your liver,” She lamented.

“No, there are. Ohhh. I know of the perfect man for you. But you won’t notice him, because he isn’t all flash in the pan. Old fashioned manners and an estate, bit run down, but only because he was away playing soldier. Underdog, unfairly disgraced. He does have some minor physical flaws? If you could look past them?”
“What are we talking there? Pirates or his head caved in on one side?”

“You met him. At John’s wedding. Major James Sholto? Thinks he is unfit for human company. Bit of a fixer upper, but the potential is... from my understanding.” He cast a side glance at John, “He was once, quite dazzling.”

“Can’t do. Tried to talk to him at the wedding. Didn’t give me the time of day.”

About this time, John sat up straight and in his most cautious warning voice he said, “Sherlock? No? Not happening.”

Sherlock smirked and pulled out his phone. He thumbed through his contacts for a minute and in his friendly charming voice said, “James? Sherlock Holmes, where are you?”

John made a half arsed attempt to grab the phone, Sherlock changed hands and held him back.

“No, nothing like that, Just John, Greg Lestrade, and I. I wanted you to meet my brother, he might be able to help clear up some of your military issues? Seems really keen to discuss it. Just us and one very old and dear friend of mine. We are in the hookah lounge, it’s very quiet and charming...”

“James it is a set up. Do not come to the par—“ John’s words of warning were suddenly cut off.

Sherlock’s fingers closed over John’s mouth like the Gollum. “Oh he’s just being contrary. Thinks we will get you in trouble. Says I am a bad influence or something. I told him you were perfectly capable of handling any dangers presented. Yes, well you didn’t come all this way to not have a bit of fun... see you in a bit.”

Sherlock ended the call and took his hand off John who was now ready to kill him. Sherlock narrowed his eyes and said low and dangerous, “Before you start, Don’t let your jealousy rob him at a tiny chance of happiness. Unless you truly believe alone and forgotten is what he deserves.”

That stopped John on a shilling. “Sherlock... I don’t...”
“Janine is beautiful, talented, charming and makes me laugh. Look at her? She was Mary’s friend too, and not just because of Magnussen, but in spite of it. They are adults. I am offering an introduction, no more.”

“But, you got him here under false pretences... holding out a hope that his military career could be patched up. That’s not right and you—“

Mycroft smirked, “Oh that, is no problem. I already looked into it. Keeping it as an incentive if I ever need a favour. I have lots of those. Would never get anything done out of you two otherwise.”

John turned to Mycroft. “I saved your bloody neck. I think that counts!”

“He is very shouty, when he is on the ghostly choo-choo.” Mycroft bellowed a large cloud of smoke straight upwards in a plausible imitation of a puffer-belly. He giggled at John’s stormy face. “Stop looking at me like that. I can have you vaporised at the snap of my fingers. Though sitting next to you at the time would be unwise. And I am getting married tomorrow, so there is that...”

Sherlock looked at his watch, he leaned over and spoke in Janine’s ear for some time. She laughed and her eyes twinkled as she nodded.

“Well, I am off to get us some nibbles. Save my seat?” She headed out into the main party.

James entered a few minutes later looking a bit dazed and horribly uncomfortable in his black Huntsman suit, a matching beret being wrung nervously in his fingers along with his still sealed plastic roll of tokens.

He spotted the table and smiled, strolled across the room on mission and stood stiffly by the table, not quite at attention.

“John, Sherlock? Thank you for inviting me. Mr. Lestrade, good to see you up and rallying. You must be Mr. Holmes,” he extended his hand toward Mycroft who took his hand and would have fallen out of the booth had John not had the reflexes of a cat and grabbed his sleeve to right the British Government.

“It is a pleasure to meet you, Sir. Your brother mentioned that there might be a small chance to ... give my records a second glance?” At Sherlock’s prompting, James took the seat next to Sherlock
and pretended to not notice that everyone was imbibing in illegal recreational activity.

Mycroft giggled and coughed-snorted another cloud out of his nose.

John made sure Mycroft was wedged upright for the moment and leaned in toward James. “I just want to say, I am so sorry. This was not my idea...”

James stiffened hiding his disappointment, “It is fine, John. Thank you for speaking on my behalf. It was worth a shot. I had hoped... but well, I appreciate the—“

“No. That’s not what—“John shook his head.

Sherlock jumped in, “What John is trying to say is that my brother is not himself at the moment. Lestrade bullied him into trying cannabis for the first time this evening and he had no idea it was one of the strongest strains known to man. Please accept my apology for his, indisposition, however on to the matter at hand, upon our return, you will receive notifications that your account of the events will be released and made public so that all questions of your actions can be put to rest once and for all. Right brother, dear?”

“What he said.” Mycroft waved his hands as if he couldn’t care less.

Sholto looked at them all. “I don’t understand? Just like that?”

Mycroft raised his hand and snapped his fingers then looked bashfully pleased with himself.

James whole body language changed. There were tears in his eyes as he met John’s. He reached across Sherlock and took John’s hand grabbing on for dear life, “John, I have no way to thank you... you have no idea. I can’t wrap my head around it... after all this time... I, had given up. “

“Sir, James.” John retuned the gesture in what seemed to be long practiced camaraderie. “I never stopped believing in you.”

“Now, feel a bit more like celebration?” Sherlock asked, pleased with himself. He offered the hookah to James who looked at it for a moment indecisively before declining.
“I wouldn’t say no to a drink though?”

At that moment Janine returned with a tray of offerings. On the tray were drinks as well as food and she promptly sat a Bailey’s on ice in front of the man in her seat as she said with a chipper lilt, “And you must be the Major? Sherlock said you were a light drinker but that you enjoyed a good Irish Cream on the Rocks. Myc? I got you chips and sauce? We have some salsa and crisps, pork scratchings, veg and dip for Lestrade, and some other random things that sounded tasty. Scooch over, if you don’t mind.”

Sherlock moved close to John and the Major obliged as well. Janine took her seat, trapping Sholto from eminent escape.

Sherlock made introductions. “James Sholto do you remember Janine Hawkins? Bridesmaid extraordinaire and dear friend of mine?”

Janine gave him a little shoulder bump and hooked her arm through his, “Well, I remember you, Mister. Had you on my dance card but you went and left early. If I can keep you from running into any pointy bothers this evening, you just may be able to make that up to me.”

“I...I am not much of a dancer,” James said, clearly out of his element with this whirlwind of a woman, seemingly noticing him.

Sherlock leaned over and said with fake regret, “That is splendid then, because she is atrocious at it.”

Janine giggled and nodded, “I really am, but I make up for it in sparkling conversation and determination to have fun anyway. You have some lovely muscles going on under this shirt, I bet you work on a farm?”

“I have one. Yes. I like assisting my gardener. I do a good deal of the heavy lifting. Do you like flowers?”

“What girl doesn’t?”

James reached in his pocket and pulled out his phone. “This was last spring.” He showed her a
Janine took the phone and looked, genuinely impressed. “It’s brilliant. You did all this. I love Irises. Here, look at my cottage.” She pulled out her own phone and flipped through some photos, showing him the beds of Iris of her own.

“Superstition! Where did you get them? I have searched for these?” He asked.

“They were my Mum’s favourite. If you come by, I’d be happy to share? Maybe we could trade for some of these ruffly purple ones... I don’t know the name, but they are lovely.”

“Jocasta, I got them in Japan,” His face was lit with happiness as he gazed at Janine, drinking her in as if he had never seen a human before.

Sherlock looked at John silently saying “I told you so.”

John just shook his head and blew smoke rings, eyes pleased and calm.

When the music began, James and Janine disappeared and never returned.

“You are a softy. Sunshine. That was a good thing. They hit it off like nothing I’ve ever seen, except maybe you two.”

“It keeps her out of my hair. It was the practical solution,” Sherlock stated gruffly.

It was still early, but Greg called it quits.

“Guys, I don’t mean to be a drudge, but I think I am going to need some help to get my husband home. I don’t think he is capable of driving and I can’t carry him. Would you mind?” Greg was tired and felt amazing and all he wanted was to go to sleep.

John pushed Greg and Sherlock managed Mycroft like a limp doll. “Come on, Fatso.”
Just as they exited, they caught a glimpse of Janine and James, dancing horribly off to the corner. Neither of them noticed anything or anyone else in the room. Sherlock stood for a moment waiting for an excited wave, like at John’s wedding, but her eyes were locked on her dance partner and his on her.

“Sickening,” Sherlock finally declared.

Sherlock and John navigated Mycroft into bed. He was snoring before they had the covers pulled up. They turned to assist Greg to find him standing and testing his legs. “I think I can manage. Look, this is probably stupid but take my chips and buy as much of that train stuff as they will let you. This is the first time I have felt human since I woke up.”

He climbed into bed and smiled. He was getting married in the morning. It didn’t matter that he already was, because this time it was for real. Painlessly he closed his eyes and went to his mind yard to tuck away the evening.

Sherlock sat with his feet up on Greg’s desk, munching a doughnut and getting crumbs all over the floor.
Chapter 50

All My Christmases

I fell in love with you
At least a thousand times
And now
Every Christmas from now on
I'll be here, by your side
And now
Every day in between
And for all of our lives
I'll be waiting under the mistletoe
And any kiss from you, you know
I do, I do, I do

https://youtu.be/f2-TgD0zYX8

Sherlock smirked at him. “Found your stash?”
“Yeah, That doughnut is from two thousand and seven, so help your self. What are you doing here?”

“You remember a doughnut from over ten years ago?”

“It was a really good doughnut,” Greg said with a shrug and a grin.

Sherlock looked at it, took another bite and shrugged his agreement. He closed the file he’d been reading and set it on the desk, laying the remains of the doughnut on top like the file was a plate. “Well, despite the security we need to teach you to implement, I just wanted to tell you that we got you at least enough Ghost Train Haze for the next year, but we will have to be sly about it. Mycroft would not appreciate twenty five pounds of pot stacked up in his study. That is intent to distribute. So I will make a deal with you, no drugs busts at Baker Street, just because you are annoyed with me, you know I am clean, and we will store it up on the third floor. I may give some to Hudders as well, depending on her hip.”

“I don’t need that much, Christ, I only puffed that thing a little. Got a bit freaked out when it hit Mycroft so hard.”

“Well, it isn’t like you can find it just anywhere. So you decide, but I didn’t realise you were hurting so much until it stopped. So I want to help. I only have one and it still aches, quite often,” Sherlock explained rubbing his chest.

“I appreciate it. We will see how it does tomorrow. How’d you get so much?”

“There were people at the dispensary counters when I came in with the chips. Word spread in five minutes who, what and why. Jim came down and gave us the whole lot. Four hundred ounces. No chips required.”

“Oh, Wow. That’s, incredibly generous.”

“Well, yes, at two hundred and twenty five American dollars an ounce, it is about a years salary at your new rank.”

“God, we are going to be actual criminals now.”
“Nanny State,” Sherlock agreed. He stood as if to leave. “Anyway. Rest well, Gregory Lestrade.” Sherlock stepped forward and kissed him, on the mouth. By the time Greg reacted and stepped back, it was already over.

“We can’t do that, Sherlock?”

“It was just a farewell. For good luck. Make him happy.” Sherlock gave him a melancholy smile, just quirking up at the corners. “Besides, this is your mind. We can do anything we want here, technically. It isn’t real, remember?”

Greg swallowed. “It was always a bit real, Sunshine.”

“Yes.” Sherlock said, then spun, coat twirling and walked quickly to the lift.

Greg tucked a chip and a baggie in his desk, cleaned up the doughnut mess, sighed at the greasy circle it had left on the file, then followed, turning off the fluorescent overhead lights as he went.

Greg woke first. He rolled over and looked at Mycroft. His hair was a riot and his cupie-doll curl a perfect ringlet sticking up on his forehead. Greg smiled and touched it. Mycroft’s eyes flew open and he was at once fully online.

“Dear lord. How did we get home and what’s the social media damage?”

Greg chuckled. “I have no idea about anyone else, but for us? We got sleepy and John and your brother brought us home. Happy wedding day. You didn’t think I’d let anything happen to you did you?”

Mycroft sighed in relief. “Thank you. I had no idea. I was against that substance from the start. More so now.”

Greg felt a twinge of guilt but let it go. “Anyway, you need to get showered and up to Anthea. Sally will be here any minute. We have to get ready.”
By the time Donovan pushed his chair to the VOTD, the day had turned brilliant and clear. You could see across the water for miles and just pick out two type 45 Daring class destroyers, out on manoeuvres. The water was choppy but decidedly Oxford Blue.

Sally had been very skeptical about Greg using cannabis from a little glass pipe Sherlock had dropped off, but when Greg stood up and walked across the room with two canes, she marvelled. “Oh, Lestrade. That is bloody brilliant.”

The ceremony was meant to take place in the Rec room. It was quite crowded. It was supposed to be just a few people and over a hundred had crowded in.

Sally wheeled him part of the way down the aisle to a rather maudlin tune played by Sherlock and Eurus on their violins. Then Sally nodded at Sherlock and set the break. From Sherlock’s violin came the screech of a two tone police siren. Eurus picked up and it sounded like a typical day in London. You could even hear the Doppler effect as the sirens seemed to pass by, then another would start up again. There was murmuring in the crowd and Mycroft was focusing his laser anger at his siblings. This covered the fact that Greg had risen from his chair and was walking down the centre aisle.

It was the clapping that brought Mycroft’s attention back to Greg and he opened his mouth then closed it. Looked carefully upwards, blinking back tears then, back at the man walking with a cane and a hobble, but walking down the aisle toward his bright happy ending.

Sherlock and Eurus played the theme to ‘Mission Impossible’, Greg, on Sally’s arm and with his cane clicking to the rhythm of the farcical song joined Mycroft on the three step up dais. The plan had been for Mycroft to step down but this was better.

“What are you doing?” Mycroft asked with a whisper.

“You didn’t think I was going to marry the British Government whilst sitting on my arse, did you?”

Siger addressed the audience, giving Greg a joyful nod with the tiniest of bows. His wings were the faintest Vapor shadows and lifted high in pure joy and glory. Greg wished everyone could see this.

“What today, I have the honour of joining two hearts. I have seen them both in singular anger and despair. But this day we rejoice before a glorious God that for the good of humanity, he has led these two souls to everlasting love. He has taken them into his hands and forged not one, but two
great men. One is a protector and a warrior. A man who has served justice and fought evil in the very trenches of London.

The other a, frankly he is a pain, but our mother is here and said I have to say something nice.”

The crowd chuckled.

“So be it. This one time I will say that my brother is a man who has spent his life doing an impossible job for thankless multitudes and saved the life of his family members numerous times to little fanfare. The truth is, I thought nobody on this planet worthy of him, until I met his chosen.

“It is the truth of that that brings me here, against orders, to perform this ceremony. So my beloved ones, today we gather for a forbidden sacrament and I bless this union with my vows, my heart and my soul. Do you Gregory, agree to forsake all others in time of pain and torment, in time of blessing and bounty, bestowing your heart into the care of this man?”

Greg said softly, “I will.”

“And do you Mycroft agree to bequeath your loyalty upon the man before you, entrusting your heart into the care of this man in life’s misfortunes and sorrows as well as in joy and happiness?”

“I will,” Mycroft said, strong and firm and true.

“By the power of the horsemen will you allow me to bless this union?”

“Yes, Father.” They said together and turned.

Siger touched his finger to a tiny dish of holy oil and made the sign of the cross on Mycroft’s forehead, to Greg’s eyes, leaving a trail of blazing golden light in the sign of the cross. “Per virtutem proelia dicam. Haec unio benedicat tibi in tutelam hominis.” (1)

He turned to Greg and said the same words with a kinder and more gentle inflection. Greg didn’t understand them but they still brought tears to his eyes. The oil on his head felt as if he were burning in the other place. He knew it was not a normal blessing and that it was important.
“You have taken your vows, gentlemen, now stand as one before your loved ones. You may offer a kiss to seal your fate together.”

Greg and Mycroft solemnly brought their lips together with great decorum as could be expected of two middle aged British men. They had a lifetime for the privacy of passion and this occasion felt too sacred for them to be overtly crass.

The crowd however came to their feet with cheers.

Eurus and Sherlock played ‘ A Thousand Years’ for the Recessional. It was highly embellished, but still recognisable.

Greg walked on Mycroft’s arm back to his chair. Sally and Anthea followed. He knew their ceremony had bucked almost every tradition in existence, not even a blessing of or exchange of rings, but he was proud of it and proud of himself for making it through it on his feet.

The reception was in the main mess and there would be no formal dinner or overdone wedding cake. They had little chocolate sweets and Petit fours and champagne. Greg wanted no traditional mess requiring months of planning and silly expenses. He just wanted to have his husband and a small acknowledgment of their commitment finally becoming true.

Mrs. Hudson was the only noticeable no show. She and Jim’s Grand had had as lovely of a time as last year and though they had not wrecked a valet cart, they had set the fireworks meant for the wedding celebration tonight off at four am. Daniel was devastated.

Greg assured him that he didn’t mind and that he would consider the Christmas ones his just as well. This mollified Daniel a bit.

Siger stood before him, wings held high to keep people from bumping into them. Greg stood and gave him a hug. “That was perfect. Thank you. Not just for today, but for bringing me home... all of it.”

“I thank God, I am merely his—“
“Hullo, Angel?”

“Ohhh, hello, Rosie. You look very pretty today. Did you have some little cakes?”

Rosie reached up to be picked up and Siger did so.

“You have wings.”

“Yes, sweetheart, but only certain people can see them so we have to pretend. Okay?”

“Can only good people see. Da says I’m naughty. But he can’t see them so he is naughty!” She giggled at her own clever deduction.

“All people are a little naughty sometimes. It is my job to help them not be.” Siger said very seriously.

“There you are. Your Da is looking for you.” Sherlock took Rosie from Siger. She whispered in his ear. “No you cannot pet his wings.”

Siger laughed and Sherlock sent him a scathing look. “Can’t you put those things away around her? Show off.”

“Jealous, little brother. Envy is a sin.”

“So is pride, if I remember.”

Janine and James were seen holding hands, talking to John. Greg sat alone for a moment, taking it all in. This was a good day.

Mycroft came up behind him and whispered, “If we cut out early, we could be naked in ten minutes.”
“Come on. They are here for us. Just a bit longer, My?”

Mycroft blinked several times. “Yes, of course. Anything you like.” Mycroft rubbed his eyes as if he could not get something out of them.

“How have you got a headache?”

“No. But perhaps one is coming on. Slight vision anomalies. It is nothing.”

They returned to their flat and sat on the couch, both too emotionally exhausted to get up to much passion at that moment. Greg brought Mycroft some paracetamol and a glass of water.

Mycroft declined. “I honestly don’t have a headache. Something Rosie keeps telling me, bothers me to no end. I think that awful cannabis we tried last night was laced with something hallucinatory. She keeps saying Siger is an angel and the suggestion combined with whatever was on that...bud. Must be affecting me. Out of the corner of my eye, I kept imagining them, giant wings, attached to him in the most garish renaissance way, like something hanging in the National. I think if you still have a small sample of it, I should have it tested. Who knows what James is capable of in the name of a good time. Do refrain from visiting that...Hookah lounge again. He could be giving us all brain damage, the evil little toad.”

“No. He sources from American medical dispensaries. It is sealed and labelled. What we smoked last night is really expensive. The thing is, that I smoked a bit more this morning as well. I couldn’t have surprised you at the ceremony without it. I didn’t smoke anywhere near as much as you did, but I think there may be something to this medical value thing.”

“I see. Well, I suppose out here it doesn’t matter. A few experiments won’t turn you into a pothead. But, seriously, you cannot imagine that a few inhales of that can do for you what all the research of medical sciences cannot? It was a... coincidence. Nothing more.”

Greg shifted, grabbed his canes and stood up. “You think that just happened? Look at me? You know how much pain I have been in? Look at me now? What do you see?”

Mycroft studied him. “Probably just a placebo effect. You were told it would help and your beliefs simply—“
“Not likely. I just wanted to get high. Like everyone else last night. But within ten minutes I felt...better. Mycroft, it was so unexpected that I didn’t even continue. I just sat and bask in the fact that it had stopped. By the time I was getting ready, I was starting to ache too much to stand again. Sherlock came by and helped me. I know you won’t approve, but it made me feel human again. You’re smarter than anybody. Could I do this two days ago?”

“It made me hallucinate! You cannot continue!”

“No. You are not hallucinating. Neither is Rosie. Because I see them too.”

Mycroft’s eyes widened. “What did you say?”

Greg sighed. “Look. I don’t know where to start. Your brother has wings. You just haven’t been able to see them.”

“Yet you can and accept it? You didn’t think something like that to be worth mentioning? You just admitted that it made you hallucinate as well. Good lord, I need to make phone calls. He has utterly lost his mind and he isn’t going to get away with it this time.”

“Who? Your brother?”

“Of course not. Jim. He brought us all out here and has duped us into... we need blood tests. He has poisoned us all. Don’t you see?”

“No he hasn’t. He has been nothing but kind. And if your brother is a hallucination then I have been doing it since long before last night.”

“What do you mean?”

“I see them all the time. Hell I thought I was imagining them at first too. I couldn’t actually see them, but something told me they were there. Since last year. It was part of why I decided to go back. I knew he was... I can’t really explain. But, when I nearly died. One of those dreams you all thought were so silly and mad. I wouldn’t be here without him. He helped me. That was why he flew to London. He was too far away.”
Mycroft laughed heartily. But the gleam in his eyes was growing anger, not mirth. “You wish me to believe, what? That my brother is some magical entity with feathers who came to you at death and guided you back from the tunnel of light?”

“Yes. But it wasn’t a tunnel. It was a huge sucking door and I wanted to go. I wanted to go more than anything. He stopped me.”

“For God’s sake he is just a priest with fanciful ideas. And you have experienced medical trauma. He is no more any of the things attributed to him than I am.”

Greg smiled. “But that’s just it. You are. For those with eyes who can see? That’s from the bible. My eyes can. So can Rosie. And Daniel. And Sherlock sometimes.”

“Sherlock. Let me guess, when he is high as the Shard?”

“Look. You brought this up. You saw. You don’t have to believe me. I am just telling you that you are not hallucinating or going mad.”

“By telling me the stupidity of this explanation? You need psychiatric help. And Jim needs an institution!”

“Don’t take this out on me... and certainly don’t take it out on Jim for something he didn’t do. I can’t explain it. I don’t have to. But you acting like this, making fun of something that happened to me... would you have preferred that I just... went on? Would you have preferred me to not have bothered? Or him to have not helped me, when he could? “

“You are asking if I preferred you died? Please. You know better than that, don’t be childish.”

Greg sighed. “It is our wedding day. Don’t spoil it? I’ll beg if I have to. Give it some time. Consider. Talk to your brothers before you decide. And, let me show you the difference? Please?”

Mycroft relented. He was still in a snit, but he did not continue the row.
“Okay then. What difference does it make what we believe? Right? As long as we believe in each other?”

Mycroft took a deep breath and calmed himself, closed his eyes and nodded.

“Good. Now, let me just... and then, I am going to shag you...into the headboard.”

Mycroft watched as Greg prepared and lit the little pipe. His disapproval silently rang like ghost bells in the room. Three drags and another small puff and he turned to Mycroft and asked, “Now how about you say some of those pretty sexy words to me now?”
Type 45s are beautiful.

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Type_45_destroyer

(1) By the power of god, I call you to battle. This union I bless to the protection of mankind.

Recessional

https://youtu.be/e4w2p3-S-uU

Mission Impossible on violin

https://youtu.be/EMCLbfG9qqY

Someone ask me what blues and twos meant. It refers to the police lights (the blues) and the two tone siren (the twos). Blues and twos is police slang for responding to an emergency call.

London two tone

https://youtu.be/U5pbZjcDoBo

And yes, police sirens can be mimicked on a violin

https://youtu.be/mK74v4YuLmc
Sorry guys, I honestly know nothing about cannabis. I looked it all up on the internet so if it is off, that is my fault.
I’ve got some presents for Santa

Chapter 51

I’ve got some presents For Santa

He squeezes into my hot chimney
Where it's oh so warm and tight
On the roof, I hear his reindeer
I'm so very glad he came here
It's only once a year but, what a night!

Santa Claus takes a pause from his long night of delivering
His big "North Pole" can sure get cold, his jolly butt's all shivering

I offer Santa my... cookies
He loves to put them into his mouth

https://youtu.be/7o9TaldKpE0
Mycroft had a nap after a dammed good shag. Greg was beyond pleased with himself when his love had simply said, “Wow!” When they were finished.

His leg was still not up to as much as he’d like it to be and no, he didn’t have the thrust he’d had before, but he’d had enough to get them there and being allowed in the British Government’s arse had been the culmination of every wank he’d had for over a year.

Greg was limp and rightfully sore as hell, but he’d given a lovely rogering to his husband on their wedding day and that was worth all the money in the world to him.

In the big picture, it probably didn’t matter to Mycroft that much. He would have always been gentle and understanding of Greg’s inability to do certain things.

But, for Greg, this put them on a balance. He was not going to be a “project” for Mycroft to martyr himself for. No, this meant to Greg that he was not such damaged goods after all. He knew he’d probably always have a bum leg, mostly dead as a door nail from the mid-thigh to his toes and for the rest of his life, he would have to be cautious about every step he took, and how he placed his foot on rugs, doorways, steps and pavement, but that was something he could live with.

He eased out of bed, needing the loo and walked there with his canes. It was that sense of freedom, not having to wake Mycroft for assistance, that made him grin. He went to the fridge, just because he could and ate strawberries. They were gargantuan hothouse things with almost no flavour, but they were fruits he’d gotten under his own power.

He took up the little pipe and had a few puffs, just to steady himself in case there was a round two. He gazed out the window at the darkness. Last year he’d stayed in a cubby hole of a room with no view so he was particularly pleased to see the sea in the warmth of this accommodation.

He had enjoyed the cold last year, walking on the beaches in the prime of his life, but he couldn’t have stayed in the West Cottage this year. A stone path had led to steps down then back up to the kitchen. It would have been an obstacle course and unmanageable. He didn’t even know who was staying there this year. He wondered if all the little rustic cottages were occupied again this year. He still thought it would be a treat to stay in one, using oil lamps and candles. He was not as enthusiastic about the chamber pots or well water bathing, but it would have been a lovely experience in theory. Last year the guests had just made the trudge to the pool showers so it wasn’t like hot water was beyond reach.

“I woke. It scared me that you weren’t there and yet your chair was.” Mycroft said sleepy and sweet.
“Needed the loo, and some strawberries and figured while I was up...” he showed him the pipe. “May have overdid it just a bit.”

There was a smile just touching Mycroft’s lips as he walked to the fridge in just his sleep trousers and tried to reach an itchy spot on his back. “You may have overdid it by a lot, in my opinion. However, it was rather... prodigious.”

“Hope that means it was good,” Greg mumbled.

To the inside of the refrigerator, Mycroft expanded, “A colossal event, extraordinarily, massively important, impressive in—“

“Okay, Okay. Mr Thesaurus.”

“Mmmm. Yes it is, thanks to you. THE sore arse, indeed!” Mycroft stood and brought out a fluffy chocolate pie. “Hello my dear. Sorry to have ignored you thus far,” he said to the pie.

Greg chuckled. “Why yes, husband. Don’t mind if I have a slice. Thank you for offering.”

Mycroft pretended he had no intention of sharing. “This pie says it belongs to the British Government. That’s me. It’s mine.”

“Worldly goods, half belongs to me now.”

Mycroft narrowed his eyes. “I knew you married me for my pie.”

“Sorry. You found me out. You almost had it. You said Spy kink, but it was actually pie.”

Mycroft sat down on the sofa, two generous portions of pie on the coffee table. The kettle clicked and he went back to make the tea.
Greg left the window and sat down but waited for Mycroft to make the tea. There was a remote on the side table and he pushed some buttons, not really knowing what he was doing. Nothing happened on the telly, but soft music filled the room. So he left it on and when Mycroft returned they ate pie. Greg dribbled some on his bare chest and Mycroft bent and licked it off.

Greg looked at Mycroft then at his pie.

Greg purposely dribbled the next bite and again Mycroft used his tongue to clean it. Greg sat for a minute and looked over at his husband. Waiting. Then he stuck his finger in the pie and smeared it on his own nipple and grinned rakishly.

Mycroft smirked and leaned over again, sucking the sweet concoction off, making Greg’s nipples perk up and take notice.

His finger returned to the pie and this time he carefully stacked the whipping cream on Mycroft’s right nipple. He looked at him with a playful grin. “You seem to have made a mess?”

Mycroft looked down at his chest in feigned surprise. “Indeed. Pity, I can’t reach it.”

“These let me be of assistance.” Greg took his time and licked the chest clean.

He added more when he was nearly finished then decided what the hell, and took a handful and slapped it all over Mycroft’s chest. Mycroft looked down at his chest. He picked up his plate and dumped it over Greg’s head then smeared it all over his face and chest then kissed him.

They laughed and kept smearing and licking until they were both hard. They shimmied out of their sleep pants and Mycroft took the last of the pie on Greg’s plate and added it to Greg’s cock before ministering to the removal of the chocolate cream. Greg loved what he was doing, but wanted in on the fun. He removed some of the whipping cream and chocolate from his chest and reciprocated the endeavour.

They made a thorough mess of themselves, and everything smelled of chocolate and was covered in streaks of mahogany and white. Mycroft covered Greg and took them both in hand, the smooth but slightly sticky concoction served as both lube and had a slight tactile drag whilst bits of the ginger biscuit crust gave an element of texture that felt wonderful in the moment. It seemed over in seconds once Mycroft began speaking.
“You are far more delicious than whipping cream, and I love making a mess of you. I will never eat pie again without this memory intruding upon the flavour. You are edible and I should insist that you always serve sweets in this fashion. Time to add the final topping. Let me see you, my kinky pie. Top this confection with your pleasure. Show me how good this feels.”

Greg could not hold out any longer and his eyes rolled up as warmth spread between them and he breathed blasphemy and called out his rapture. Mycroft exhaled as his thrusts took on frantic rhythm and he followed.

They paused for a moment then Greg began to giggle. “You are a mad man. We probably have just ruined this expensive furniture and now we have to shower again!”

“You started it. Now you must suffer the consequences,” Mycroft retorted.

Greg laughed louder and declared, “I don’t really care. It was worth it. You like sploshing! Hottest thing in the world. Come on, though. We need to have a wash before it dries on and then we need to see to this poor sofa.”

“I think you could say, we already have. Seen to it. At least to its breaking in. Tell me, how do you feel about marmalade?” Mycroft inquired as they headed to the shower.

They sat on the newly cleaned sofa. Greg picked up his little pipe. “I know you don’t approve.”

Mycroft looked over at him. “You have only taken two pain pills today. Down from six to eight and yet you have improved in a matter of hours. I am... gathering data.”

Greg nodded and offered the pipe to Mycroft. “Just a tiny bit. You had way too much the other night.”

Mycroft sighed and glared at the pipe then without commenting he gingerly took it between his fingers. He puffed the smoke out with a few anticlimactic coughs. Made a small face and tried again.

“I was shocked that the least affected seemed to have been, John. He grew quiet and pensive rather
than stupid. Even my brother was somewhat...giggly.” Mycroft said.

“John isn’t as squeaky clean as he pretends. I remember a time when he first moved in that he and Mrs. Hudson spent an awful lot of time watching crap telly in her flat. Also, it isn’t spoken of, but he was in Afghanistan and it is one of the places that is famous for the genetics of some varieties. He didn’t put up much of a fight. I think he had more experience than he lets on.”

Mycroft hit the pipe again.

“That’s enough. Let it settle and see how you feel.”

Mycroft handed over the pipe. “Surely if this were hallucinatory, Doctor Watson would be livid?”

“Are you seeing things?”

Mycroft took measure of himself. “Not that I am aware. I feel nothing, other than, perhaps relaxed. But that was true after the pie.”

“The pie was relaxing.” Greg said deadpan then snickered.

Christmas Eve morning dawned with pink and peach grace and calm seas in their picture window. John Watson was cooking for the lot of the Baker Street bundle. Somehow this included Daniel. Everyone watched him, but he managed not to set anything on fire. He had mostly forgiven Mrs. Hudson and graciously offered to let her ‘help’ with the fireworks.

Donovan gave them a hard time about keeping her up all night, which probably was not true, but she delighted in the teasing.

John sat a heaping plate of black pudding in front of Anthea. She gave a tiny squeak of delight and nicked one off the plate immediately. She groaned in pleasure and grabbed another. John smirked as he wiped his hand on a dishcloth, obviously pleased with her response.

Mycroft smiled as he crossed the room to open the door because it pleased him to no end that John had thought of her. James and Janine were at the door looking bashful and yet glowing with secrets and endorphins.
Mycroft whispered to Greg that John was very pleased for his friend but had just a touch of jealousy behind his military themed teasing. Once it was pointed out, it was really hard to miss. It was as if John were the superior and James the one seeking his former commander’s approval. Greg contemplated the dynamics of John Watson, who could gain such loyalty despite his overall directing and often negative personality. He was sure Mycroft would enjoy discussion of body language later. Greg could read it well enough, but Mycroft was an artesian of the craft.

Molly and Harry were late because Harry was furious about something and only settled down after she deposited him in his fathers lap. She gave him a glare stating he was on duty in no uncertain terms. He sat his plate aside and spoke to his son as if he were any adult, and Harry worried his fists, but his attention was riveted to Sherlock, which meant Rosie was in his lap within minutes.

Greg watched him with a smile and whispered to Mycroft, “Who knew your brother would be the baby whisperer?”

“One prediction I would never have made. Indeed.” Mycroft raised his voice so Sherlock could hear, “Don’t forget we have our practice this afternoon? Mummy has mentioned she is looking forward to our playing for her again.”

“I wrote a good deal of it. I imagine I can struggle through.” Sherlock returned.

“You have, I assume, purchased something appropriate for her? If not we can add your name to the card as usual?”

“John got her some tatty statue of a Cock. Reminds me of you. I had a brass plaque attached, giving it that extra special personal touch. Satisfied? Not the one who couldn’t be arsed to buy his husband a single trinket last year.”

Mycroft rolled his eyes and sighed. He went to get seconds, mumbling about counting the joyful hours.

They endured the day, having a gift giving afternoon with the Moriarty family at the main house prior to the evening event.

John and Sherlock’s gift turned out to not be a tatty statue of a chicken but a lovely bronze depiction of a much younger Mr. and Mrs. Holmes sitting on a sofa reading to four engrossed children. It was
a three dimensional re-enactment of a long ago photo. A little boy of maybe a year sat on Mrs. Holmes lap and a pretty toddler on the lap of Mr. Holmes, looking up at her oldest brother with a shy grin. His arm is carelessly slung around his father and he sits on his knees, not yet the towering man he would become and not yet endowed with any priestly grace. A plump boy sits to the side of Mrs. Holmes pointing toward the book as if explaining something or asking a question, his head though is lazily comfortable on his Mummy’s shoulder and his lips are buried in the curls of the youngest who wears a scowl as he looks directly at the person who took the photo.

Mrs Holmes didn’t say much, just an offhand, “how very lovely.” But she sat the five stone statue on her lap for more than twenty minutes shifting it this way and that to see it from various slightly different angles and touching the tiny faces with wonder and appreciation.

Even Mycroft was speechless.

Jim, who had seemed rather less jovial and more subdued this year handed Mycroft and Lestrade each a neatly wrapped but not ostentatious gift. They each opened their package to find ten files each. Mycroft read the first name, Sarah Panitzke, and frowned.

“Not the top ten most wanted, but the top ten, most dangerous, to me. Win-win. Career boosters for you lot, and protection for my family. Shane O’Brien, can be for either of you. I have provided their locations. People they trust... merry Christmas.”

“I didn’t buy you anything, but—“ Mycroft stomped on Greg’s foot.


Mycroft jumped in, “Well, despite your motive, if this information pans out, it would almost make up for my missing helicopter last year?”

Jim laughed and shrugged. “Holds grudges doesn’t he?”

Greg shook his head, “You have no idea!”

“Oh yes. He does,” Mycroft returned with cool ease and a secretive little smile, as he studied a file with great interest. “Mmm... not in ...Taghi is not in Morocco then?”
“Not for years.”

Eurus sat down next to her brother. “Maybe we should have just bought you a tie? I thought this would be less boring.”

“I am in such pure awe that we have forgotten our manners. My and I very much appreciate this thoughtful gift. You both have made this the most wonderful holiday of my whole life.” Greg tried to convey how much he meant that.

Mycroft added, never looking up from another file he was scanning, “All true, but he shall still arrest you if you blow up, poison or brainwash all or any part of London, dear sister.” It was said with no actual malice and only a halfhearted warning.

“I really, really wouldn’t.” Greg said kindly?

“You what?” Mycroft demanded.

“I’m related to her? Conflict of interest? I can’t be acting like a thirsty DI any more? Got to follow the rules now days.”

Mycroft relaxed, “Detective Superintendent has gone to your head.”

The festivities were jolly and the food superb. Everyone dressed in their Christmas finery and the time came for the gifting of the children right after Jim read his traditional Holiday tale, ‘The Hungry Donkey.’

Then the sound of sleigh bells sounded and Father Christmas stepped onto the stage with three of his reindeer. This Father Christmas was very different from the one last year. In the first place he was dressed in Royal blue and white robes as a Russian Father Frost. Jim tilted his head when he was handed the first gift without a word.

He blushed and made a joke, “Sorry children, he seems to be making disparaging reference to my not being much taller than most of you are. He gave me.. “ Jim frowns and shakes his head, “I’m the present, love everybody? I don’t..” Then he looked hard at Father Christmas and asked, voice going a little hoarse, “Sebby?”
Sebastian Moran threw his hood back and laughed like a drunken pirate. “Jamie, Yea wee bastard, Did you Miss Me?”

The rest of the evening was a bit chaotic as the master of ceremony was more manic than normal. But, there was gifting and a concert and a lovely Midnight Mass and fireworks after that before the misfit children of St. James isle found their snug beds and sugar plums.

Mycroft entered the bedroom and set a large box on the bed. “I am afraid that John Watson and I have conspired on this. You may not approve, however it was difficult to say no.”

As Greg pulled the box toward him it flopped as if something rolled inside. It was lighter than he expected but when he opened it a distinctive puppy smell wafted out. The maker of that smell yapped cheerfully.

“Royal Welsh Corgi, bloodline impeccable, and a direct descendant of one of the queens own, before she stopped breeding them. This is a great great granddaughter of One of the several Willows and her owner had hoped she would be of Westminster standards.”

“Wow. She is really cute but she doesn’t look like any Corgis I have ever seen.” Greg lifted the pup away from the soiled box and the puppy wiggled and squirmed its dark wrinkly snout to his face for a friendly lick. “Awwww. She likes me?”

“Yes, well it seems that when the puppies were born, the expected sire had been supplanted by an usurper. The royal line had been corrupted by an unregistered pug.”

“Oh?”

“Yes it seems many born to shall we say genetic snobbery appear to find a...bit of rough to suit them better. They were to be ,of course, destroyed. I talked Lady Elizabeth Smallwood into a stay of execution.”

“The Ice Man? Rescued a litter of puppies? Best Christmas ever, that. Just so you know?”
“Yes, well, I don’t believe the pug will be celebrating. This will be the end of his procreational mishaps.”

Greg snickered and ask the puppy, “Your Da is in a lot of trouble. What are we going to name you, little Missy? Are you going to be trouble as well?”

“Sherlock will be receiving her brother just about now. John has assured me he won’t allow him to experiment on it. Molly is giving Harry the other male and the other two females will join Eurus’s ever growing menagerie.”

“You, Mr. Holmes, are a softie!”

“If you say that in front of anyone, I shall have you tortured.”

“Anya Amasova?” Greg asked as if he had already decided.

“Where did you come up with that? Bit long?”

“Never you mind. Come here Anya? Do you like that? My little Anya?”

“I thought you might go with something more holiday oriented?” Mycroft presses.

“Nope. You’ll like it... once you figure it out. She’s wonderful. Really. Perfect.”

“John thought she would be therapeutic for you.”

“Yeah? Maybe, but don’t spoil it with logic. She is cute and cuddly and you saved a whole litter just to bring her to me? How did you pick her out?”

“She was the smartest,” Mycroft said with a shrug.
“Like you?”

“And the bravest. Like you,” Mycroft added gently, patting her head and touching the velvet of her floppy ears.

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Do you know where Greg got the name Anya? Post in comments if you know?

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Real wanted people... why make them up when they exist.

Sarah Panitzke
Wanted by HMRC for conspiracy to acquire criminal property. Panitzke was a senior member of a crime group involved in a VAT fraud. She controlled the company accounts of many companies remotely via different IP addresses. Panitzke travelled extensively to further the fraud to places including Dubai, Spain and Andorra. She was responsible for laundering approximately £1 billion pounds. Panitzke absconded in May 2013 prior to the end of the trial and was convicted in her absence. She was sentenced to eight years on August 22 2013. Eighteen members of the crime group received sentences totalling 135 years. She is described as 170cm tall, slim build with mousey straight hair, blue eyes and has a Yorkshire accent.

Shane O’Brien, the suspected killer of 21-year-old Josh Hanson, who was stabbed to death in a bar in Hillingdon, west London, in 2015, was arrested in Cluj-Napoca last month.

Ridouan Taghi, who is suspected of being involved – as the commissioning party – in several murders. A reward of 100,000 euro has been offered for the tip that leads to his arrest.
Chapter 52

Puppies are forever

Puppies are forever, not just for Christmas

‘Cause they’re so cute and fluffy with shiny coats
But will you love ’em when they’re old and slow?

[link](https://youtu.be/dZ0LgZ_yWv4)

Christmas Day was Making the rounds between various locations. Mycroft and Greg spent a good deal of the morning watching Harry and Rosie open gifts. The adults taking an unseemly number of photos and videos of the two smallest humans in the room, was giving Sherlock a headache.

The three puppies were a hazard, delighting in being reunited after their adventures. They were also rather happy to wear bows and drag bits of paper about. They were the subject of additional data storage issues on some phones.

Sherlock, John and Rosie showed up in the early afternoon to drop off little Gladstone for a puppy play date during dinner. They were to be corralled in the large handicap accessible toilet to prevent any accidents because Sherlock and John’s accommodations had carpeting everywhere, but not Mycroft and Greg’s.

Sherlock flopped on the sofa with exhaustion then shot up with a disgusted and slightly teenage, “Eeeewww? Really? Mycroft! At least warn people. John, keep Rosie away from the furniture. At least all the cushioned bits. It is all probably tainted!”
John held the two puppies in his arms and smirked. “Radioactive or just puppy pooh?”

“Worse. Trust me, you don’t want to know... and stay away from the pie! At least the chocolate one, from the odor!” Sherlock said furiously brushing off his suit, whether it be of dog hair or imaginary contamination was unclear.

Greg was blushing as Sherlock narrowed his eyes at him. “Anya? Why Anya? Who she?”

Mycroft, happy to change the subject, volunteered, “He won’t tell me. It is Russian, but I checked our data base against several aliases and found no Anya Amasova there in. I even reviewed his school records. I cannot find the connection.”

John burst out with a snort. “It’s Bond!”

“I don’t understand?” Mycroft admitted with a frown.

John looked at Greg as he blinked. “They really are idiots.”

“I told him you’d get it. Go on then John, take our super-spies through it? Otherwise he’s just going to keep digging through HOLMES2 and half the KGB flies until it becomes an international incident.”

“Major Amasova? Triple X?” John expanded.

He was met with two blank stares and one delighted grin. John sighed. “In ‘The Spy Who Loved Me’ she was the one who James Bond fell in love with. They started out wanting to kill each other, of course, and were competitive but they also respected each other as their counterpart and equal. Just as smart as him and lived for the work!”

“Ohhh. Like the fake spy’s Irene?” Sherlock added helpfully.

John glared. “I hope not. No, Sherlock. So they fell in love and she was one of the first female
characters who were more than just... seductive arm candy. That’s actually very witty, Greg! You named your pup from—“

“The Spy Who Loved me enough to save all the puppies... yes!” Greg gave a superior but shy peep toward his husband, who blushed but seemed slightly out of his depth.


“Oh really? And why, pray tell, did you name your canine after a nineteenth century prime minister?” Mycroft asked with raised brows.

“I didn’t. Who? I named him after the bags Doctors used to carry. John has one and he gave me the puppy!”

“Oh. So that droll sentiment thing? Named after John’s baggage?” Greg asked almost in tears of laughter.

Mycroft sighed and rolled his eyes as he spoke, “The Gladstone bag was designed and manufactured in the middle of 19th century by J. G. Beard, a purveyor of luggage. He named the bag “Gladstone” after William Gladstone, the British Prime Minister, whom he and everyone else greatly admired. Gladstone was known for his constant travels even into his later years. The bag bearing his name was designed to hold important diplomatic documents whilst travelling. But its sturdy shape proved to be just what the doctor ordered and soon enough they were globally known as doctor bags, little brother.”

“Awe, That is kinda sweet. A diplomat thing turned into a doctor thing. That might be even more sentimental than my thing because it was Mycroft who Got the puppies out of... “

“Well, If He were Ugly I would have been sentimental and named him Mycroft, but John made me promise not to kick him so that just didn’t work for me!” Sherlock said with venom.

Just about then Rosie kicked Sherlock hard in the ankle and declared, “No kicking!”

“Rosamund Mary!” John said in his scary daddy voice.
She glared at him defiantly. “Don’t kick My-Nono!”

Mycroft chuckled in amazement. “That’s my girl. Hopefully you can teach Otter some manners?”

Rosie smiled, somehow knowing that if My-Nono approved, then she wasn’t really in trouble.

Sherlock raised his chin, offended by the betrayal, “Don’t let him corrupt you, little Bee. He’ll have you on the roles of MI6 by the time you are three.”

Mycroft looked abashed and snootily corrected, “She can’t even be tested until she is five!”

John intervened, “That better not be a real thing, Mycroft. You will not recruit my daughter into your world of .. spooks ...and pawns. Do you hear me? She is going to be a normal kid in a normal school with normal—“


“Define normal, John?” Sherlock said with deadly offence blazing on his face.

John pointed his fingers at Sherlock, “You know what I mean, Sherlock! No posh schools off being raised by strangers and no weird psychological evaluations in your brother’s files! I don’t want her to be part of this family business!”

“Isn’t that up to her, Doctor Watson?” Mycroft poked, just to watch the storm.

John set the two pups on the floor and was about to unleash his Captain Watson the smiling Psychopath when the doorbell sounded and forced it to fizzle.

Greg jumped in, “That will be Molly. You two have the next twenty years to plan Rosie’s future and watch her cycle through astronaut to accountant. Who knows, she may take after me and Join the Met. Can we give it a rest? It’s Christmas?”

“I hate Christmas!” Both Sherlock and Mycroft said at the same time. Even John had to chuckle at
“I like Christmas. But I am good,” Rosie declared before returning to her “spooook, spook, spooook” chant and jumping up and down on the tainted sofa.

Dinner was served and strangely Greg was not only at the big grown up’s table this year, but he was afforded a seat at the left of his hostess and across from Siger. Mycroft sat next to him on his left.

It was an opulent difference from the first time he’d seen this ancient and slightly warped wooden table when it was loaded with heavy rucksacks readied for a hopeless mission to save his now husband from being executed. It had been bare and stark back then. Now it was festooned with Christmas linens and pretty china and transformed with candles, fairy lights and drapes of sweet smelling conifer boughs.

Last year he’d been in the dog house and seated at the children’s table and glad of the respite. Last year, his body had been whole, but he wouldn’t trade it because this year his soul was. He looked up the long table and felt at home among this mad bunch of nutters and knew that this was the family he’d dreamed of most of his life. His own people were a bit scattered and everyone was busy with their own families. He had no idea how they would take to him being married to a man and what they thought really didn’t much matter because the man beside him eclipsed all of those occasional phone calls and empty promises to get together soon.

They had sent cards and flowers when he was injured and they would have made the effort to be at his funeral, but they had not made much of an effort to be in his life. Especially since the divorce. But it wasn’t just them. He came from a family of workaholics who prided themselves on always going above and beyond.

Siger gave a short blessing and as always Eurus insisted on toasts. James indulged her and she clapped after each, especially if someone mentioned her and the baby. She was a year older than Sherlock and that meant mid forties. Bit late for a first child, but She radiated happiness and it was contagious.

Greg took his turn and stood, though a bit stiffly. “This time of year has been practically a non-event most years of my life. My Dad drove a lorry then was a policeman and some years he couldn’t make it home. As a copper, well, some of you lot always seemed to drag me away for a shout. I have spent more years at crime scenes than near Christmas dinners. This time next year I am going to be a Godfather to a brilliant little boy, and I have to say, I hope I can be half as good to him as I see my Brother-in-law is to Rosie. Eurus and James, thank you for that honour and for allowing me to be part of this family. And to my wonderful husband, I thank him for sticking by me through the sickness bit. Hope that is over with for a while. So those of you who helped to bring about this absurd dream come true for me, and you all know who you are, I just have to say, thanks, thanks so
very much.” Greg took his seat and Eurus clapped enthusiastically while the others followed more politely. Everyone took sips of their wine.

Dishes were passed and roast beast was devoured. Crackers were pulled and people read the jokes and wore the silly paper crowns. By the time pudding was served Everyone had had a bit too much wine and Greg felt content and a bit sleepy.

He and Mycroft retuned to their quiet flat, the puppies were walked and finally Christmas was over. Greg went to bed early. Mycroft worked on his spy computer typing furiously to God only knew who, while he waited for John and Sherlock to retrieve Gladstone and Molly to retrieve ‘Scout’ which was her name selection.

“I am sorry that I am so worn out tonight. You sure you don’t mind that I am off to Bedfordshire?”

“Not at all. I have a few minor matters to occupy myself with until the piddle-pots are retrieved. Go on. You need the rest.”

Greg grinned and teased, “You aren’t really putting Rosie on any sort of list are you?”

Mycroft looked incredibly innocent, “Certainly not.” He added a mumbled, “She’s already there. I am working on Harry now.”

Greg decided to take that as a joke. He would have to bring it up again when his wits were in better shape. “So much for the long life thing. Sherlock’s gonna kill you.”

“Mmmmm... has to catch me first.”

He hardly moved as Mycroft finally joined him in the bed, but mumbled a soft, “Happy Christmas, love you.”

Anya was gently placed in his arms, asleep, and he could smell her little puppy breath, which made him smile. He felt the warmth of his husband settle beside him and he dreamed of nothing because it had already come true and it was all here.
Don’t give puppies for Christmas. They are not good gifts unless you plan to help with their care. Mycroft was saving unwanted puppies and in this story they each found homes that they would be wanted and cared for forever! That is so often not the case. Puppies become doggies and they chew your furniture and poop on everything! They deserve to be a member of the family and not a photo op with your toddler to be discarded once the new wears off. Please cuddle responsibly!

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anya_Amasova

Well guys, we have one more little epilogue type chapter...

I thank you all for your kind comments and delightful conversations. I appreciate you all so very much.
Greg has come to realise that Jim Moriarty and his door prizes were not as random as he’d been led to believe. He could not debate that his car was not appreciated more than he could explain. It had a special seat on the drivers side that with the push of a button swivelled and lifted.

It was not ostentatious, simply an XF sportsbreak estate, but it was a shiny, vibrant Caesium Blue, and the first completely new car Greg had ever owned. It looked like a family car but still drove like a beast.

This additional seat feature (labeled ejection seat on the panel) was not always necessary by any means, but there were days in which he could not have managed without it. His leg did well for
many hours a day, but by the end it did fatigue. There had been long days in which he would not have been capable of getting out of the car if he’d had his old Vauxhall.

Mycroft had not raised any objections to his second essay contest win. He had greeted it with a rather resigned approval.

Mycroft has been quite happy that his own door prize was a simple tasteful fragmented marble statue of a Greek athlete squatted into position to throw a lance. It was based on the Discobolus Lancellotti, which was similar to the Discobolus Of Myron which was famous.

Greg knew nothing about statues, but it was a big house and if a headless naked guy pleased Mycroft then he would not complain. It was to be delivered at some point and Mycroft had made room for it in the entrance way, awaiting its arrival. He had even splashed out on special lighting to be installed to highlight it museum style.

He pulled his Jaguar saloon up to the kerb and was about to make the turn into his house when he happened to glance to his right and realised that situated just above the privacy wall was an obscenely naked and enormous white arse. His jaw fell open as he sat looking up in unnaked shock.

“Oh... that can’t be good,” Greg said slowly cornering his car into the gate and keeping his eyes on the enormous moonscape and the neighbours who had come out of their houses and begun gathering like disgruntled villagers.

From the street it looked absolutely like a giant was mooning everyone driving by from that angle, and well, it was obviously going to be some kind of row. It would be Greg’s fault for insisting they associate with Jim and Eurus. It would be a scandal. Oh God, what if it were in the papers?

Mycroft stood in the drive, eyes fixed up at the statue, smoking a cigarette. Greg couldn’t quite read how his husband was feeling, but prepared for the worst and was thankful he had not had to be the one who explained this cock up.

He pulled up and tentatively said, “So, I see your Christmas gift arrived?”

“Yes. It appears to have done so.” Mycroft took another deep drag and just stood calmly gazing at the colossus gracing his drive.
“Bit larger than expected?” Greg held his breath waiting for the fury.

“It didn’t appear quite that size in the accompanying brochure, no.”

Greg looked back at it. It actually didn’t look bad from this angle. It looked sort of Stately and fit in the landscape as if it belonged there. “How did they get it here?”

“A lorry, with escort and a crane. All the permits were in order. It will cost approximately twenty thousand pounds to have it removed.”

“Oh... God. I am so sorry. I won’t be mad about the cigarette?” Greg tried to be supportively chagrined, but as he stepped out of the car, he knew he was going to photograph it for Sherlock and the generous dick who sent it.

Mycroft held out his pack and the lighter. “Did you know that tobacco enhances the effects of cannabis?”

Greg reached for the temptation as he reached his conclusions that his husband had been at his stash and was wholly baked. “You are high!”

“Oh yes. That I am. I felt it to be a lifesaving measure. But, the more I consider it, the more I am growing... accustomed to the ... gesture.” Mycroft handed Greg a note.

(Good show, Iceman. I had this made special. Take a wild guess? Tell them all to kiss your arse! Love Jim.)

“What’s this mean?”

Mycroft smoked and smiled. “It is classified. Suffice it to say that it means, I am not quite as inclined to hate it as much as I should.”

Greg lit up, then tilted his head a bit. “I don’t know much about art. But it looks pretty artsy to me. Be easy for people to find our house if we host a party! Or need emergency services.”
“Yes. The house of the gargantuas arse? Sherlock will have such fun with his little puns and inspirational insults. It would be a pity to deny my little brother such unbridled joy.”

“You have always been a good big brother.”

“Technically I am the big brother king,” Mycroft mildly returned with a wry curl to his lips.

“I didn’t remember his willy being so... generous, in the brochure either. Seems a bit larger than I remembered?”

“Well, it seems Dear Jim sent inspiration to the artists. It is solid marble. Hand carved in Italy, in fact. At a staggering cost, I might add. Don’t you recognise it? Or the backside?” Mycroft widened his eyes and bit his lips firmly between his teeth. His face was growing red in mirth as he tried to hide his laughter.

Greg paused and looked more closely. “Oh God no... How in the hell would he know?”

Mycroft reached in his pocket and extracted his phone. “The artists made sketches from these.” Greg looked down and saw himself splayed out for the world, head on Sherlock’s stomach and green streaks of lime jelly with sparkles.

“That bastard!” Greg shouted now furious with embarrassment! “Why would he do that? Oh my God! We have to get rid of it! Now!”

Mycroft finally broke and his laughter stopped Greg’s anger in its tracks. He always swore he’d put smile lines on this man’s face and he couldn’t be upset when he heard the sound of Mycroft laughing so hard he was gasping for air.

“Very funny, Haha,” he said, but the venom was smouldering into resignation.

“I...know! Please let me keep it? I actually adore it. You always did have such a lovely arse.”
Greg sighed. “I guess it doesn’t matter. Nobody will even know, right? I mean Sherlock may suspect, but—“

“Sherlock is already on his way over. Who do you think pointed out the obvious to me?”

“That’s unfortunate,” Greg said with a sigh. He pulled out his own phone and searched Google. “Have you seen this?”

There on the front of an online tabloid was a photo of the statue from the street view and a comparison photo side by side of Greg’s backside in his leathers from when he was riding O2 to crime scenes.

“Dishy Detective Superintendent has a fan? I am going to kill everyone. The whole lot of you! I mean it!”

Mycroft put his arms around Greg, “Why? You can’t say it isn’t true?” He let his hand slide low and gave a possessive squeeze.

A cab pulled up and out popped Sherlock, John and Rosie. Sherlock was hysterical and could barely walk for laughter and John was only in slightly better condition. Another car rolled slowly past, backed up and pulled in. Greg groaned as Sally, her bagman and two constables got out with huge grins and snickers.

“Hey Guv? How’s your day been?” Sally called out innocently. Sally had won an essay contest as well, and it was reflected in her very conservative and classy, bespoke DI wardrobe. She looked like she should be the lead in a BBC series, not working real life crime scenes.

He started chuckling and shaking his head.

Greg had been to four crime scenes, handled at least forty calls, had lunch with the newest Mayor, and come home to his husband giggling. Maybe he was the butt of the joke, but even he could see how funny the situation was. He could have never seen this day. He dipped his head and sent his warmest vibes to a man with wings who had worked very hard to make sure he didn’t miss this one.

“My day has been Jolly good, Sally-O. Damned fine job you and your team did on the Macinson
case. You always make me proud. So, go on, enjoy the view, got beer in the fridge once you all get your fill of admiring my booty! Take your time!” Greg called out cheerfully.

Greg dug through the freezer and took out a lot of meat to thaw and fired up the pellet grill. It was Friday, and he knew more people would show up as the word got out. But, he also knew that no matter how deep the crap, that light at the end of the tunnel was real and it had not got him today. So, until it did, when people made time for him, he’d turn it into a party one way or another.

Just to be an arse, he changed out of his suit and put on a Lycra workout ensemble. Let them look. It’s all good.

A security camera followed his path across the kitchen. Greg heard the little motors whirling and the focus adjusting. Nope. Not creepy at all. He went out to the back garden and put the still frozen steaks on the grill.

And... roll credits
My hope that there will be a newest Mayor soon is pure speculation and does not reference real world events... yet.

As always this work is meant as a writing exercise and all characters of the show, belong to the show and I receive no monitory reward for it. It is published to exchange critique amongst writers and no copyright or trademark infringement is intended.

Thank you all so much for participating in and reading and lurking through this story. For those of you who comment Often... you keep me going! I had a wonderful adventure with this and I hope all the angst was worth the pay off.

I love Greg. There will be more in this world at some point. I deliberately left the James and Janine out so we could have a bit of a romp with them. (Really hard for us to see them in Greg’s perspective). Thank you all again and again. Comments and kudos are not demanded, but are very, very welcome!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!