In Absentia

by SeaweedWrites

Summary

Sherlock sends John a mysterious text.

*We need to talk. 7PM, Baker Street. SH*

While John waits for Sherlock to come back to 221B to explain, Sherlock is involved in a terrible car crash, and everyone's lives are irrecoverably changed. Will Sherlock survive?

And the bigger question for John- If he does survive, will he ever be the same?
This story is based on a prompt I found online that I changed slightly: Character B asks Character A over to talk. A agrees and B gets into an accident on their way over and ends up in a coma.

I've tried to do as much research as I could. With a MASSIVE amount of help, I've attempted to make this as realistic as possible, but I did have to take some artistic liberties for the sake of the story. I'm NOT a doctor. Not even remotely.

A few warnings and information:

There's a bunch of medical jargon being thrown around, so if there are terms that I thought needed defining, I put descriptions at the end of the chapter. I've also given links to information where possible. Be warned that some websites may contain pictures of medical procedures, so please click the links at your own risk if you are squeamish.

Also, in Chapter 23, there is one very minor VERY VAGUE reference to possible child abuse. Just a forewarning if that's an issue for you. It's at the very end of the chapter, so that part of it can be easily skipped.

And finally, in Chapter 34, towards the end, it deals with suicidal thoughts, and describes the moments in some detail, so skip the last part of that chapter if this is something that you'd rather not read.

This story would not be possible without the assistance of my betas. First- my comma wrangler, my “that” reducer, Hoosiergirl81. (I realize the irony of how many commas there are in the last sentence. Sorry. She didn't beta this part!) I can never thank her enough. I'm also lucky enough to have the amazing J_Baillier- the expert on everything doctory- to be my medical beta. She's the reason there are so many cool medical details in the story. Between the two of them, they've made this fic SO much better than it ever would've been otherwise. My eternal thanks to you both. You guys' skills humble me.

A quick extra note. I realized as I was posting the first chapter I had no chapter names. So I decided to name each chapter after a song I like that has some relevance to the story. So you will find a title and a YouTube link to each song at the beginning of each chapter. I have an eclectic taste in music, so the songs might be all over the map.

A million apologies to SinceWhenDoYouCallMeJohn for subconsciously stealing the idea from her awesome fic "Gimme Shelter". Seriously. Go read it. NOW.

Enjoy!
See the end of the work for more notes.
In which the world crashes down around John Watson, and Mycroft Holmes tries to be the voice of reason.

“We need to talk...”

Those words settled in John's brain like a lead weight, slowly burrowing through his body, to his very core, where they clung like a burr to his soul.

What had Sherlock wanted to talk about? Would he ever know?

Sadly, John's eyes roamed down to the bed. What lay there was hardly recognizable as human. Between casts and bandages, machines to help him breathe, monitoring wires to make sure there were no changes in his vital signs, tubes in his nose and throat, cannulas jutting out of his arms and the intersection of his neck and shoulder- his veins still scarred and marked from past abuse, swollen eyes and bruised alabaster skin made it almost impossible to recognize who lay in that bed.

But John Watson knew.
“Sherlock.” He whispered, his voice raspy. “What did you need to tell me?”

John's whole body ached. Sherlock's hands were crushed and bandaged- he couldn't even hold his friend's hand to reassure him, to ground him, to remind him he was here. Sherlock had so many broken bones it would've been easier for the team of doctors to list what wasn't shattered or punctured.

Sherlock had been brought in as a major trauma case. The team hadn't even finished cataloging his injuries until after emergency surgery was undertaken to control the most immediate threats to his life. They knew John was a doctor, so the Trauma Team leader didn't sugar coat his words when he talked to him, explaining that it'd be a miracle if he survived, and that it was no small marvel he was even still here. His heart had stopped twice on the operating table, and once in the intensive treatment bed.

Not everything could be fixed with the first operation- Sherlock was far too unstable for that. His abdomen had been packed to curb further bleeding, and a more detailed operation was done 24 hours later to survey the damage. John knew it was blind optimism to say that he was permanently stabilized now. Any number of things could still happen to rock the proverbial boat and plunge the situation into disaster, which was why the doctors were reluctant to do any further surgeries, assuming no life saving measures were needed. He was still so utterly fragile. He had to either get better, or die broken.

At the scene of the accident, Sherlock had been given a five on the Glasgow Coma Scale. The scale was used by doctors to determine a patient's level of consciousness based on how they can communicate, move, obey commands, and react to pain. Normal consciousness was a fifteen. Anything lower than a nine was life threatening and required immediate intubation. With that low of a score still lingering even after breaks in the sedation to test Sherlock's consciousness, John didn't need to be told how grave the situation was.

When the doctors finally left, John sat next to Sherlock and leaned in close. “I've... heard that when you're in a coma, you can sometimes hear when people talk to you.” John's voice was a hoarse, gravelly whisper. He wasn't sure of the last time he'd eaten, drank, or slept. He wasn't even sure how long he'd been in this God forsaken hospital room, or what day it was.

“I... don't know if you can hear me, Sherlock. But you... you just need to get better. You have to wake up. I lost you once. For two years I thought you were dead. And now, I'm watching you slowly slip away. And I'm helpless once again. You need to prove these doctors wrong You always have to be right. You insist on having the last word. Please, for me...” His words trailed off.

He felt ripped open and raw. Every time he looked at the bed and saw that lifeless body so terribly still, John's very essence was slashed, like a wound- exposed, oozing and gaping.
John looked at his phone. It was the 18th. That meant Sherlock had been here six days. Was that all? He was sure it must have been a year or more by now. At the beginning, the doctors doubted he would even last 24 hours. The first time John saw him, he’d had a panic attack, ran to the restroom, and threw up what he’d had for dinner.

After John had returned from Afghanistan, he found that sudden loud noises like a car backfiring, or firecrackers, or shouting could set off panic attacks. He’d become a hermit in his tiny one room flat for a while. Therapy did help—eventually—and he started to slowly poke his head out into the world, like a turtle tentatively emerging from his shell.

On the battlefield, his men were his family. When one went down, it was as if there was a sudden tear in the fabric of the universe.

But when he saw Sherlock, lying in that hospital bed, it was more like a black hole.

There was a lot the doctors didn't have to tell him, John was good at reading between the lines. And besides, if the doctors didn't say it, that meant it wasn't true, right? That's what his brain tried to rationalize him into believing. Deep in his heart he knew this kind of denial would only make things worse in the long run, but right now, it was the only thing keeping him even minimally functioning.

At first, Sherlock had been kept heavily sedated due to the severe contusion that had caused brain swelling and bleeding into the brain tissue. The swelling did go down—so agonizingly slowly—enabling sedation brakes to let Sherlock try to wake up. But the doctors couldn't promise that if he regained consciousness, he'd still be the same.

In spite of everything else, even though he still might not survive, that filled John with the most dread. It haunted his every waking hour. John had been told that the worst damage was to his frontal lobe, which meant there was a risk of both short and long term aftereffects. His Sherlock, that brilliant, brilliant man, that luminous being, might come through all of this and never be able to tie his shoes or even remember his own name.

Fuck.

A gentle knock at the door brought him out of his thoughts. A moment later, Mycroft stepped in. For a man who was always put together pristinely, he looked positively haggard, but John was sure he himself likely looked even worse. Without a word, Mycroft leaned his ever present umbrella by the door. It was wet, John noticed. Had it been raining? He hadn't been away from Sherlock except to
use the loo. The spacious hospital room— which must have been Mycroft’s doing— had a large window, but the curtains were always drawn, keeping the room in eternal darkness.

*How apt.*

Mycroft delicately lowered himself into the chair across from John, on the other side of the bed.

“No change?”

“No.”

“John...”

The air hung heavy between them for a few heartbeats.

“Go home, John. You haven't eaten or slept in six days. I'll stay here until you return, and call you if there are any changes.”

*If he gets worse...*

John wanted to refuse. He wanted to stay here until Sherlock woke up because he just had to wake up because he was Sherlock Bloody Holmes and he was 'known to be indestructible'.

*Wasn't he?*

In his heart, he knew Mycroft was right. John understood the signs of sleep deprivation. His motor skills were poor, he was having trouble focusing his eyes, and he'd caught himself taking micro-naps in the chair.

“I have a car waiting for you downstairs. Get some sleep, a shower, and eat something. When you're ready, text me. I'll have a car at your flat within ten minutes to bring you back.”
He very well could have said no. His brain was *screaming* at him to refuse. Despite his internal objections, John found himself slowly nodding. It seemed to take an hour for him to get up, as if his body was lined with lead. As he stood, his muscles turned to overcooked spaghetti. He was trying to stand, but found himself sinking towards the ground. John grabbed the railing on the side of Sherlock's bed, shaking it slightly. In his haphazard scramble for support, he accidentally snapped off an ECG lead from Sherlock's chest. It caused a wall monitor to beep in alarm, and a nurse appeared a few moments later to investigate the situation.

Mycroft stood and gently put up a hand, palm out.

“I apologize. Doctor Watson stumbled slightly.” The nurse fussed and checked the machines, reattaching the wire. When she was satisfied Sherlock was stable, she turned to John, who was looking rather pale and sallow, still crumpled on the floor.

They helped John pull himself up on wobbly legs and led him to the chair, where the rather pretty blonde nurse with deep green eyes took his pulse and gave him a quick look over.

“Your pulse is 120, and you look about dead on your feet.” She looked to a much older nurse who had just walked in and was straightening Sherlock's sheets. “Gwendolyn, please go get this man a glass of orange juice. You're not diabetic, are you, sir?”

John shook his head slightly. “No, I'm not. Thank you, but that's not necessary. I'm about to head home.” The nurse looked at him, concerned. “In a cab.” He quickly added. “I'll eat something there, thank you.”

The blonde nurse, whose name tag read 'Smith' hesitated for a moment, not really wanting to let him go, but she finally relented. “Alright. If you promise to eat when you get home.”

John managed the tiniest of smiles for her. “I promise.”

Nurse Smith finally shuffled out of the room, and John stood back up to a still unsteady stance.

*Had the room always seemed slightly off its axis?*

“Sorry.” John said sheepishly, embarrassed at the ruckus he'd caused. “I'll just... go now.”
Mycroft tilted his head slightly in acknowledgment. “Rest well, John. I'll be here when you get back, and so will Sherlock.”

‘And so will Sherlock.’

Mycroft must have known he’d needed to hear that.

John nodded. With one last plaintive look at the bed, he turned and left, willing his legs to move before he lost his nerve, turned around and planted himself back in that chair- never to leave again. As he watched the door close behind him, he heard Mycroft’s voice, barely a whisper as he leaned over Sherlock's bed. “Oh, William.. Please wake up. For both of us.”

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Cannula- A thin tube inserted into a vein or body cavity to administer medicine, drain off fluid, or insert a surgical instrument.


Glasgow Coma Scale- A scale used by doctors to determine a person's level of consciousness. There are 3 responses that are tested. Eye opening response is tested on a 1-4 scale. Verbal response is tested on a 1-5 scale. Motor response is tested on a 1-6 scale. The numbers are added, and that is a person's score. A score of 3 is the lowest, meaning the patient is totally unresponsive. Anything under an 8 is considered comatose. 15 is the highest score, which indicates a patient is totally conscious and alert.


Intubation- The placement of a flexible plastic tube into the trachea (windpipe) to maintain an open airway or to serve as a conduit to administer certain drugs.

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/5d/EndotrachealTube_colored.png/400px-EndotrachealTube_colored.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/5d/EndotrachealTube_colored.png/400px-EndotrachealTube_colored.png)
Sedation Breaks-Patients are often kept under sedation to let injuries heal. Doctors often back away from the sedation for a short time every few days to see if the patient can breathe on their own and wants to naturally regain consciousness.

Brain Contusion- A bruising of the brain tissue, often happens in conjunction with traumatic brain injuries.


Frontal Lobe- The two lobes of the brain lying immediately behind the forehead, including areas concerned with behavior, learning, personality, and voluntary movement.

https://www.health.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/image/0037/447787/frontal.gif

ECG lead- Electrocardiograph monitors the electrical activity of the patient's heart. It shows the activity as lines on paper. The spikes and dips are called waves. The leads are the wires that are placed in very specific places on the patient's chest to read those electrical signals.


ECG lead placement- http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/nursing/practice/resources/cardiology/images/ecg_scene.gif
Chapter Summary

In which we get a bit of the back story of the recent history between John and Sherlock, and Sherlock goes missing.

This chapter and the next one will be flashbacks.

*Time*

**Hootie and The Blowfish** - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbXWrmQW-OF](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbXWrmQW-OF)

*We need to talk. 7PM, Baker Street. SH*

That was odd, John thought to himself, as he read the text during his lunch break. He took another bite of his sandwich and read it a second time, then a third. In all the time he'd known Sherlock, he'd never been summoned under the pretense of just needing to talk. It was always 'Come quickly' or 'Come if convenient, if inconvenient, come anyway' or some other such nonsense.

When Sherlock 'fell', after the funeral, John couldn't go back to Baker Street. He found himself a small, single level flat in King's Cross, close to Saint Pancras Hospital, where he worked. This had, when Sherlock 'magically' came back to life, put a bit of a damper on running around with the
detective at all hours of the day and night on cases. They did the best they could, but things were a bit... strained between them.

Sherlock's 'death' had hit John hard. After 2 years he'd come to terms with it, but Sherlock was never far from his mind. He'd tried to move on, have his own life- something he hadn't done since before Afghanistan. He wasn't even sure if he knew how to anymore. It was tough, and little things would remind him of his best friend. But ever so slowly, John carved out a little niche for himself.

And then Sherlock came back.

When John had finally been able to live without Sherlock, he came traipsing back into his life like it was no big deal, as if he could slot himself in like nothing had ever happened.

John had a hard time forgiving Sherlock for what he did. It took weeks before he even spoke with Sherlock again. He'd grieved for his best friend for months. He almost lost his job because he quit coming to work for a time, and when he did, he'd spoken to the patients and staff in short, terse sentences. After Sherlock returned, John knew life couldn't return to the 'normal' it used to be.

When Sherlock finally convinced John to start going out on cases with him, it was awkward- to say the least. They didn't talk any more than they had to, exchanging notes and comments, and when it was over they immediately broke off to head back to their respective flats.

There was a part of John that wanted to move back into Baker Street. He'd hoped that maybe it would ease the... thorniness between them. But he'd signed a year's lease, and was stuck for many months in this rather uncomfortable situation.

John looked at the clock. It was going to be close to get out of the clinic by 6:30. What would be less than a ten minute taxi drive during the day would take three times as long during rush hour. He wolfed down the rest of his sandwich, brushed the crumbs off of his jacket, and headed back to his office, already ready for the day to be over.

John was sure the clock was moving backwards. It took ages for 6:00 to finally roll around. He said goodbye to the nurse on duty, and headed down to the locker room where he took a quick shower and put on one of the clean jumpers he'd stored in case he'd had to run off somewhere with Sherlock. It had happened often enough that he'd learned to have a clean set of clothes ready at any time. Even after Sherlock had 'died', he'd kept up the habit of having a change of clothes in his locker. Maybe it was wishful thinking, or just maybe old habits just died hard.
One good thing about working at a hospital, he thought, there was always a cab ready to pick you up. He grabbed the first one and slid in. “221 Baker Street, please.”

It was only five till seven when John pulled up. The lamp that was literally never turned off was flickering in the window, so it was impossible to know if Sherlock was inside. He paid the cabbie and headed up the stairs, glad that he’d never remembered to turn the keys back in to Mrs. Hudson. After a couple of steps he paused for a moment, thinking he should say hello to say to the landlady, but then he remembered that she’d told him earlier in the day she was leaving to visit her sister and would be gone for a few days.

It was strangely quiet in the flat as he went up the stairs, careful to avoid the squeaky third step. There was no creaking of the floorboards as Sherlock paced, no sound of a violin floating softly on the breeze, no crap telly being played way too loud- but not loud enough to drown out the deep baritone yelling back at the television, ranting about how idiotic today's guest was.

The flat was quiet and still. The only lights on were the kitchen and the lamp in the living room. He checked Sherlock's bedroom to make sure he hadn't fallen asleep- he kept the strangest sleep schedule- when he did sleep. But the room was empty.

“Hmm. I beat him for once.” John smiled and sunk into his well-worn chair. “Guess I'll read a bit while I wait.” He picked up the day's paper and flicked through it, not really taking in any information, just idly passing the time.

When seven o'clock came and went, John wasn't too worried. Sherlock was usually very punctual when -he- set a time to meet, but always loved to be fashionably late when he knew others were waiting for him.

After 7:15 passed, John sent his first text.

*At Baker Street. Did a case slow you down? We can meet another time. JW*

Usually he got an answer within a couple of minutes. Five minutes went by. Ten. Fifteen.

Fear pooled inside him, twisting his stomach in knots.

He tried one more text.
Where are you? JW

That was followed immediately by a text to Greg Lestrade.

Sherlock was supposed to meet me at seven. Is he with you? JW

Less than a minute later, he received a response.

Haven't seen him for a couple of hours. I'll keep an eye out and text if I see him. GL

John tried actually calling Sherlock, which rarely worked, as he almost never picked up, but it was worth a try. Of course it went directly to his voicemail, which meant the phone was off, so he left a message.

“Sherlock, I'm getting very worried. You were supposed to meet me at Baker Street and Greg hasn't seen you for hours. Please call or text me.”

There was one other person John could try before he had to contact the man he wanted to speak with the least.

Molly, is Sherlock with you? He was supposed to meet me. Greg hasn't seen him in hours. JW

A couple of minutes later, his phone buzzed with a response.

I haven't seen him today. I'm sorry. When you find him, text me that he's okay, please. MH

John sighed and ran a hand down his face. Sherlock hadn't given him any indications during the day that this would be a 'danger night'. Greg had been feeding him cases pretty regularly, and there was no particular anniversary of any traumatic event that John knew about that might upset the detective.
It made no sense. John let out a long breath and decided he had no choice. He picked up his phone and dialed Mycroft Holmes.

Mycroft picked up on the start of the third ring. “Yes, Doctor Watson, what can I do for you this fine evening?” His tone was pleasant on the surface, but terse and clipped, like he’d been interrupted in the middle of something important.

*When did he ever NOT sound like he’d been interrupted in the middle of something important?*

“I was wondering if you’d seen your brother recently.”

“Define... recently.”

“He was supposed to meet me at Baker Street at seven o'clock. Neither Greg nor Molly have seen him in the last few hours. He's not usually this late unless he texts me.”

There was silence on the other line for a moment. John pulled the phone away long enough to look at the time. It was only 7:40. Surely he shouldn't be so worried, he was only forty minutes late. But something nagged at the back of his mind, like a dark creeping unease, that instinctual feeling of dread.

And a soldier knew to always trust his instincts.

Mycroft must have heard something in his voice. He finally answered. “I'll have my best men on the job. We'll find my brother.”

The line went dead.
The Waiting (Is The Hardest Part)

Chapter Summary

In which we find out exactly what happened to Sherlock. And it ain't pretty.

We'll get back to the present day in the next chapter.

(Lots of definitions and links for medical terms in the End Notes.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Waiting (Is The Hardest Part)

Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMyCa35_mOg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMyCa35_mOg)

John paced around the flat like a jaguar in a cage. All of his muscles were tightly coiled, wound, ready to snap.

An hour came and went, then a second. Still no word from anyone.

He had the phone in his hand, dialing Mycroft when a call came in. Greg.

“‘You found him?’” His voice was quick and high, anxiety stamped into every syllable.

“Yeah.” Greg's tight, strained tone mirrored John's own apprehension. John's heart sank as soon as he heard the stressful timbre of his response. His muscles tightened, his breath shallow and fast.
“Where is he?”

“John, he... was in a car crash. It's bad. He was in a taxi going through an intersection. Another car ran the red light and hit the side of the cab. “

A shaky hand grabbed onto his chair that was thankfully near by. He sunk down into it, not trusting his legs to carry his weight any longer.

“Is... he...?”

“He's alive. He's been taken to St. Mary's Hospital. I've already called Mycroft, he's on his way. I've got a police car en route to you now. They should be at the flat in less than five minutes. They'll get you there quicker than a taxi. I'll finish up here at the scene as fast as I can and meet you at the hospital.”

John wasn't even sure if he tried to whisper a thank you before ringing off. He used the armrests to pull himself up to a standing position, and somehow made his legs move through the flat, down the seventeen stairs, and out the front door to wait for the car.

A million scenarios- each worse than the last- flashed through his head while he counted the seconds waiting for the police vehicle. John's mind reeled with possibilities. Sherlock could die on the way to hospital, he could die on the operating table, he could die before John ever got to say goodbye to him.

When the car pulled up, John didn't wait for it to stop before he opened the door and hopped in, yelling “St. Mary's Hospital! Run your lights and sirens!” There was a part of John deep inside that knew it was wrong for the policeman to do it, since they weren't on their way to a call, and he really had no authority to tell the policeman to do so. But right now, John couldn't be arsed to care. Anything to get to the hospital as fast as possible. The policeman obeyed, lights and sirens blaring as they weaved through London's evening traffic.

What should have been a twenty minute drive took just under ten. John jumped out of the car as it pulled into the A&E, his eyes frantically searching for a nurse while he ran through the automatic sliding doors, when he saw the imposing form of Mycroft Holmes walking towards him.

John's whole body tensed, anticipating the news he knew he could never prepare for.
“He's in surgery now.” Mycroft said, forgoing any unnecessary greeting. “I've been told his heart stopped twice.” There was a pause as the world seemed to slow down. “He'll probably be in surgery for a bit longer, so you might as well get comfortable, Doctor Watson.”

When John was finally able to speak, he ran his tongue over his dry lips. “Will we get to see him when he comes out of surgery?”

“They didn’t say. We may not get to attend to him for a while, yet. They'll wait until he's more stable. I have a feeling that we are going to have a long night here.” Without another word, Mycroft turned around and found a seat in the waiting area, which was thankfully mostly empty due to the time of night. John willed his feet to move and followed, collapsing into a chair with an empty space between them.

“So, now we wait.”

“Yes. Now we wait. I've arranged for us to have a private sitting area where we can be a bit more secluded, but it's still being prepared, so it won't be ready for about an hour. I've already informed the staff that when Detective Inspector Lestrade arrives, he is to be brought to us immediately.”

_I guess 'The British Government' 'will have to mingle with the commoners for while._

When the waiting room was ready, they were taken by a young black haired nurse whose name John didn't catch to what looked like a family sitting area- a small room with a couch, a few comfortable chairs, a television, and various magazines and toys for kids. The heavy door cut out the worst of the noise from the hospital on the other side. It was a little oasis in the middle of the pain and suffering surrounding them.

The room was deathly quiet until they heard a soft knock on the door. Both John and Mycroft tensed, ready for more bad news. When it opened, a different nurse showed Greg inside.

“Thanks.” He nodded as the nurse left, closing the door behind her. He looked over to Mycroft. “So. Any news?”

Mycroft repeated what he'd told John. The doctor watched Greg's face go paler and paler with every sentence. When he was done, Greg flopped down onto the couch.
“That bad, eh?” He ran a hand through his salt and pepper hair. “Well, he's a tough bloke. If anyone can make it through this, it's Sherlock Holmes, yeah?”

John could only hope he was right.

Xxxxxx

Secretly, John was glad there was no window in the waiting room. He purposefully kept his back to the only clock in the tiny room- he didn't want to know how long it was taking to do what he could imagine was a frantic scramble to control bleeding, set major fractures, and address any injuries to the heart, lungs, and other organs. Still, he found himself twisting his torso and looking over his shoulder every once in a while, frowning every time another forty five minutes or an hour had gone by since last he checked.

3:15 AM. Still several hours before dawn. It wouldn't be too long before the city would be waking up, stretching its limbs and coming alive.

And John still felt like he was tumbling forever.

Xxxxx

A light rapping on the door jolted John into sudden wakefulness. He hadn't even realized how tired and drained he was. Quickly he shook his head and rubbed his eyes, bracing for the news they were about to receive.

A man in clean operating scrubs strode in. Immediately, all the air in the room left, three bodies stiffened.

“Good morning. I'm Doctor Phillip Williams, Mr. Holmes' chief surgeon.” John shifted forward
towards the edge of his seat.

“Mr. Holmes is in the ICU right now. He has quite an extensive list of injuries. Right now I'll just go over the basics, and we can talk more about the details later.” He halted for a moment before continuing.

“His spleen had to be removed due to a bleeding rupture, but the lung contusion required no immediate surgical measures, so he was spared a thoractomy. We'll likely have to do another laparotomy tomorrow to have a closer look at everything else. Right now he's too unstable for anything else other than controlling the most immediate, life threatening issues.”

“There are numerous fractures, including several ribs, which will likely delay weaning him off a respirator. However, what we're most worried about right now, is the traumatic brain injury. There's a hemorrhaged contusion with a significant amount of swelling, which is likely to get worse. We have to wait until the intracranial pressure stabilizes before we can assess his consciousness again. The longer that takes, the more likely the severity of the damage.”

“No surgery was needed for it at this stage, but a decompressive craniotomy might be necessary if we can't control the pressure with more conservative measures. The CT scan that was taken in the initial trauma stages will only tell us so much- but the true extent of how he'll be affected is simply unknown right now.”

“The profuse bleeding into his abdomen from a ruptured spleen which may still lead to cardiac arrest might have caused further damage to the injured brain tissue. There will be an MRI done later, but only after we're satisfied that he's stable. There was an all too brief pause for the doctor to take another deep breath.

“If he can get through the first 24 hours, we'll have a better idea of his long term prognosis. I'm not going to sugar coat this. At this moment, his outlook is not good. He needs to have more surgeries to fix his shattered bones and damaged organs. But we can't risk it until he's more stable.” He took one more breath and looked around the room, three sets of eyes fixated on the doctor, and what he was going to say next.

“I'm sorry. I wish I had better news. The damage was considerable, and we're working as hard as we can to help him recover. Right now all we can do is wait.”

It was Mycroft who finally spoke up. “When can we see him?”
“The ICU staff are still getting him settled in, but I can take two of you to him in about fifteen minutes, only for a brief visit. It's still touch and go with him, and he's under the equivalent of general anaesthesia right now.

Greg cleared his throat. “I... ah... I should probably be getting back anyway. My shift starts soon. I'll try to come back later, yeah?” He rubbed a hand nervously through his short hair. “Just... um... send along my best wishes.” Awkwardly, he hurried out of the room.

Mycroft groaned almost imperceptibly as he got to his feet. “I suppose we're ready when you are, Doctor.” When he spoke, John almost thought Mycroft sounded composed.

Almost.

Chapter End Notes

Lung Contusion- Also called a pulmonary contusion- a bruising of the lung, caused by chest trauma that causes blood and other fluids to accumulate in the lung tissue.
http://www.doereport.com/imagescooked/311W.jpg

Thoracotomy- A surgical incision into the chest wall.

Laparotomy- A surgical incision into the abdominal cavity, for diagnosis or in preparation for surgery.
http://www.surgeryencyclopedia.com/images/gesu_02_img0137.jpg

TBI- Traumatic Brain Injury- A severe and violent blow to the head, which can cause the brain to hit the side(s) of the skull and cause temporary or permanent damage
https://www.mayfieldclinic.com/Images/PE-TBIfig1.jpg

Hemorrhaged Contusion- Also called cerebral contusion- A form of TBI, it is a bruising of the brain tissue.

ICP- Intracranial Pressure- The pressure inside the skull, brain tissue, and cerebrospinal fluid. Increased ICP can be life threatening.
Decompressive Craniotomy- A neurosurgical procedure where part of the skull is removed to allow a swelling brain room to expand without being squeezed. 

CT scan- Computerized Tomography Scan- Combines a series of x-rays images taken from different angles and used computer processing to create cross-sectional images, or slice, of the bones, blood vessels and soft tissues. A CT scan is much more detailed than a normal x-ray. 

MRI-Magnetic Resonance Imaging- A machine that uses a magnetic field and pulses of radio wave energy to make pictures of organs and structures inside the body. 
http://svdrads.com/images/home/grid/MRI-head-zoom-38266824-3.jpg
Somebody's Watching Me

Chapter Summary

In which John tries to get some sleep, Mycroft is a nosy git, and neither of them are really okay.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Somebody's Watching Me

Rockwell- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7YvAYIJSZY

John didn't remember the ride back to his flat. On the way, he passed the hospital where he worked. At least he had been working there. Considering he hadn't shown up for his job in what was soon to be a week- going by the night sky from the car window- he wasn't even sure he still had a job.

Right now he really didn't care.

Fumbling fingers eventually found the lock on his door, and immediately John stumbled onto his bed. A little part of his mind was screaming at him that he'd promised the nurses he'd eat something. But he wasn't the least bit hungry. He was tired, so very tired.

He didn't even bother to take off his shoes when he collapsed diagonally on the mattress, on top of the sheets, his head missing the pillows.

And there he slept.
And then the nightmares came.

_I'm on top of St. Barts._

_I'm falling_

_Falling_

_Falling_

_Through the concrete_

_Though the earth_

_Deeper_

_Deeper_

_Into the fiery pits of Hell._

John woke up with a jolt. He bolted upright, his hair matted with sweat, his chest heaving. One look out the window told him it was still late at night. He couldn't have slept more than a few hours. He was still bone tired -exhausted- but he didn't want to close his eyes again. He grabbed his phone that he hadn't even bothered to take out of his pocket and sent a text.

_Is he... OK? JW_

_No change. -M-
"I'm ready to come back. JW"

"It's barely been 2 hours. I'm not sending a car unless you get at least 8 hours sleep. -M-

"I could sit here for 6 hours and wait. JW"

"You underestimate me, John. I'll know if you slept. -M-

“Fucking bastard.” John muttered. He probably had a damn camera hidden somewhere. He shot two handed birdies around the room, hoping Mycroft could see them. He thought about getting up and trying to eat something, like he'd promised. For the first time since this whole mess, he was actually feeling the tiniest pang of hunger, but he wasn't even sure if he'd be able to keep anything down, so he quickly nixed that idea.

John's 'Doctor Brain' knew that what he was doing was A bit not good. An extended time without sleep and nourishment would get quite detrimental very quickly. He was neglecting himself, and he understood that it would catch up with him sooner or later.

He knew it. He just didn't care.

But Sherlock.

Sherlock.

Sherlock was in hospital, hovering near death.

Damn his body, damn sleep, damn food, and damn Mycroft trying to tell him what to do.

John threaded his fingers through his hair. He needed to at least attempt to get some more rest. He'd worry about food later.

He kicked off his shoes, still fully clothed, and wiggled around until his head was on the pillows.
Maybe sleeping on the bed properly would let him rest, he naively thought.

He could only hope.

*I'm -THERE- again.*

Sherlock is on the roof.

*I'm running to stop him. This time, I'd save him and it would all be okay, There would be no mourning, no death, no....*

*The sickening crack of skull on the pavement,*

*The blood, all the blood.*

“SHERLOCK!” He hadn’t even realized he’d been screaming until he felt himself sitting up again, sweating and desperately gasping for air like he was drowning. His sheets had been kicked off the bed. He could see the moistness on his pillow. John took another look out the window. The first tendrils of light were starting to creep across a cloudless London sky. Once he had gotten his breathing and heart rate under control, he picked up his phone.

*No change? JW*

*No. -M-*

*Has it been long enough now? JW*

*No, but that's more sleep than I thought you'd get. Take a shower and eat something. I'll have a car waiting for you in an hour. -M-*

John sighed and ran a hand over his face. He picked out a new set of clothes and laid them out on the bed, then headed to the shower and ran it as hot as he possibly could. He scrubbed and scrubbed, as hard as possible. No matter what, he couldn't wash the guilt away. Sherlock had been coming to see -him- when this happened. It was *his* fault. His friend was going to die, this time for real, and once
again there was nothing John could do about it. By the time he was done, his skin was red and raw, but he didn't care.

He dressed by automatic reflex. If he'd thought about the effort it took, his shaky hands would've never been able to go through the motions. Afterwards, he made a couple of pieces of toast and jam and a cup of coffee. He didn't dare try anything more substantial for fear it might make a return appearance. Despite his rolling gut, he nibbled down about half of his toast and drank almost all of his coffee, which he managed to keep down.

John looked at the clock on the wall after he'd finished. Even with the shower and brief breakfast, he still had almost half an hour to wait for the car to arrive.

_I'm ready now. Send it early. JW_

_You hardly ate. Try to eat a bit more. -M-

So apparently Mycroft had cameras around the flat. _Of course_. John swore when this was all over, he was going to find every single one of them, burn them all, and send the ashes to Mycroft's office, wrapped up in a big pink bow. Maybe he'd add a dog turd for good measure.

_Car. Now. JW_

There was no response, but John was sure he'd gotten his point across. He took a shoulder bag, filling it with his laptop, power cable, and a couple of books. If he had his way, he wasn't going to be coming back here for a long while, so he was going prepared this time.

He was out in front of his flat when the car pulled up. If he hadn't been so lost and drowning in his own sadness, he would've thought it was a rather beautiful day. It wasn't much after dawn, and the city was yawning and stretching and bursting with life. It was surprisingly warm and clear for a spring morning. But John didn't care about any of these things as he slumped into the car.

The car ride was agonizingly slow. He cursed every red light, every car that slowed them down, every pedestrian that deigned to walk in front of them. When they finally got to the hospital, he jumped out before the driver had come to a full halt. Even though he'd only been to the room once, the route was burned into his brain. His feet didn't stop until he was outside Sherlock's door.
He wasn't sure why, but he hesitated for a moment. Even in his flat he hadn't been able to get the detective out of his mind, but he knew seeing him again would make it so... real. He took a deep breath and steeled himself, then pushed through the door.

That smell.

It was antiseptic and plastic, bleach and blood. He knew all of those scents far too well. Flashes of Afghanistan came unbidden to his mind, but he quickly shook them away. As he walked in, he noticed Mycroft had actually been nodding off, but as soon as the old door into the room squeaked, he jolted awake. Immediately the mask of indifference slid back down onto his impassive face, like he'd been awake all night.

“Any change?” That seemed to be how all their conversations started now.

“None.” And that, thankfully, had so far always been the answer. “The doctors are concerned his brain function isn't improving. He's not showing any signs of trying to come out of the coma. A new EEG was done, and I was informed there is no seizure activity that could provide an explanation. The longer he stays like this, the worse his prognosis will be.”

John tumbled into his chair, the messenger bag clattered to the floor beside him, unnoticed. “So... what do we do?”

Mycroft looked sadly at the bed, then over to John. “There is nothing -to- do. We stay by his side, and hope that Sherlock can find his way back.”

The silence was deafening.

Chapter End Notes

EEG- Electroencephalogram- A machine that detects electrical activity in a patient's brain by using small, flat metal discs (electrodes) attached to their scalp. Brain cells communicate 24/7, even when asleep, and the resulting activity shows as wavy lines in the EEG recording.

EEC cap- https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/bf/EEG_cap.jpg/220px-
EEG_cap.jpg

EEC reading-
Chapter Summary

In which Sherlock gets visitors, tries to die, and is rescued by Mycroft.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Say Something

A Great Big World- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVgixOjGhVU

Minutes bled into hours.

Hours bled into days.

Days bled together, one indistinguishable from the next.

John got used to a steady stream of people coming in and out of the room. Besides the bevy of doctors, there were nurses and orderlies to bathe and shave Sherlock, to brush his teeth, and to gently move him so he wouldn’t develop bedsores. There were physical therapists to move his arms and legs (when they had healed enough) so his muscles would atrophy as little as possible, and frequent visits from neurologists and neurosurgeons to assess whether anything had changed in the state of his brain.

John and Mycroft were informed that if nothing changed, there would come a day when the decision
to withdraw intensive care would have to be brought up. Neither of them would even consider it. Not now, not EVER. Not if there was even the slightest chance Sherlock would wake up. Mycroft, as the person with Sherlock's Lasting Power of Attorney, had the final say on his brother's care.

Ten days after the accident, Mycroft informed John that Anthea had called the clinic where he'd been working and told them he'd have to resign his position to take care of a family member who'd suddenly taken ill. They were disappointed of course, as well as upset he hadn't told them earlier, but they left the possibility open that he might be able to come back to work there when he was ready.

Sherlock -was- practically family, and what a dysfunctional family they were.

It was a gray and dreary morning- appropriate, John thought- when he and Mycroft had a serious talk. A lot of well wishers wanted to see Sherlock, but the two of them had decided that only the most essential people should be allowed in, and just for a short time. It'd be the least stressful for both them and Sherlock. The list was pretty easy to make- his parents, Mrs. Hudson, Greg Lestrade, and Molly Hooper. They would come in one at a time, except for his parents, and would stay no more than thirty minutes.

And Mycroft, poor Mycroft was going to be the unlucky one that would have to explain the situation about the crash each time someone new visited Sherlock. John could see the pain hiding behind those seemingly neutral azure eyes.

Sherlock's parents were first, of course. As soon as they arrived, John made some lame excuse and hurried out of the room. This was a time for the Holmeses to be together. Despite how close he and Sherlock had become over the years, he knew he would never truly be family.

Molly didn't stay long when she came by. John could see her heart breaking as soon as she entered the room and saw the state Sherlock was in. She spoke a few words to him, whispered in his ear, and sat for about ten minutes before she couldn't take any more, mumbled that she had to get back to work, and hurried out of the room.

Lestrade's visit was longer, but he was clearly nervous and anxious, sitting on the edge of his seat and twiddling his thumbs. He glanced down at his hands more than at Sherlock. John knew it was hard to look at the man as he was now, remembering how vibrant and alive he had been less than two weeks ago- it seemed like a lifetime now. Eventually he had to go back to work as well, and the room returned to what passed as normal- just the three of them.

Mycroft sent John back to his flat four days after his first exile. He got less sleep than he had the first time. His mind couldn't stop replaying what the accident must have looked like- the sounds, the
smells, the utter devastation. He wondered if Sherlock had even seen the other car approaching, if he’d had enough time to realize what was about to happen. He shook his head violently, chasing the rising panic that he could feel swelling within his chest. That was not a road of thought he could afford to go down right now.

When John was ready to return, he didn't even wait for Mycroft's 'approval'. He grabbed a taxi after he'd showered, changed, and eaten a few nibbles of toast, and was back to the hospital less than 4 hours after he'd left.

He wasn't terribly surprised when he saw a small contingent of reporters outside St. Mary's as he arrived. It had only been a few months since Sherlock had been exonerated and 'miraculously' came back to life after two years of self imposed exile. Sherlock was hot in the eyes of the news again, so this tragedy would be newsworthy to those vultures. John guessed that Mycroft had tried to keep it out of the papers for as long as he could, but even the 'British Government' was susceptible to leaks.

Though John understood that it was their job, he'd had little sleep and had even less patience. He pushed past their microphones and cameras, forging his way through to the lobby, where he quickened his steps up to Sherlock's room.

The question always on his lips as he entered the room hung unsaid as he walked through the door. The look on Mycroft's face told the whole story. That, and the fact that he didn't even admonish John for coming back early. Was it possible for Mycroft to be even paler than he normally was? He looked like he had no blood left in him.

“What happened?”

“He had a seizure early into his last sedation break. He coded earlier. It was difficult to control despite a quick return back to deep sedation. Even the smallest setback could cause him further, possibly permanent damage. The doctors aren't confident he'll wake up at all. It's been nearly two weeks now, and there have been no significant improvements.”

“Mycroft... we... we can't give up. He'll come back. He has to.”

The response came in a broken whisper. “I'm not ready to give up on him, either.” After a moment Mycroft added in a much stronger tone, “And I'll make sure the reporters never bother you again.”

One weekend evening, it was suggested that Sherlock be given a tracheostomy. When a patient is
going to need ventilatory support for an extended amount of time, a tracheostomy lessens the amount of vocal chord and tracheal damage done. Somewhat reluctantly, Mycroft agreed. He was quite sure that Sherlock had had enough surgeries for several lifetimes. Everything went well, no complications arose during the surgery, and Sherlock was back in his room in a matter of hours.

Xxxxx

They fell into somewhat of a routine. Every two days, Mycroft would spend the night with Sherlock while John went home and pretended to get rest and nourishment. They both spent the entire weekend at the hospital, and on Monday the cycle began again.

John had been taking short naps in the hospital chair, and had even managed to choke down the occasional sandwich from the canteen. It was enough sleep and food to sustain him, to keep him functional, but just barely. His clothes hung more loosely off his frame, his eyes were sunken and dark, his skin was pale and drawn. He was a shell of his former self.

Now that a routine had begun to set in, the ICU started to gently enforce its usual visitation policy of a maximum of two people in Sherlock's room at a time. Sherlock's parents had come up from their country home to stay with Mycroft until 'Sherlock got better', as they put it. There didn't seem to be any doubt in their minds he would pull through this.

I'm not so sure.

Mycroft visited at least once a day during the week, usually after work. He stayed as long as he could- normally a few hours- until sleep threatened to overtake him. Then he went home to get a few hours of restless slumber before it was either time to head back to the office, or take the night shift at the hospital while John went back to his flat.

This wasn't living. This was surviving.

Xxxxx
John looked at his phone. It was the 3rd. That meant it'd been exactly three weeks since the accident. Mycroft had given Anthea the job of paying John's bills, so at least for now he didn't have to worry about his power being turned off, or violating his lease. But that was the last thing on the man's mind.

Sherlock's doctors had seen almost no advancement in his condition. Since the recent MRIs had looked good, Sherlock had been allowed more time than most other patients with such devastating injuries to begin to show signs of emergence. But they warned that if there was no significant improvement very soon, important decisions would have to be made. A propensity for seizures during sedation breaks, and the fact that he was still deeply unconscious with or without sedation gave a strong indication of significant brain damage. It was possible that the neural networks regulating consciousness may have been irreparably impacted.

The doctor's words shook John to the deepest part of himself. “If he doesn't improve, we're going to have to discuss how long we want to continue letting him stay like this.”

Something inside of John broke... shattered, fell to a million pieces on the hospital floor. The look he gave to Mycroft was nothing short of pleading.

“Mycroft. Please. Christ, please don't listen to them.” John begged. “You swore you wouldn't give up.”

To John's utter relief, Mycroft nodded his head. “Doctor Watson is correct. I will not give up on my brother. As long as there's still even the slightest chance he will awaken, we'll wait for him to do so. As you must be well aware, there are many reports of individuals awakening from comas lasting much longer. I'm my brother's decision maker. If I say we wait, then we wait.”

The doctor nodded, though his face told the whole story. John knew he'd seen dozens, if not hundreds of cases like Sherlock's, and he knew the chances of a happy ending to this story was minuscule at best.

After the doctor left the room, John gave a soft, sad smile of thanks to Mycroft. For a while, there was no sound, save the whirs and beeps of the machines. John looked out the window. London was warming, spring was ebbing, and summer would be coming soon. The world still turned on its axis. People went about their lives, oblivious to what was going on in this room.

Time moved on, and John stayed still, waiting for a miracle that might never happen.

Lasting Power of Attorney- Same as the Power of Attorney in the United States- The person who has authority to act on behalf of another person for legal, financial, and medical matters.

Coded- A term usually used for a person in cardiopulmonary, or cardiac arrest, may also refer to the team of doctors and nurses who come to the emergency aid of a patient.

Deep Sedation- Also called analgesia-the best synonym might be "general anaesthesia", although technically GA is what follows when deep sedation deepens. The line between those two is very much academic. Analgesia refers to painlessness, which is a component of sedation or general anaesthesia but does not refer to regulation of consciousness.

Tracheostomy- An incision in the windpipe made to relieve an obstruction to breathing. This is used on long term patients, and can be permanent, it causes less potential damage than an intubation. http://medicalacademy101.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/tracheostomy-care.png


Just an FYI: An alternative (joking) title for this chapter was “Achy Breaky Heart”, but I didn't want to subject my fair readers to that type of torture. But if you are brave, here you go. Don't say I didn't warn you. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=byQIPdHMpjC
Hey You

Chapter Summary

In which Sherlock tries to move, Mycroft tries to reason, and John tries to hope.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Hey You

Pink Floyd- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFjmvfRyjTc

It was a Thursday, John knew, but he'd purposefully stopped looking at his phone. He hardly cared about dates any more. One day drained into the next, days seeped into nights, and then slowly trickled back into daytime again. It was late in the afternoon, so John knew it wouldn't be long until Mycroft came to visit. That was how John counted his days. They started when Mycroft left for the evening and ended when Mycroft came to visit again.

John had taken to reading to Sherlock. It kept his mind busy, and let Sherlock know he was there. Mycroft had an impressive library at his disposal. So when John suggested that he start bringing novels, there was no shortage from which to choose. Usually they stuck to mysteries like Agatha Christie, classics like Dickens and Melville, and the occasional horribly dry scientific paper that held zero interest for John- but he figured Sherlock would appreciate them.

“This was the state of matters, on the afternoon of, what I may be excused for calling, that eventful and important Friday. I can make no claim therefore to have known, at that time, how matters stood; or to have any....” Suddenly, something in John's peripheral vision caught his attention. He could have sworn he saw movement coming from the bed. He immediately halted his reading of David Copperfield.
“Sherlock, did you move?” He knew how ridiculous that sounded the moment the words left his mouth. Sherlock couldn't respond to him. People in deep comas like Sherlock's didn't react to commands. John waited a moment longer, watching Sherlock anxiously, his stomach in knots, hoping he would prove John wrong.

Please. Please. Do something, he begged silently.

The clock on the wall ticked by the seconds relentlessly.

But no movement came.

John sighed and picked up the book again. “I can make no claim therefore to have known, at that time, how matters stood; or to have any remembrance, founded on the evidence of my own senses of what follows...” There it was again. He wasn't imagining things. He'd actually heard the tiniest rustle of the sheets. The book was forgotten, dropped to the floor in a heartbeat. When he looked back to the bed, for just a tiny, tantalizing moment, he saw Sherlock's leg shifting erratically under the thin blanket.

“Sherlock. I … know you can't respond, but if you can hear me, fight. Wake up.” There was, of course, no response. No movement. Any thought of reading was banished from John's mind. Sherlock had moved. It'd only been a tiny movement of one leg, but it was something. His first instinct was to call the nurses, but there was nothing they could do. If he was starting to come out of the coma, he'd have to do it in his own time, John knew.

When Mycroft came in an hour later, he set his umbrella by the door, and his briefcase on the table, like he always did. When he looked over to John, he was quite surprised to see what could almost be called a smile on his face. The elder Holmses' countenance shifted from confusion to annoyance, then back to its default setting of indifferent, all in the space of a couple of heartbeats.

“John?”

“I saw him... he moved his leg. Well, it was just a little twitch, a couple of times. I know, it might not be anything but maybe... it's a good sign?” When he realized he was rambling, he went quiet and still.

Annoyance crept back onto Mycroft's face. That was what had the man nearly smiling. This time he didn't bother trying to look passive once again.
“John, it was mostly likely just an involuntary muscle twitch.” John could hear the condemnation in Mycroft's voice. *You know better.* “It's not uncommon when muscles have not been used for a time. Paraplegic patients have involuntary muscle spasms quite often. You said it only happened twice?”

“Yes... but it was more than a twitch. It was a movement.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“Did you notify the nurses?”

“When they came in for his hourly observation, yes. They said the same thing you did. I explained that it wasn't just a fast muscle twitch, it had lasted longer. They said they'd wait until the morning to see if he moved any more, then they'd test him on the Glasgow Scale again.”

“John, I don't want you to get your hopes up. It's been six weeks. Most comas only last between two and four. As a doctor, you understand that when patients don't regain consciousness during the first days of sedation breaks that usually indicates...” There was the briefest of pauses. “...that there will be substantial brain damage.”

Whatever John was going to say stuck in his throat when Sherlock moved his leg again. They both saw it clearly. It was much more than a twitch, it was a deliberate movement. Immediately, Mycroft leaned over to Sherlock, whispering softly in his ear.

“What we're waiting. We'll wait as long as you need. Just come back.”

John was silent, listening to Mycroft speak so tenderly. It was a side of the man he'd never seen before. He always knew Mycroft cared for his little brother. He'd proven it many times over, despite his insistence that 'caring is not an option'. But to actually expose this level of affection in front of someone else was exceedingly rare. John knew it took an immense amount of trust. And for that, he felt honored.
When Mycroft had fallen silent again and settled back in his seat, John asked, “William?”

“That's his given name. William Sherlock Scott Holmes.” When he was a child, we called him William. But, there was an... event when he was six. Afterwards, he wasn't the same. He was more closed off, guarded. It was heartbreaking to see the happy child turn into....”

“A Holmes?”

Mycroft shot him a deadly look. John backed down, muttering a quiet apology.

“After that, he didn't want to be called William anymore. He insisted everyone call him Sherlock. I think secretly he liked the idea of having an unconventional name. He knew he was an unusual boy, even that young. At that time, he still admired me. He'd always liked my atypical name.”

John longed to ask what had happened to change Sherlock so much, to shape this enigmatic, walled off man that he'd become. But he knew now was not the time. John understood that he would get no answer, so he kept quiet.

“Do you think... calling him William might stir his memories?” John finally asked after a pause.

Mycroft shrugged noncommittally. “It is worth a try.”

There was another small movement, this time it was his opposite arm. Despite Mycroft's warning, John couldn't help but let the hope that burgeoned within him bloom and warm his happiness starved soul. It felt as though his body had been encased in a block of ice since the day of the accident. Each little movement, every twitch Sherlock made cracked the surface, melted the glacier by infinitesimal measures.

He was no longer sedated, since he had stopped reacting to the sedation breaks with seizures or a rise in his intracranial pressure. The ICP meter that had been measuring it had been removed once there had been no incident for days after the sedatives had been completely withdrawn. The fact that he had begun breathing on his own meant that the respiratory center of his brain was intact, but that promised nothing when it came to consciousness or anything more demanding than simple respiration.
Mycroft stayed through the night, despite having work in the morning. He'd never admit it, but he was as anxious as John for those tiny movements to mean something substantial. They didn't speak, John didn't read. They were antsy, fidgety, barely able to stay in their seats, but too damn exhausted to actually move. There wasn't any change through the night. Sherlock twitched a couple of times, but it was nothing consequential.

In the morning, John heard Mycroft go into the hallway and call Anthea, informing her that he was staying at the hospital today. John knew he shouldn't listen in, but after seeing the softer side of Mycroft, he found himself fascinated by the man, wondering what else he might be hiding behind that impassive mask of posh indifference.

Mycroft cut his phone call short when he saw a doctor walk up to Sherlock's door, ready to reassess him. He followed the doctor in, watching intently as they tested Sherlock. He didn't open his eyes. He did groan softly and purposefully curled away when given a painful stimulus- the doctor pressing his finger hard onto a spot a the lower right side of his brow. When the doctor had completed his exam, Sherlock was given an six. It was a slight improvement, though there was still a very long way to go.

Something warm and protective coiled deep inside of John. His Sherlock was coming back. It was slow, and there was no telling what state he'd be in when he woke, but he was improving. FINALLY, there was something to curl around and hold onto tight.

It was hope.

XXXXX

Over the weekend, Sherlock continued to improve in tiny increments, minuscule forward movements. John had taken to holding Sherlock's hand, hoping he would try to squeeze. He asked Sherlock to try, though he never got a response.

In the evening, The first twinges of sleep were starting to cloud John's thoughts, when he felt a slight press on his fingers. Any thoughts of rest were gone in an instant. His heart leapt out of his chest, thudding hard against his sternum.

“Sherlock, you're almost there. Just a little more, mate.”

The weekend came and went. Mycroft continued to do what work he could from the hospital room.
The doctors were worried that he still hadn't opened his eyes, which was one of the three main criteria on the coma scale, but he'd continued to improve in the other two criteria, so they were still somewhat optimistic. He was moving more- not doing anything very purposeful or coordinated. He had grimaced in response to pain, which was most certainly hopeful.

Because of the improvements Sherlock had made over the weekend, John had not taken his usually scheduled flat visit. The first few weeks, he had been so terribly afraid to leave, fearing that Sherlock would die while he was gone. Now he was so awfully afraid to leave, because Sherlock might actually wake up while he was away.

And that kept him going through a few more sleepless nights.

Chapter End Notes

ICP meter- Intercraniel Pressure Meter- A device placed inside the head to sense the pressure inside the skull and sends the measurements to a recording device. The monitor is drilled into the skull.
http://promotion.medicalillustration.com/imagescooked/8018W.jpg
Better Days

Chapter Summary

In which Sherlock opens his eyes, and John and Mycroft despair.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Better Days

The Goo Goo Dolls- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-kHleNYIDc

Leave it to Sherlock Holmes to cause a ruckus at the most inopportune times.

That was John's later thoughts about the first time Sherlock opened his eyes.

It was very late on a Tuesday night. Mycroft only had so many excuses he could use to stay out of the office, so he'd gone back to his house to get a few hours of rest before going into work the next morning. John had been catching cat naps on and off in the terribly uncomfortable hospital armchairs.

It was a fairly high backed number, with only barely enough padding in the seat and back to make it comfortable to sit in for hours at a time, and wooden arm rests that were not quite wide enough for an entire arm to fit on them, so his arms would fall off in the middle of the night and wake him up.
Being a soldier meant that he'd trained his body to sleep lightly. John's ears were so attuned to the sounds of the room that even the slightest change in the tone of the machines would immediately wake him.

A bit after 3:00 AM, John was awoken by a quickening of Sherlock heart rate monitor. It wasn't a large enough change to alert the nurses, but he'd gone to sleep many a night to the rhythm of Sherlock's heart. When it changed, John knew, and was instantly on alert.

What he saw made his own heart stop.

“Sh... Sherlock.. “ John's voice failed him at the most inauspicious time. “Can.. you hear me?”

Sherlock's eyes fluttered open for just a moment. Light blue orbs shifted over towards the source of the sound. For a heartbeat, their eyes met, before Sherlock's closed.

“Sherlock... Sherlock....” His monitor went back to the steady, beating rhythm it'd had been for the past month and a half.

What had felt like flying for the briefest of moments shifted to a free fall. Sherlock had been awake... just for just a instant, and then fell back unconscious again.

There was no recognition in those eyes.

John desperately clung to the hope that it was because he was just now beginning to come to, and Sherlock wasn't really fully conscious, but deep in his brain, in the dark recesses that he didn't want to delve into, he knew what it could also possibly mean.

My Sherlock, that beautiful, brilliant detective, may be gone FOREVER.

John knew what damage to the frontal lobe could do. Even if patients woke up quickly and had little impairment to their speech, the frontal lobe had an important part to play in many human functions. A significant injury could alter emotional responses, personality, impulse control, the ability to concentrate, initiative, social skills, and interpreting the environment, among other things. All of those were vital to 'The Work', as Sherlock had always called it. There were so terribly many things that could permanently alter the very core of who Sherlock was.
John shook those blasphemous thoughts away. He couldn't think like that, not yet. It was still too early. He had to focus on helping Sherlock wake up first, then they could deal with the repercussions.

John looked at his watch. It was 3:11 AM. He knew he shouldn't wake Mycroft, but if Sherlock's brother found out he'd woken up and John hadn't told him, it'd be worse.

_Much worse._

He'd seen what 'The British Government' could do to people, and he didn't want to get on the man's bad side. He took his phone out of his pocket and typed out a text message.

_Sorry to send a text so early. I saw Sherlock's eyes open. It was only for about two seconds. He looked over at me when I spoke. JW_

John started to type about how there was no recognition in his eyes, but he quickly deleted it. If it had only been a one time thing, there was no reason to unduly worry Mycroft. He hit send. A moment later, he got a response.

_I'll be there in fifteen minutes. -M-

_You should try to get some sleep. I'll inform you if anything else happens. JW_

John knew the fact that he got no reply meant Mycroft was already on his way- damn the time of night, and damn his job tomorrow.

Almost precisely fifteen minutes later, Mycroft walked in. Like always, he placed his umbrella by the door and his briefcase on the table. He was, as ever, impeccably dressed. One wouldn't have been able to tell that it was almost four in the morning. He looked like he was ready to walk into his office.

_“Any change?”_
“No.”

John smiled sadly at the routine question and answer. It was their greeting. It was never 'Hello, how are you today, have you slept? Have you eaten? Have you showered?' Sherlock always came first.

*It was always Sherlock.*

“He hasn't moved since I texted.” John finally elaborated, after a bit of an awkward silence. “I called a nurse in, and she said it was a good sign that he was attempting to regain consciousness, but it still may take some time. People don't suddenly wake up like in the movies.”

Mycroft nodded, but didn't answer.

John sighed and looked down at Sherlock. The vast majority of his wounds had healed, and the long cast for his arm fracture had been removed. A part of his head had been shaved before the insertion of the ICP meter, and now the hair was growing back. This meant there was an almost bald, square patch of scalp. Sherlock had always been so fastidious about his appearance, especially his hair- a curl was never out of place. If it'd been for any other reason, John might have found that bald spot funny. This was anything but.

Silence fell over the room like a thick carpet.

One of the nurses came in to do her hourly checkup a short time later, a part of his constant vital signs monitoring. She quietly went to work, quick and efficient. She wrote down notes about the settings of the respirator- browsing through the machine's history, did the usual panel of simple neurological tests, then left without a word. It was a strange comfort. All this time, John had never had much of a conversation with any of the nurses, never bothered to try to learn their names, asked about what they liked or disliked, or what they did outside the hospital. But having them here every hour meant that Sherlock was still alive, and they were still fighting for him, with him.

While the nurse was in the room, she’d removed the sheet that was pulled up to Sherlock's chest, revealing the short hospital gown he was wearing that did nothing to hide his thin legs. Sherlock had always been thin, but he looked positively skeletal after being in a coma for weeks. John knew that it was going to be a very long time before he was going to be able to sit up or stand by himself. He was only too glad when she pulled the cover back over him. Seeing him this way drilled a hole into his heart.
Night slowly turned into day. The curtains were closed, but John could tell by the amount of light coming through where the two pieces of fabric met about what time it was. He didn't have much else to do when the days stretched out to eternity, so over the weeks he'd learned to observe instead of just see.

*Wouldn't Sherlock be proud?*

Once again, Mycroft managed to make a few phone calls to ensure that he'd be able to stay at the hospital that day. John had to wonder, with everything else going on, how much work was he getting done?

Sherlock stirred again a few hours after dawn. His eyes sluggishly opened, drawing halted breaths from the two people in the room.

“Sherlock. Can you understand me? Do you know where you are? Blink once for yes.” Mycroft spoke slowly and deliberately, enunciating each word for maximum clarity.

Sherlock did turn his eyes towards Mycroft, but no response of any sort came. His eyes were half lidded and glassy, like he was looking a thousand miles away, instead of at his brother.

“Sherlock... William?”

Hearing Mycroft say his given name seemed to do something to Sherlock. He blinked a few times, like he was trying to puzzle out what was going on, trying to piece his thoughts together. He stayed like that for a few seconds, neither of the other men daring to speak or breathe, before Sherlock turned his eyes upwards again and closed them.

John had no idea what to say to Mycroft, the man's face told the whole story. He looked like someone had murdered his brother in front of him. The emotion on his face was raw, like an open sore. He was appalled, afraid, utterly devastated. He'd seen what John had. There was emptiness behind those blue eyes.

Without a word, Mycroft got up and walked into the bathroom attached to the Sherlock's room. The door closed and locked. John could hear the sounds of retching from the bathroom. A short time later, there was a flush and the running of water, longer than it would normally take to wash one's hands. When Mycroft stepped out a moment later. John saw his eyes. They were red and puffy, and despite his best efforts, tear marks were still visible on his chin. But John said nothing, and Mycroft sat back down like nothing had happened, his face a mask of indifference once again.
Chapter End Notes

If anyone cares to know what the seat John was sleeping in looked like, I based it on this:
http://www.ukhealthcarechairs.co.uk/uploads/prod_447_1.jpg

Also, sorry it is a day late, and Happy Father's Day for anyone who is reading this the day it is released!
Comfortly Numb

Chapter Summary

In which Sherlock wakes up, and John and Mycroft learn his prognosis.

Chapter Notes

I know that this is a very serious chapter, but I just had to link this specific version of the song because it's kind of awesome. Benedict Cumberbatch joined David Gilmour of Pink Floyd on stage for a rendition of “Comfortably Numb” and it rocks.

This is a long one folks. It's full of medical drama, so strap in for a bumpy ride. It's full of a lot of medical jargon as well. As always, there are definitions in the end notes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Comfortably Numb

Pink Floyd- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FaaolTvEdKtA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FaaolTvEdKtA)

Through the next couple of days, Sherlock drifted in and out of consciousness. Every time he'd stay awake a little longer, but he showed little indication that he knew who John or Mycroft were. Sometimes, he squeezed their hands when they asked him to, though his compliance seemed rather random, without rhyme or reason. There was no way to tell how comprehensible a sound he might be able to make, since the tracheostomy made any attempts to speak impossible. He had made a leaky grunt a few times, but that had been the whole of it, so far.

The doctors asked him to perform some simple muscle movements, to which he partially complied. But even that was promising. Two days after starting to wake up, he was given a 11 on the Glasgow scale. He continued to show more awareness of the people present, but it was hard to tell what he could or couldn't comprehend, since he couldn't speak.
Every little tiny step forward filled John with a warm hope, but it was tempered by the lingering cancer that entered his mind and grew and festered. When Sherlock finally did finally fully rouse, what shape would he be in? Nothing could halt the spread of doubt that had taken seed in the darkest recesses of his mind.

It was agonizingly slow watching Sherlock become more and more aware. He moved his head to look at whomever was talking to him, and sometimes he would respond if he could blink once or twice to answer yes or no. Even with that, John was never quite sure if he was actually answering, or simply blinking. John would have expected- or at least hoped- that he'd attempt to talk, even if he couldn't because of the tracheotomy tube. So far, other than the couple of low grunts, he had not.

A number of tests were frequently repeated to assess recovery as Sherlock slowly started to re-enter the world. Despite the fact that John wasn't anything close to a neurosurgeon, he knew a bit about TBI's- traumatic brain injuries, and some of the tests they were going to perform.

A new MRI was done, the results of which were not available right away. On that same day, a battery of other tests were also performed with the assistance of a brain injury specialist from the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery who was doing his weekly visit.

If- hopefully when- he became more communicative, John knew that further neurological tests would be undertaken to test his abilities, such as the Rey-Complex Figure for visual memory, and the Kinura Box Test for apraxia- the awareness of a body in space.

The trip to the radiology department for the MRI drained Sherlock of what little energy reserves he had, and he reacted very little to the company in his room that afternoon. It'd been ages since either John or Mycroft had been home, and though they both ached to stay, they also understood that being at hospital while Sherlock was going to be otherwise indisposed with testing was rather useless. Mycroft called for a car. Forty minutes later, John was dropped off at his flat. He watched the car speed off, taking what he was sure was an equally bone weary Mycroft home.

As much as John knew he should take a shower- it had been an embarrassingly long time since he'd had one- he couldn't steer himself away from his bed. He collapsed onto it, fully clothed, and instantly fell asleep.

He was so tired that not even the nightmares could awaken him from his slumber.

What finally woke him was his phone ringing. Consciousness every so slowly seeped back into his mind. Everything was dark and hazy and fuzzy. He fumbled a couple of times, almost knocking his phone off the bedside table.
How had it even gotten there? I don't remember taking it out of my pocket.

“H-hello?” His voice was slurred, gravelly with sleep.

“Doctor Watson. I tried texting you several times. There was no answer. This is my third attempt at phoning you. I was about to send Anthea to make sure you were still alive.”

“Mycroft... are you at hospital?” John tried to wake up enough to determine the news by the tone of the man's voice, but between his own grogginess, and the annoying flat tone that the Holmes family excelled at, he couldn't gather any information.

“I am. The tests are done, and the MRI has been evaluated by a neuroradiologist. Are you ready to come back to discuss the results?”

That woke John up quicker than 10 cups of coffee.

“Yes, but can't you tell me now?”

“The doctors would like to speak with us personally.”

“Have they... already talked to you?” Dread pooled deep in his stomach.

“They have, but they'd like explain it in more detail to both of us.”

“Is... it... bad?” John held his breath, his whole body tense.

There was a pause. It felt like the world stopped.

“It'd be easier if you came back to hospital. The car should be arriving any moment now.”
Before John could say anything, Mycroft rang off, and a moment later a car horn honked outside his flat. He looked out the window for the first time since he woke up. It was already late evening. He must have slept almost six hours. That was more sleep than he'd gotten in at least a week, John had to admit. For the first time in over a month, he felt slightly less exhausted. Though, as a doctor, he knew that one long nap wouldn't make up for weeks of sleep deprivation.

He quickly changed clothes, grabbed a bag of crisps that he hoped wasn't out of date, and went out to meet the car.

If the other drives to the hospital had seemed slow, this one seemed downright backwards. Had it taken an hour to get there? It certainly seemed like it. John's mind contemplated every terrible thing the doctors could say... Broca's speech center destroyed... mind like a child... What if he couldn't walk, or talk? What if Sherlock couldn't remember who they were, or who he was?

John's thoughts spiraled lower and lower.. his breath got shallow, his vision blurry.. he could feel a panic attack coming on. Quickly he lowered the window and stuck his head out into the cool night air. He closed his eyes and focused on controlling his breathing...

_In..._

_Out...._

_In..._

_Out..._

After what seemed like an eternity, he felt himself calming down. His heart slowed down to a more normal pace, and he was able to eventually get his breathing under control. John spent the rest of the ride looking out at the lights of London as the city came alive in the evening. When they finally arrived, John ran as fast as his legs could carry him through the hospital and up to Sherlock's room. He was almost glad, strangely enough, that Sherlock was sleeping. He wasn't sure he could look into those vacant cerulean eyes right now.

“Mycroft... What's going on.?” John was panting and out of breath. He'd been doing pretty much nothing the last seven weeks, and his body wasn't used to such bursts of exercise.
“Please, take a moment to gather yourself. The doctors should be back any moment to speak with us.”

John took his customary seat at Sherlock’s right side. “He's.....”

“Just asleep.”

“Oh.” John paused. Now that he was actually in front of Mycroft, he tried once again to read the man's mood. But as usual, Mycroft kept a neutral tone, only frustrating John more.

“Damnit, Mycroft. What's going on with Sherlock? Tell me!” John yelled. Before Mycroft could answer, a nurse came in and admonished John for being too loud. As the nurse was leaving, the team of doctors walked in.

An older man with salt and pepper hair and a short, well trimmed beard stepped forward. “Good evening, Mr. Holmes, and Doctor Watson. I know we've met before very briefly. I'm Doctor Abraham Simpson, Mr. Holmses' head physician here at the ICU.”

John tried as hard as he could to concentrate enough to remember the names of the other doctors as they were introduced, but his mind was still stuck on Sherlock, and if he was honest, he didn't care who they were at this moment. He just wanted to know the prognosis.

“... Doctor Watson?”

Apparently someone had been speaking to him.

“I'm sorry, what? I apologize, I haven't gotten a lot of sleep lately.”

Since this all began...

“It's okay. We understand. I wanted to make sure you were ready to talk about Mr. Holmes' prognosis.”
"Yes. How is he, doctor?"

He leaned his head towards the door. “If you two will please follow me, I'd like to talk about this in another room.”

John knew what that meant. Whatever it was, it was bad, and because they were not sure how much Sherlock understood at this point, it was best to not talk about it in front of him, in case he woke up while they were discussing his case. John's heart dropped.

They were led to a small room with a long, dark wood table and a bevy of rolling chairs that were pushed in under it. The doctors crowded in on one side, and John and Mycroft were left sitting by themselves on the other.

“You asked about Mr. Holmes' prognosis. The short answer is, not good at this moment, but that's normal for a severe traumatic brain injury.”

Just when John thought he couldn't break apart any further, he was proven wrong.

The doctor saw the look on John's face and quickly continued. “It's not unusual for patients with traumatic brain injuries to have to re-learn how to speak and walk and do other day to day activities. These can be relearned over time with the help of physical and speech therapies.” The doctor paused for a moment to let it all sink in.

“The other issue is, with any brain injury, if specific parts of the brain are damaged, it can cause damage to certain functions. Often, in car crash injuries with front and side impacts, as in this case, we see damage to the frontal and temporal lobes. Mr. Holmes does appear to show significant deterioration and diminished metabolism in both of these, signaling that there are areas which may have suffered permanent damage. This is not surprising, but we had been hoping the damage wouldn't be this extensive once the acute phase passed.”

“Depending on the location and severity of the injury, there can be issues with many different functions, including sensory input, communication, comprehension, sensation and coordination, among others. It's impossible to know what has been affected, or to what extent other areas of the brain might compensate to take up the function of injured areas. It's possible to remove the tracheostomy now, his swallowing and protective airway reflexes seem intact. We'll do that
tomorrow, and request a speech assessment consult. I believe that within a few days we'll know enough to create short and long term plans for him.”

“The most improvement will happen over the first six months. After two years, the patient will not usually improve much, if at all. You have to understand that even though he will go through therapy to relearn life skills, it's likely he'll still have permanent changes. Those can include personality changes- sometimes patients will be more aggressive, they may have trouble paying attention, and may get agitated, frustrated, or overstimulated too easily. Most of the time there will be long term issues with balance and coordination, and a patient with a TBI will fatigue much easier than normal.”

The doctor took a long look at Mycroft, and then back to John. “I know it sounds very bad right now. We’ll make sure both of you are part of his recovery. Every brain injury is different. We can't say what his precise prognosis will be. That will depend a lot on him. Having support from family and friends has been proven to greatly improve the recovery of traumatic brain injury patients.”

The room was deathly silent. John opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out. They'd told him everything and nothing at once. It was bad, but they weren't sure how bad. He might recover, but they didn't know how much. He understood as a doctor that these types of injuries could vary widely, but they'd given him very little hope that Sherlock would ever be the way he was before.

Finally, Mycroft spoke for both of them. “Thank you doctors, for the valuable information. I think Doctor Watson may need some time to process this. Perhaps he can speak with you in the morning if he has any further questions.”

“Of course, Mr. Holmes, Doctor Watson. Have a good evening.”

“Thank you.”

The doctors slowly filed out, and once again the room was silent.

“Doctor Watson.”

Why does it sound like Mycroft's talking to me from underwater?

His mouth is moving, but I can't understand the words. My whole world feels like its full of syrup, sticky and slow.
“Doctor Watson.” The voice was slightly raised.

All I can hear is my pulse beating a drum rhythm in my ears. I cant take a full breath, my chest feels full and tight, an elephant's weight, pressing down on me...

Since when did the room look like it was a lens smeared with petroleum jelly? Everything is wavy and out of focus.

John looked over at Mycroft with slightly glazed eyes. His breathing was shallow and fast, and there was a fine sheen of sweat at the edge of his hairline. Mycroft got up and walked over to him.

“John. You're having a panic attack. Breathe deep. In and out. I'm going to touch your shoulder now. I'm initiating contact.” Even with the warning, John tensed visibly when a hand gently brushed against his shoulder.

“I want you to breathe in, count to 5, then breathe out. Count in your head.”

Somewhere through the haze and breathlessness and fear, John heard Mycroft's voice. He took a deep breath and counted...

1...

2...

3...

4...

5...

Slowly, he let his breath out.
“Good. Do it again.”

Slowly, painfully sluggishly, the dimness began to clear. John's heart was no longer slamming in his chest. It took several more repetitions of steady breathing before he finally started to feel some semblance of normality.

*Normal, but not really.*

Silence filled the room, leaking into all the empty spaces. It was quite a while before John closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths. “Th...thank you.” His voice was low and wavering.

“Of course, Doctor Watson.”

Anxiety still lurked in every muscle of his body. He was stiff and uptight, keyed up. The room seemed wobbly, like it was slightly off center. He'd had plenty of panic attacks in the past. He knew the feeling would pass, but it'd take some time.

“If you'll be alright by yourself for a moment, I have some further questions for the neurologists. After that, I'd like to find an empty bed for you to sleep in. I think it'll behoove you to stay out of Sherlock's' room for a bit.” Mycroft didn't have to say what they were both thinking.

*Looking at Sherlock only makes me worse.*

John hated to admit that he wasn't sure he'd disagree with that statement. He went to a small bathroom on the side of the meeting room to splash water on his face while Mycroft spoke to someone at the nurses station. John was just drying his face when Mycroft came back in.

“You're in luck, Doctor Watson. There's a room reserved for family members who have come a great distance to visit, and it's currently unoccupied. The bed linens have already been changed. It's only for tonight. You should get some rest. “

That was one of the strange after effects of a panic attack, John thought. Even after a decent sleep, they always made him extremely tired.
“Thank you, Mycroft.” John made it out the door of the meeting room, where he was met by a nurse who led him to the family room. He climbed into the bed and was asleep within minutes.

Chapter End Notes

Rey-Complex Figure- A test used to evaluate the relative contributions of encoding, storage, and retrieval processes to memory performance, and differentiate between normal and brain injured patients. It can also differentiate between motor impairment and memory impairment. 
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Charles_Morgan/publication/6853290/figure/fig1/AS:27765867:1-The-Rey-Ostereith-Complex-Figure-ROCF-In-the-administration-of-the-test.png

Kimura Box Test- A series of tests that are performed individually, then in sequence to gauge damage to the parietal lobe of the brain (located behind the frontal lobe). This tests for apraxia.

Apraxia- A motor disorder characterized by damage to the brain, in which the patient has difficulty with performing simple motor tasks or movements when asked, assuming the request is understood and the patient is willing to perform the task. It is most often caused by a lesion on the left frontal or parietal lobe.

Neuroradiologist- A doctor who specializes in the diagnosis and characterization of abnormalities of the central and peripheral nervous system, spine, head and neck using neuroimaging techniques such as CT scans and MRIs.

Broca's Speech Center- An area of the brain in the frontal lobe of the dominant hemisphere (usually left) which is linked to speech production. it deals with language comprehension, recognition, and production. 
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Broca%27s_area#/media/File:Broca%27s_area_-lateral_view.png

Frontal Lobe- The two lobes of the brain lying immediately behind the forehead, including areas concerned with behavior, learning, personality, and voluntary movement. 
https://www.health.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/image/0037/447787/frontal.gif

Temporal Lobe- The two lobes of the brain that lie beneath the temples that include areas dealing with the understanding of speech, visual memories, auditory and visual processing, language recognition, and new memories. It is below the frontal and parietal lobes. 
https://www.macalester.edu/academics/psychology/whathap/ubnrp/tle09/lobes.jpg

Also, I apologize for having two Pink Floyd songs in 3 chapters. I am trying to not re-
use bands when I can, but these two just lent themselves to these chapters the best, I thought.
A Hard Rain's a Gonna Fall

Chapter Summary

In which John and Mycroft face Sherlock's first day fully conscious, and Sherlock tries to speak.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A Hard Rain's a Gonna Fall

Bob Dylan- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5aI0HmR4to

A light shake on the shoulder woke John from his surprisingly nightmare free slumber. His eyes quickly opened and he almost immediately sat up, blinking his eyes to adjust to the overly bright room. He hadn't even thought to pull the curtains closed the night before. The low morning sun had made a beeline for his face.

Damn this stupid east facing room.

“Good morning, Doctor Watson.” Mycroft's tone was not nearly as cheerful as those words usually warranted. “The doctors are performing a decannulation, removing the tracheostomy tube.”

The cloudiness of sleep dissipated. With a quick rub of his eyes, John was finally able to focus. He turned to the man speaking to him.

“Mycroft.” He said simply. John was still slightly edgy and nervous from the panic attack yesterday, but it wasn't nearly as bad as when he'd first come out of it.

“They expelled me from the room during the procedure. I decided that it was a good time to wake
“What time is it?”

Just after ten. Between yesterday afternoon and last night, I believe you've gotten more sleep than you have in the past seven weeks combined.”

For a moment, John was confused. It was an odd thing for Mycroft to say. Then his brain caught up with him, and he took it for what it was- a somewhat half hearted attempt at a joke. He smiled softly at Mycroft.

“Thank you.”

“For what?”

“Everything. You've been... an anchor. I should've been the one consoling you this whole time. He's your brother. You're one of the strongest people I've ever met. You Holmeses are made of some pretty sturdy stuff.” John managed a half smile, but Mycroft looked like he wasn't even in the room any more.

“I've had to be strong my entire life. I'm used to it.” The tiny glimpse into Mycroft’s mind surprised John, and he stayed quiet. But as fast as it appeared, the melancholy look on his face was gone again. Mycroft quickly slid on his impassive mask and turned away. “Now come along, Doctor Watson. Sherlock will be starting therapy today, and we don't want to be late.”

John shakily got up from the bed and followed Mycroft to Sherlock’s room. As soon as they walked in, they noticed he was awake and alert. Sherlock’s eyes followed them as they took their seats, John taking his normal spot. It was strange to see a big while pad of gauze and medical tape on Sherlock's neck instead of the ugly light blue tube that had been there for so long.

“Good morning, William.” Mycroft tried to sound as lighthearted as he could, which sounded foreign to John's ears. Sherlock turned his head slightly toward Mycroft, but did nothing else. “Do you know where you are? Can you nod or shake your head?” There was no response for a moment, but finally, there was a small shake of the head- definitely a deliberate movement.

“You understand me. That's good.” Mycroft smiled at Sherlock. It wasn't much, but it was more than they'd gotten from him the day before.
John's stomach curled in a bit. Was his roommate- his best friend- still there? Perhaps there was some hope.

Why isn't he trying to talk? Christ knows it's usually impossible to get the man to shut up.

“You were in a car accident. You've been unconscious for a very long time.” Mycroft said softly. John wondered if it was a conscious choice for Mycroft to talk to him slowly, like he was a child, or was it just instinctual?

“Can you remember who you are?” There was a very soft nod. John sighed audibly. He canted his eyes upwards, breathing a silent prayer to some higher power- one he had never believed in before all of... this happened. The old saying 'There are no atheists in foxholes' seemed rather appropriate here, John thought. He felt like he had been in a foxhole for months. And now- just maybe- his stay was coming to an end.

“You can attempt to speak if you'd like to.” Mycroft said softly. “Your throat may be dry, but without the tube you can talk. Try to say something.”

Sherlock looked at him like he was conversing in a foreign language. After a few moments, John could see that his brain had interpreted what Mycroft said, and he shifted a little in bed, attempting somewhat unsuccessfully to sit up a bit more.

Mycroft was patient, and waited until he was comfortable again. “Now, try to say something. Can you say your name?”

Sherlock tried to form the sounds, but only a couple of hoarse, unintelligible syllables came out.

“It's okay. You've only just woken up. I do apologize. I shouldn't have pushed you so early.” Mycroft looked sadly at his little brother and gave Sherlock's hand a gentle touch. John tried not to shatter to pieces. Seeing Sherlock like this, it was just too much.

I'd die happy if I could just hear him say his name.

John noticed that a nurse had left a small cup with ice chips in it. “Here, Sherlock, take this, suck on
it. I know it's going to be tough, but don't chew it, and don't swallow it whole. It should help your throat a little.” John took one of the chips and gently put it in Sherlock's mouth. Relief flowed over Sherlock's face when the water started to dribble down his throat. John unclenched the nervous fist he didn't even realize he'd been making with his other hand.

“Let's stick to yes and no questions then.” Mycroft continued with the child-like tone after Sherlock had sucked down a few of the ice chips. “Are you in any pain right now?”

Slowly, Sherlock shook his head.

*Well at least that's good.*

“I wonder. Does he remember who we are?” John asked, meaning the question for Mycroft. But as he spoke, Sherlock's head slowly turned towards him. He looked at John... *Really* looked at him, and not through him like he had when he'd first woken up. Then to John's utter relief, Sherlock nodded his head.

*I could swear that's the same annoyed look he used to give me when he thought I 'd said something dumb, the 'Before Sherlock', the detective in the funny hat.*

“You... do remember me?” John didn't even care that there were tiny pools of moisture forming in the corners of his eyes.

There was another nod, just a bit stronger this time.

Sherlock was still looking at John, staring right into his eyes, unblinking. John knew that stare, the detective had it when he was about to say or do something very important and he needed to make sure John was giving him his full attention. Sherlock took a deep breath, and spoke one word. It was more like a breathy exhale, but the doctor knew it for what it was.

“Ahhhhnnn...”

*Oh God, he said my name. The first thing out of his mouth was MY name...*
John's heart soared. “Yeah, that's right. Good job.” John sniffled and grinned widely at Sherlock. When he glanced over to Mycroft, the smile he returned was one of pure relief and joy—something he'd never seen on the man's face before.

Sherlock looked over to his brother and breathed out a word that sounded like “Myyyy...”

Mycroft's eyes went wide, and he turned to John. “He hasn't called me by that name since he was a child.”

Was it because his throat was sore and he was still confused and exhausted? Or perhaps it was something more... troubling? That was a thought John simply could not entertain at this moment. He quickly shook it away, locking it deep into the recesses of his mind.

“Yes, William. It's My. I haven't heard you say that in a long time.”

_Had Mycroft's voice actually.. broken?_

John felt like he was intruding on a private family moment, like he was privy to something he shouldn't be a part of. Something... familial.

“I'm glad to have you back, brother mine.”

To both of their complete surprises, Sherlock actually _smiled._

Chapter End Notes
Decannulation- The process where a tracheostomy tube is removed once a patient no longer needs it.
http://www.medicaldemonstrativeevidence.com/imagescooked/185W.jpg

Also, I just want to add a personal note here. I have gotten several personal accounts of people who have had to deal with various types of TBI (Traumatic Brain Injuries) or issues with the brain with friends or family members. I want to say that I appreciate so so so much that you guys have been brave enough to share your stories with me. It humbles me so much to hear about the people who really have had to deal with the things that I am writing about. You are all so terribly brave and I am in awe of your strength. I can only hope that I do you guys justice.
A knock on the door halted any further conversation.

“Good morning. I'm Emily Thompson, from the Neurological Rehabilitation Unit.” John vaguely remembered her as one of the half dozen doctors that had been introduced last night. “I'm going to be Mr. Holmes' physical therapist from now on. I'm glad you're both here. I know that you've both been present through his entire stay, and intend to help with his recovery.” She paused for a moment.

“I'll be doing some exercises with Mr. Holmes to start rebuilding his muscle mass. We're going to begin here in his bed, and when he's a bit stronger he'll go to the physical therapy room where he'll get more intense training. I intend for you two to help as well. I'm going to show you ways you can help him exercise as you sit here with him throughout the day. They'll be short activities, so they won't tire him too much, but his muscles are going to need a lot of work to get back to their former strength. It's also likely we'll need to do a lot of work on balance and coordination, judging by the neurologists' reports.”

She showed them some range of motion exercises they could do, which mostly consisted of moving
the arms, legs, wrists, ankles, hands and feet in continual circular motions. It would work the muscles and help with joint stiffness and pain. They practiced a few times under her supervision until she was confident they knew what to do. When their training was done, she started her own exercises, testing grip, finger flexibility and trunk strength to determine what she had to work with, and the best way to move forward.

After just 30 minutes, Sherlock was sweating and panting. He hadn’t spoken a word the entire time, only grunting with exertion at some of the particularly hard calisthenics. Even without words, John could read his face and body language. He was tired and anxious and wanted this to be over.

Mycroft had a worried look on his face. He could read the signs as well. “I’m sorry, William. I know you don’t like this. But you were unconscious a long time. Your muscles need exercise. If you want to get better, this has to be done.” Mycroft gently put his hand on his brother’s shoulder.

The therapist left a short time later. Mycroft was still trying to calm Sherlock down. He was fidgety and making grunting noises like he wanted to say something but wasn't sure what or how. No matter what Mycroft said or did, it didn't seem to be helping, and John could see the frustration hidden just under the surface of the older brother’s face. He could only imagine how much Sherlock must have been even more frustrated at not being able to give voice to his thoughts.

John was feeling more and more like a third wheel, like this was something to be worked out between Mycroft and Sherlock. He knew Mycroft was trying to be the good big brother and help him calm down and relax. John thought maybe now was a good time to try to grab a sandwich, so they could have some time to themselves. He got up and started heading towards the door.

“Aahhhhhnnn.”

*He wants me to stay....*

John wasn't sure how, but his heart both broke and soared at the same time.

“You... want me to stay?”

“Y’ssss..” There was a soft nod.

“Ok, I'll stay then. “
Sod ever eating again, if he wants me here, I'll never leave.

Sherlock smiled softly when John took his seat and, quite surprisingly, calmed down. It made no sense to John. Why would Sherlock relax just because he'd refrained from leaving? Mycroft, as usual, was unreadable and offered no help. John settled in, and looked over to the elder Holmes, unsure of what to do or say next.

Thankfully for John, Mycroft did. “The speech therapist is scheduled for after lunch. The doctors want him to start trying to eat solid foods now that his ability to handle water has been established. There will be a special soft food diet for him. We have been given the choice of assisting him with eating, or if you'd rather, one of the orderlies can. It's up to you. I did not want to make the decision for you, Doctor Watson.”

The thought of some stranger trying to feed Sherlock sent a spike of possessive jealousy down John's spine, Hell, he wasn't even sure Sherlock would let anyone else touch him, with the way he'd reacted to the physical therapy.

“I think one of us should try. We can always call for help if we can't get it done.”

Surprisingly, Mycroft seemed almost relieved. John was quite certain that Mycroft was feeling as overpoweringly protective as he was about Sherlock right now, when it came to anyone besides the bare minimum of hospital staff interacting with him. Sherlock needed less stress right now- not more- if he wanted to get better.

As John and Mycroft silently watched each other, a thought occurred to the doctor. They were sitting here, talking about Sherlock in front of him. It seemed that he understood most of what was going on. He responded to them earlier and had non verbally answered questions and worked with the therapist. But he didn't initiate conversation- the only exception being when he called for John when he was about to leave. For the most part, he sat there and simply watched them, looking as though he was listening intently.

He always did love to observe.

When Sherlock had settled down a bit, John turned to Mycroft. “I'm aware of the irony of what I'm about to say, because I've already done it, but I think we need to be mindful to not talk around Sherlock, like he's not in the room. I think that's frustrating him.”
Mycroft looked at him like he had grown a third head. “I never had any intentions of doing so, Doctor Watson.”

_There he goes again, calling me ‘Doctor Watson’. He always does that when he’s trying to be dismissive or condescending, or when he wants to end the conversation._

Only a few moments ago, Mycroft had been talking to him about meals and therapies, like Sherlock was some abstract concept and not the living, breathing man who sat between them. John sighed, and sunk back in his chair, too tired to get into an argument with Mycroft about it right now, so he just let it go.

Little more was said after that. Sherlock dozed a little, still very tired from the physical therapy activities. Eventually, a Heathcare Assistant brought a lunch tray in and put it on the pull out table across Sherlock's bed.

“William. Wake up. Your food is here. The doctors want you try to eat a bit, okay?” Mycroft gently shook his brother's shoulder. Sherlock blinked a couple of times, his eyes still cloudy. Mycroft repeated what he had said. John watched the realization slowly wash over Sherlock, and he nodded softly.

“Would you like some help feeding him?” The Heathcare Assistant asked, patiently waiting as Mycroft used the bed remote to maneuver Sherlock into a sitting position.

“I think we'd like to try ourselves, if we can, thank you.” It was about as polite as John had ever heard Mycroft speak.

“Okay. Call for a nurse if you need help” He turned around and left.

Mycroft dipped his spoon in the container, coming up with a small spoonful of applesauce before he looked to John. “The nurse this morning instructed me to gently press the gauze on his neck while he eats.” John nodded and ever so gently pressed the palm of his hand to the gauze. He could feel Sherlock's warm skin under the thin gauze.

_Warm. He was alive._
“Okay, William. Open up.” Sherlock opened his mouth and to his credit did try to eat, but it ended up making him cough and spit up most of what went inside. But at least he was coughing. It meant he could protect his lungs. Of course, it could also mean that his swallowing reflex was not as functional as the doctors had originally thought. John quickly banished that thought from his head.

Mycroft, showing an almost infinite amount of a parental type patience that gobsmacked John, took a napkin and wiped his little brother's face.

“A good first attempt. Let's try again.” The second attempt was somewhat more successful, some applesauce was actually swallowed. Eventually after a bit of trial and error, they figured out that it was all about timing, putting the food in his mouth as Sherlock was breathing in. This allowed him to take his time with swallowing without feeling out of breath.

Almost half an hour later, most of the applesauce was gone. Sherlock was starting to get antsy again. It hadn't taken long for John and Mycroft to notice a pattern. Whenever Sherlock got frustrated, restless, or tired, he'd grunt and fidget around, which he was currently doing now. Mycroft sighed. They could tell he'd reached the end of his patience, and were going to get no further cooperation out of him.

“Okay, William. We're done.” Mycroft moved the food tray to a table off to the side, and folded the bed table away, which immediately calmed Sherlock down.

Well, that could have gone a whole lot worse.

Now that the nasogastric tube was gone, Sherlock would still need additional nutrients through his IV for some time, but at least this meal was a start.

Sherlock was ever so slowly on the mend.

Chapter End Notes

Nasogastric Tube- A plastic tube which is inserted through the nose, past the throat, and down into the stomach to provide caloric intake for a patient who cannot eat and/or swallow.
I am heavily in the middle of editing and re-writing the last 10 chapters or so.. and there is a very distinct possibility that the story may end up going more than 40 chapters. If it does, I will update the number here. I don't want the end to feel too rushed.
So watch this space for updates!
Enjoy!
Fix You

Chapter Summary

In which Sherlock has (another) therapy, and John has (another) panic attack.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Fix You

Coldplay- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4V3Mo6IjIM

Not long after a Healthcare Assistant had come to take the half eaten food tray away, there was another knock on the door. A young man with short, sandy blond hair and dark eyes walked in.

“Good morning. I'm William Smith. I'm going to be Mr. Holmes' speech and language pathologist.”

“Wiiileeeeee...”

Three sets of eyes shots to the bed, where Sherlock was grinning like he'd just discovered the most interesting thing in the world.

Christ, he sounds like a child.

John tried to give Sherlock a smile, but it didn't quite reach his eyes. This was quite possibly how Sherlock would always be. It was something the doctors had warned them about, the fear that
 lingered in the back of John's mind- hovering like a specter at the feast. What would they do if he never got any better? In John's mind there was never any doubt.

_I will take care of him._

Mycroft gave his brother a proud smile that John could see was tinged with sadness, and turned back to the man, his face once again passive. “His first name is William, though he's gone by Sherlock for a long time.” Mycroft explained to him. “I've been calling him William since he gained consciousness. He seems to be responding to it well.”

“Would you like me to call him William, or Sherlock?” He asked.

“Sherlock, please.”

John understood without anything else having to be said.

_William is MY name for him. No one will call my brother that but me._

The speech pathologist nodded and turned to Sherlock. “It's very nice to meet you Sherlock. I see you've already started to speak. That's wonderful. The more you practice, the better your coordination will get, and the more your speech will improve.

“Wiilllleeee....”

“Good job.” He smiled. “Okay. We're going to try some exercises now to test your range of sounds. First, let's test the vowels. Let's try an A, with an 'ahh' sound like author. Can you do that?”

“Ahhhhhhhh.”

He smiled warmly at his patient. “Excellent. Now, Let's try an E, with an 'eh' sound like ever.”

Sherlock looked at the pathologist with a confused expression, so he repeated himself, a bit slower this time.
“Sherlock, can you give me an E? It sounds like 'ehhhh'.

Sherlock scrunched up his face a bit, and tried to emulate the noise, but it came out as more like a breathier version of the sharper 'eee' sound he had made a few moments before.

The pathologist smiled and patted Sherlock on the hand lightly. “That's alright. Let's come back to that one. Why don't we try an O, with the 'ohh' sound like only?”

John tried to listen to what they were saying, but their voices seemed to turn hollow and ring tinny in his ears. The more Sherlock struggled the more sounds seemed to fade and turn to static in John's brain.

John scrubbed his hand over his face and let out a deep sigh. This was a lot of deal with at once. How was Mycroft even functioning right now? Everything felt like it was too much for him, and he was only Sherlock's roommate. Mycroft was his brother- his flesh and blood. John wanted to get the hell out of there, he needed something other than these four constricting walls. The room felt like it was closing in on him.

Oh no, not again. Not another panic attack.

John bolted up out of the chair, causing it to tumble backwards. Everyone else in the room stopped and stared at him, three sets of eyes boring into his soul. “I'm sorry... I have to... get some air. I'm sorry.. I'll be back in just a moment.”

“Aaahhhhhnnn...”

“I'm sorry Sherlock. I promise I'll be back in a minute.” His heart was racing and he could feel his breath getting faster. Without another word, he fled out of the room, racing down the hallways until he made it all the way outside. He kneeled in the grass and retched- mostly dry heaving- he didn’t even remember the last real meal he'd eaten. The taste of bile filled his throat, burning and bubbling inside of his mouth.

Everything came flooding in, drowning him. His flatmate, his best friend, his Sherlock was reduced to a child. He couldn't feed himself, he could barely form words, he was... helpless.
Hot tears streamed down his face, but he didn't care. His fists tore at the grass under him, his eyes shut tight as the salty streams flowed.

Eventually a hand on his shoulder shook him back to reality.

“Sir. Sir... are you alright? Do you need some assistance?” He looked up through puffy red eyes to a slender, dark haired nurse who had her hand gently resting on his shoulder. “You were saying someone's name. Who is it? Do they need a doctor?”

John hadn't even realized he'd been doing it until she stopped him.

I was yelling HIS name.

He shook his head. “No.. I...” he tried to wipe the wetness off his face. Shame flickered heavy in his heart. He was a solider, he was better than this. “I'm alright, I promise. I just needed to... let off some steam.” His cheeks felt like they were burning red hot. He tried not to think about how embarrassing it was to have someone find you, kneeling in the grass, bawling your eyes out, yelling another man's name. He took a moment to get himself under control, then finally looked up at her.

She smiled warmly, rifling her hand around in her pocket until she found what she was looking for. She handed him a small package of tissues. “Alright, if you're sure.”

He accepted the offering with a small nod, and went to to work trying to set himself right. “I am. Thank you.”

The woman left, and John flumped down in the grass, trying to compose himself. Despite the fact that being in the hospital room had triggered his panic attack, and the fresh air felt wonderful, he was still a tightly wound ball of anxiety.

John needed to get back to Sherlock to make sure he was okay. Being away even this long was becoming terribly taxing on his mind. In all the weeks he'd been there, he'd never been away for more than a few hours, other than the time he'd slept all night in the family bed at the hospital. Being away these few minutes shouldn't have been a big deal.

But it was. He needed to see Sherlock. NOW.
“Fuck, get yourself together, Watson.” he chided himself. “Do you want to be in the room, or do you not? You can't have it both ways.”

John took a few minutes to make sure his breathing and heart rate were back to normal, then he headed back into the hospital. He picked up sandwiches and a couple of bags of crisps for himself and Mycroft, then made a beeline back to the room.

“Aaahhhnn!” The smile on Sherlock’s face could melt the coldest of souls.

It fucking breaks my heart every time I hear Sherlock try to say my name. I want to run over there and hold his hand and tell him that I’ll never leave...

“Sherlock. I'm really sorry I ran out. I just... I had to stretch my legs for a moment.” He looked over to Mycroft. There was a flash of... something on the man's face. John knew that Mycroft knew he'd been crying. To his credit, he said nothing. The impassive mask was back in an instant.

“I got us some sandwiches and crisps.” Mycroft nodded his acceptance as John put the food down on the table to the side of the bed and made his way to his normal seat.

“We were actually just finishing up here.” The speech pathologist smiled. “Sherlock, you did very well for your first day. I'll be back tomorrow and we'll try again with those consonants.”

“Wiilllee..”

“I suspect I'll see you both tomorrow. Have a good day.” And with that, he stood up and headed out the door.

“Aaahhnnn.”

John turned back to Sherlock after watching the pathologist leave. “Yes. I'm here Sherlock. I promise I won't leave any longer than I absolutely have to, okay?”

You came back to me. Twice. I promise I'll never leave you. I could never, ever leave you again.
He put his hand on top of Sherlock's and smiled—sadly.

“Aaahhhhn.”

Chapter End Notes

I forgot to add here that I have a Tumblr! I'm still a bit new to it, so there isn't a lot there yet, but I only have a few followers, and I'd love to find more people on there, find new friends!

So if you have a Tumblr, come find me at My Blog

Thanks!
The afternoon passed painfully slowly. While Sherlock napped, Mycroft and John nibbled on their lunches. After the events of the day, though, neither were very hungry. Time passed in a rather uncomfortable silence.

“How... are you, Mycroft? I mean... really... How are you holding up? Cause I'm barely keeping it together, and I'm not sure how you aren't in pieces.”

Mycroft gave a long sigh. John saw the mask slip, just a little, enough to see pain behind those dark blue eyes.

“I'm... coping.” It wasn't much, but it was more of an admission that John had ever suspected he'd get.

“How? I'm not.”
“You're doing quite well, Doctor.” Mycroft seemed to relish the opportunity to turn the focus back to John and away from him “All things considered. He's my brother, and I care for him deeply, but you've been his steadfast companion for over 4 years now. I daresay he cares for you, more than you realize.”

What was Mycroft saying? John was sure he must have had a confused look on his face. Did Mycroft really think he'd replaced his brother, that Sherlock cared for him more? Or was Mycroft insinuating Sherlock had... feelings for him? John was quite certain that wasn't the case.

John shook his head and closed his eyes for a moment, steadying his breathing. “I'd say that my presence at 221B was tolerated. I was useful at times to him as a sounding board, a set of ears to bounce his deductions off of. But you're his brother. You two may not always get along, but you're family. I'm sure he cares for you a great deal. You know how Sherlock... is. He doesn't exactly broadcast his feelings.”

*I almost said was. WAS. How Sherlock was...*

“Be that as it may, you're obviously important to him, as he requires your presence to keep calm. I won't be able to work remotely much longer. I'll need to return to my office soon, and I think it would be best if you remain here to assist my brother with his recovery.” He paused to take in John’s reaction.

“I've arranged for a spare bed to be delivered here, and starting with dinner tonight you will also receive meals. My assistant is still managing your finances, bills, and mail. I know this isn't a the most feasible of long term arrangements, but seeing as my brother will most likely be invalided for an extended period of time, I would like someone that I trust to watch over him. Is this agreeable, Doctor Watson?”

John had stayed the last seven weeks, waiting to see if Sherlock was going to die. Now, he was going to stay to help his best friend live. He silently nodded. It was no small task he was agreeing to, but he would've done it anyway.

*Anything for Sherlock.*

“The bed should be arriving soon. I apologize that I didn't arrange for it sooner, but, in my defense, no one could have foreseen how long it took for him to wake up. I'll stay today and leave tonight as he sleeps. I'll visit on the weekends and afternoons as I can. Somehow I doubt that my absence will go noted.” Mycroft gave a sad smile. “He has who he needs here.”
Was that... bitterness in his tone?

John had no response, and the room once again fell into an uneasy silence.

The delivery of the bed woke Sherlock a short time later. The room was rather large, unusual for a hospital, but John knew Mycroft had connections, and when it came to his brother, he'd pull all the strings. Despite the second bed, there was still plenty of room to walk around.

“Myyyy... Ahhhnn.” Sherlock looked to each side as he came awake. John shot Mycroft a look and a smile.

See? He does want his brother.

“We're here, William. I'm just putting in a bed so Doctor Watson can sleep nearby, okay?”

“Kaaayyy”

Both men looked surprised. He hadn't tried to say 'okay' yet. “Good job, Sherlock.” John beamed at his friend.

“William, I have to go to work tomorrow.. I'm going to come visit, but John's going to stay here to help you get better. Is that alright?”

“Myyyyyy...” John had never heard one word contain such longing. It broke his heart all over again.

John could have sworn he saw moisture forming in the 'Iceman's' eyes, if only for a moment. “What if I promise you I'll visit you after work tomorrow, then?”

“Kaaayyy..”

Mycroft gently ran his hand through Sherlock's unruly curly hair. After his face had healed enough
while he was still in a coma, the nurses had been able to keep his face mostly clean shaven, but his hair was getting rather long and unkempt, except the one area that had been shaved for surgery. Unfortunately, now that he was conscious, John wasn't sure if they'd be able to keep him still long enough to shave his face, but that was a fight for another day.

“Alright then. I'll be back tomorrow afternoon. I'll wait to leave until you fall asleep tonight, so you won't even miss me.”

“M'sssss Myyyyy.”

The moisture was unmistakable in both of their eyes. “I'll miss you too, brother mine.”

Evening fell. When dinner came, they attempted to tag team feed Sherlock again. They were slightly more successful than at lunch, but more seemed to land on the napkin around his neck than in his mouth. After they finished, Mycroft talked to Sherlock a bit, and John nibbled on his dinner.

John was still not very hungry- his mind was on a million other things besides food. Plus, it was hospital food, so it was far from the best fare, though he had to admit it'd been a long time since he'd had a hot meal. He'd mostly been surviving on sandwiches and crisps for the last seven weeks, and the hot food felt good, warming his insides.

John poked at his food, rolling the mashed potatoes around his plate while his brain whirled with one terrible idea after another. His thoughts kept drifting back to how Sherlock had acted when he had to leave the room, and a short time ago how upset he was when he found out Mycroft was going to have to leave to head back to work. The Before Sherlock would never have been this... clingy. There was no other word for it, really.

There was a small, shameful part of John that actually kind of liked this Sherlock, one who was more open with his feelings. But that was quelled by the guilt of knowing how terribly wrong it was to feel that way, and the anger that his Sherlock may never return to the way he used to be. John would give anything to have the surly, egotistical git that he'd known what seemed like a lifetime ago here, now.
When dinner was done and everyone had settled down into a comfortable silence, Sherlock started to drift back to sleep. Mycroft softly got out of his chair, being as silent as he could, but was surprised when he was met with a soft, sleepy “Myyyy....” John could see Mycroft silently cursing himself for not waiting longer.

“William, I have to go. Remember, John will be here, and I promised I'd see you tomorrow afternoon.”

“Niiiiii.. Myyyy.”

Mycroft came over and gave Sherlock a soft kiss on his forehead, brushing those now long bangs back. “Goodnight, William. Sleep well. I'll see you soon.”

*Is that what he did when Sherlock was a child?*

Mycroft turned and left. Sherlock was fidgeting and making the already familiar low grunting noises. John needed to find something to distract him.

“Sherlock, how about I read to you?” That got his attention. He stopped wiggling around and locked that intense glare on John.

“Ahhhhnnn.”

“I'm not sure if you remember, but I read to you while you were... asleep. “

*Sounds better than in a coma, near death.*

“I was in the middle of reading Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*. Do you want me to continue where I left off? Or maybe I should start at the beginning.”

“Caaahhhh'uurrr...”

John smiled warmly. “Okay, why don't I start back at the beginning then.” John rifled through the
pile of books on the side table until he found that old, beaten novel. He wondered, how many times had Mycroft read it? It was obviously well loved. He assumed Mycroft would keep hardcovers. They were more posh, easier to store, and less prone to damage. Yet this was a paperback, with pages yellowed at the edges. He must have had it a long time, and though it was well read, it was still in good shape.

John turned to the first page and started to read. “Chapter One. I am Born. Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own line or whether that station will be help by anyone else, these pages must show....”

It only took about fifteen minutes for Sherlock to fall into a deep, calm sleep. John watched his breathing, His chest was slowly moving up and down, his eyes closed tight, his face calm. It tore John's insides. As he watched the man sleep, he realized he looked like he had... before. He appeared to just be resting, like he did on those rare occasions in Baker Street- reluctantly attending to his 'transport's' needs, ready to get up and go at a moment's notice- eager for the next case.

John tried to pretend the room wasn't spinning.. He closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths. With everything that had happened in these past weeks, he'd been getting better at spotting his panic attacks and stopping them before they started. He put the book down and crawled into his own bed, but sleep did not come easily that night.

Chapter End Notes

Wow. Over 2000 hits. That is just AWESOME. Ironically, 2018 exactly. I've only had one fic with more hits than this one, and it will be surpassed soon if this trend continues!

Thank you THANK you to everyone who reads this. The hit counts and kudos and comments are like sweet ambrosia for my soul!

Also, I call myself a HUGE R.E.M. fan, but this was the first chapter I could find a song of theirs that works. (And it's not even a favorite of mine. They have SO many better songs that weren't played on the radio). Do yourself a favor and search for "Wolves, Lower", "So. Central Rain (I'm Sorry)", "Driver 8", "Near Wild Heaven" and "At My Most Beautiful" and enjoy! :) You're welcome!
The morning that Sherlock was moved to a regular hospital room was a lot more stressful than John had anticipated. The doctors had told him the day after the tracheostomy was removed that he'd be changing rooms soon, as he was out of immediate danger, and beds in the ICU were always needed.

Since he had awoken, Sherlock had had good days and bad days, which John had been warned about. Unfortunately, the move came on a 'bad day'. Sherlock was already on pins and needles, all keyed up before the nurses came in and started to unhook cables and turn off machines to get him ready to move.

It had been getting easier for John to read Sherlock's mood as the days passed since he awoke. There were times when Sherlock was antsy and nervous, but when they moved him, it was worse than John had ever seen. Sherlock had to be restrained by a rather large nurse, while another worked on removing the cords and tubes tethering him to the room.

By the time it came to move him, Sherlock was so skittish and tense they had to stop several times on the way to make sure he wasn't going to thrash his way out of bed, or re-injure himself. Sedation was a last resort that they luckily didn't have to resort to. When it seemed at its worst, John took Sherlock's hand and held it, gently lacing their fingers together. He calmed somewhat- enough for the nurses to make the rest of the trip down two floors to the regular ward.
As they entered the room, John paused for a moment. It was quite large, compared to most rooms. He was sure Mycroft had had a hand in getting his brother a private room. It was obvious that this room was supposed to house two beds, though it had stood empty until Sherlock was wheeled into it.

The small roll away bed John had been using in the ICU unit was delivered a short time later, after Sherlock had been reattached to his wires and was finally relaxed and exhausted enough to be napping quietly. Because of the stress of the move, his therapies had been canceled for the day. The general consensus was that it was best to let him rest.

Time seemed to cascade away. John and Sherlock fell into a routine starting the day after the move. John would wake Sherlock up for breakfast. After breakfast was physical therapy, followed by speech therapy. There was a bit of down time before lunch, and after lunch a short nap. In the afternoon he had occupational therapy, then John would give Sherlock a short session of the range of movement exercises and stretches that Doctor Thompson had taught him while Sherlock distracted himself with whatever crap was on the telly. Dinner was next. After dinner there was time to chat and relax. If Mycroft could make it that day, he'd come by in the evenings for a couple of hours. The day usually ended with John reading to Sherlock until he fell asleep, and an exhausted John nodding off not long after.

John noticed even just a few days after Sherlock woke that little pieces of his personality were slowly coming out. He would pout and sulk and get easily frustrated when he couldn't move for long periods of time, if he couldn't do something, or sometimes when he didn't get his way. Those were all a part of the before, though the frustration level seemed higher to John now than it had been preceding the accident.

Sherlock could also be short to people when he didn't feel like trying to communicate with them-which was much tougher now that his vocabulary was quite limited. Thankfully, John had only been on the receiving end of that once, so far.

John had been trying to make Sherlock do some hand strengthening exercises, even though he didn't want to. For the first time since the Before Sherlock, he'd actually gotten truly angry at John, and afterwards he didn't talk to him or even acknowledge him for the rest of the night.

In the past, when the detective was angry at John, he'd blow up quickly, then reduce himself to a pouting sulk- usually for the remainder of that day. John had gotten quite used to Sherlock's little brooding episodes while living in Baker Street.

But this had been more like a thunderstorm, starting subtly at first, then growing and rolling in upon itself before it finally broke and washed over them in an exploding rage. Anger and frustration fed
into itself, much like a hurricane gathers strength from the wind and rain it creates. Sherlock tried to express his anger, and became more and more exasperated and enraged when he couldn't make his mind put his thoughts into words. He tried to speak but it was mostly very loud grunts and almost animalistic growls.

The argument had grown loud enough to get the attention of a nurse who happened to be walking by the room. She came in, nervously curious. John quickly waved her off, explaining that Sherlock was fine, just tired and frustrated, which drew a rather sharp look from Sherlock, who went surprisingly quiet when the nurse walked in.

After she left, silence descended on the room, an awkward emptiness that left John feeling drained. Sherlock did his best to turn his body as much as he could away from John and proceeded to stare blankly at nothing for hours.

John had offered to read to Sherlock later that night, but there had been no response, so John waited until Sherlock had finally been fatigued enough to fall asleep before he climbed into his own bed.

While John started up at the hospital ceiling, he contemplated the day. He wasn't sure if he should be happy that parts of Sherlock's temperament were returning, or mad at him for refusing to do his exercises, getting petulant and having a strop about it. But either way, by the next day, it was seemingly forgotten. No apologies. Life just went on.

That's my Sherlock.

The day after their little row, Sherlock met the occupational therapist for the first time. The doctors didn't want to introduce too many people at once, so they let him get used to having physical and speech therapists for a few days before they brought in another one.

She was a nice older lady, a grandmotherly type, with poofy white hair that looked like it took half a bottle of hairspray to stay in place, and a pleasant scattering of wrinkles on her face. It wasn't only her age that made her stand out among all the medical personnel that John had met so far - when she talked, she spoke with an American accent. It was something vaguely Southern, but it was hard to pick out the specific region. John couldn't help but smile the first time she said his name. With the slightly nasally, long 'ah' sound of the southern U.S., it came out sounding more like 'Jowwn'.

Interestingly enough, she was also less keen on John helping with Sherlock's therapy, insisting that while it was great to have moral support, Sherlock needed to do the physical exercises by himself.
So John was relegated to the sidelines as he watched Doctor Winters show Sherlock what she wanted him to do. One at a time, she picked up a small painted wooden block, and put it in one of three plastic tubs, sorting them by color. When that was done, she dumped them back out onto the tray table across Sherlock's bed and told him to sort them himself this time.

It was heartbreaking to watch Sherlock. He had to fight his own body to even do a simple thing like pick up a block. He'd grunt with frustration every time he tried to grasp one, but he was an inch off to the left, or a little too high, or the block would simply slip through his fingers. All the time, the therapist would voice encouragement, trying to help him without physically moving his hand to direct him where to go.

After about 15 minutes, when he had only managed to pick up a couple of blocks, and none of them had made it as far as the plastic containers, Sherlock had had enough. John had watched the frustration building, and tried to warn Doctor Winters, but she insisted on soldiering on. When Sherlock finally hit his limit he let out a loud, low roar, and surprisingly to John had enough control over his arm to sweep it across the tray and send the blocks flying in all directions.

“I... I'm sorry, Doctor. Sherlock can get frustrated rather easily.”

That's not too different from the Before Sherlock, really.

John got up and helped the doctor pick up the blocks and put them and the three tubs back in the container she'd brought them in. All the while, Sherlock simply observed, fidgeting and grunting, his eyes wide, his breath short.

“We'll try again tomorrow, Sherlock. Get some rest and relax.” She turned to John. “Take care of him. He needs a calming presence in his life when he gets frustrated. It's going to be a long road to recovery, and he'll need all the help he can get.” With that, she left.

While John put the tray away, a thought popped into his head. He gently scooted Sherlock to one side of the bed- which thanks to all the weight he'd lost wasn't hard- and climbed into bed next to him.

To say that it was awkward- in every sense of the word- would have been an understatement. There was no way in hell John ever would have thought of doing anything even remotely like this before. He really had no idea why this idea had inserted itself into his mind. He'd already started moving onto the bed before his brain could tell him what a stupid plan this was.
The *Before Sherlock* would never had stood for this. A terrible concern wormed its way into John's brain. Was he just taking advantage of a broken man? He had to shake that thought away. This was for Sherlock's benefit. Not his own.

The more John tried to arrange himself on the bed, the more he realized that there was barely room for the two of them. It took a bit of finagling, but John was finally able to lie at an angle where neither of them would be in danger of falling off the bed. At first, Sherlock looked confused, cocking his head slightly like a dog trying to understand what his master was saying.

“Awwwwwn?” Sherlock asked, but John didn't have any sort of answer for him, so he shrugged. Sherlock seemed to take that as an answer and did nothing else.

As John settled in, Sherlock slowly, by little increments, started to relax. Their sides were pressed closed together, and John could feel Sherlock's tenseness drain, bit by agonizing bit, until his breathing was finally back under control and John could feel his body unwind and relax.

The next time John looked up at the clock on the wall, over an hour had passed. He must have dozed off. When he looked over at Sherlock, he was still napping, emotionally exhausted from earlier. It was way past time for John to do his daily range of motion exercises with Sherlock, but he figured he could skip them for one day. Sherlock needed time to rest, and it would be more of a liability if they tried to push him too hard so early in his recovery.

John sighed. He knew he should get out of the bed, but it'd wake Sherlock up, and he looked so peaceful- calm and relaxed- so he stayed put. He was content to watch him sleep, watching over him protectively.

If the nurse who brought in their dinners thought it was strange that John was sharing a bed with a sleeping Sherlock, she didn't let it show. She simply put the trays down on the side table and walked silently back out.

It took a while for the blush to drain from John's cheeks. There was nothing between the two of them, but to an outsider, that would certainly not seem to be the case- seeing two grown men sharing a bed. It hadn't been bad at all, if a bit cramped and slightly awkward, John thought- and he was happy it'd helped Sherlock relax and get some rest. Even still, John thought that perhaps he should refrain from doing it again. Plus, he had no idea how Mycroft would take it seeing that, and he'd rather not find out.

John got out of bed, as gently as he could. To his surprise, Sherlock groaned and shifted around a bit, but didn't wake. A shot of warmth flooded through him when he saw a still sleeping Sherlock gently
prodding at where John had just been, as if reaching out to him, searching for him.

John was tempted not to wake him, but Sherlock needed to eat, and he didn't want to throw off his sleeping schedule any worse than it already was. It was awful that it had taken this terrible crash to get Sherlock on a somewhat normal circadian rhythm. But on the upside, he was sleeping almost as much a 'normal' human now, which would aid in his recovery.

Gently, John put his hand on Sherlock’s shoulder, rubbing against the cloth nightgown and moving him slightly until he woke up. “Sherlock.. Sherlock. Time to wake up. Dinner's here.” Sleepy blue eyes blinked back at John, unfocused and lazy. Sherlock yawned and stretched like a cat- like the before and smiled softly.

“Awwwwwnn..”

“It's time to eat, Sherlock.” John put the tray table back down, not sure how Sherlock would feel about it, considering what had happened earlier when the tray was in front of him. He saw Sherlock tense, relaxing a moment later when he realized that it was just dinner in front of him.

Not surprisingly, Sherlock wasn't very hungry, and to be honest, neither was John. After dinner John read to Sherlock. He finished David Copperfield that night. Since he didn't want to start another book in the middle of the evening, for the rest of the night until Sherlock fell asleep- which was much later than usual because of his nap- John told him stories about when he was a soldier, and his time as a doctor at St. Bart's. When Sherlock was finally asleep, John retired to his bed and was out like a light in minutes.

It had been a hell of a last couple of days.

Chapter End Notes

I can't believe that I have over 2000 hits and over 100 kudos!

Thank you all so so so much for sticking with this labor of love of mine!

Comments and kudos give me so much encouragement, and I appreciate every single one of them!!
I am almost positive that I will be pushing this past 40 chapters, but I probably won't update the chapter count until I know exactly how many chapters it will be, so stay tuned!
Friends

Chapter Summary

In which Sherlock gets ginger nuts, and John learns how Sherlock and Greg first met.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Friends

Uncle Mingo- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3jR1XeY2yw

John and Mycroft had come to an unspoken understanding that it would once again be best to limit the number of people who could visit Sherlock until he was further along with his rehabilitation. Of course, the exception to the rule were his parents. Mycroft had managed to stall them from seeing Sherlock until he had been fully awake for five days. The morning they arrived, bringing with them some contraband sweetsies, there was a lot of crying and hugging.

Sherlock recognized them, which was a gigantic relief to both John and Mycroft. Worry had been gnawing incessantly at the back of John's mind since his friend awoke and he was sure that Mycroft felt the same. They knew this meeting was inevitable, and couldn't help thinking about all the terrible ways it could go wrong. Sure, Sherlock had recognized Mycroft when he first gained consciousness, but the doctors did not yet have the full picture of the extent of his brain damage and how much of his memory it had affected.

Over the next few days after his parents visited, John and Mycroft allowed Mrs. Hudson, Molly, and Greg to see him- one a day, and not for long- so Sherlock wasn't overtaxed. His speech was very slowly improving. He was getting better at stringing a few words together into mini sentences. John, Mycroft and the speech therapist understood him, but his sounds were still very slurred and elongated, which usually ended up frustrating both Sherlock and whomever was attempting to communicate with him.
Mrs. Hudson immediately became Sherlock's favorite visitor. When she came, she brought along some of her famous homemade ginger nut biscuits for him. He'd lost so much weight during the time he was in a coma, and he'd already been so wiry thin before that, so the nurses that came in for their hourly checkups gave a smile and a wink, and turned a blind eye to the sweeties.

The days Sherlock had visitors, his therapy sessions were either rescheduled or cut short. Even short visits left him mentally exhausted, and the utter frustration of not being able to communicate as eloquently as he used to to set him on edge. To John, it was seemed like he was trapped in his own mind. Sherlock knew what he wanted to say, but he couldn't get his ideas across- which for a person with a mind like Sherlock's was the worst torture of all.

Xxxxxx

It was a gray, cloudy day the first time Greg was able to visit an awake Sherlock. He'd just finished lunch and Mycroft was cleaning the last of the food from around his mouth when a soft knock got all of their attention. Greg opened the door a moment later- just enough to pop his head in.

“Can I.. umm.. come in?”

John smiled warmly. “Of course, Greg.”

He took a couple of tentative steps inside the room. “Hi, Sherlock. I didn't think you'd like flowers, so I got a card from the guys at the Met.” There was already a small pile of cards on the side table. Greg added his and stood stiffly, nervously next to John. To his credit, Greg had a good poker face. John could see the alarm behind Greg's eyes, but his voice was steady and strong.

Sherlock was eyeing the Detective Inspector, but hadn't said anything yet. A few heartbeats of awkward silence hung thickly in the air before John broke the quiet. “Sherlock, you remember Greg, right?” So far he had recognized all of his visitors, but Sherlock had made no indication he knew who was standing beside his bed.

“Grraaahhmm.”

“What?” It was clear Greg was as confused as John was.
The smile on Sherlock's face gave it away when he repeated it.

“Grraaahhmm.”

John looked at Sherlock, who was acting like he'd just told the funniest joke in the world. And then it dawned on him.

*Oh, you total arsehole. There's some of the 'Before Sherlock' in you, isn't there?*

What started as a low chuckle in Greg's throat erupted into loud laughter. Soon, John joined him. Even Mycroft smiled. Greg found an extra seat in the corner and pulled it up beside John on the side of Sherlock's bed and plopped down.

John felt warmth flood through him. That was just a tiny hint of the man that Sherlock used to be. He was still alive in there, buried deep.

“Alright. I tell you what, Sherlock. You get better and come see me at the Yard, and you can call me Graham or Geoff or whatever the bloody hell else you please. Deal?”

“T'sss aaaa deaaaaal.”

The tone was much lighter afterwards. A giant bubble of tension that had lasted for so long softly burst and dissipated. There was some odd semblance of almost... normalcy.

Greg mostly talked to Sherlock, told him some general details about some recent cases, how boring it was since Sherlock wasn't able to come to the crime scenes, and how Anderson and Donovan had to admit that they actually missed having him around. “They even signed the get well card!” Greg admitted with a smile. Sherlock listened intently. He never responded, but he was soaking it all in like a sponge, still eager to listen... to learn.

John had been tense at the beginning, when Greg started to talk about cases. He was utterly terrified that Sherlock was going to think about the fact that he used to be a part of those investigations. But Sherlock was rapt with attention as the Detective Inspector talked. Either Sherlock wasn't thinking about that... or...
John wasn't sure if that was a blessing of a curse.

No one was quite sure how it came up, but the question arose as to how Greg and Sherlock had met. Not surprisingly, Sherlock had never bothered to tell John.

Greg leaned back in his chair, his hand on his chin as he thought about how to start the story. “Well, it was, I guess, about five years before you and Sherlock met, John. I was still a Detective Sergeant. It'd been a pretty busy summer that year, we were up to our ears in cases. And all of a sudden, we started getting these emails. They were never from the same email address, but it quickly became obvious that the same person was sending them. The wording in the emails was the same and they'd always sign it the same way, with a capital 'S’.” Greg glanced over to Sherlock, who was silently taking in everything Greg was saying.

“The letters continued throughout the summer, for about three months. But just as suddenly as they started, they stopped. For two weeks we heard nothing from our mysterious friend. I remember thinking 'That's a shame'. Who ever it was that had been sending those emails had helped us with quite a backlog of cases, which lightened our load. We were extremely grateful.”

“One night, I was called to a crime scene. At first, it was nothing particularly interesting, until I stumbled upon what I thought was a body right outside the police tape. Upon closer inspection, I saw that whoever it was, he was still alive, though barely. I could tell with a quick look that he wasn't injured- it was likely he'd OD’d on something. He looked like he couldn't have been much older than twenty-five.” Greg paused for a moment to take a deep breath.

“I called an ambulance and went back to the crime scene, trying not to think about the kid. But something stuck in my mind. It just seemed odd that I happened to find some random guy in the middle of an active crime scene. I'd learned long ago to trust that copper's intuition. It wasn't hard to find out which hospital they had taken him to. The next day, I did a little more digging around, and found him.”

“When I got to his room, someone else was already in there. He introduced himself as Mycroft Holmes, the kid's brother. He thanked me for saving his brother's life, which I thought was odd, 'cause I hadn't even said who I was or what connection I had to him.”
“He said his brother's name was Sherlock, and that he'd been the one sending those emails to Scotland Yard. Odd coincidence I thought, that I'd found the kid, but by the look on the man's face, I could tell he knew that coincidence had nothing to do with it. I didn't press him to elaborate at the time. Of course I understand now. Sherlock had wanted to be found. He didn't have as much of a death wish as it first appeared.

“I told Mycroft his brother was a genius. He'd helped us solve a lot of cases and put away some pretty awful people. That day, I made the Holmes brothers a deal. If Sherlock could get clean and stay clean, he could help the Met in a consulting fashion with some of the more obscure cases. I knew I couldn't promise much, 'cause these dealings would have to be 'under the table' as it were, but I didn't want to see this kid's obvious talents go to waste.”

“Mycroft agreed, and I left, not sure if I'd ever hear anything from either of them again. There wasn't a peep from the Holmses for over two months. To be honest, that fall was almost as busy as the summer, and I'd pretty much forgotten about them. Then one day, Sherlock Holmes waltzed into Scotland Yard, somehow found the tiny cubicle that passed for my office, and that's how it all started.” A warm smile filled the man's face, reaching all the way to his eyes.

“I still remember the first case Sherlock 'officially' helped us with. An older woman was found dead in a sauna. She'd died of hypothermia. It turned out that the killer was her husband, he'd locked her in a freezer where she'd died, then moved her to their sauna to try to destroy the evidence. It'd been a cold case for almost a year, and Sherlock figured it out in two days.”

John couldn't help but feel a warm tenderness. He'd never realized Sherlock and Greg went back that far. Sherlock had never offered any information, and John had never pried about their past. But he felt better for knowing now.

A short yawn from Sherlock made Greg clear his throat. “Oh. I should, uh probably get going now.” He gathered his coat and smiled at Sherlock. “I'll come visit again soon, and I'll be sure to get all the latest office gossip.” He chuckled. “See you later, Sherlock.”

“Byyyyyee.... Grrraahaaaaaamm.”

Greg was laughing as the door closed behind him.
I really just wanted an excuse to put on one song from a band that I really loved when I was in college. I was really into the local and regional music scene then, and Uncle Mingo was from Charleston, SC. Sadly, I never got to see them live, but the album 'Little Baby Brother' is AMAZING. It's kinda hard to explain their sound. A lot funky, a little groovy, and a sometimes even a little tropical, with a good dose of trumpets thrown in for good measure.

I suggest listening to:

Little Baby Brother- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRE426drZRQ (this song is kinda appropriate for the relationship between the Holmes family if you listen to the lyrics)
Bottle of Moonlight- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRqLsdFCzUo
Better Days (A Song For Sydney) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MBlz2kfRyA

If you can find a copy of this CD, do yourself a favor and get it. It's a great album. (https://www.amazon.com/Little-Baby-Brother-Uncle-Mingo/dp/B01MRMUEV7/ref=sr_1_6?ie=UTF8&qid=1526748517&sr=8-6&keywords=uncle+mingo)

There is a link to the MP3 album on Amazon.com. You are welcome.

Also, I've had this headcanon of how Sherlock and Greg met in my head forever now, and I was so happy that I could finally put it into a fic.
The next morning, shortly after breakfast, a rather large nurse came in, pushing a tray on wheels in front of him. While he would never claim to possess Sherlock's deductive abilities, John was certain the man was Russian. He very much looked the part—tall, built like a wall, thin dark eyes and a military style short flat top. When the man spoke, John's theory was confirmed—he had a strong accent.

“My name is Marko” He said, speaking slightly slower to make sure he was understood. “I'm here to give Mister Holmes a shave.”

John looked to Sherlock, then back to Marko.

After over a week of not shaving, Sherlock had a light, annoyingly even patch of beard over his face. If John looked closely, he could see some red hairs interspersed with the dark brown. John had noticed that Mycroft's hair, in the right light, had the tiniest bit of a reddish hue to it as well. It made him wonder—what color was their hair when they were children, and did they have any Irish blood in them?

It had always frustrated John to no end that Sherlock had a youthful face and didn't have nearly as
much of an issue with a five o'clock shadow as John did. It seemed terribly unfair in John's book that on top of all his other traits, Sherlock didn't have to shave as often, and when his beard came in, it looked quite even throughout.

“Aaaahhhnn?”

Sherlock's voice pulled John out of his thoughts. Since regaining consciousness, both he and the doctors had been trying to avoid shaving, not knowing how Sherlock might react. But they couldn't put it off forever. Unlike feeding his friend, John was going to leave this particular chore to the nurse. He knew his role was to try to keep Sherlock as calm as possible during the process.

“Sherlock, you're growing a beard. This nice man here is going to give you a trim.” He took Sherlock's hand and ran it over his face, letting him feel his beard, which garnered a strange, slightly confused look.

“You're going to have to be very, very still, alright? This has a blade, and if you move, it will cut you. Do you think you can stay still for me?” Sherlock nodded his head.

John turned to Marko and nodded. “Alright.” Marko got right to work, first covering Sherlock's face with shaving cream. Although John wasn't sure what to expect, he was definitely surprised at the reaction it got.

Sherlock giggled.

That set John back on his heels. He had caught Sherlock's deep baritone laughter from time to time, but this was a sound he had never heard from the former detective. It was light and airy, like he didn't have a care in the world. That was not the Before Sherlock— the man he'd known in his time at Baker Street. In the past, Sherlock never would have been so open to such unadulterated emotion.

It was both a breath of fresh air and a kick to the gut.

“Well, like you noticed, this might tickle a bit.” John smiled at his friend, a smile tinged with sadness. He watched Marko put the can down and wipe his hands off on a towel. “Alright, Sherlock. This is where you have to be very still. It might feel kind of strange, but as long as you stay motionless, it won't hurt.”
“Okay, Mister Holmes. Here we go.” Marko put the razor to Sherlock's face and took a short, almost experimental stroke down the middle of his right cheek to gauge Sherlock's reaction.

Neither of them were ready for what happened next.

Sherlock's eyes went wide. He froze for a moment, then gave a sharp yelping noise and pulled his whole body away from Marko and as far as he could to the other side of the bed, twisting in on himself. Only the bed rail kept him from falling of the far side. He looked like a caged animal, pupils dilated, body stiff and tense, lightly shivering. John knew that brain injuries could cause hypersensitivity, but Sherlock hadn't reacted this severely to anything before.

As a doctor, he was aware that the brain was a mysterious entity. Sometimes people reacted to things one thought they wouldn't, other times they might not react to something a person thought they would. For some reason, the shaving cream didn't elicit a negative reaction, but the touch of the razor sent Sherlock's senses reeling.

'Sherlock. Sherlock. You're alright. It's just a razor.” John looked back to Marko and put a hand up, silently asking the nurse to let him handle this. He wasn't sure if he should even touch Sherlock, but he took the chance and gently put a hand on his shoulder. He felt Sherlock tense up for a moment, then slowly relax after a few heartbeats.

John let out a breath he didn't know he had been holding. He had no idea why Sherlock had reacted the way he did. One way or the other, he was going to have to get used to being shaved, at least until he could do it himself, which John knew might be a very long way down the road.

Sherlock uncurled from himself, his muscles ever so slowly relaxing. “Sherlock, Marko isn't going to hurt you. He just wants to give you a shave. As long as you don't move, it won't hurt. I promise. Can... he continue his work, please? I'll be here to make sure you are okay, yeah?” For one agonizing moment, John wondered if his words were actually getting through to Sherlock. He seemed to understand before, but was that just John projecting his hopes that Sherlock comprehended more than he really did?

No. He couldn't think like that.

“Hurrtt...” Sherlock's single word brought John abruptly back to the present. It was the closest pronunciation Sherlock had had of a word since he woke up, and it broke John's heart.
“How about this. What if Marko just does a few strokes, then stops for a moment, then does a few more? That way it won't be too much at a time?” John looked to Marko and spoke with an apologetic tone. “I'm sorry. I'm sure you have other patients, but is that okay, what I'm asking? He's still a bit... overwhelmed with everything, I'm afraid.”

Marko looked a little frustrated, his eyes canting to the door for a moment before looking back. He gave a little sigh and nodded. “I've seen other patients with sensitivity issues.” He said in his thick accent. “Hopefully we can get him used to it, for the future. But this first time, we'll go slow.”

John nodded his thanks, then turned back to Sherlock, who was still curled up in a near fetal position. “Sherlock. Please, sit back up for me.” He gently tried to move Sherlock back to sitting up. Initially, he grunted and tensed and tried to fight John, but after a few minutes of gentle cajoling, he was able to get Sherlock to sit still and upright. Marko had to re-apply the shaving cream- there was a good bit that was going to have to be cleaned off the side of the bed and the railing later- and he got back to work.

It took longer than either of them had suspected. Even though the beard was not thick, it was quite coarse, and it took a couple of passes to remove everything. The longer it took, the more Sherlock fidgeted and squirmed, which meant they had to stop more often, which in turn meant that it took longer. It was a downward spiral of frustration. By the time it was over, Sherlock was as close to a full meltdown as John had seen him since moving him out of the ICU.

As soon as Marko was done, he took his tray and vamoosed, visibly glad to be out of the room. John managed to keep his anger in check until after the man had left. He understood that Sherlock had been a less than an ideal patient and had taken longer than usual, but there had been a distinct lack of patience and professionalism. He made a mental note to talk to a shift nurse about this later.

John sighed, calming himself down. He knew that Sherlock could sense when he was tense, and it make him tense as well. He ran a hand through his slightly graying hair. John was well aware that because of this incident, it meant that very little was going to get done in Sherlock's therapy sessions today.

*There are going to be good days, and bad days.*

John remembered when the doctors had explained that fluctuations in mood and performance level were normal for patients with traumatic brain injuries. His mind flitted back to a few days ago, when Sherlock had become frustrated and swept away all the blocks the occupational therapist had been trying to get him to pick up.
He understood Sherlock's frustration. A lot of the man's memories seemed to be intact. Sherlock remembered that he used to be able to do these simple things like talk, and grasp something—things that people took for granted every day. And now he was reduced to not being able to care for himself in even the most basic way. John couldn't even imagine how heartrendingly depressing it would be, to be trapped in your own mind, your body unable to do simple things. To go from a high functioning detective, to... this. John was actually surprised that Sherlock didn't have more bad days, when the frustration level would rise until it was just too much.

The day before the incident with the blocks, they'd had their first row since... the Before Sherlock. Sherlock hadn't wanted to do his daily exercises. John had pushed the issue past the breaking point, and it escalated enough that it got the attention of the staff.

That had been a bad day. Like today.

But, on balance, John had to admit that there were more good days than bad. The days when people visited Sherlock tended to be good ones. By the end of each visit, he was emotionally drained, but in a good way.

Sherlock always smiled when Mrs. Hudson visited, because she would sneak in a plate of her homemade ginger nut biscuits. John suspected she was bribing the doctor's silence on the ward with a plate of their own, but he never could get a straight answer when he confronted her about it. She was always keen to start talking about Sherlock whenever John asked.

The thought made John chuckle, which garnered a confused look from Sherlock.

“Aaaaahn?” There was a lot behind that one breathy word—confusion, hurt, maybe even anger.

John sighed, his face relaxing into a more neutral pose. “I'm sorry, Sherlock. I was just thinking about how much you enjoyed Mrs. Hudson's ginger nut biscuits when she brought them in the other day. I wasn't laughing at you. It was just a good memory.”

“Mmmmm...”


This time when John smiled, Sherlock joined in.
I can't believe the wonderful comments and kudos that I have been getting. It's really made this labor of love (there's nothing else to call this, as I've been struggling with it for 2 years now) worth every single moment.

Thank you, every one of you, from the very bottom of my heart.

There's still some big things ahead in the story, so buckle up!
A few days after the shaving incident, Mycroft was forced to break some unpleasant news to Sherlock.

Mycroft had come in for his normal after work visit. As soon he walked in, John could tell something was different- he had a larger than average weight on his shoulders. The elder Holmes began the visit with his normal routine- setting his umbrella by the door, placing his laptop and briefcase on the side table, then silently pulling up the chair on the opposite side of Sherlock from John.

“Myyyy!” Sherlock's eyes lit up as soon as Mycroft entered the room. John's heart melted a little. As much as Mycroft tried to insist that Sherlock wanted John by his side, it was plain to see how excited he got when his brother came to visit, and how sad he was when Mycroft left. Because of this, if at all possible, Mycroft always tried to delay his departure from the room until Sherlock was asleep.

“Good evening, brother mine.” Mycroft responded, as he always did. “I hope you are well.”

“Noooooo.”

There was an awkward silence- John could tell Mycroft was trying to figure out the best way to broach a subject he was not anxious to talk about.

“Myyyyy?” Sherlock looked confused and a bit worried.

“William, I've been called out for a work related conference.” His voice was low and soft. “I'm going to be gone for at least a week, two at the most. I promise you that I'll come home as quickly as I can. In the meantime, you'll have John to keep you company.”

“Noooooo.”
John felt himself breaking in those two little syllables. To say that the brother's previous relationship had been rocky before the accident was a bit of an understatement. John felt a sharp pang of guilt when he thought about how this horrible tragedy had been the catalyst to bring the two closer together.

No sooner had the words left Sherlock's mouth then Mycroft did something John hadn't seen him do since before Sherlock had awakened from his coma. He took his brother's hand and gave it a little squeeze. "I'm sorry, William. I don't have any choice in the matter. I leave in the morning." He let go of Sherlock's hand and sighed softly. "I'll stay tonight until you fall asleep. I promise. And in the morning John will be here. You won't even miss me."

"M'ssss... Myyyy." 

It was almost word for word the same conversation Sherlock and Mycroft had had shortly after he had awoken from his coma. John remembered every word, and he was certain Mycroft did as well. Whether Sherlock remembered and understood its significance was a mystery, but one look in Mycroft's eyes, and John knew that he understood the gravity of what had been said.

"I'll miss you too, brother." Mycroft almost whispered.

It took much longer than usual for Sherlock to finally drift off to sleep that night. John wondered if Sherlock was deliberately trying to stay awake to delay his brother's departure. He was afraid they were going to have to resort to a sleeping pill to ensure he got some rest. Finally, after several chapters of Robinson Crusoe, Sherlock surrendered to slumber, his breathing pattern deep and even, his body still.

Mycroft got up quietly and gathered his belongings. "Please, keep care of him while I'm gone, Doctor Watson." John never did like it when Mycroft was stiff and formal- addressing him by his title, but he understood how important it was for the man to maintain his composure despite the obvious feelings hiding under that impassive facade.

"Of course, Mycroft." John kept his voice low. "I always do."

"My travels could take quite a while. The two weeks I mentioned is a hopeful estimate. If I'm able, I'll try to call some evenings, although that may be an impossibility. I have your email address, and you have your laptop. I will endeavor to keep in touch when I can."

"Perhaps you and Sherlock could video chat?"

Mycroft steepled his fingers under his chin, much like John had seen Sherlock do countless times. "Perhaps. We will see how my schedule works out and what the satellite phone connection permits." He walked to the door, gathered his belongings, and looked back over his shoulder one more time. "Good evening, Doctor Watson."

"Good night, Mycroft. Safe travels." Mycroft nodded and softly closed the door behind him.

John looked over to Sherlock, thanking his luck that he'd slept through the conversation. That wasn't always the case. There had been several nights when Mycroft had tried to leave before Sherlock was fully asleep. It was was always a struggle afterwards to get Sherlock to calm down enough to rest.

John sighed and ran his hands through his hair. He wasn't looking forward to the coming weeks.
The first couple of days weren't too bad. Therapy kept Sherlock fairly busy. John felt bad for doing so, but he'd spoken with his therapists and had them work Sherlock a bit harder than usual, in the hopes that it would tire him out and help him sleep. At first, it did- but by the third day after Mycroft's departure, Sherlock was getting more and more anxious and upset. This was the longest time the brothers had been apart since the accident.

By the end of the fourth day without Mycroft, Sherlock was in a right strop, refusing therapy and barely eating. John and the doctors were worried, because he had just been weaned off the supplemental nutrients that had been supplied through his IV, and they didn't want to have to resort back to needing those extra nutrients again.

John and Sherlock were eventually able to come to an accord- if he did his therapy for the rest of the week, Mrs. Hudson would bring a batch of her ginger nut biscuits. John hated that he had to resort to childish bribery, but it worked. Sherlock reluctantly did his sessions, and over the weekend, Mrs. Hudson came to visit. For the first time since before Mycroft's trip, John saw Sherlock smile.

“Whaa happ'nnn... ?”

John had been afraid this question was going to come up- it was inevitable that at some point Sherlock would want to discuss the accident. John was actually surprised it had taken as long as it had. He'd been dreading this conversation since before Sherlock woke up, and wished Mycroft were present to offer support.

He quickly looked at the clock on the wall. It was still at least an hour before the next therapist was due to come in. John was pretty certain he couldn't deflect the question until then, so he sighed and asked, “So, you want to know what happened to you?”

“Yaaaah.”

“Well.. umm..” John cleared his throat, and tried his best to keep his voice steady. “How much do you remember? Do you recall what you used to do as a job?” Sherlock nodded his head, but said nothing, so John continued

“You were a detective, so you were out and about around London a lot. I worked as a doctor, and I lived in my own flat, so I couldn't always go with you to your cases. It wasn't unusual for you to text me where you were going to be, and request that I join you after my clinic hours were over.” John paused for a moment, deciding on the best way to approach talking about the accident.

“Sherlock, do you remember the day you were in the cab?” The man shook his head. There was a small part of John that was actually a little glad Sherlock couldn't remember. John could only imagine how traumatic it would have been. Flashes of Afghanistan ran through his head, but he shook them away- he couldn't let his mind go down that corridor now.

“That day, I assume you were likely coming back from a case. You'd sent me a text, it said that you
needed to talk to me. I agreed to meet you at your flat on Baker Street. But... on the way there, you
 got into an accident. A car ran a red light and hit the side of the taxi you were in.”

Sherlock was silent for a moment as he absorbed the information, before he spoke.

“Whaaaat I tellll?”

John couldn't help his voice breaking a little. “I don't know what you needed to tell me.”

And I'm not sure I'll ever know.

“Ohhhh.”

Xxxxxxxxx

To John’s relief, it ended up being a day short of two weeks before Mycroft returned. John had just
finished feeding Sherlock lunch. Sherlock was napping lightly, and John was skimming the day's
news on his laptop, when the door opened, causing the former detective to suddenly wake up. His
eyes went wide, like a child at Christmas.

“MYYYYY!” John had to physically restrain Sherlock from attempting to sit up and subsequently
falling out of bed when his brother stepped through the door. In the past week, the physiotherapist
had been having Sherlock practice sitting in a chair to help with his balance and trunk strength, but
he still had a long way to go before he could get out of bed on his own safely.

Mycroft didn't even bother to hide the broad smile that played across his face while he watched John
attempt to wrestle Sherlock back into bed properly. He put his umbrella and laptop down, then
hugged... actually hugged Sherlock, who held on for dear life. Mycroft had to practically peel
himself off of the younger Holmes. He took a seat, his usual stoic countenance back on his face by
the time he was settled.

“I trust you are well, William?”

“Noooo...”

“Bribery might have been used...” John almost mumbled. Sherlock actually shot him a look- ah,
there was the Before Sherlock. It tore John apart to think that somewhere inside, there were bits of
Sherlock's old personality. He would give anything in the world to have his surly, anti-social genius
back, solving crimes in Baker Street. Sherlock was like a puzzle that had been taken apart. Some
pieces had been fit back together, but most of the picture was still mixed up, or missing.

John had no idea if the puzzle could even be put back together again.

Mycroft lifted an eyebrow at the mention of bribery. “Indeed?”

“I told him that if he did his therapy, Mrs. Hudson would bring him ginger nuts.”

“And, I assume that it worked?”

“Do you want to show him, Sherlock?”
Sherlock's grin filled his entire face. They had kept his applesauce from lunch in the room after the nurse removed the tray- John tended to use it as an afternoon snack. It was quite fortuitous that Mycroft had showed up when he did.

John took the applesauce and opened it, pulling out Sherlock's bed tray and putting the applesauce and a plastic spoon on it. Sherlock reached out, and grabbed the spoon. He had to put it down and pick it back up again a couple of times until he had it positioned correctly in his hand.

John held the plastic container while Sherlock dipped his slightly shaky spoon into the applesauce and brought it to his mouth. He hit the corner of his lips, and some of it fell off onto the tray, and his hospital gown, but he did manage to get some in his mouth as well. He chewed it a couple of times, then swallowed, looking over to his brother when he was done with a radiant smile.

Were those... tears in Mycroft's eyes?

“I'm very proud of you, William.” Sherlock beamed at his brother.

“He's been secretly practicing that all week, hoping he'd get to show you. Not even the occupational therapist knows yet. I'm still feeding him for now, except for a few foods he can easily eat with his fingers, but the doctors are optimistic that he'll be able to totally feed himself soon. He was weaned off the supplemental nutrients in the IV a few days ago. That's one less thing to worry about.”

“Stttuuuppiidd ttuuuuubes.”

“I know.” John chuckled. “You don't like all these tubes. You've really been working hard. We're both really proud of you.” He took the applesauce, put it on the table, and folded up the tray.

Before anyone could say anything else, there was a knock on the door, and Doctor Winters, the occupational therapist, popped her head in. “May I come in?”

John smiled broadly. “Yes, please. I think Sherlock has something that he wants to show you.”
Progress was slow when it came to rehabilitation. Re-learning how to eat was one of the first things Sherlock mastered, whereas tasks that required more hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills were much slower going. Buttoning a shirt often became an exercise in frustration, but brushing his teeth and hair proved to be a bit easier.

Learning how to write again turned out to be the thing that sent Sherlock’s irritation to a whole new level.

One session had to be cut short because Sherlock, who was already in a stroppy mood before the occupational therapist arrived, threw a foam brick at her. When it happened, as surprised and disappointed as John was, he had to suppress a slight smile at the thought that throwing things around was one way to work on his hand-eye coordination. Unfortunately, the therapist failed to acknowledge the ironic humor, and cut that day’s session short.

Two steps forward, one step back.
June quickly bloomed into July, and with it came a record heat wave. John was thankful that he got to spend most of his time inside the chilly, air conditioned hospital. But he also found himself becoming a victim of cabin fever. He still took a couple of trips back to his flat per week to gather his mail and have a change of scenery, but he found that even those excursions weren't enough.

Sherlock was starting to get sufficiently independent enough that John felt okay with stepping out of the hospital for an hour or two every day to get a coffee and people watch in nearby Norfolk Square- a small but welcome stretch of green in the middle of central London. Hyde Park was another option, a less than fifteen minute walk from Sherlock. It provided a much more expansive and pleasant view than the Square. If John was feeling like a longer stroll, The Regent's Park was a comfortable twenty five minute leisurely jaunt away.

Today, he needed a bit longer to himself. Occupational therapy had been particularly frustrating, requiring all parties involved to take some time to cool down. He couldn't help but detour slightly on his way to The Regent's Park, walking a longer route that would take him down Baker Street. John's strides slowed as he neared his old abode. He paused in front of that old black door, with the handle still slightly askew. John stood stock still, his eyes drinking in the place where he had spent some of his best- and worst, moments.

People passed him on the sidewalk, unaware of the storm of emotions that were washing over John. Seeing that door again had brought a flood of memories- good and bad, mundane and extraordinary. It felt strange, but familiar. He hadn't been back to Baker Street since the night the police car whisked him away to St. Mary's Hospital.

The night Sherlock was going to tell him something- something John may now never know.

John could feel his chest tighten, the world tilting slightly sideways. He could feel the start of a panic attack coming on, so he ducked into Speedy's, silently thanking his luck that none of the regular workers were there to give him the third degree on why neither he nor Sherlock had been around for a while.

He barked out an order for a coffee- with cream and no sugar- at the poor waitress who was assigned to his table, and closed his eyes, struggling to get his breathing under control. By the time he felt the last vestiges of panic subsiding and the anxiousness fading into a dull roar in the pit of his stomach, the coffee had been delivered- along with a raspberry danish, which had always been his favorite when he'd still lived on Baker Street.
He flagged down his waitress as she came by with someone else's order. “Excuse me, miss. I didn't order a danish.” The blonde smiled at him warmly. “I know. A nice older lady came in, ordered it for you, and left.”

“Oh. Thank you.” The waitress nodded and went about her business. Of course. Even though Mrs. Hudson and Mr. Chatterjee- the owner of Speedy's- had had a brief affair and a longer falling out, she still frequented the cafe. He'd been so lost in his own thoughts that he hadn't even noticed her. But, for some (thankful) reason, she hadn't stayed to talk. She knew the stress John was under, so perhaps she had decided that he needed his space.

*Bless her wonderfully huge heart.*

*Xxxxx*

The walk through The Regent's Park turned out to be pleasant, if uncomfortably warm. John saw mothers and children feeding the ducks, couples playing tennis, and students walking around Regent's University- taking advantage of the abundant sunshine.

Despite the carefree atmosphere, he felt the familiar ache in the deepest part of his chest- the guilt eating away at him slowly that he should be back at hospital with Sherlock, who didn't have the luxury of such strolls, and likely wouldn't for a very long time.

John didn't feel particularly happy when he was with Sherlock. Of course he was terribly grateful that the man was alive, but how could say that he was happy while his best friend was stuck in hospital, struggling to do even the simplest things? But he was even more miserable when he was away from him. What right did he had to be out enjoying the summer when Sherlock could not?

*Damned if you do, damned if you don't.*

John quickly walked back to the main road and hailed a cab to St. Mary's, which in the lunch hour traffic ended up being almost as slow as walking. At least the air conditioning cooled his sweaty brow. When he arrived, his feet beat a quick tempo back to the room, where he was greeted with the sight of Sherlock working with his speech therapist on his t's and p's. As soon as John stepped in, Sherlock seemed to abandon any idea about continuing his therapy. His focus was solely on John.
“Joooohn!” Sherlock was getting much better at saying his name. He had all the right sounds together, though he still held the 'o' much longer than normal. It had been quite frustrating for Sherlock to get his mouth to form the soft 'j' sound, but he was determined, and eventually he mastered it, much to John's delight.

“Hey, Sherlock.” John flopped down in his regular chair and silently observed as the speech therapist managed to coax Sherlock through the last few exercises of the day. Soon enough, it was just the two of them in the room again.

“Jooohn?”

“Yes Sherlock?” John turned curiously to his best friend.

“Staaaayyy..” His tone was thick with desperation.

For a moment, John was silent. He could feel his insides crumble. Did Sherlock still fear that he was going to leave and never come back? He'd left the room many times before, and while Sherlock never liked to see him go, he'd never seemed this sad and desperate for him to stay. John couldn't help wondering if something had happened. No one had stopped him on the way in to mention any incident, so he had to assume that it was not anything specific. John sighed.

This was yet another mystery among the many that accompanied this 'new' Sherlock.

He looked at his friend, trying to read an explanation on his features but coming up short. With a soft tone to his voice, he spoke. “Sometimes I have to leave, Sherlock. But you know I always come back. I may be gone for a while but I'd never leave you alone for good. You... understand that, right?”

There was a soft nod, but John got the distinct feeling that the former detective didn't quite believe him. Sherlock often nodded, said yes, or didn't react at all when he didn't really understand things. John had come to the conclusion that it probably came down to embarrassment at not comprehending, which could make communication rather challenging at times.

Maybe it would be best to stay in for a while.
John laid back in his fold away bed after lunch while Sherlock took a nap before the occupational therapist's arrival for their afternoon session. John lay awake, staring at the ceiling, his mind wandering a million different directions.

While Sherlock's speech was getting better, it must have been the thing that was still holding him back from communicating clearly.

Or was there something deeper going on, something that John really didn't want to imagine? He made a mental note to himself to talk with with the neurologist about Sherlock's recovery. In some of the more physical ways, he seemed to be progressing well, but when it came to the mental issues, it was sometimes hard to tell if Sherlock was moving forward at all, and that scared the hell out of John. How much did he remember about his former life, and how much of it could he possibly regain?

Xxxxxx

Evening twinkled outside the hospital window. The lights and sounds, hustle and bustle of London seemed a million kilometers away to John.

The rest of the day had been... awkward. Besides helping Sherlock with lunch and the rest of his therapies, very little had been said by either of them after the conversation when John had returned from his walk. A pallor hung over the room, a bubble ready to burst.

“Joooohnn.” The way Sherlock said his name- so softly and tentatively, as though it were a fragile thing to be handled with the utmost of care brought John out of his thoughts.

“What is it, Sherlock?”

“Reaadd.”

And just like that, the bubble burst, and they were back to their normal routine. This wasn't the first time it had happened- something Sherlock said, or the way he said it gave John hope- a reassuring glimpse into the old Sherlock- evidence that he was still there and was simply trapped behind his injuries. Every time, John had to believe that this was a little push forward, the way back to the Before.
Two steps forward, one step back.

“Alright. I think we were close to the end of Robinson Crusoe, weren't we?” John managed a warm smile at his friend who smiled back. That sight was both wonderful and terrible at the same time. The Before Sherlock had smiled at him, but never as often and not like this. It was the nature of this new smile, so unreserved and almost child-like that broke John. He'd trade all of the smiles in the world to get his Sherlock back.

It was becoming more and more clear with every passing week that they would very likely be able to get Sherlock to a point where he could become a mostly functional member of society again, but he'd never be what he was.

He was now a former consulting detective.

The impact of those words was devastating. Day by day it was becoming harder for John to feign being endlessly supportive and optimistic. Sooner or later he'd have to accept that they were approaching a time when significant improvement was no longer likely to happen.

John turned his head to hide the tears that threatened to spill unbidden from his eyes. He had lost his detective. The truth was right in front of him, no matter how long he managed to postpone facing it.

“Joohhnn?”

He could see Sherlock's mind working. His friend was confused and distressed that John was upset, and he wasn't sure at all what to say or do.

Sherlock reached out a hand towards where John was sitting.

John snifflled and wiped his face, and turned back, plastering on his best smile. He'd put on a brave face for Sherlock. Seeing John worried would just upset Sherlock more, so he'd have to keep his feelings in check while he was at hospital.

Gently, John reached Sherlock's outstretched hand, and gave it a little pat. “Sorry. Just... got something in my eye. Okay, Let's start reading.” John picked up the book and held it in front of his face so Sherlock couldn't see the pain written in every little wrinkle of his skin.
He opened the novel and started where they'd left off. “I believe the reader of this will not think it strange if I confess these anxieties, these constant dangers I lived in, and the concern that was now upon me....”

Chapter End Notes

And once again, I used the same bad for a second song. I'm sorry. I'm a HUGE fan of The Killers, so it's been hard not to use them more. I apologize in advance if I end up using them again.

I got an AMAZING surprise this week. Not only did my awesome medical beta, J_Ballier mention my fic as one of the ones she is working with, which of course will give me more exposure (both scary and exciting), but she made a CRAZY AWESOME cover to go with it.

This is the first ever gift art I have ever received from anyone, so that just makes it all the more special. I cannot thank you enough, J!
in absentia
by seaweedwrites
Chapter Summary

In which Sherlock stands up for himself, and John tries not to melt.

Chapter Notes

I am very, very sorry guys that I didn't get a chapter out last week. I was out of town, and I thought I was going to have good enough internet to post a chapter last Saturday, but the internet at the hotel I was at was abysmal.

Thank you for sticking with me, and I don't foresee having any problems in the future, I hope.

You And Me

Lifehouse- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ac3HkriqdGQ

In which Sherlock stands up for himself, and John tries not to melt.

“I swear, just when you think it can't get any hotter, it manages to.” John did his best to fan himself as he stood outside his flat, waiting for a taxi he could flag down to take him back to the hospital. July had come in like a lion, and it continued to roar. He was only too happy when he finally hailed a cab and reveled in the luxury of air conditioning.

The walk from where the taxi dropped him off was blissfully short- just a quick jaunt through the parking lot and back into the arctic coolness of St. Mary’s. John rushed up the stairs, taking two at a time.
As always, a warm smile and a loud “Jooohn!” greeted him as he entered Sherlock's room. Immediately a weight lifted from his shoulders, like it always did when he returned to his former flatmate.

John glanced at the clock on the wall. He'd come back just in time. “It's almost time for you to go to the therapy room. They want you to try to stand up on your own.”

The therapy room was a relatively new development. Sherlock had been steadily improving when it came to his trunk strength over the last few weeks. It had been a proud day when he was able to maneuver himself into a sitting position in bed.

John had to admit he wasn't surprised that Sherlock was turning out to be to be a fast learner in rehab. His brain wanted to do everything he used to, but his nerves kept giving his body the wrong signals, which was an endless source of frustration and caused a lot of lashing out.

Simple things- feeding himself, dressing himself, and tying his shoes were agonizing slogs through many trials and errors. As much as John knew it didn't help Sherlock in the long run, if he saw that Sherlock was on the edge of a meltdown and too frustrated to continue, he'd hold Sherlock's hand while he did the task- helping to guide his fingers to completion.

He'd already improved vastly- he'd been able to feed himself for a while now, much to the relief of both John and Mycroft. Clothing was a bit of a mixed bag- buttons were still a problem. It was writing that was proving to be a much tougher obstacle to overcome.

John never expected much in return when it came the daily help that he gave Sherlock. In a way, it had become his job. He wasn't paid for it, and the hours were long, but ultimately it was worth it. On rare days, he would actually get a “Thank you” from his former roommate, but more often than not there was either no acknowledgment whatsoever, or Sherlock was petulant and stroppy towards him. It reminded John of the Before Sherlock in the most heartbreaking way.

Xxxxx

John had come back to the hospital ready for a fight with the therapists about accompanying Sherlock to this physical therapy. Damn them if they thought he wasn't going to watch his best friend stand again. Thankfully, there had been no need to gird himself for a battle.

As Sherlock's medical liaison, and due to the wealth of support and therapy assistance John had been
giving over the past months, *(had it really been months already?)* the therapist was fine with him joining Sherlock in this phase of his recovery. It was obvious to the staff that Sherlock relied on John, and was integral to his continued recovery.

The trip through the hospital seemed like a never ending trek. John's mind wandered, conjuring up the worst possible scenarios as they traversed the hallways What if Sherlock fell and hurt himself? What if he couldn't do it and he got frustrated and lashed out? Or worse, what if became depressed and and refused therapy? He was already semi-uncooperative at the best of times- remnants of the *Before Sherlock* were still deeply ingrained.

The therapy room looked somewhat like a cross between a gym and a ballet practice room. The room was home to various implements- machines to work on arm and leg strength, double sets of bars to walk between, and short sets of three steps with railings on each side to practice going up and down. To John, the oddest thing was that there was an entire wall covered with mirrors. He assumed it was for watching whatever the patient's technique, but it gave the room an strange, exposed feel.

Sherlock had been silent the entire ride over to the therapy room, observing the hospital and its patients as the porter pushed his wheelchair down the long, sterile hallways. It wasn't until they got into the room that he looked up and over to John, a questioning look on his face.

“Jooohn?” It wasn't a question of where they were, or what they were doing there- it was more of a *'You'll help me, right?'* In the time that Sherlock had been in the hospital, John had become an expert at knowing what Sherlock's tone of voice meant, even if the man only said his name.

John smiled softly and put his hand on Sherlock's shoulder. “I'm here, mate.” He said, fighting to keep his voice strong. “They couldn't kick me out if they tried.” Sherlock's almost goofy smile broke his heart.

Xxxxxx

After a short tour to show Sherlock and John the facilities, the porter wheeled Sherlock over to the double bars, where a young, fresh faced physical therapist took over getting Sherlock ready to stand.

Despite the pang of jealousy that he felt, John knew that it was silly for him to be envious that the members of the rehab staff would see this huge step in his recovery. Sure, there were other people in the room, but they were all busy with their own exercises, and were not paying attention to one more man in a wheelchair.
In a way, it was all terribly unfair. To John, Sherlock was so much more than just 'one more man in a wheelchair' even though in the grand scheme of things, that is exactly what he was. Sherlock would always be so much more to him.

This was a new physical therapist, one he and Sherlock had only met a few days ago. His name was Doctor Wilson. He was a kindly older gentleman with silver hair, a slight face, and thick glasses perched on the end of his almost hawk like nose.

“Alright, Sherlock. It's time to give this a try. I don't want to start you walking quite yet, we're going to work you on the leg machine to get your muscles a bit stronger before we attempt that. For now, I want to practice getting out of the chair and into a standing position. I've been told that you're doing well when it comes to transferring from a wheelchair to your bed and back, which is an excellent start. Your trunk and arm strength is at a near normal level, which is quite extraordinary for the amount of time since your accident.”

John inwardly cringed. Sherlock had come so far- the car crash seemed like a lifetime ago. The less John was reminded of it, the better. But the evidence was never really out of sight- or out of mind.

“Are you ready, Sherlock?” The determined look on his face and the very deliberate nod left John no doubt that he would succeed. He'd seen the flashes of tenaciousness and stubbornness in his best friend, qualities that would help Sherlock get closer to the person he had been before.

Doctor Wilson took a few steps back, letting another therapist stand on Sherlock's left side, and the young, sandy haired therapist, whose name tag read 'Smythe' was on his right. They were poised close enough to help him, but with enough room for Sherlock to raise himself on his own.

John held his breath, his body coiled like a spring- every muscle and nerve fiber tense- ready for what was to come.

Sherlock put his hands on the armrests of the wheelchair, gripping them tight enough to turn his knuckles white. His arms shook with the effort. It was one thing to lift himself for a moment to shift from a chair to a bed, but it was another to actually get up to standing under his own power.

Slowly, oh so slowly, Sherlock rose from the chair. The strain showed on his face, but still he rose. The therapist had already helped him get his feet out of the footrests of the wheelchair and put them on the ground, flipping the footrests out of the way so he wouldn't trip on them. There was nothing stopping him now. It was all up to him.
“Come on, Sherlock. You can do it.” Through his laser-like focus on Sherlock, John hardly noticed that he was muttering under his breath.

John was fairly sure his heart stopped beating. Smythe, and another therapist named Miller helped Sherlock balance himself while he moved his right arm from the armrest to the balance beam. They only gave him the minimum of support needed, supporting him only long enough for him to balance himself, and then Sherlock was on his own again.

For a moment, there was nothing. The air seemed to go out of the room. John's focus became tunnel vision. The rest of the room blacked out, leaving only him and Sherlock in the world.

Sherlock's whole body shook now, a fine sheen of sweat glistened in on his forehead under the bright lights of the rehabilitation room. He stopped for a moment, to balance himself and gather his strength for what was going to be the hardest part.

Time moved in slow motion when Sherlock lifted his other hand off the armrest of the wheelchair, straightened his legs, and with a quick, almost desperate movement, grabbed the other railing.

For a heartbeat, there was no movement, no breathing. The world fell away, the entire universe stopped for one infinitesimal moment.

And then, everything came slamming back into place.

Blood pounded through John's ears like a drumbeat.

Wait, no.

That was clapping.

The other people in the room were clapping for Sherlock. Many of them had stopped what they'd been doing and watched him stand for the first time in over three months.
Moisture pooled in the corners of John's eyes, threatening to spill down his cheeks. There was a tiny voice inside of him telling him 'You're a soldier, don't cry!'

He ignored it.

Though it must have felt like a lifetime, Sherlock only held himself up for a few seconds before Smythe and Miller helped him back into the chair, where he flumped down like a sack of potatoes, catching heaving breaths, But he was grinning like a madman.

John wanted to say something, to go over to him and hug him, but his body refused to cooperate. He stood there, gobsmacked. It was funny, he thought, that he'd almost forgotten how damn tall and beanpole-y Sherlock was. The man easily had fifteen centimeters on him, and being in the hospital for so long had only accentuated the former detective's gaunt figure, making him look even taller.

“Jooohhn?” The deep baritone knocked John out of his own head and back into the present. The people in the room had gone back to their own therapies. The doctor and the therapists were still standing on the sides of the wheelchair, bright smiles on their faces.

And in the middle of all of it was Sherlock.

_Sherlock._

He had that wide smile, his eyes crinkling, his sweaty face absolutely glowing.

Finally, John was able to will himself to move the few steps over to his friend and lean down for a hug, not giving a whit that Sherlock's hair was matted with sweat,even from such a small effort.

“Good job. Sherlock. I'm proud of you.”

The tears came unbidden, streaking down his face, but John didn't care.

Sherlock was one step closer to coming home.
Clocks

Chapter Summary

In which Mycroft has a row, John has a crisis, and Sherlock just wants to go home.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Clocks

*Coldplay*- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d020hcWA_Wg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d020hcWA_Wg)

Due to a critical situation in Bulgaria that unfortunately required his personal attention, Mycroft had been unable to see Sherlock standing for the first time since the accident. By the time he returned to England five days later, Sherlock was getting much better at it. Although the therapists always stayed at his sides as a 'safety net', they no longer needed to assist him- they were only there in case he lost his balance.

The therapist didn't want large crowds in the therapy room, so John took the opportunity to head back to his flat for a couple of hours to check his mail and have a lunch at little cafe nearby while Mycroft watched his brother's session. The restaurants around the hospital were nice, but the limited choices had already become rather monotonous.

By the time John returned- sated and in a surprisingly good mood, Sherlock and Mycroft were already back in the room, and by the sound of it, having a bit of a row.

Now that sounded like the Before Sherlock to him.

John had half a mind to let them fight it out and not get involved. He only had to get a little closer to
the door if he wanted to hear what they were saying. They weren't even trying to keep their voices
down, which was unusual for the perpetually calm Mycroft Holmes.

John took half a step towards the door, still not sure if he should stay put and listen or just go on in
when it suddenly opened, coming within centimeters of smacking him in the nose. Mycroft frowned
at him. “If you are going to eavesdrop, you may as well enter, Doctor Watson.

“I only got back a minute ago. I was about to come in.” He replied, which was only a partial lie- one
he was sure Mycroft saw through like glass. But if he did, Mycroft didn't reply. He started to move
past John towards the hallway. John stepped slightly to the side, partially blocking his way, enough
to make the elder Holmes pause for a moment.

“What was that about? I could hear you two arguing from clear down the hall.” It hadn't quite been
that loud, but it got his point across.

“It doesn't concern you, Doctor. Now if you don't mind, please move aside.” Mycroft's tone made it
clear that it wasn't a polite request.

“If it concerns Sherlock, then it concerns me. I'm his GP and friend.” John said firmly, before
acquiescing and moving to side. He wasn't afraid of Mycroft, but the man was already in a bad
mood, and he could rescind the rather generous visitation rights that John had been granted, so he
wasn't about to push his luck.

Mycroft took a few steps down the hall, then surprised John by turning around. “Don't go giving him
any ideas that he will be going home anytime soon.” And with that, he was gone.

So that was the reason for the row, John reflected. Sherlock thought that since he was almost mobile,
he was going to get out of the hospital soon. It was quite understandable from Sherlock's point of
view. Unless he was neck deep in some sort of experiment or conducting research for said
experiments, he hated staying still for more than a few minutes. Sherlock had so far been trapped in
this hospital for over fourteen weeks- and awake for half that. To stay in one place for seven weeks
was unprecedented for the likes of Sherlock Holmes.

John stepped into the room, only to find Sherlock trying to get out of bed.

'Sherlock!” John ran over to the bed and gently but forcibly pushed Sherlock back down, using his
superior weight and angle to get the upper hand. Sherlock halfheartedly fought back for a moment,
before he finally gave up and laid down, panting slightly and making the soft grunting noises that he usually did when he was frustrated and unable or unwilling to vocalize how he felt.

John collapsed into the nearby chair and rubbed his temples. He'd actually been having a good day, which was a rarity. Of course it couldn't last. He sighed.

“Hooome, Jooohn.”

“I'm sorry, Sherlock. It's still going to be a while before you can see Baker Street again. You've come a long way, but we still need to get you up and walking again.”

Sherlock huffed, crossed his arms, and turned away.

John wasn't surprised that Sherlock had already polished his pouting into an art. It was a remnant of the Before Sherlock. He'd been an expert at it, and that part of his personality had quite obviously survived the horrific accident.

“Fine.” John walked over to the small table by his roll away bed and found a book to peruse. After a few minutes he realized that there was no way he was going to be able to concentrate on reading. He looked up at the clock. The occupational therapist should be there soon. John figured he could slip out when she arrived. Part of him felt awful because he'd only just returned, but dark thoughts preyed heavily on John's mind, and he needed to work through them before they began to affect his interactions with Sherlock.

Less than fifteen minutes later, John waited until Sherlock was busy with the therapist and slipped out of the room, making his way to the hospital's chapel. He wasn't a religious person by any means, but it was a quiet, peaceful place to do some thinking.

The Holmes brothers' argument had brought one particular thing into sharp focus- something that John hadn't previously thought about. For months now, he'd put so much of his effort and time into worrying about Sherlock that he hadn't even begun to think about how he was going to live his own life after all of this.

While it was true that it'd be months before Sherlock could set foot in Baker Street again, John had to wonder, what was going to happen when he did? Sure, Sherlock was progressing well, but at this point, he was incapable of living on his own. When Sherlock left whatever posh rehabilitation unit Mycroft would inevitably put him in, he'd likely still need a lot of help.
Would John be willing and able to assist Sherlock at home after his rehabilitation ended? How would he balance work and living with Sherlock? John refused to continue to take advantage of Mycroft's generosity once Sherlock was home. He knew that he'd need to find a job. Besides, he'd go crazy if he was stuck in the flat with Sherlock 24/7. He'd need to be able to get away and have his own life.

But would he?

Would he really have his own life?

He'd already dedicated months to caring for Sherlock. He'd mostly abandoned his friends, and had quit his job. Sherlock was filling his entire existence.

How much change would it take to continue to care for him at home?

It was still a gigantic question mark- how much help Sherlock would need after he was released? Would he have more of his personality back, or would he be the man he was now, with traces of the Before Sherlock, but still mostly unaware of his past?

The more time that passed since the accident, the more of the Before Sherlock John had begun to see in him. It had been very subtle at first, but he could definitely see small parts of his personality returning. One of the biggest worries John had had was the question of whether Sherlock would realize that he wasn't how he used to be.

How would he handle that information? That epiphany could happen soon- Sherlock was getting more and more curious about the past, and he seemed to be reaching a tipping point of awareness. It could be devastating, and there would be nothing John could do, other than to let Sherlock work through it and support his friend as much as he could.

John sighed and ran his hands through his hair. All this stress was turning him gray fast. His brown hair was being overtaken- it had started slowly, giving him an almost sandy blonde look, but now his hair seemed more silver than brown. That, along with the deep worry lines that had carved themselves on his face like Mount Rushmore made him look at least ten years older than he was.

A sudden creaking of the door shook John out of his thoughts. A vicar was leading a visibly upset family into the small chapel. He got up and nodded his head to them as he moved past them and out the door to give them privacy.
John found himself wandering aimlessly around the hospital's open areas. It was a fairly large building, and John had gotten to know it quite well in the last few months. Some of the doctors and nurses smiled and waved to him. He was a permanent fixture now, a mascot of sorts for the ward.

He wasn't surprised when he ended up back outside Sherlock's door without even thinking about which way he was heading. He felt drawn there, like the pull of gravity - like the tides to the moon, it couldn't be stopped. He no longer heard Doctor Winters' voice, so the session must have ended - though by his watch she should have had at least ten more minutes left. John wondered if Sherlock had managed to scare her off, yet again.

With a deep breath, John walked in, not sure what version of Sherlock he was going to find this time.

Papers were strewn about the floor, littering the area around Sherlock's bed. John picked one up and looked at it. It was Sherlock's messy scrawl - he'd been trying to write his name again.

His WHOLE name.

Had one of the doctors told him, or had he remembered it?

It was easy for John to deduce what happened. Sherlock had gotten frustrated at how hard it was for him to write, so he'd thrown his papers around - which meant John had been correct when he guessed that the session ended early.

Sherlock was curled up in a little ball on his bed, his back to the door. John had no doubt the man was aware of his presence, but apparently he was in a strop and didn't want to acknowledge John.

“Sherlock.” John said, firmly but not too loud. Unsurprisingly there was no response, not even a little twitch.

“Sherlock!” John snapped in his best Captain Watson voice. That made the former detective turn around enough to look at him.

“Look. I know it's frustrating. Your writing is coming along slower than you'd like, and you want to get up and walk right now. Unfortunately, life isn't that easy. You've been working so hard, and look how far you've come. You just have to keep fighting a little bit longer. That's all, yeah?”
There was a grunt, but no actual answer. Still, it was more than John had expected out of him.

“Alright, well, apparently you're not going to talk today. Roll over onto your back, I need to do your range of movement exercises.”

As expected, Sherlock didn't move.

“If you want to walk out of here, Sherlock, you're going to need to strengthen your legs. These exercises will help. I'm not gonna make you do them, but if you want to stay here longer, then so be it.” John started to walk towards his bed. He was mentally exhausted, and not in the mood to put up with a stroppy Sherlock.

A creaking noise to John's left made him look over. Sherlock was still not speaking, and the heated anger on his face could melt a block of ice, but it appeared that he was going to cooperate. He had rolled onto his back and was staring up at the ceiling, brooding and quiet.

“Thank you.” John walked over to Sherlock's bed and began the routine, one he already knew from rote memory. His hands knew which movements to make, which muscles to work.

The whole time Sherlock laid there, silent and still, only making soft grunting noises once in a while when a sore muscle was stretched. When John was done, he gently patted Sherlock's lower leg.

“Good job. Dinner should be here soon. If you want we can continue The Great Gatsby afterwards.”

John had come to cherish the ritual of their evening readings. It gave them both time to come down from the stresses of the day and relax before falling asleep. John knew that as Sherlock became more and more aware of his past- more like his old self, this would almost definitely stop eventually, and a part of him dreaded that day. Then again, If that was the price to pay for getting the Before Sherlock back, he wouldn't lament the loss for a single moment.

That night, as he lay in bed, John found himself wondering yet again how much hope he should allow himself when it came to Sherlock’s recovery. Would it ever feel like the old times? Would there be cases again?

If Sherlock's cognitive abilities wouldn't recover much beyond their current state, John almost hoped that he wouldn't recall how they had been before. John would remember, of course, and it would hurt every single day for the rest of his life.
Despite his sheer exhaustion, sleep came slowly that night.

Chapter End Notes

I want to give a HUGE shout out to ChicxulubZero. They did a digital photo manip for chapter 18. It looks absolutely amazing. I just sat there and stared at it for a while, I was so blown away!

So go give it a look and give them some love, they deserve it!!

https://archiveofourown.org/works/15945089

Thank you so, so much for doing that for me! I love it!
Dust in the Wind

Chapter Summary

In which Mycroft is conspicuously absent, Sherlock is still brooding, John tries to get to the bottom of it, and Greg proves that he's a good friend.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dust in the Wind

Kansas- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tH2w6Oxx0kQ

Over the new few days, John noticed that Sherlock's mood was not improving. Usually, when he had a strop, he would brood for the rest of the day, but by the next morning he'd be his new, more chipper self.

Now, for the first time since the accident, that wasn't the case- a new day no longer brought a new Sherlock. Even four days later, Sherlock was still barely saying a word to John, and Mycroft had not shown up since their little row. In the past, Sherlock had always pined for his brother to come back, but this time he didn't even seem to care.

Something was definitely not right.

Sherlock could now stand for over a minute at a time, and without using the supports for shorter periods. It was slow going, but progress was unquestionably happening. Lately though, his heart had just not been into it. When it came to his therapy, Sherlock was going through the motions, but only just.

After his sessions, he would usually have a bit of time where he seemed to be in a decent mood-
riding the high of another successful therapy. Sadly, that never lasted long, and soon Sherlock was back to his quiet, sulking self. John noticed that in the last few days the highs had been shorter and the inevitable crashes afterwards were harder and deeper.

It was after a session, in which Sherlock had managed to stand for thirty seconds using only minimal support when John decided to get to the bottom of this. Of course, being male and English meant that talking about one’s problems didn’t come easy- and with Sherlock that was doubly so. But what choice did John have? Something had to change. And soon.

It ate an acidic hole in his stomach to think about what might happen if Sherlock didn’t snap out of this funk that he was in. Sherlock had a history of destructive behavior, and now, with this injury, John was even less sure of what to expect from his best friend.

Sherlock lay in his bed, silent and still. He appeared relaxed, with his eyes canted upwards- watching something on the telly, but it was quite obvious that he wasn’t paying it much attention. John's stomach tightened, his muscles stiffened. This was it. He knew this was the best time to talk to Sherlock.

“You... you've been pretty quiet lately. I know you and Mycroft had a bit of a row. Is that why? I'm sure he's been busy, but I can ask him to visit if you like.” Whether Sherlock understood that Mycroft was just as likely avoiding his brother as he was actually busy, John didn't know.

Sherlock shook his head. So, either it wasn't Mycroft's absence that was bothering him, or Sherlock was just being Sherlock and not admitting it. John decided to press a little harder. The worst the man could do was give John the cold shoulder again, and he was well used to that by now.

“If it isn't Mycroft, then what's bothering you?” Of course, there was no answer. “Is it that you can't go home?” When Sherlock remained quiet, John was pretty sure he was on the right track.

“Sherlock, I-” He was interrupted before he got any further.

“D'tectiiive.”
The air went out of the room. Christ, Sherlock really was starting to remember. This was exactly what John had been afraid of. The clues had been there. Sherlock had been asking questions about Baker Street and was starting to behave more like the man he used to be. John had been hoping against hope that the breadcrumb trail wouldn't lead back to his former profession. But this was Sherlock Holmes. He knew it was inevitable that this would happen.

“Yes. You... were a detective. And a damn good one at that.” John had given Sherlock a brief explanation about the Work a month before, though he wasn’t sure if Sherlock had remembered it afterwards, or if he had even understood what John had told him. John knew that if he had to explain everything to Sherlock again, it was going to hurt like hell. A heavy, thick lump settled in his stomach and festered.

For a moment, Sherlock said nothing, looking for all the world like he was back to his old self-pondering, deciding on what to say next.

As the time dragged on, John wished Sherlock would say something—anything, but eventually the former detective rolled on his side, away from John, and curled up in a fetal position.

And that was the end of that conversation.

Xxxxxx

The rest of the day was spent in awkward silence. John slipped out after lunch before the occupational therapist arrived—while Sherlock was having a nap, or at least pretending to, so John wouldn’t bother him. John felt bad for leaving the therapist alone with Sherlock, since he seemed to like her the least out of all the rehabilitation staff and thus directed his ire at her more than the others.

John was heading out of the hospital when he decided to text Greg on a whim. It was a long shot, but he was hoping they could perhaps meet up. After the events of the last few days, he really needed to forget for a little while.

_Fancy a pint, mate? JW_

The response came about a minute later.

_Actually, yeah. You're in luck. I'm off today. Took a personal day, had some things to take care_
Unfortunately, there wasn’t a large selection of pubs around the hospital, but John had spotted a place that looked pretty homely from the outside. It only took a moment to find the address.

*How about Fountain's Abbey, in 15 min. 109 Praed St. JW*

*Sure. Be there soon. G*

*Xxxxxx*

The moment John stepped into the pub, he regretted it. He hadn’t gotten a good look at the inside as he’d walked by it previously, but as he stepped in, memories came flooding back.

The interior was quite Victorian- it reminded John very much of 221B. There were thick red curtains tied back on the windows, and one wall had wallpaper that simulated a floor to ceiling bookcase. The walls were a dark mahogany and the thick upholstered leather chairs, dark red wall to wall carpets in the style of oriental rugs, and a large stone fireplace rounded out the room. The soft strains of a single violin being played floated through the air.

John collapsed into a chair by the door, his chest heaving. The room felt like it was closing in on him. He knew he was on the verge of a panic attack. His lungs burned, his eyes went glassy and unfocused. The pub faded away into a hazy tunnel vision.

*A hand on his shoulder shook him back from the brink.*

“Oi, mate, you okay?”

Vaguely through the haze of panic he understood that Greg was speaking to him, but he couldn’t make his mouth form any words to respond.

“Hey! I need some water over here, quick!” Greg yelled to anyone that was listening. A man brought a tall glass a few moments later, and Greg held it to John’s lips.
“Hey, John, here. Try to drink a little. I’m ’ere if ya need me, yeah? Just take a few deep breaths, you'll be alright.”

**Breathe in.**

**Breathe out.**

John closed his eyes, willing himself to come back from the threshold of panic. He had no idea how long it was before he opened his eyes again, to see Greg and a heavy set man with a thick salt and pepper beard that stood out from his bald head staring at him- which only made him even more self-conscious and guilty about almost having a panic attack in such a public place.

“He's alright. Thanks.” Greg said in his firm police voice- a tone that meant ‘Go away, now.’ The man nodded and headed back towards the pub's kitchen.

“Sorry, mate. That was the manager. He was afraid you'd taken a spill or somethin’. I told him you were fine, but he insisted on staying. Hey, why don't we forget about that beer and go take a walk? There's a park nearby.”

“No, it's alright. I really think I need it.” John was sure that it wasn't smart to have a beer right after the beginnings of a panic attack, but it was just one pint, and he was only a block away from the hospital, so he wasn't too worried.

“Alright, if you're sure.” Greg shrugged and pulled out the chair across the table from John. “Since we seem to be occupying this table anyways.” He flashed John a smile, trying to lighten the mood. When John smiled back it didn't reach his eyes.

Greg left for a moment, returning with a couple of pints of a nice dark stout. “Figured you'd want somethin' a bit strong.” John nodded his thanks.

There was a slightly awkward silence for a moment as they sipped their beers before Greg piped up again.

“I... have to ask, was there something that precipitated this meeting? It's been a while since we've had
a pint. I know you've been busy but...” His voice trailed off, not sure how to finish that sentence.

“Sherlock.” John whispered.

Greg took a sip of his beer. “What about Sherlock?”

“He's starting to remember a lot more. I think he's catching on that he... isn't how he was before.”

“Oh.”

Silence fell as both men took their time thinking.

“Would it help if I came to see him? I know I've been a bit busy. Since I had a day off I was actually thinking about popping over to visit before you texted me.”

“You're a very strong reminder of his life before...” John couldn't bring himself to say anything more out loud about the accident. “I don't know if it'd be a good idea to jog his memory right now. Besides, I don't think you'd wanna see him with the way he's behaving, he's not very pleasant to be with.”

“Isn't that the way he's always been?”

John knew Greg was just trying to make a joke, but it sent a spike of anger through his body. Why was he so defensive? There was no reason to be. John knew the DI was right.

Greg frowned just after the words left his mouth. “Crap. Sorry. I wasn't thinkin'.” John nodded and silently took a long swig from his beer. His head still felt soft, wrapped in cotton wool from the incident a few minutes before. Perhaps the beer was affecting him more than usual. He realized that he hadn't eaten much so far today, which he knew could make it worse.

“It's alright.” John finally said, his voice low and gravelly. “He remembered that he was a detective today. I told him a bit after he woke up, but he just shut down when I tried to talk to him about it again today.”
“Do... you think he's gonna ask about it again?”

“Oh, I'm sure he will. Part of me wishes he'd talk to Mycroft about it- he's always been good at explaining things to Sherlock. But they had a bit of a falling out a few days ago. And besides, it's my responsibility. I was the one who worked with him on his cases, not his brother.”

Greg took another swig of his stout. “If you want, I could be there to give my side- the police perspective, I guess you could call it.”

John shook his head sadly. “I appreciate it, but I think this is something he and I should discuss privately.” Against his better judgments, John swigged down the last of his beer, unaware until that moment that he'd been drinking it so quickly.

“I... I should get back, Greg. Thanks for the pint, and sorry I wasn't a better drinking companion.” That familiar ache, the need to get back to Sherlock- despite the man's dour mood, was eating away at John. He threw a few bills down on the table, more than enough to cover his tab.

“It's alright, John. I know things are tough. For what it's worth, you're a good friend, an' if he doesn't see that, then it's on him, not you.”

“Thanks.” John quickly made his way out of the pub before his emotions spilled over. The last thing he needed after a horrifyingly public panic attack was to be seen bawling like a child. He had already been humiliated enough today.

The walk did John good- the warm summer breeze rippling through the trees calmed his frazzled nerves. Even though the hospital was directly across the street, he took the long way in, strolling around the building to the far entrance. It gave him enough time to walk off some of the effects of the alcohol, get his wits about him, and calm him down before he walked back into Sherlock's room.

It was time to face the music- every bittersweet, somber note.
I had mentioned before that I had to do some major editing of chapter 38 and a total rewrite of chapter 39. Those are done, which means I am essentially done with the fic.

I am just waiting for the final edits from my ever busy betas, and then it will be totally complete. Its both a huge relief, and more than a bit scary to have this done, and all that is left is to show it to everyone and hope they like it.

I can’t wait until the last chapter goes out. Thank you all, who have read it so far!

Also, for updates and other random Sherlock and Marvel nonsense, and a decent smattering of cross stitch as well, feel free to peruse my Tumblr.

https://www.tumblr.com/blog/seaweedwrites
Chapter Summary

In which John talks, and Sherlock listens. And Mycroft is still strangely absent.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Sleep

My Chemical Romance- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eij0tbVHgL4

When John walked into Sherlock's room, it looked like the man hadn't moved an inch since John saw him over an hour before. In the past, when John had been gone for a time, Sherlock was anxious until he returned, and relieved when he walked back into the room. But when John looked at him this time, Sherlock had the bored look on his face that he'd often had between cases. It was a startling reminder of the Before Sherlock.

John walked over towards Sherlock's bed, taking his usual seat next to it. He awkwardly picked at his fingers, trying to find the best way to start a conversation that he really didn't want to have right now. “Umm.. Sherlock, about earlier...” John's voice trailed off. What could he say? 'I'm sorry you won't ever be a detective again?'

“Jooohnnn..” Sherlock's voice was low- soft and vulnerable. Just that one little breathy sound, his name on his best friend's lips was enough to break John's heart all over again.

“Sherlock, I'm..” John sighed deeply.

“Tell mee.”
Damn. He deserved to know.

John took a deep breath, and began telling their story. He talked for hours, sending away the nurses and therapists when they arrived. Mostly Sherlock listened, but he would occasionally ask a simple question or seek clarification on something John had said. He told Sherlock everything—how they met at Bart's, about their first case, and the other important highlights of their lives up until 'The Fall', as John had begun to call it.

There were times when Sherlock’s eyes lit up— and John was certain there was something that jogged Sherlock’s memory. Other times, he sat there, like a child being told stories over a campfire. It was clear by the questions Sherlock asked that he understood that this had been his life, his story. It was encouraging to John, how much he was starting to remember, but there were still large parts of his past that were unknown to him.

That could remain unknown to him forever.

When John got to 'The Fall', he paused for a moment. There were two years of blank history for him. He didn't know if Sherlock remembered what happened in the time he was away, dismantling Moriarty's network— but he decided that now was not the time to ask. If Sherlock remembered any of it, he made no indication.

Perhaps that was one small miracle to come of this tragedy.

"Jooohnn?"

He shook his head. “Sorry. It's just.. when you..” John swallowed, feeling his throat constrict. “When you fell... faked your death, I have a large gap in your life for that time. We never talked about it, what you did when you were gone for two years. And then, you just magically showed up again. I was at some fancy French restaurant with yet another failing date, and you just popped in with your stupid fake accent and your even stupider fake mustache. You barged right back into my life, like you'd never left...”

He trailed off, so much unsaid lingering in the air between them, hovering like a specter at the feast.

John hadn't noticed that his voice had been slowly ramping up. He'd been getting steadily louder and angrier as each word left his mouth when he spoke about the time when Sherlock was gone. It hit
him like a ton of bricks when he realized that he'd never really, truly forgiven Sherlock for leaving him.

John understood that he needed to do so now. Sherlock had already karmically paid for what happened a thousandfold. It wasn’t that John really thought he deserved any of this. Nobody did. It was just that losing Sherlock had been so... there were no words to describe it, not even now.

“Sorry.” John whispered. It was a word with more weight than just it's base meaning. He was sorry, he forgave Sherlock, and he was finally ready to move on from what happened over two years ago.

After a brief pause and a few deeps breaths to calm himself down, John continued, telling Sherlock about the period after he'd returned from his 'death'. Things had been awkward, to say the least, between them. It had taken some time for Sherlock to convince John to start going back out on cases with him, when he wasn't working at the clinic.

They had just started settling back into their version of a normal routine, when John got that fateful text, and both of their lives had changed forever.

“Whaat diiiid I wannna assssk?”

John cringed. Sherlock had asked him that once before- when he had told the much more abbreviated version of the story. John had no answers to offer him. All he could do was repeat what he had said already.

“I have no idea, Sherlock. I'm sorry.”

And Sherlock gave the same answer John had already heard once in return.

“Ohhh.”

Xxxxxx

The rest of the day dragged on. Neither of them seemed very keen on starting a new conversation. There was a lot to digest- for Sherlock especially. While before he had been moody- brooding and
sometimes even petulant, now John saw that he was quiet, introspective, lost in his thoughts. John much preferred a thoughtful Sherlock over a stroppy one. Perhaps telling Sherlock about his life before would lift the cloud that he'd been under for so long. At least, that's what John hoped.

When dinner came, they both picked at their food- hunger was not first on either of their minds. John hadn't been back to his flat in who knows how long now, it seemed like a lifetime ago. He'd been subsisting on the hospital meals Mycroft had arranged to be delivered to him- and while they were better than most of the chow he'd gotten while in the Army, it was only marginally so.

John tried to keep some semblance of normalcy to their evening routine, so he continued reading *The Great Gatsby* to Sherlock. Not surprisingly, it took Sherlock a long time to finally fall into a light, fitful sleep. When John went to bed, it wasn't until the wee hours of the morning that slumber finally overtook him.

Xxxxxx

John stood in a long hallway with doors to either side as far down as he could see. Every door he tried was locked. They all looked the same- which reminded him of... no... it was exactly like that college where he had shot the cabbie, except that this hallway seemed to go off into infinity for either direction.

Dread pooled in his gut. He had to get to Sherlock, but he couldn't get into any of the rooms. Something deep inside John told him he wouldn't get there in time. Sherlock was going to die, and there was nothing he could do about it. His heart pounded, sweat matted his hair. He was trapped, with no way in or out- nothing but locked doors as far as the eye could see.

Without thinking, he broke into a run. He passed door after door- endlessly they flew by him. He kept trying to open then, but somehow he just knew that no matter how many he tried, they would all be inaccessible.

Faster and faster he ran, until sweat poured down, stinging his eyes and blurring his vision. His legs burned and his lungs ached for oxygen.

Still he ran.

He ran until his legs couldn't hold him up any more. He collapsed in an undignified heap. Tears mixed with sweat, running down his cheeks. He slammed his palms on the floor until his knuckles
bled, tears and sweat now mixing on the tiled ground whose source he didn't even know. It was pooling around him, rising higher and higher- threatening to drown him.

“SHERLOCK!!” John shouted as he woke with a start, bolting upright in his bed. He was gasping for breath, and he had a death grip on the sheets. He hadn't realized he'd actually yelled out loud until he looked over to Sherlock's bed. The man was sitting upright- there was enough residual light to see that he was awake, and looking at John with wide eyes.

It took a moment for John to find his voice again. When he did, it was gravelly and harsh. “Christ. I'm sorry, Sherlock. It was just a nightmare. Go back to sleep. I'm fine.”

Sherlock looked at him for another few moments- studying him, like the Before Sherlock used to do. Finally, the former detective laid down, rolled over to his side and closed his eyes. John watched him, until he was sure that his friend was fully asleep.

Once Sherlock's breathing was reassuringly steady and strong, John got up and headed to the loo. He splashed some water on his face, and cupped his hands to take a few gulps of the liquid. It cooled his parched throat. He sighed and ran his hands through his silvering hair. The reflection that looked back at him in the mirror was a mess.

While Sherlock was still in a coma, John had gotten decently good at guessing the time of night outside the large window in his ICU room- he hadn't had much else to do while he sat and waited for Sherlock to come out of his coma.

There was a small window in the loo. John was a bit out of practice as he peered through it and tried to judge the time of night. He figured it was probably about two or three hours until sunrise. The moon was already below most of the tallest buildings in the London skyline. He knew there was no way he was going to get back to sleep now.

The hospital cafeteria was open around the clock, though the kitchen was only open until ten in the evening. Even if nothing was cooking, there were always sandwiches, snacks, and coffee available- if one could call the bitter brown water they served 'coffee'.

John grabbed a book and headed down to the cafeteria, figuring he could kill a bit of time until Sherlock woke up for breakfast.

Xxxxxx
John was awoken by a soft hand on his shoulder. He startled awake, nearly knocking over his almost full and completely cold coffee cup.

“I'm sorry. I didn't mean to surprise you.” John looked up into the face of a doctor. He looked familiar- John knew the man worked on Sherlock's ward, but he wasn't one of his doctors. They had exchanged pleasantries plenty of times before, though John couldn't recall his name for the life of him through the haze of leftover sleep.

“The staff let you sleep for a bit. You looked exhausted. But I thought you'd want a semi-familiar face waking you up. It's about time for morning rounds. I figured you might like to get back to your... friend.” The pause before the man said friend immediately ignited a spike of something inside of John. He was so used to saying “I'm not gay.” or “He's not my boyfriend.” Both of which, of course, were perfectly true.

But... what were they then, he and Sherlock? One could argue that John was spending an awful lot of time at the hospital for just being a friend.

John looked up- he wasn't sure how long he'd been sitting there thinking, but the doctor was still standing, patiently waiting for a response.

“Oh, sorry. Yes. My friend. Thank you.” It was a pretty weak response, but John was still groggy and slow- his whole body felt stuffed with tissue paper. Everything seemed slightly distant, not in the same way as a panic attack, but somewhat similar.

John pushed his chair back and stood up, which the doctor took as his cue to leave. He gathered his book, threw away his coffee, and headed back up towards Sherlock's room, unsure of how ready he was to face this day.
The last chapter has been beta-ed, and is now waiting for my last edits, which I hope to do today. So in theory if all goes well, the fic should be TOTALLY done today. It's an awesome feeling.

I wanted it done before I started to write a new fic November 1st for National Novel Writing Month (NanoWriMo) and it looks like I will have a month to spare! That will give me plenty of time to do more research for the passion project I've wanted to do for MONTHS now.

I hope you all will enjoy it when it comes out, I am hoping for sometime next year.
In which John comes to a realization, Sherlock is still Sherlock, and Mycroft makes his (triumphant??) return.

Two days passed before Mycroft returned to Sherlock's hospital room. As soon as he arrived, he unceremoniously shooed John out, stating that he needed a private word with his brother.

Almost half an hour later, Mycroft re-emerged. John could have sworn that for just a moment, he saw a painful sadness on the older brother's face, but in less than a heartbeat it was gone, leaving John to wonder if he had even seen it at all.

“Walk with me, John.”

The fact that Mycroft had called him by his first name was shocking enough to make John follow him.

The older Holmes was silent as they made their way through the halls. Despite the fact that Mycroft's visits tended to be quite short and increasingly infrequent, John noticed that the man knew the
hospital as well as John did.

John tried not to think about the reason for their familiarity with the premises. He couldn't help but wonder how many times had he seen his younger brother in a bed like the one he was in now, coming down from whatever drugs he had bought, or more likely, made. John had never asked Mycroft how many times Sherlock had overdosed, and neither of the brothers had ever volunteered the information. It was obvious despite the brave face that Mycroft put on that Sherlock's extended hospital stay was affecting him deeply.

They finally stopped in the hospital gardens. It was a place to which John had retreated to from time to time- when seeing Sherlock unconscious was just too much for him. But he hadn't been back since his former roommate had woken up.

The flowers were just reaching their peak in the height of the summer- bright yellows and reds and purples made the small area burst with color and life. When Mycroft found a small concrete bench to sit on, John followed, leaving a respectable distance between the two of them.

It was a few moments before Mycroft began. “As you are aware, I spoke with Sherlock for a time this morning.”

A tight feeling coiled in John's gut.

“Apparently, you told him about his past.” It was difficult for John to gauge from the man's tone of voice whether Mycroft was pleased or upset, but as always with 'the British government', he was unreadable.

John nodded- it was all he could do. The ability to speak seemed to have slipped away.

Time dragged on as he waited for Mycroft to respond, feeling those intense blue eyes boring into him like lasers.

“I am quite surprised that it took him this long to ask.” He finally said.

John breathed a sigh of relief. It seemed that he wasn't upset about John telling him.
“Well, he needed to know eventually.”

“Quite.” Mycroft was silent for a moment more as he seemed to be picking the right way to broach the next subject. “Sherlock already has a lot on his plate. Adding that information at this time may not have been the wisest decision.”

John sighed. *Well, I guess I was wrong about that.* It wasn’t entirely unexpected that Mycroft disapproved of his decision to tell Sherlock about his life before the accident.

“I couldn’t exactly *not* tell him.” John said, slightly defensively. “You know, he asked about a month ago. And I told him a little, but not too much. I couldn’t keep putting it off forever. He’s going to eventually go back…” John trailed off. He’d almost said ‘home’.

Only, it wasn’t John's home anymore. He had his own flat now.

“…to Baker Street. And all the evidence will be there- his old life, who he used to be…” His voice trailed off again as his throat tightened. No, he had to stay calm, in control. He wasn’t going to lose it in front of Mycroft, of all people.

“Perhaps.” Mycroft responded cryptically. “He now remembers, at least in some way, his life before this. It is highly likely that he is going to go through a rather intense period of depression. I daresay that he already is. This is the time when he will try to push you away the hardest, but this is also when he is going to need you the most, even if he will never admit it.”

John was rather surprised at the admission. If there was one thing that John knew about the Holmeses, it was that they never liked to show any type of weakness or defeat. And yet here was Mycroft, stating in no uncertain terms that his brother needed John's help now more than ever.

“I’ve had my suspicions for a while.” John said, quietly. “He's been quieter than usual, and even more unhelpful when it comes to therapy. I was hoping.. this…” He said, waving his arms a little, referring to Sherlock’s depression. “...Wasn't the case, but it's quite obvious now. Of course I'll help him however I can.”

Mycroft stood up. “I am glad we have that settled then.” Without another word, he left the garden, not turning left towards Sherlock, but right, to the hospital's front entrance.
John had the distinct feeling that he was going to be seeing even less of Mycroft now. It seemed that the man had just handed over his brother's care to him exclusively.

He wasn't sure if that was the best or worst thing that could have happened.

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John's heart was heavy as he walked back to Sherlock's room. He'd seen the signs of depression for a while now, but he'd hoped that it was just a temporary setback. Having his brother put not too fine a point on it made it hit quite hard.

*What do you do with a person like Sherlock, especially under these strange and challenging circumstances?* John thought to himself. There was nothing even remotely normal about him, and John had no idea how to tackle this. The obvious routes of speaking with a psychologist or psychiatrist were right out- there was no way Sherlock would do that. Trying to talk to Sherlock himself wouldn't work either. They were both pants when it came to talking about feelings- part and parcel of being English.

As far as John could figure, the only other option was to let Sherlock deal with it on his own, with John doing the best he could to be there when Sherlock needed someone to yell at- be a place for him to direct his anger. That didn't feel all that different from the *Before Sherlock*. John had been the target of Sherlock's ire more times that he cared to count.

But it really was different now, wasn't it?

Sherlock still had some trouble speaking and expressing himself, though John could see him becoming more like the Sherlock he used to be every day. Being frustrated and not able to vocalize those feelings had been awful at the beginning. But now Sherlock was increasingly willing and able to vent his annoyances, and almost exclusively at John.

John was willing to take it, if it meant that Sherlock was slowly becoming closer to the detective that he remembered.

But the pipe dream that Sherlock would ever fully be who he used to seemed to be slipping further and further away, like sand through John's fingers.
Sherlock's neurologist visited in the afternoon, after his least favorite therapist had finished. His writing was starting to take a turn for the better, though he still had very far to go. His script had been elegant and sloping when he took the time to form each letter, but when he was jotting notes down for a case, he gave the doctor's scrawl a run for its money. He hadn't quite reached the level of his old quick scratch, but he was starting to get close, which was encouraging.

“Can I.. speak with you a moment, in the hallway, please?” John asked Doctor Brown once he was done with his examination of Sherlock.

The curly haired man gave John a confused look. “Joohn?”

“I promise, I'll just be a moment.”

When they were outside the room, John's shoulders slumped a bit. “Look, I know you aren't a psychologist, but you've had enough contact with Sherlock to notice a change in him, right? I mean maybe I'm just too close to everything, but he seems...” John hesitated to use the word out loud, but there was no other way. “Depressed.”

“Depression is quite common for patients with traumatic brain injuries.” Doctor Brown responded, in his long Irish drawl. “Their whole world has changed, and it takes time to process and come to terms with it.”

John nodded mutely. He knew he didn't want to face this alone, but there was no one that was equipped to deal with Sherlock's unique psyche, other than himself and Mycroft. It had been a source of contention for quite a while now- what would happen once Sherlock started to improve.

“I can assign him a psychologist if you like, but I get the feeling that he wouldn't take that well.” A small, sad smile graced his face. “I can see the independent streak in him, even though he still relies on you greatly. I daresay you are going to be his best asset when it comes to working through his feelings.”

It felt like deja-vu, all over again. Wasn't this almost exactly what Mycroft had told him earlier that day?
“He isn’t going to tell me how he feels. I have no idea how I’m supposed to ‘work through his feelings’.”

“Mr. Holmes strikes me as more of a man of action than words. It would do you well to watch for visual clues, little tells that can tell you how he’s feeling, even if he’s unwilling or unable to tell you in so many words.”

John nodded. While the *Before Sherlock* could be quite... loquacious, the former detective had always been more action based, when it came to getting things done. His actions often spoke louder than words.

“You job is both extraordinarily easy and impossibly hard. There’s nothing physically that you have to do, but you’re going to have to let him vent, be it physically or emotionally, and let him know that it's alright to be upset or frustrated. Let him heal in his own time.”

John thought to himself that for not being a psychologist, the man seemed to have some pretty good advice.

“Thank you, Doctor. I’ll try to do the best I can,”

Doctor Brown smiled at him. “That’s all you can do. There will be times when that might not seem to be good enough. You just have to work through them. You're both going to have good days and bad days.”

John’s mind flashed back to almost two months before, right after Sherlock had just woken up. Another doctor had told him almost the exact same thing, which ended up being quite true. As time went on, the good days had outnumbered the bad, but as Sherlock slipped further and further into depression, the bad days were getting more numerous and worse.

“I... should be getting back to him.”

Doctor Brown nodded and smiled. John watched him walk off down the hallway before he turned, took a deep breath, and stepped inside the room.

“Joohn!”
A smile filled former army doctor's face. No matter how bad a day he or Sherlock were having, hearing him say John's name never got old.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was a bit of an emotional roller coaster, but you better strap yourselves in, because next week turns the angst and emotions and drama up to 11 !!

Also, on a much more somber note, I feel like I really want to say this:

I was very surprised and saddened to hear of Tim Bergling (known as Avicii) 's death this year. He wasn't even 30 years old. To feel so helpless that you take your own life, it's just so terribly heartbreaking. PLEASE, I will say this again, if you ever, EVER feel like you need help, there are places to call and people to talk to.

I am from the US, and in the US and Canada, you can call The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-TALK [8255]) any day, 24/7.
For my friends in the UK, you can call the Samaritans 24/7 toll free at 116 123.

As someone who has lost people to suicide, I urge you, if you need help, please, seek it out. It is there.
The Day I Tried to Live

Chapter Summary

In which Sherlock has a crisis, and John has to put his doctor hat on.

Chapter Notes

A couple of warnings here- first, there is a rather detailed description of a medical emergency in this chapter, and it's aftermath, though it isn't graphic, so be warned if that is possibly triggering.
Also, towards the end of the chapter, there is mention of John's childhood, which hints at possible child abuse, though nothing is blatantly stated. Again, just a caution in case this is something that is rather sensitive to you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

John had no idea what the catalyst was. He hadn't mentioned anything to Sherlock about what he and the neurologist had said that day, but something in Sherlock changed. Either he had deduced what they'd talked about, or Mycroft had said something to his brother that lit a fire under him. Whichever it was, Sherlock now seemed determined to work through whatever was causing his depression.

John wished he knew what the two brothers had discussed while he'd been sitting outside, fighting
the urge to listen in. As much as he wanted to, he knew it'd be wrong to ask Sherlock and break the fragile trust between the siblings that had developed due to this terrible event.

Before, Sherlock had been only doing his therapies halfheartedly, but in the days after his brother visited, he pushed himself harder than he had since emerging from the coma. By the time the afternoons rolled around, he was always beyond exhausted- a pliant heap- when John did his afternoon stretching and range of motion exercises.

It worried John to see Sherlock working himself to exhaustion, into a state where he was too weary to even sleep. He’d even started skipping his afternoon naps, and was usually so drained by dinner that he didn’t have the energy to eat. That was a part of the Before Sherlock that John didn't want to return.

Unfortunately, the few times John tried to help by feeding him, it didn't go over well. The rebellious, independent Before Sherlock kept making appearances at the very worst times. John had talked with his doctors, and while Sherlock was not eating as many calories as he had been before, he was still getting enough to sustain him. The last thing they wanted was to put him back on a nasogastric tube. That would be a huge step back and an even bigger blow for Sherlock, who needed as much independence as he could get- now more than ever.

There was little John could do but try to reign Sherlock in as much as he could, and hope that whatever was spurring him to work himself so hard would ebb soon.

Xxxxxx

It was another successful day in the therapy room. Sherlock had been trying for the last few days to walk, but the therapists had, somewhat surprisingly, discouraged him. They told him that he'd come a long way, and that they'd try to let him walk very soon, but he still needed to work on his lower body strength a bit more. They warned him that he couldn't push himself too hard too fast, or he'd set himself back even further and risk an exertion injury.

Instead of riding the physical high that usually came with the finish of a therapy session, Sherlock was even moodier and more dour than he had been before. He outright refused his dinner, sweeping the food off the table tray and onto the floor.

John bent down to clean up what he could. As he got up to throw the food in the rubbish bin, he caught a strange sound coming from the bed. It was an odd 'whooshing' noise, like someone was
squeezing the air out of a bag.

“Sherlock?”

John turned towards him.

The food fell to the floor.

“Sherlock!!”

Sherlock was in a half sitting, half lying position. All his muscles had gone rigid. His skin was a deathly shade of pale. He was staring straight up at the ceiling, his eyes dilated and unblinking. One hand was rhythmically clenching and unclenching.

John realized immediately that the groan he'd heard was the beginning of a tonic-clonic seizure. It was the air rushing out of his lungs as Sherlock's body stiffened- this was the tonic phase. His 'doctor brain' kicked in. He needed to get to Sherlock, monitor his respiration, and prevent any injuries from spasming limbs.

John's legs felt like lead, like he was trying to rush forward on a backwards moving treadmill. Was it a second, or a lifetime before he finally reached Sherlock's bed?

By the time he had, Sherlock was already in the clonic phase. His limbs were jerking and convulsing wildly. His skin had turned from a pale white to a dusky shade of blue. Foamy spit trickled out of the side of his mouth, tinged slightly pink where he'd bit the inside of his cheek. His eyes were rolled back into his head, and a sheen of sweat covered his face and arms.

“Oh God... Sherlock.” John looked towards the closed door. He was on his own. He had a call button, but the nurses couldn't do anything more than he could. John's job right now to was time the seizure- he'd need intervention if it went over five minutes- and make sure that Sherlock didn't injure himself further.

John could feel the walls closing in, his breathing became shallow and fast. No! He had to fight it- Sherlock needed him. He couldn't have a panic attack now.

He stared at his watch, using the ticking hand to ground him like a lifeline as it traveled around the
clock face. He had missed the precise moment when the seizure started, but he estimated it had been about thirty seconds before.

The seconds ticked by like syrup as John stood glued to his watch, watching the minute hand move around once, then a second time. Every couple of seconds he'd glance up at Sherlock to check for any change in his condition.

It was almost two and a half agonizing minutes before the visible part of the seizure slowed, and then finally stopped altogether.

John knew there could still be epileptic activity going on in the brain for some time after a seizure, and another could happen, so he knew that he had to monitor Sherlock closely.

The worst may not be over.

Sherlock lay in bed, staring up at the ceiling absently, hardly blinking, his chest gasping for air that didn't seem to be flowing properly into his lungs.

A foul odor hit John's nose. He didn't need to lift the sheet to confirm what had happened. He peeled himself away from Sherlock long enough to stick his head out of the room and ask a Healthcare Assistant for a new set of clothes and sheets, then went back in and gently put his hand on Sherlock's back, helping him rise to a sitting position. By then, Sherlock had begun to come back to himself and was looking around, a signal that the seizure was well and truly over. He didn't respond to John's touch- he simply groaned.

While it would have been best to let Sherlock rest for a while, common decency fought against playing it safe in John's head. He couldn't leave his best friend in such a state. He needed to be cleaned.

It would've been easier to get a Healthcare Assistant to wash him, but John prickled at the idea of some random person seeing Sherlock naked, cleaning his soiled flesh- even if it was their job. Maybe it was pride, maybe it was something else- John didn't want to believe it was possessiveness, though that was what is felt like. Either way, he knew what he had to do.

“Okay, Sherlock. I'm going to pick you up and carry you into the loo. We're going to give you a shower, yeah?” John wasn't expecting any answer, and he didn't get one.
With all the gentleness he could muster, John picked Sherlock up in a one-person lift, a carry usually reserved for children. He helped Sherlock put one arm around his neck for balance. John was quite surprised at how light Sherlock was. This was not a carry that could usually be done on a full grown man, but John toted Sherlock with little problem.

It was a short trip to the loo, where there was a small shower with a built in bench. John gently deposited Sherlock down, making sure he was balanced enough to sit up on his own.

“Sherlock. I'm going to take off your soiled clothes. I'm sorry, but it's the only way we can do this.” Sherlock was silent and still. It felt so odd, telling Sherlock every little step of what he was doing, but John felt like he had to. He wasn't even sure if Sherlock understood what he was saying. At least he seemed to be able to carry his own weight in a sitting position. Sherlock kept his eyes mostly closed, but John thought he could make out his friend whispering his name- once, in that slow, drawling way that had been Sherlock's speech pattern since the accident.

John removed his shirt first- that was the easy part. It was barely stained, except for a small spot right around his stomach.

The trousers and pants proved to be a bit more tricky. He had to maneuver Sherlock to lean his weight onto one side, and then the other, while John shimmied them down and tried as hard as he could to not touch the mess.

He left the trousers, pants and shirt in the bottom of the tub- he'd get back to them later.

With that finally done, John turned on the shower and let it warm before removing the head from the bracket and tenderly washing Sherlock off, using the flannel and soap that were already in the shower.

It was slow going, Sherlock had unfortunately both urinated and defecated on himself. But John soldiered on. He couldn't let himself think about how strange this situation was. The doctor in him worried that this would not be an isolated incident. It had been two months since he'd woken up. Although this was the first seizure he'd had since waking, there was no way to know if it'd be the last.

And the not knowing was what was destroying John- as a doctor, and as a friend.

Finally, Sherlock was clean, and John took the time since he was already there to finish washing the
rest of his body and shampooing his hair.

Though Sherlock had not responded much or hardly even moved during the entire ordeal, when John’s fingers went into his hair, the former detective let out a soft hum and closed his eyes. It was the first sign of a true response that John had seen in Sherlock, so he milked it for all it was worth, spending extra time on his hair, until he knew he had to move on.

He heard Sherlock’s little sigh, the slight droop of his shoulders that signaled his disappointment when John finished. It killed John, but he continued on, rinsing his hair clean.

“Alright, Sherlock. You have to answer me now. I need to get your clothes, Do you think you'll be okay here for less than a minute?

At first Sherlock didn't answer- though after a moment, he barely nodded his head.

John was glad to find that the Healthcare Assistant had already changed the bed and left fresh clothes on it by the time he came back. He grabbed them and went back into the bathroom, to find Sherlock staring at the tub wall, exactly where he’d left him.

John took a few moments to use one of the small towels in the bathroom to dry Sherlock off as best as he could. It was a rush job, but better than nothing.

“Alright, Sherlock. Lift up your arms.” It was heartbreaking, like talking to a child. Sherlock did as he was told and lifted his arms up. He seemed lethargic, which was to be expected after a seizure. John slipped the shirt down on his body. He was so rail thin. When he lifted his arms up it was easy to see his ribs poking through to his skin. He looked like a person one would see on those commercials for a charity for a third world country.

Only this wasn’t a third world country. This was London.

This was Sherlock.

John shook those treacherous thoughts out of his head. He didn't have time for his mind to go to such dark places. He still had to take care of Sherlock- and right now dressing him was job one. The younger man was already starting to shiver, even in the post-shower warm air.
“Alright, this is gonna be a bit tougher to get your pants and trousers on.” John pulled the pants up as far as he could, then assisted Sherlock by helping him rocking his weight back and forth to get them up the rest of the way. The trousers were the same, and despite the help that John was able to give, he could see that Sherlock was sweating and exhausted by the time it was done.

His stamina was nothing like it used to be, and he was as weak as a kitten after the the seizure. John scooped him back up and laid him down in bed, covering him up with the sheets and blanket, which thankfully stopped his shivering after a couple of minutes.

It didn't take long afterwards for Sherlock to fall asleep. It was well before his normal bedtime, but the last thing John was worried about now was Sherlock's sleep schedule. Nervously, John stood vigil while Sherlock slept- scared that at any moment he was going to witness another, worse seizure. Through it all, Sherlock slept on, deeply and calmly.

John reminded himself that this shouldn't have been surprising- the localization of the injury made it very likely for Sherlock to remain susceptible to traumatic epilepsy, and the doses of medication to present seizures had very recently been lowered since he'd been symptom-free. John needed to talk to the neurologist about this- it was likely he'd recommend that they return to the previous dosage.

John hated to leave Sherlock, but knew he couldn't delay informing the staff about what had happened. He found the nurse on duty, who put the information on the former detective's chart, and advised John that Doctor Brown was off site and that Sherlock would be kept under a much closer observation overnight. He'd be examined by the neurologist first thing tomorrow morning.

He trudged back into the room, where Sherlock continued to sleep soundly. John hadn't even realized he'd been holding his breath when he came in- unsure of what he would find.

The exhausted doctor slumped down in the chair next to Sherlock, intending to continue to monitor him. John's eyes felt as heavy as lead and he struggled to stay awake, but he didn't dare look away. He knew seizures could come in bunches, and if he wasn't there, Sherlock could bite his tongue or choke on his own vomit.

It was only a matter of time before John knew he couldn't win this battle. His eyes grew weightier and weightier, and finally he laid his head down beside Sherlock's hand and fell into a dreamless slumber.

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A hand in his hair— that was the first thing John felt. It was nice, soothing, like he imagined Sherlock had felt as he washed his hair. He kept his eyes closed. If this was a dream, it was a nice one, and he didn't want to wake up.

Sadly, life had other plans for John Watson.

“Joohn?”

The one word jolted him awake. The first thing he felt were the aching muscles in his neck from sleeping at an odd angle. As he blinked his eyes, letting the last vestiges of sleep leave his still weary body, he looked over to Sherlock, who was giving him an odd look, his hand still lingering in the air.

_Sherlock._

It'd been Sherlock who was running his hand through John's hair as he slept.

And he'd ruined it.

“Oh. Sherlock. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to startle you.” He paused for a moment. “It's alright, what you were doing. It was... nice. It just woke me up, that's all.” He rubbed at his neck and rolled his head around. He was going to need some ice or a heat pack to get this crick out of his neck.

But that was a problem for another time.

“Are... you feeling better?”

Sherlock nodded, but his eyes still looked glassy and unfocused. It sometimes took hours, or even days for people to recover from seizures, so it wasn't surprising that Sherlock was still a little dazed from what happened.

John looked up a the clock. It was past eight in the evening, which meant he'd been sleeping for almost three hours. He'd missed his own dinner that usually came about half an hour after Sherlock's-
not that he was hungry. His stomach was still in knots from before and he doubted that was going to change anytime soon, so the idea of going to get a late snack at the cafeteria was a no go.

“Hey, why don't I read a bit, yeah?” This was earlier than they normally started, but despite the sleep, John still felt exhausted after the events of the day, and he was sure Sherlock was even more so.

John picked up 'The Great Gatsby' and thumbed to the first page.

"In my younger and more vulnerable years my father game me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since. 'Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone,' he told me, 'just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had.' "

The book dipped in his hands. That passage- it gave John pause. The old Sherlock would've balked at the thought. He was quick to criticize and slow to apologize. John didn't know a lot about Sherlock's pat, his family- other than his brother, though it was pretty obvious that he came from a privileged household.

John hadn't had the best childhood. His dad was a drunk, and had rowed with his sister, Harry almost any chance he got. At first it was over grades, then when Harry came out as a lesbian, he railed at her 'choice of lifestyle'.

John had always been 'the good boy'. He got good enough grades, mostly stayed out of fights, and generally kept his head down and plowed on. They never had much money- their dad drank away a lot of it, but John had muddled through until he was old enough to join the Army and get the hell away from it all. Harry, as the older sibling, had moved out years before.

John was excited when he found out the army would pay to train him to be a doctor. It seemed like the perfect way out. When Harry left, John was at his father's mercy, scrutinized for any mistakes that could be turned into a severe scolding, which then occasionally turned physical. Getting out of the house as soon as possible became of paramount importance.

War was hell, but it was better than home- at least, until the sniper's bullet found his shoulder, and changed his life irrevocably.

John's eyes dropped back down to the book in his hands. When it came to 'The Great Gatsby', John believed that Sherlock was Jay Gatsby, and he was Nick Carraway. The parallels were surface deep
at best, but there were enough similarities to make John ponder.

“Joohn?”

Had he paused for too long? Sherlock was looking at him with confusion and a bit of worry.

“Sorry. Let me continue.”

Chapter End Notes

The last words have been written and edited, and I am calling the fic COMPLETE. It's a huge weight off my shoulders to know that I'm done, and all I have to do now is keep giving the chapters to you. At this rate of one a week, it will be completely posted at the beginning of February. I haven't decided if I want to expedite the posting process, but I am leaning towards no, because those extra months will give me time to work on other things that I can post for you guys. But please, feel free to weigh in on the matter, if you have a preference one way or the other, faster updates, or keep it like it is.

Also, I know I posted this last week as well, but it bears repeating, because of the subject matter and song choice.
The choice for music is kind of doubly sad, because it is about contemplating suicide, which of course comes up in this chapter, but also because the lead singer of Soundgarden, Chris Cornell, killed himself while Soundgarden was on tour. He had fought depression, substance abuse, and suicidal thoughts for years, and he finally lost. PLEASE, if you ever think you are feeling even remotely suicidal, reach out. There are people who care, and who will help however they can.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline in the US is open 24/7- 1-800-273-8255
In the UK talk to the Samaritans- 116 123
The next morning, Sherlock did not seem to have shaken off the effects of the seizure yet. He ate a tiny bit of his breakfast without any cajoling from John, which was a small miracle, but the former detective still seemed rather distant. John knew that some people took days to feel 'normal' after a seizure, so he didn't push Sherlock to talk about it, though he had to wonder if Sherlock remembered that his friend had taken him into the ensuite and cleaned him up. John hoped that Sherlock didn't recall any of it, to spare him the embarrassment.

A few minutes after Sherlock's breakfast tray was taken away, Doctor Simpson came in with an porter and a wheelchair.

“Sherlock, it's time for your EEG.” He said, while moving Sherlock's bed to the upright position.

John knew that the neurologists wanted to be sure there was no residual epileptic activity going on in his brain. John had told Sherlock yesterday that he was going to need an EEG after he'd cleaned him and got him back into bed, but by the look on the man's face, he apparently hadn't remembered that conversation.

Which of course answered John's earlier question.

“Joohn? Coome wiiiith?” Sherlock glanced over to John, giving him a confused and questioning look.

“I'm sorry, Sherlock, hospital rules state that I can't go with you. But I'll be here when you get back, I promise.”

Sherlock didn't look exactly happy, but he willingly let the porter help him to his feet and into the wheelchair.

He looked back once as they were wheeling him out, and John's heart ached. He wanted to go with
them, but even Mycroft’s influence couldn’t sway the policy. He knew that Sherlock had to stay perfectly still while they took the EEG, and having other people in the room other than the doctors and technicians only made taking the readings infinitely harder, which of course put more stress on the patient as well.

John sighed softly as the door closed behind them. He sank onto Sherlock’s bed, still warm from his body heat.

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John had shifted over to his bed and was sitting up, attempting to read the same passage in one of the medical journals that Mycroft delivered regularly for a third time without success, when there was a knock on the door. Before he even had time to wonder who it was- it hadn't been enough time since Sherlock left for them to be returning, and they wouldn't have bothered knocking- the door opened, and Mycroft walked in, his umbrella tapping a staccato rhythm on the floor.

“Sherlock had a seizure yesterday.” Mycroft stated bluntly as he walked towards the doctor. Well, John thought, at least he wasn’t beating around the bush. “I visited him a short time afterwards. You were asleep, so I thought it best not to disturb you. Sherlock was also resting, and I didn't get to speak with him. But it was apparent that he was in good hands.”

A flash of heat flushed John's cheeks. Was there some sort of surveillance camera in the room? Had he seen us holding hands, or Sherlock running his fingers through my hair? he wondered, though he knew an answer would never be forthcoming.

“That's... ahh... good.” John managed to stammer. Mycroft just shook his head slightly at John's obvious embarrassment.

“You have nothing to fear from me, Doctor Watson.” Mycroft replied. “You are good for my brother, as both a doctor, and a companion.”

That brought a full blush to his face. His cheeks felt like they were on fire. He wildly waved his hands in the air, palms up towards Mycroft. “No... no.. It's not like that. He always told me that he was married to his work. And I'm not gay.”

He -was- married to his work. Not anymore.
Mycroft looked somewhat less than convinced of what John had said, but he shrugged it off, and thankfully changed the subject.

“Be that as it may, I appreciate your prompt attention to my brother in assisting him through his seizure. I've had a talk with his doctors, and they believe it was an isolated incident, brought on by a lack of sleep and food. The stress added to his already... disturbing predicament. I am confident that the EEG they are running now will confirm this.”

“Of course.” John replied, cautiously.

“I was informed that afterwards you also cleaned and re-dressed him.”

The blush returned tenfold.

“He was... soiled, he had to be bathed.”

“That's not usually the job of a doctor, especially one not specifically assigned to his care.”

John thinned his eyes. *What was he insinuating?* “I saw what had to be done, and I did it.” His tone was clipped and guarded.

To John's utter surprise, Mycroft put his palms out in a placating gesture. “I am not extrapolating anything, Doctor Watson. Merely stating facts, and attempting to show my gratitude.” There was an undercurrent of annoyance to his tone.

“You're welcome.” John's intonation was still a bit exasperated, but he knew it wasn't easy for Mycroft to say such a thing, and he did, grudgingly, appreciate it.

“Good. Well, now that we have that out of the way, I suppose you will be wanting to get back to waiting for my brother to return.”

John actually was quite anxious for Sherlock to come back, and to hear the results of the EEG, but he'd been trying not to show it. Of course, he was speaking with Mycroft- the man who could deduce anything.
John shifted a bit on his bed, ready for this conversation to be over. “Yes. He's going to try some water therapy to assist in bridging the gap between his current fitness level and regaining the ability to walk. He'll be taken to the therapy pool either this afternoon or tomorrow, so I'm anxious to see how that goes. The doctors are hoping it'll improve his leg muscles and balance. He's really close to being on his feet again, so they want to make sure he's ready.”

Mycroft nodded his head slightly, indicating that the conversation had- to John's great relief- finally concluded. The elder Holmes stood and picked up his umbrella from where it leaned against the bed. “Give him my regards.”

“You... aren't going to wait until he returns?” John gave him a look of confusion.

“As I have already expressed to you, he has who he needs.” Mycroft sounded put out by having to repeat himself- a sentiment John remembered that he'd expressed in the past.

“Alright. Thank you.”

“Good day, Doctor Watson.” The elder Holmes offered John his hand. John took it, and they exchanged a brief handshake before Mycroft retracted his arm again and headed towards the door.

John watched the man leave, even less sure about what went on in Mycroft's head than he had been before.

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John was a bundle of nerves for the next ninety minutes. He knew it could take as long as two hours to complete an EEG, and most likely- since this was Sherlock- it would take longer because he was never very cooperative when it came to doctors or procedures.

Eventually, he gave up on trying to read that blasted medical journal, and tidied up the room a bit. There wasn't much to do, and after completing the chore, he decided to work off some of his nervous energy with exercise. Sometimes he did jumping jacks, sit-ups, or the like when Sherlock was off in a therapy or getting another round of tests done. He was doing a lot more sitting around that he had been when he was a doctor, and he felt the need to try to keep himself in some semblance of shape.
He tried to take a few minutes to walk around outside and get at least a little physical activity every day—though some days were more successful than others. There were quite a few times, like today, where he wished he had a punching bag he could take out his frustrations on.

By the time they returned, John was sweating and panting with exertion. Three rather surprised faces had paused in the doorway, watching him do his push-ups. John took the time to towel himself off while the porter helped Sherlock back into bed and pushed the empty wheelchair out the door.

When John was done, he wasted no time asking the doctor about the test. “Do you have the results, Doctor Simpson?” Some of the Before Sherlock must have worn off on him—he couldn't be arsed for pleasantries, he wanted to get to the heart of the matter. When John glanced over to Sherlock, he saw that his friend was wearing a soft smile. Either he was glad to see John again, or he was glad that he wanted to get down to brass tacks.

Or both.

Doctor Simpson gave them both a bit of a frown. Always composed in his manner, he seemed to decide against commenting on John's terseness. He looked down at his notes. “EEGs are always a bit more complicated when you're dealing with a traumatic brain injury because you have to take into effect the damage that's already been done. The good news is that we couldn't see any epileptic activity at all.”

“As we told Sherlock's' brother, this looks like it was brought on by sleep deprivation and overexertion. As long as Sherlock doesn't over exert himself and you can make sure that he eats and sleeps, he should be fine. Of course we can't totally rule out that this will never happen again. I'm going to put him back on the same level of phenytoin and phenobarbital he'd been on after his first seizure, to be added to the other medications he's already on.”

Sherlock had had a much shorter tonic-clonic seizure about two weeks after his injury during one of his sedation breaks that caused him to stop breathing and code. Immediately afterwards, he'd been returned to deep sedation and put on two anti-epileptic drugs. The doses had been downgraded shortly after he woke from his coma due to no further seizure activity.

Until yesterday.

John let out a long sigh and nodded. Sherlock was already on a cocktail of drugs that John helped manage every day, so the re-addition of two more wouldn't affect anything. He looked over to the plethora of bottles that John doled out into a daily pill organizer at the beginning of each week. Besides the two drugs the doctor had mentioned, there was sertraline for anxiety and depression,
methylphenidate for attention and memory, valproic acid for memory, agitation and impulsivity, and bromocriptine to help with restlessness, plus the pills he took for the chronic pain and headaches. It was a lot to keep up with, but John had willingly taken on the responsibility once Sherlock had been able to swallow the pills on his own shortly after waking up.

“We're going to let him rest today.” Doctor Simpson continued. “I've already canceled his therapies. I want him to start on the water therapy tomorrow. He's close to walking again, and once he we can get him mobile, I'm going to recommend that he be moved to a rehabilitation facility, where he can continue with his recovery.”

That surprised John. He looked over to Sherlock, who had been sitting and listening quietly the whole time. He could see the taller man was not happy that they'd been talking like he wasn't in the room. His arms were crossed and he had a scowl on his face. John feared that he was in for a right strop later.

John turned to Sherlock, putting his hand lightly on his friend's shoulder, wanting to include him in the conversation, even if it was coming to an end. “Hopefully that plan sounds good to you, Sherlock?” He asked, and the man nodded emphatically.

“I guess that means you're probably beyond ready to get out of here, yeah?” John smiled softly.

“I wannnt tooo gooo hoooome.”

John's heart shattered, the smile sliding off his face onto the floor.

Had Sherlock understood what they'd just been talking about? They were talking about a rehabilitation center, not Baker Street. Did the man comprehend that it was still going to be a long time until he could go home? Was his cognitive level much lower than what John had thought, or hoped?

There were too many questions, and not knowing the answers tore John apart.
So Much to Say

Chapter Summary

In which Sherlock gets talkative, gets his feet wet- quite literally, and John discovers that his friend is still full of surprises.

Chapter Notes

I just want to apologize PROFUSELY for not posting this up on Saturday. I just got back from vacation, and I totally forgot to take a copy of the fic with me.

I know, it's a lame excuse, and I feel bad. I hope I don't lose any readers from this.

But the good news is that you will get another chapter in just a few days, so I'll get back to my Saturday schedule again.

Again, I am very sorry and I will do my best to make sure it doesn't happen again. I don't plan on taking any more vacations before the end of the year, so I don't foresee any further issues.

Thanks for your patience, and Happy Halloween!

So Much to Say

Dave Matthews Band- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HgJojB8-e8w

That evening after the EEG, it was almost like a switch had been turned on in Sherlock. After he'd
come out of his coma, he'd spoken in one word sentences, but as his recovery progressed, his sentences were expanded to two or three words.

But after he'd quietly spoken those five words that broke John's heart, Sherlock had been much more talkative for the rest of that afternoon. Considering how much trouble he was still having with his speech, John was worried he'd never speak in normal sentences. He had no idea if it was just a coincidence that this had happened after the seizure, or if somehow Sherlock's brain had been rewired afterwards. Who the hell knew how the former detective's peculiar brain worked under these circumstances?

What quite surprised John was not only that Sherlock was more talkative, but that he was asking after the activities of his friends- mainly Greg, Molly, and of course Mrs. Hudson. Since he'd been quite busy with his therapies, and at first was rather embarrassed and frustrated at his level of speech, their visits had become somewhat infrequent, though Mrs. Hudson usually came by once every week or two to deliver another batch of ginger nut biscuits.

John swore those were what was really keeping Sherlock going this whole time, since he seemed to despise the hospital food.

John was trying to keep their friends updated as best he could through group texts. Since daily progress was fairly slow, he usually kept it to a couple of times a week unless there was a breakthrough- such as when Sherlock had stood up for the first time. He'd already told them about the seizure, and that Sherlock was fine, so they didn't need to make an extra visit. But he was thinking that this new found talkativeness might warrant another quick message to the group.

"Whaaat arree youuu wriiitiing?" Sherlock asked as he typed up a message to the group, which he had named 'Sherlock Therapy Watch'.

"Oh, just updating the usual group about your progress."

"Th' seiiizurrre.."

John shook his head. "I already told them about that. More about how you're doing well and are much more chatty."

"Ahhhh."
Almost immediately he got a couple of texts back.

“Greg says that it's nice to have a talkative Sherlock back. And Molly says 'Yay' and put a little smiley face after it.”

When Sherlock rolled his eyes at that, John burst into laughter. He didn't remember laughing in such an unrestrained manner in a long time. That gut-rolling laugh felt like he'd just opened a pressure release valve.

This was proof that there was still a good bit of the Before Sherlock trapped deep down inside. It was nice to see Sherlock ever so slowly starting to get back to something close to his normal self.

Doctor Salsbury was the next in a long list of the doctors, nurses, therapists, and orderlies that John was desperately trying (and failing) to keep straight in his head. He and his assistant, a physical therapist with a name tag that read 'Hill', arrived the next morning to help Sherlock with his water therapy.

Usually, only family was allowed to watch the treatments, though they'd have no part other than moral support. John was not family, but since he had the Lasting Power of Attorney for Sherlock, he was for all intents and purposes legally his guardian. So it wasn't hard for Mycroft to pull a few strings to allow John to stay and watch Sherlock's water therapy, provided he kept a distance and didn't interfere.

John found himself lost in thought as he followed the porter pushing Sherlock down the hospital hallways. The last two days had been so strange. A seizure, an EEG, and then an oddly talkative Sherlock. It was a lot of change in just a short amount of time, and he was still coming to terms with all of it- the good and the bad.


“Oh, sorry.” John apologized with an embarrassed smile. He took a look around at the therapy area.

It was an interesting setup- in front of them was a small pool, about one metre square and one metre deep, with a graduated bottom and a chair on a metal pole that could pivot on its axis and move up or
down to be lowered in and out of the pool. There were jets in the pool that John knew could create more resistance if needed, though they were off at the moment. Simple, but effective.

The transfer from his wheelchair to the therapy chair was smooth- it was quite obvious that both the porter and Sherlock were pros at this. Sherlock, for his part, was quiet, silently taking it all in. It occurred to John that it was strange to think that his friend being quiet was unusual. John knew the seizure the day before was still preying on both of their minds. The therapists wanted him to continue with his therapies, but at a slower pace and with lower impact exercises, hence the water therapy.

Sherlock made a small surprised noise when his feet hit the water. John knew he was much more sensitive now, including to heat and cold. And the shower John had given him after his seizure had been his first since the accident- he'd only been getting sponge baths in bed before. When they'd lived together on Baker Street, Sherlock had showered at least once a day, sometimes multiple times. The Before Sherlock had abhorred being dirty.

Now he didn't pay any attention to his looks. That thought brought a sigh to John's lips. If it'd been for any other reason, John might have lamented with a smile that at least it meant Sherlock wouldn't hog the bathroom for an hour at a time and use up all the space on the shelves for his hair product.

But knowing what this seemingly minor change might mean broke John's heart. Frontal lobe damage in particular was infamous for causing personality changes. A person with a sunny, trusting disposition could become paranoid and aggressive, and vice versa. It was difficult to deduce which of his uncharacteristic behaviors were transitory, or simply Sherlock reacting to what he'd been through, and which might be more insidious signs that the rift between the Before Sherlock and the Sherlock after the accident might be big, and permanent.

Thinking back to the Before time made John sigh. After The Fall, he'd left 221B, and even if he did return to take care of Sherlock when he was ready to go home, he knew that it would never be like it was before. Time would tell what level of independence he could plausibly regain. There were good days when John hoped for- if not a full recovery, then at least a return to the old routines and casework. Then there were bad days which made him wonder what exactly he was signing up for. Was he destined to care for someone who needed his constant supervision and assistance?

The therapy was a fairly short affair, thirty minutes from start to finish. They wanted to work him up gradually, so the time would eventually be raised to forty, then forty-five minutes over the next week or two as he improved his muscle mass.

The therapists' plan was that once Sherlock could successfully walk in the water, they would gradually lower the water level, which would in turn raise the amount of his own weight for him to hold up. When he could walk with the water at his knees, they were confident that he'd be strong enough to walk without the water- at first with the aid of rails on either side to hold onto, then
eventually without any aid at all.

Despite Sherlock's new found loquaciousness over the past 24 hours, he'd remained mostly quiet throughout the entire therapy, other than answering the brief questions the therapists asked him. John knew Sherlock understood what was going on. He was quiet because this was something new and unfamiliar, and he was approaching it like he had Before- silently assessing the situation. John had seen Sherlock do this before when new therapies or routines were added to his ever increasing schedule. He knew he liked to absorb all the new information, and then needed time to process it.

When they were finally done, Sherlock was transferred back to his chair. The porter that had dropped him off was silently waiting right inside the door. Without a word, he nodded to the therapists, walked behind the chair, turned Sherlock around, and headed back towards the room.

It was hard for John to tell if Sherlock was feeling his normal post-therapy 'high', as he called it. The man looked totally unreadable. Perhaps the Before Sherlock really was starting to return.

Once they were back in his room, Sherlock spent his time thinking, as opposed to being talkative, like he had been earlier in the day. John had caught him a couple of times looking like he was deducing- though if he was, he stayed quiet about what he was thinking about. That was not like the Before Sherlock at all. He'd always loved announcing what he'd worked out and solved as soon as he could- he wasn't happy unless he could show off how smart he was. That meant that either John was wrong, and he wasn't deducing, or that Sherlock had changed fundamentally and deductions no longer held the thrill that they once had.

Neither of those prospects were ones that John wanted to think about.

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“Jooohn.” Normally Sherlock would be taking an afternoon nap, but it was obvious he was not tired. This of course worried John, but he made a mental note to make sure that Sherlock got to sleep a bit earlier tonight to make up for it. Or, at least, he'd try.

“What is it, Sherlock?”

“Youu sawww Mycroof.”
John's eyes went wide. How had he known? He hadn't said anything yesterday when the two had their conversation. He'd changed clothes and taken a shower since then, so there wouldn't be any lingering trace that he'd been here. The hospital had been nice enough since he started staying there to let him use the washers and dryers that were usually reserved for the staff so he could have fresh clothes to wear, since he'd become somewhat of a long term resident himself. Perhaps he was just too tired from the effects of the seizure and the tests he had to endure the day after.

“I did, yesterday. But how'd you know that?”

“Colooogne.” He replied simply. “Onn yourrr hannnd. Touached myy shoulderrr.” Sherlock looked at John with a hopeful smile on his face, like a child who was waiting for a pat on the head and a 'good job, sport.'

As if by reflex, John sniffed his left hand, the one he had shaken Mycroft's hand with. Of course there was no smell there now, after a shower and a number of hand washings in the loo. But Sherlock must have smelt it yesterday and made the connection.

“Sherlock.”

His friend looked at him expectantly.

“That was amazing. Have... you been doing this the whole time, but you weren't able to say it out loud?”

The former detective shook his head. “Nooot alll theee tiiiime.” he said, slightly sheepishly.

“Recently, then?”

Sherlock nodded.

John shook his head in disbelief and smiled. “You never cease to amaze me, you know that?

Sherlock beamed.
And so did John.
Wish You Were Here

Chapter Summary

In which Sherlock is still in (not so) hot water, and John and Mrs. Hudson have a little chat.

Chapter Notes

Well, I'm back on track for posting every Saturday, so here is the next chapter with a bit less waiting this time! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Wish You Were Here

Pink Floyd- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DPL_SV3n7IU

John had made it a habit to attend Sherlock's water therapies for the first week. As it became a bit more routine, he began to leave Sherlock to his various morning sessions while running errands. It was a good time to do laundry, go back to his flat, or find something to eat. Sometimes he'd grab a pint with Greg, or have lunch with Molly or Mrs. Hudson.

It was a bright, sunny, warm day, a couple of weeks after Sherlock had started his water therapy, when John took a cab to 221 Baker Street. As the cab approached the familiar address, his anxiousness ramped up and his stomach churned around the breakfast he'd a few hours before. He knew this shouldn't be a bit deal- going back to where he used to live. But to John, it was more than just a scruffy old flat. It'd been his life for two years.

His life with Sherlock.
Somehow, when the cab stopped in front of 221 Baker Street, he had miraculously been able to keep his food down. John quickly paid the cabbie and stepped out onto the sidewalk he knew so well.

His breath quickened, his heart pounded in his chest, his throat felt like it was closing up. The whole world seemed off its axis, ready to tumble down.

John shook his head. He had to stave off the growing panic in his breast.

The black door of Baker Street, with its now straightened knocker loomed ominously in front of him. It'd been almost five months since he'd stood here. It might as well have been a lifetime ago.

Despite the looming trepidation in his entire being, John still had to smile. Sherlock always kept the knocker slightly off kilter, and Mycroft- whenever he visited- would always straighten it again. It was a constant battle between the two brothers.

Of course it made sense that Mycroft would've visited the flat since Sherlock was in hospital. John wondered if he'd visited Mrs. Hudson? Had he attempted to placate her fears with kind words and polite manners?

Very doubtful.

John took a deep draw of air into his lungs, held it for a moment, and let it out. He closed his eyes and attempted to center himself and tamp down the anxiousness that was eating at him like a cancer.

It was now or never.

After being gone for so long, he actually thought about knocking, but after a few heartbeats, he put his hand on the doorknob and turned. John was not surprised that it was still unlocked during the daytime- just as it had been when he and Sherlock lived there. There had always been an understood open door policy at Baker Street. After taking one more deep breath, he pushed the handle and took a step inside.

There creaking of the door was loud enough that out of the corner of his eye, he saw movement behind the frosted glass door of 221A, but John's gaze lay to the left, on the stairs. Seventeen stairs would take him back up to the flat, the place where he and Sherlock had lived and fought and solved
His mind flooded with memories, threatening to drown him in his thoughts.

A soft, noise brought his attention back to the moment.

“John?”

He turned towards the sound- it was Mrs. Hudson, her housecoat pulled tight around her, a worried look on her face.

“Hey, Mrs. H. I... came to talk to you.”

The already worried look intensified. “Is something wrong with Sherlock?”

John shook his head. “No, he's in therapy right now. But I wanted to talk to you about... the future.”

She made a waving motion towards herself. “Come in, I'll put the kettle on.”

John looked back towards the stairs. The flat could wait a little longer. He followed Mrs. Hudson into her flat.

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Less than ten minutes later, they were sitting at the kitchen table with cups of tea and a small tray of biscuits between them.

“So, John, what would you like to talk to me about?”

“Well, as you know, Sherlock can stand now, and he's going to start walking again soon. When he does, he'll likely be moved to a rehabilitation facility. I don't know how long he'll stay there, but I don't think it'll be more than a few months. After that, assuming all goes well, he'll be coming back here.”
Mrs. Hudson let out a little noise and put her hand over her mouth. Her eyes teared up.

John smiled warmly and put his hand over hers, giving the back of her old, wrinkled hand a soft pat.

“I... want to come back, and help him.”

“Oh, John.” Mrs. Hudson gave his hand a little squeeze. “I can't believe it. I'm going to have my boys back.”

John sighed. She says that, he thought. But Sherlock really isn't the same.

This was something he dreaded bringing up, though he knew it had to happen sooner rather than later. He hadn’t discussed Sherlock’s long term prognosis at length with anyone except for Mycroft and Sherlock’s doctors, and he wasn’t sure what Mrs Hudson’s assumptions were.

“Well, it won't be for a while, yet, Mrs. H. We still have a ways to go.”

She was silent for a moment, taking a long sip of tea before putting the cup down. John braced. He could tell that she was gearing up for an important question. His stomach tightened.

“How is he doing... really? I know I see him every week or two, but you're with him on a daily basis.”

He knew immediately what she was asking. Was Sherlock back to his old self?

Unfortunately, he didn't have the answer she wanted. John shook his head softly. He put his cup down as well and leaned away from her in his chair, his back ramrod straight against the backrest.

“He's getting better, but it's very unlikely he'll ever be the way he used to be.” He heard the soft sob, but he couldn't look at her face. He was staring off into some distant plane, a million kilometers away. He reached blindly across the table, gently taking her hand and giving it a very soft squeeze.
“His speech is getting better, as well as his writing. He can dress and feed himself, and he can stand with no support for a short time. As I said, he should be walking soon. And I do see little parts of his personality coming out from time to time. In fact, I saw him do an actual, honest-to-god deduction. He surmised by the smell of the cologne I had on my hand that I'd seen Mycroft. His brother had shaken my hand as we parted ways, and Sherlock knew.”

“That sounds like the Sherlock we know and love.”

John's quiet lasted a couple of heartbeats. He'd stopped bothering to try to correct Mrs. Hudson about the relationship- or lack thereof- between himself and Sherlock.

“Yes, but he's only made one other deduction since then.” He took a deep breath. “Traumatic brain injuries can change someone's personality permanently. Every injury is different, so there's no way to know how much it'll affect a person or if the effects are only temporary. I've noticed some changes in him that could actually be seen as positive in a strange way, though they'll of course seem odd to us.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, he’s more demonstrative, and seems to tolerate company better than he used to, In fact, with me at least, he actually seeks it out.”

John wondered if she would ask about the other side, the negative effects of the injury, or if this had already been enough information to digest for one day.

“What about your job, and your flat?” She asked, her hand shaking too badly to pick up her teacup again.

“I haven't had a job for over four months now.” He said, matter of factly. “Taking care of Sherlock has been my full time occupation. Mycroft... well, his PA actually, has been taking care of my bills. My lease will be up in November. As soon as it's done, if it's okay with you, I'd like to move back in here. I can help get the flat ready for Sherlock.”

There were tears in Mrs. Hudson's eyes when she smiled and nodded. “Of course, John. I'd love to have you back. It'll be nice to 'not be your housekeeper' again.” She managed a little chuckle.

John smiled softly back.
“After all you've done for Sherlock, you're going to come back here and continue to take care of him. Will you try to find a job once he comes home?”

John shrugged. “I'm not sure. I'll have to, I suppose. I have no clue about his finances, and someone has to pay the rent.” He went quiet.

Wait. He thought. If neither of them had been here for months now, how was she financing their flat?

“Has Mycroft been paying the rent since we've been gone?”

Mrs. Hudson nodded sheepishly. “I tried to refuse him, but somehow he found a way to directly deposit the money into my bank account.”

John chuckled. “Yeah, that sounds like Mycroft.”

He took another sip of his tea. “We're going to have to make a few minor changes around the flat before he arrives. It's nothing that should be too expensive, I have some money in savings that should cover it.”

“Nonsense!” She pat his hand. “I'll use the money Mycroft has been sending me. It was more than I'd been collecting as rent from you two, anyway. What's he going to need?”

“Probably a railing for the shower, and if it's possible, one for each side of the stairs as well. His balance is improving, but it won't be what it used to. I'd suggest a shower chair, but that's simply not possible in the little claw tooth tub we have now. Perhaps we could replace it with a small shower cubicle with a railing and chair. There isn't enough room in the loo for much else.”

Mrs. Hudson nodded. “I don't care what has to be done. If Sherlock comes back home, I'll do whatever's necessary.

John nodded. “I'll talk with his doctors, and see what they think he'll need. We may need to wait and see the progress he makes in his rehabilitation first. Physically he's coming along well. It's his emotional and psychological well-being, and his memories- or lack thereof- that I'm really worried
about. Unfortunately, there's not much that can be done for that, other than support.”

“Well, he'll have that, in spades.” Mrs. Hudson said in a determined voice.

“Yes. Yes he will.” John replied softly.

He could only hope it would be enough.

Chapter End Notes

I couldn't help but put a third Pink Floyd song for a title. They just have some great angsty songs that work with angsty chapters! Sorry, but not really sorry :)
Falling to Pieces

Chapter Summary

In which Sherlock takes his first steps (for the second time) and all does not quite go well.

_Falling to Pieces_

*Faith No More*- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32bdevGCID4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32bdevGCID4)

The next couple of weeks went by in a blur of therapies, doctor's consultations and deliveries of ginger nut biscuits.

The water therapy went well. Over time, the water level was slowly lowered until Sherlock was standing with minimal help from the railings, the water no higher than his knees. After he was able to do this for a few days in a row, Doctor Salsbury, who was overseeing his rehabilitation, decided that Sherlock was ready to go back to the therapy room, where he would attempt to walk.

From the way he had been going at his therapies, John knew Sherlock was under the impression that the sooner he improved, the faster he could go home. That seemed to be the likeliest reason why he'd been pushing himself so hard—hard enough that it may have contributed to the seizure. Thankfully, since then, Sherlock had relented to the lessened intensity of his therapies.

His speech therapy had been moving forward positively. He was surprisingly close to speaking like he had before the accident, but the biggest issue was his fluency. Pronouncing things correctly took some time, making syllables overstay their welcome. There were words that he still greatly struggled with, and sometimes he knew what he wanted to say, but his brain would not let his mouth form the words. That, of course, led to frustration and lashing out. John was already used to being the target, and he rolled with the punches.
Even with all the positive steps forward, there was a novel element of stress- Sherlock's parents were insisting that they be there when Sherlock took his first steps. It was quite understandable, as they had missed him standing for the first time since the accident. Sherlock had wanted to minimize what he referred to as their 'meddling’, and for the most part, Mycroft had kept them satiated with frequent updates as opposed to having them visit more often. Now, though, they were being quite insistent. It had been a long time since they'd seen Sherlock, and they were anxious to see his progress.

Mycroft couldn't really begrudge their parents wanting to be there for this huge hurdle, even if Sherlock wasn't happy about it. After some cajoling, and a bribe of another batch of ginger nut biscuits, he reluctantly agreed. A date was set- two days from the last water therapy session. This would allow his parents time to arrive in London and get situated.

Mycroft had booked a room in a posh hotel close to his Belgravia flat. He loved his parents, and his flat was quite spacious, but he drew the line at them staying with him. He’d much rather eat the cost of a nice hotel room and keep them out of his way.

And so he did.

The stage was set.

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The day Sherlock was scheduled to start his walking therapy without water was gray and unusually cold for the beginning of September. Thunder clouds loomed above, threatening to loose their wrath upon the world.

John and Sherlock had only just finished their breakfast when there was a knock at the door. A moment later, Mycroft entered, his parents a few steps behind.

“Sherlock!” Violet Holmes almost ran over to her son, giving him a long hug that he didn't return but endured- John could tell by his body language.

“Mummy.” Sherlock protested. It took a few more seconds before she finally relented and let go of her son. His father, William, smiled and inclined his head in greeting. He was much more reserved when it came to showing affection, something that Sherlock had inherited- in abundance.
“Are you excited, dear?” Violet asked, earning an eye roll from Sherlock, and a chuckle from John.

The whole time, Mycroft stood off to the side. John was quite sure he was enjoying every moment of seeing his little brother get the bulk of his parents' notice, much to Sherlock’s embarrassment.

Thankfully for Sherlock, he didn't have to endure his parent's awkward attention for long. There was a knock at the door, and a moment later, a porter came in, pushing a wheelchair.

“Good morning, Sherlock.” The porter, whose name tag read 'Brown' said, cheerily. “I see we're going to have a big group watching today. Normally, they wouldn't allow so many people into the therapy room. That's why the therapist had you scheduled early, so you can be there before the other sessions start. It'll allow everyone to attend.”

There were introductions all around while the porter helped Sherlock into the chair. He needed no aid, but it was hospital policy that he have assistance any time he was leaving his room, despite Sherlock's almost tantrum, insisting that he could do it himself.

When Sherlock was settled, and everyone had been introduced, Brown led the cadre of people down the halls to the therapy room, which was empty except for the equipment strewn about. Enough folding chairs were procured, and the Holmeses and John settled in for what they hoped would be a successful session.

Sherlock started by grabbing onto the bars and using them to pull himself up to standing, and holding that position. At first he kept his hands on the bar, then as he got used to his center of balance again without the water to assist him, he started to increasingly let go of them for short periods of time.

Despite many attempts, Sherlock couldn't quite pull himself up to standing without using the bars for support, though he was very close. The doctor said that if Sherlock could get just a bit more muscle tone in his legs, he should be able to raise to a standing position with no help at all, which would assist in walking as well.

The exercises, practicing the ability to stand under his own power- something almost every person takes for granted daily, exhausted Sherlock. He'd been improving his stamina, but he was working muscles that hadn't been used this extensively for many months. A fine sheen of sweat glistened on his brow, and his arms shook slightly with the effort of pulling his weight up and out of the chair repeatedly.
When Sherlock had slumped down into his chair after the last pull up, Doctor Wilson looked to him, then the assembled group. “I’m sorry to do this, folks, but I think we should postpone Sherlock trying to walk until tomorrow. He’s done very well pulling himself up, but he’s worn out. I don’t want to overtax him.”

“No.”

Everyone looked at Sherlock, who was already gripping the bars again, ready to stand back up.

“Give me one more try.”

There was determination in his cold and steely eyes. Doctor Wilson nodded his head and sighed softly. “Alright, one try, that’s all. You can attempt a couple of small steps, but nothing more. The therapist can help you back to your chair if necessary.

John’s heart was in his stomach. He gnawed on his bottom lip. He was gripping the edges of his folding chair hard—all the blood drained from his knuckles. The world seemed to slow to a crawl.

Sherlock’s hands held the metal bars with an iron grip. His muscles shook as they strained under his weight. For a moment, Sherlock stood at the edge, taking a few deep breaths to steady himself.

John’s whole world became the scene unfolding a few feet in front of him. His vision tunneled, lasered in on Sherlock and nothing else.

Everything moved in infinitesimal measures, syrupy slow. Sherlock raised his right foot—which seemed to hover off the ground for a lifetime before it came down a short distance ahead. It might have been a few seconds or a year later when he lifted his left leg and moved it almost parallel to his right. Sweat matted his hair and stained his gray shirt under the arms and around the neckline. He was panting for breath, but Sherlock was single minded and steadfast. John knew he wasn’t done yet.

He lifted his right foot again. It was only a few inches off the ground when his muscles finally gave out. Everything happened in a heartbeat, but inexorably slowly as he began to fall. He reflexively turned his body sideways. As he went down, he caught his chin on one of the metal bars. The meeting of his jawbone to the cold steel made an awful pinging noise that reverberated in John’s ears.

He collapsed in an undignified heap. The physical therapist was there in a moment, picking him up
and depositing him as gently as he could in his wheelchair.

“Sherlock!” John got to his wheelchair at the same time as Doctor Wilson. There was a small but deep cut on the underside of his chin that was going to need stitches. It was bleeding- but nothing was broken. Sherlock had also bitten his tongue. It was trickling blood, and would most likely be awkward and swollen while it healed. Thankfully, it looked like it wasn't going to swell enough to restrict his breathing, so nothing had to be done other than to pack it with some gauze.

John watched Sherlock's wrist twist slightly when he tried to catch himself as he fell. He was pretty sure it would bruise and be tender for a few days. One bit of good news was that Sherlock hadn't hit his head or lost consciousness.

Sherlock's mother gasped loudly, putting her hands to her face. Her husband held her tight while she dotted the tears from her face with his handkerchief. She tried to get up to help her son, but Mr. Holmes gently yet firmly held her back, knowing that the doctors needed to attend to him now, even if it was heart wrenching to see their son in a crumpled heap on the floor.

The two doctors quickly got the bleeding under control. Mycroft and Sherlock's parents were ushered out by the porter and instructed to wait for Sherlock back in his room. Of course they were reluctant to leave- Mrs. Holmes kept looking back towards Sherlock even as they were moving towards the door of the therapy room. They were told that he'd be returned to his room after he was tended to, and they could wait for him there.

As they were being led out of the room, Mycroft turned to John. “I will escort my parents back to the hotel. I feel it best to let Sherlock rest.” The elder Holmes brother accompanied his parents to the exit. The door closed silently behind them.

“I'm sorry, Sherlock.” John looked sadly at his friend, who stayed quiet and still throughout the doctors ministrations to his chin and tongue.

Sherlock's jaw was temporarily bandaged up, and his arm was splinted. There was no deformity, but the doctor decided that they should take an x-ray to make sure there was no hairline fracture. John walked behind the doctor and the porter towards an exam room.

John realized this was going to be a big step backwards for Sherlock- physically and mentally. He sighed. He could only hope that Sherlock took this small stumble and used it to push himself forward even more.
Chapter Summary

In which Sherlock walks (take two), it goes much better this time, and John and Mycroft plan for Sherlock's future.

*Here Comes the Sun*

*The Beatles* - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfMXXMH9thc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfMXXMH9thc)

Two hours, one x-ray, and a few stitches later, Sherlock was back in his room. Thankfully he didn’t have a hairline fracture on his wrist, so the splint that had been applied as a precaution was removed. John noticed that Sherlock had been quietly sulking through the entire ordeal, something the *Before Sherlock* had been an expert at.

“Jawwn?” It was frustrating and terribly unfair that just when Sherlock’s speech had been almost back to normal, he'd bitten his tongue. The slight lisp would persist until the swelling went down.

John looked at his best friend questioningly.

“Yeah, Sherlock?”

“Youu been sthoo Baakah Shteeet?”

“Have I been to Baker Street?” John nodded his head softly. “Yes, once. About three weeks ago.” He stopped himself before he said that it was just like he remembered it. Considering John had no
idea how well Sherlock remembered the flat- if at all- he refrained from finishing the sentence, to avoid making Sherlock feel worse.

“Mrs. Hudson's been keeping care of the place.” John paused again. *It will be ready for you when you come home* popped into his mind, but Sherlock didn't need reminding that it was still going to be some time before he saw that scruffy old flat again.

“Wheen c'n I go hoome?”

John ran his hands through his hair.

“Not quite yet. We'll get you there as soon as we can. I promise.” Sherlock grunted in frustration- a habit that he'd had when he first woke up, but had faded as he'd become more aware of his surroundings. John was not happy to see it pop up again.

“I know, Sherlock. I want you to be able to go home soon, too. Keep working hard like you are and you'll get there.”

It couldn't come soon enough- for either of them.

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Three more days passed before Sherlock got another chance to walk again. Doctor Wilson wanted to give his bruised wrist a bit of time to heal.

Mycroft and Sherlock's parents were in attendance as well. It was another early morning session in a room devoid of anyone but the half dozen people who were waiting for Sherlock to take his first steps- again.

This time, Sherlock managed to take four steps before his arms gave out and he started to collapse. The therapist was ready, catching Sherlock as he stumbled and helping him back into his chair. John's grin filled up his face, even with the slight scare of a second fall in a few days. He could see the pride in Sherlock's eyes. It was may have been a small step forwards, but it was progress.
Doctor Wilson smiled broadly. “Well done, Sherlock. That was better than I expected. You're well on your way to mobility.”

Sherlock’s mum had tears in her eyes. As soon as Sherlock was back in the chair she hurried over to him, hugging him and telling him how proud she was. His father gave him a pat on the shoulder, a smile, and a “Good job, son.” Understated, as always. Mycroft merely inclined his head, a small smile on his face. John could have sworn that he'd seen the older brother dab his face with his handkerchief out of the corner of his eye.

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John was quiet until they reached Sherlock's room, and its only patient was settled in. It was easy to tell that Sherlock had been overwhelmed by all the attention he'd gotten, as well as physically exhausted, so he let his friend process everything quietly for a time. That was not a very Before Sherlock trait- he used to love having people pay attention to his brilliance. It was just another reminder to John that his best friend was never going to be like he was before.

“John.” It was nice for John to hear that the swelling had gone down, and Sherlock had practiced pronouncing his first name so much that it was back to sounding close to normal.

“Hmmm? What is it?” He looked up from the medical journal that he has been reading to focus on Sherlock.

“Where willl I be trannsferred tooo?” Sherlock still exaggerated a few sounds, but it never ceased to amaze John how much of his abilities he had already regained.

A realization hit him. John had been so busy in the last few weeks, with Sherlock's water therapy and attempting his first steps, that he hadn't really had time to think about where the former detective was going to go next.

“I'll have to talk it over with Mycroft. I have a feeling he already has a place hand picked out for you.” he replied. Knowing the elder Holmes, there was a room reserved and waiting for Sherlock- somewhere posh that John would never have been able to afford if he'd been the one injured.
John didn't care where Sherlock went- as long as they took good care of him, that was the most important thing.

John's chance to speak with Mycroft came a few days later. The elder Holmes had somehow convinced his parents after they'd watched a couple more sessions with Sherlock that it would be best if they let him continue on his own. Their parents reluctantly agreeing to it was a huge relief to both the brothers and John. He knew that Sherlock loved his parents, but a little mollycoddling went a long way, and that really wasn't what he needed right now.

So, when Mycroft came by the hospital to fill out a few forms to start working on Sherlock's release while he was in physical therapy, John cornered him outside his room.

“Mycroft, we need to talk.”

'Talking’ was about the last thing Mycroft wanted to do- at least if one went by the expression on his face. He let out a soft sigh and clicked his umbrella on the ground.

“You want to discuss Sherlock's discharge arrangements.” He replied in a bored monotone.

*Damn.* John hated how the Holmes brothers could read him like a book.

“Yes.”

Mycroft motioned silently for them to enter Sherlock's room to talk privately. Mycroft opened the door, and John followed him in, sitting on his cot so Mycroft could have the lone chair in the room.

“As I am sure you have already surmised, a room will be made available for my brother at a suitable facility when the doctors deem him ready to be moved out of hospital and into rehabilitation.” Of course John wasn't surprised. But still, he wished that Mycroft had thought to involve Sherlock and himself in at least a bit of the planning.

“Don't you think Sherlock is going to put up a fuss if you haven't run the options by him?” John
asked, trying to keep his voice even.

“I think that right now, he doesn't have much of a choice. Surprisingly, the resources are somewhat limited for his... specific condition.” Mycroft took a pamphlet out of the briefcase he'd been holding and handed it to John.

“Ascot Rehabilitation Impatient Centre, in Surrey. I understand the significant distance is not ideal. I was searching for a place in London, but this facility is still less than an hour away from Baker Street by car. They specialize in patients with traumatic brain and spinal injuries and certain other neurological conditions. They offer a comprehensive selection of occupational, speech, neuropsychological, and physical therapies.”

John was sure Sherlock was going to resent that his brother had made the decision for him. But as he looked over the thick pamphlet, he had to admit that the place looked really nice. Of course it was the best place available- Mycroft wouldn't have chosen it otherwise. John didn't even want to know how much one week's stay would cost- more than he'd earned in a month at his locum job, that's for sure.

“It says here they have 'Outreach Sessions', which means that they'll come out to our flat once he's released to continue with home therapy.” John said with a bit of question in his voice.

“Yes.” Mycroft said simply. “It was one of the major factors in choosing this facility. He will not want to stay there any longer than absolutely necessary, so he will need to continue active rehabilitation after returning to Baker Street. In this way, the shift from residential rehabilitation to home will be as seamless as possible, and he will already know the therapists who will be coming to his flat to work with him.”

John was not surprised at Mycroft's thorough survey of the rehabilitation centre- after all, a Holmes never did anything half arsed.

Mycroft was silent for a moment, until John realized he was about to drop the other shoe. “While Ascot does have flexible visiting hours, and they do encourage family and friends to have an active presence, you will not be able to stay with him, as you have been here. Even with my... extensive resources, there are simply no facilities for overnight stays of patient's family members.”

Damn.

John hadn't even thought about that. He'd just taken for granted that he would always be able to be
around Sherlock, considering he was the his friend's main support structure.

And now, his access to Sherlock would be greatly reduced.

“There are local hotels, of course, and Ascot can arrange comfortable transportation to and from London daily, if needed- as can I.” Mycroft offered, though that was of little comfort to John. He wasn't about live out of a hotel for the next few months after just having spent 21 weeks in a hospital room- even if it would be a huge step up from this place in respect to size and amenities. Besides, he couldn't afford to live in a hotel, seeing as he had no job- and he wasn't about to accept any further help from Mycroft. He'd already done bloody well enough for John.

Mycroft must have noticed his frown. “I know that this is less than ideal, Doctor Watson. But we must think about what is best for Sherlock, and this facility offers what he needs.”

John nodded slowly. “I know, Mycroft. I understand.” That didn't mean that it wasn't terribly hard for John to imagine not being able to be with Sherlock. Through all the ups and downs, the man had been a constant in his life for the last five months. Could he even grasp how it would feel to suddenly not be by his side?

He was going to have to, very soon.

John shook that thought out of his head. He had other things to worry about first.

Not being at the hospital meant that he'd have time to start packing up his flat. He still had two months left on his lease. As soon as it was up- if not before- he planned to move back to Baker Street. And there were still the modifications that had to be done at 221B. He hadn't even started any planning for the upgrades, and all of a sudden time was starting to run out.

That's the best problem to have. John thought to himself with a smile.

Sherlock was one step closer to coming home.
Wake Me Up When September Ends

Chapter Summary

In which Sherlock is increasingly mobile, John tries not to laugh, and Sherlock is finally discharged and able to start rehab.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Wake Me Up When September Ends

Green Day- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NU9JoFKlaZ0

The next major hurdle in Sherlock's progress was to be able to walk without the aid of the bars. He was still going to need help with balance, and the doctors advised him he'd need to use a walker until he was more steady on his feet.

Sherlock steadfastly dismissed the idea, making it patently clear that he was not going to use- in his words- 'those awful things made for the elderly'.

Now - that - sounded like the Before Sherlock . Of course, he had to bite his lip to stifle his smile, as it would be a more than a bit not good to laugh at such a statement.

“I'm sorry, Sherlock.” The doctor said, in his regular, no nonsense tone. “This isn't a suggestion. It's the only way you're going to improve safely. We have to get you mobile with a walker before we release you to the rehabilitation centre.”

John sighed and ran his hand down his face. This was heading towards a good old fashioned strop,
he could tell. He had to try to cut it off at the pass. “Sherlock, I know you don't like the idea, but the
doctor's right. This is the next step, and it'll only be for a short time. You're doing so damned well,
please don't derail your progress now.” Over the months that John had been by Sherlock's bedside,
he'd become an expert at diffusing his volatile moods. The Before Sherlock was mercurial at best, but
the TBI had exacerbated his temper. He was much more prone now to get frustrated and lash out
with little provocation or warning.

The look that Sherlock shot John would have made a lesser man wilt under the intense glare. He
knew Sherlock understood he was outnumbered, and wouldn't be able to talk his way out of this.
Besides, John still had Mycroft as a backup if needs must. If his brother got word that Sherlock was
refusing treatment, the younger Holmes wouldn't hear the end of it from big brother, until he
relented. John hoped he wouldn't have to use Mycroft- even as a last resort, but it was encouraging to
know that he'd have the elder Holmes' support if it came down to brass tacks.

“Fiiiiiiiiine.” Sherlock rolled his eyes and responded as dramatically as he could, sounding out the
word to emphasize his annoyance.

For the second time in a couple of minutes, John held back his smile. It felt like he was getting his
Sherlock back. Slowly, but surely.

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“Thiss iss awful.”

Sherlock had been expressing some variant of how terrible or embarrassing it was to have to use a
walker since John arrived that morning. And yet, he endured, making it from his bed to the loo and
back twice before lunch, with a sufficient rest in between. Even those short trips exhausted him, but
at least he wouldn't have to roll his wheelchair into the en suite any more- the walker was much more
maneuverable.

John, for his part, tried to stifle his amusement. “You're doing great, Sherlock. The doctors informed
me that if all continues to go well, you can be transferred to Ascot next week.” He didn't miss the
brief flash of exhilaration on Sherlock's face before it turned into a frown a moment later.

“I wannted a sayy.”

“I know, Sherlock. I did too. You know how your brother is. I haven't seen it, but the website and
pamphlets make the centre seem nice. Very posh. You should fit right in.” John chuckled. It felt nice to still be able to gently tease his best friend.

But, instead of looking amused, Sherlock's frown deepened, and the smile faded on John's face when he remembered the one aspect of Ascot they hadn't discussed yet. How was Sherlock going to take the news that John couldn't be around all the time any more? Or had Mycroft already broken it to him? If he had, Sherlock had stayed mum about it. A sinking feeling pooled around his insides. He needed to tell Sherlock, and now was a good as time as any.

“You can't stay with me.” Sherlock said, simply, before John could do more than open his mouth.

Damn, those deductive powers.

John shook his head. “Not overnight, no.” He admitted with a shake of his head. “Ascot is about an hour away from Baker Street. I intend to visit as often as I can. I'll have a talk with the centre about arranging visiting hours.”

“You are in Baker Street now?”

He shook his head again.”Not yet, no. The lease on my flat runs out soon, and I'm planning to move back when it's up.” He didn't say that plans were already moving forward to alter the flat to accommodate Sherlock. John knew the last thing Sherlock would want was to feel like he needed assistance, to be reminded that some of the effects of the accident might be permanent. It was clear that Sherlock would derail any conversation on the subject, so it was left to Mycroft and John to attend to that themselves.

“Oh.” Sherlock put his walker to the side and rearranged himself back into bed, throwing the covers over everything but the top of his head.

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It was an unusually cool and blustery day in early October that Sherlock found himself being wheeled out of St. Mary's and towards a van that would take him on the hour long drive to Ascot Rehabilitation Centre.
Of course, he complained the entire time he was being pushed towards the vehicle, insisting that he'd finally relearned how to walk, and that it was frustrating and humiliating to not be able to do so now.

“Hospital policy, brother mine.” Mycroft explained, as if that would suddenly make everything better.

Of course, it didn't.

Sherlock, his walker and all his belongings- including many that Mycroft had brought from Baker Street specifically that day to make Sherlock more comfortable at the rehab centre- were loaded up into the large conversion van. Mycroft and John joined him in the passenger compartment, and they were off towards Surrey.

Despite the fact that Sherlock should've been happy to get out of the hospital, he was in a strop the entire ride. John knew he was incensed that he'd been encouraged to walk, and then wasn't able to as he left. Sherlock had wanted that one final moment of defiance- to leave the hospital on his own two feet- and it'd been denied to him. The odd mood in the van made for a rather awkward trip. Mycroft, naturally, paid Sherlock's temper no attention. He was busy doing something that John assumed was either vitally important and work related on his phone, or he was feigning being busy to avoid having to deal with his annoyed brother.

John wouldn't put either of those possibilities past Mycroft Holmes.

London slowly gave way to the low, rolling hills of the Surrey countryside. John had been born in the north of England, and this landscape reminded him of a past that he would've preferred not to think about. Still, he could appreciate the stark beauty of the massive green fields, patches of ancient trees, and shepherds herding their flocks like their fathers fathers fathers had done before them.

The town of Bagshot itself was nice- cute and small, but with all the amenities one would need to live comfortably. The little hamlet seemed to be confined to the left side of the ironically named London Road, while to the right the scenery mostly consisted of cricket fields and countryside.

John's first impression of the Ascot Rehabilitation Centre was not what he'd expected. It was a three-story brick building with a large number of long, deep set windows. It almost looked like someone had taken two houses that had been built close together and made them into one large facility. The main house didn't look old, and John was surprised that at least from the front, it didn't look terribly large. It was separated into two buildings, with a glass atrium in the middle connecting them, which the leaflets he'd read on the way said also served as the welcome area.
Unfortunately, once again, it was policy that Sherlock start his journey to rehabilitation in a wheelchair. A nice older gentleman porter helped him into it, and another man took his bags from the boot, presumably to be dropped off in his room.

Although John hadn't been overly impressed by the outside, he was most certainly was by the inside. A modern design dominated the decor- simple neutral colors- modern and minimalist, but with friendly and comfortable furnishings and accessories.

A rather short woman with her dark brown hair pulled back into a tight bun, wearing a conservative black and dark blue blouse and long skirt combination walked up to the group as they came through the front door.

“Good afternoon! My name is Fiona Broadberry. I'm the Regional Manager, and head of the Ascot Neurological Rehabilitation and Care Centre.” She shook Sherlock's hand first, then Mycroft's and John's. “It's wonderful to have you here, and we look forward to assisting you on your way back to independence. I'm going to give you a quick tour so you can start to learn your way around, and then you can get settled. We'll start the paperwork and orientation- also known as the boring stuff- tomorrow. How does that sound?”

*She is way too chipper for Sherlock's taste,* John thought, but held his tongue. He could see Sherlock was still frustrated that he couldn't at least attempt to walk around, though John knew even a short jaunt would exhaust him. It was a lot more practical to be shown around this way. Not that John would dream of actually saying that out loud. It might be the truth, even if it wasn't what Sherlock wanted to hear.

The tour was a bit of a whirlwind. They saw state-of-the-art rehabilitation rooms, and a small pool like the one Sherlock had stood in at the hospital, but this one was right next to a larger lap pool where patients could exercise their muscles with less weight resistance. They were shown large, sprawling visiting areas with tea and coffee and snacks, private quiet areas where patients could get away from the hustle and bustle of the rest of the centre, and meeting rooms for places like crafts, music, and even a well stocked library.

Their last stop was Sherlock's room. John sucked in a breath when he saw it- it looked more like a fancy hotel room than anything else. It was roomy of course, partially for wheelchair access should the patient need it, but even beyond that it was spacious. Walls of soft neutral beiges and dark blues complimented the luxurious looking azure quilt over high thread count khaki sheets on the bed that sat against the right hand wall. Beyond it was a comfortable chair and a tall chest to hang clothes in.

Straight ahead from the door was a tall window, with the tan and blue striped curtains wide open,
drawing lots of natural light into the room. On the left hand side another, a shorter drawer with plenty of space for clothes and a large dark wooden desk with a light and a matching wood chair filled in the room.

On the corner of the desk lay a plain white vase with flowers, and next to it was an electric kettle and a selection of teas and coffees. A basket of fruit lay on the windowsill, and a personal dressing gown was folded perfectly on the bed. Sherlock's bags sat on the floor next to the bed, ready to unpack.

The door to the en suite was between the door and the bed. It had a roll in shower with a bench, bars to help shift to and from the toilet, and two sinks, a lower and a higher one. Not surprisingly, it had already been decked out with all the toiletries that one would need.

“Well, I'll let you get settled in. You're free for the rest of the evening. We'll continue your orientation and paperwork in the morning. Have a nice rest of the day.” Fiona Broadberry waved, and with a smile she was gone, leaving the three of them alone.

“Can I... umm.. help you unpack, Sherlock?” John asked, uncertain whether he had enough of the *Before Sherlock* in him to be appalled at needing help, or if he'd appreciate the assistance.

Without answering the question, Sherlock maneuvered himself over to his bed and transferred onto it, then shoved the wheelchair as far as he could away from him. It rolled to the middle of the room, stopping when it blocked the door to the loo.

“Should I return this, Sherlock?” Mycroft asked in a bored tone, looking up from whatever he'd been doing on his phone a moment before. John wondered if he was making an excuse to leave the heavy, awkward air that had settled into the room, or if he wanted to give them time alone. Perhaps a bit of both.

Without waiting for an answer, Mycroft grabbed the handles on the back of the chair and deftly maneuvered it through the wider than normal door and down the hall, where the soft slam of the door returning to the closed position cut Sherlock and John off from the outside world, yet again.
Fiona Broadberry is the current head of the Ascot Rehabilitation Centre. Whether she would have been when this takes place? Who knows, but in my story, she was!

Also, the description of the room is based off actual pictures of the rooms at the Centre on their website. It's true that they get personalized bathrobes. It would sound like a nice place to stay, if it wasn't for the reasons that people went there.
The moment Mycroft was gone, John walked over to the bags waiting on the floor, hesitating before opening them. It was time for Sherlock to regain the right to decide about himself and his belongings. “I know you...” He paused. Sherlock used to be meticulous about how his clothes were arranged. He'd had a sock index, for christsakes. But that had been the Before Sherlock. Did Sherlock even care about that now? Would bringing it up only remind him of what he'd lost?

“John?”

I guess I was thinking too long. Well, it's too late now, he thought to himself. In for a penny, in for a pound. “I can help you put up your clothes, if you'd like. Is there... a certain way you want them arranged? I mean, I know some stuff will need to be hung up, but I mean, the rest...” He took a deep breath to calm his blabbering mouth.

Sherlock looked at him, and for a moment, John saw the sadness in his eyes. So, he did remember, or at least, he recalled some of how he used to be with his clothes. John could never quite be sure what
was going on in Sherlock Holmes' mind, even now.

Finally, the former detective shrugged, laying down and curling up a bit, his face away from John.

Ah. A sulk is imminent.

John decided to go ahead and do something about the clothes, since the damage was already done. John had usually been the one who ended up doing laundry when they'd lived in 221B, so he had a rough idea of Sherlock's clothing setup. He'd never quite grasped the finer points of the sock index though. He knew he was on his own to work that out.

Sherlock was silent and still the entire time John worked on making the room a bit more homely, a bit more his. Once the clothes were sorted as best as he could replicate from Baker Street, John set up Sherlock's laptop on the desk, and added a few touches to the room that Mrs. Hudson had dropped off at the hospital the day before they left. He noted with a smile that there was a decent supply of ginger nut biscuits on a plate packed between tea towels in a collapsible freezer bag. He sat those next to the laptop on the desk. It was so very tempting to steal one, and he only barely resisted the siren call of her wonderful baking.

The smell of the biscuits eventually lured Sherlock out of the cocoon he'd made with the sheets covering all but the very top of his curly head. John noted that he desperately needed a trim- his curls were getting quite unruly- but that was a fight for another day. He lamented with a soft sigh that the Before Sherlock would never have let his hair get anything remotely approaching this unkempt.

“Come on, Sherlock. You need to make sure you're getting enough calories each day. How about a biscuit?” John plucked one from the plate on the table and walked over to the bed. As fast as a lightning bolt, a hand shot out of the sheets, grabbed the biscuit, and once again disappeared.

“Sherlock.” John chided. “You can't eat in bed under the covers. You'll get crumbs everywhere, and then you'll have ants, seeing as we're in the countryside.”

John just barely ducked the ginger nut projectile that was hurled at him, sans one bitten corner. He picked it up where it had hit the floor, and deposited it in the bin next to the desk. “Alright. I understand this is a lot to take in, Sherlock. A new location, new doctors and such. But I thought you'd be happy to get out of the hospital. There's no need to toss things like a petulant child.”

He had no idea what had set off such a formidable strop, but John wasn't about to let it ruin his day,
so he took a seat at the desk, determined to let Sherlock silently work through whatever it was that was going through his mind.

While John was sitting at the desk, watching the lump of sheets slowly rise and fall with Sherlock's breaths, he noticed that the elder Holmes hadn't returned. It seemed odd that he'd leave without saying goodbye to Sherlock, but then again, this was Mycroft. Who knew what went on in that strange head of his? Perhaps he'd been called off to yet another crisis in some country that John could barely pronounce. Or maybe he thought that leaving his brother here without making a fuss would be the best approach.

At any rate, John severely doubted that Mycroft would leave him high and dry without a way back to London just to spite Sherlock. They were simply going to have to wait it out until Himself deigned to grace them with his presence again. There was really nothing he could do in the case of either Holmes brother other than to just bide his time. John shrugged, finally giving in to his desire to have a ginger nut biscuit. If Sherlock was too busy being childish to enjoy them, he wouldn't let them go to waste.

It ended up not being long before Mycroft, without knocking, walked back into Sherlock's room.

“Sherlock. Doctor Watson, I do apologize. I had some... telephone calls to make that couldn't possibly wait.”

*Must have been a matter of national security.* John thought, with an internal sarcastic chuckle.

“I see Sherlock is his normal, jovial self, then.” That got a muffled huff of indignation from under the covers. Maybe it was good that those two were fighting again, just like old times.

But it wasn't, not really.

“Doctor Watson, are you ready to return to London? If you would rather stay, I can arrange for another car at a later time.”

John was quiet for a moment. “Sherlock?” There was a soft grumble under the sheets, recognition that he'd been heard, but nothing more.

“Would you like me to stay?”
No answer.

“Alright, well, I'll be back tomorrow morning then, and we can go through the rest of orientation together, yeah?”

Still no answer.

John sighed and ran a hand through his hair. “Okay, Mycroft. I guess I'm ready then.” He turned to Sherlock. “Please, try to get at least a little rest, Sherlock, and call the staff if there's anything you need, anything at all. You can text me if you need me. I can't get here quickly, but I'll do my best. Your new mobile is on the desk next to your laptop.”

Dead silence. Sherlock hadn't shown any interest in the phone, but John hadn't thought anything of it since he was the was the only one Sherlock ever really used his old mobile to communicate with, apart from Lestrade and case-related calls, but those were not currently relevant.

Will they ever be, again?

“Okay. I'll see you tomorrow, Sherlock.”

Without another word, John and Mycroft left, closing the door softly this time behind them.

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John couldn't even remember the last time he'd seen his flat when he collapsed down onto his couch that night. It was obvious Mycroft had been having someone dust, because the entire place looked like the morning he'd left work and got the text to meet Sherlock at Baker Street that evening.

There was a large stack of unopened mail on the coffee table next to the couch. It was quite substantial, but he knew someone- most likely Mycroft's PA- must have gone through it, because it was no nowhere near five and a half months worth of accumulation.
He knew he really needed to go through it, but he couldn't be arsed about it right now. There were a lot of things he couldn't be arsed to do, which included getting up to walk the short distance to his bedroom.

Of course, he understood the irony of finally being able to sleep in his own bed, and the first night not even wanting to walk the short distance back to the bedroom. But there was a difference between knowing and caring. And right now, he was simply too mentally exhausted for the latter.

Despite being curled up on a too short couch with all his clothes still on, the overhead light shining and no blanket to cover him, he had a surprisingly easy time falling asleep. All in all, he had a very restful first night back in his flat.

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The morning dawned, cool but sunny. A knock on the door of John's flat jerked him suddenly awake. He wasn't used to sleeping on the much thinner couch, and he rolled off, right onto the hard floor- which must have been furnished with the thinnest padding and carpet his skinflint of a landlord could find.

“Ow.” He rubbed his arse while he stood up on slightly wobbly legs. Of course now that his body was awake, it reminded him that it was past time to relieve himself as well.

But the incessant knocking meant his bladder would have to wait, as tempting as it was to let the rather annoying person behind the door wait for him to do his business.

Much to the discomfort of said bladder, John did the civilized thing, and opened the door.

Upon recognizing the visitor, however, he wished he had made them wait, after all.

“Doctor Watson. Didn't make it past the couch last night, I see?” Mycroft's brows descended first in concentration, then hitched themselves back up with a knowing look.

John shrugged, a frown stamped on his face. “Any reason why you're here at half eight in the morning? Sherlock's orientation isn't scheduled until ten, and it's less than an hour's drive to the centre.”
Mycroft didn't wait for an invite inside, nor did he answer the question. Instead, he pushed past John, made a displeased face as he looked at the rumpled couch, and instead took a seat in a nearby chair, placing his brolly and briefcase within an easy arm's reach on the floor next to him.

John took a moment to breathe in and out, letting the anger coursing through him about having his sleep interrupted, and Mycroft letting himself in settle and fade. Still tempted to leave the man to his own devices while he relieved himself, John walked over and sat in the chair across from the elder Holmes.

Mycroft must have noticed that this flat was consciously or unconsciously set up much like 221B. Thankfully, John thought, he refrained from commenting. Of course, John's furniture didn't even remotely look like what was in Baker Street. It was a pale comparison.

“Your lease is coming up soon.”

“Yes, in about four weeks, at the beginning of November.”

“And... you still plan to move back into Baker Street, correct?”

John gave him a bit of a side eye.

“Yes. Why, is that a problem?”

To John's surprise Mycroft actually backpedaled, putting his hands in a consoling gesture, palms up towards John. “Not at all, Doctor Watson. To the contrary, in fact. And that is why I wished to have a word with you about it.”

“Okay.” John drew the word out, not exactly sure where this was going.

“If you remember, I offered you assistance when it came to packing and moving.” He looked around the flat, which quite obviously had had nothing done to it yet.
“I would hate to suspect that you are stalling because you have... doubts.”

John shook his head vigorously. “That's not it, no. I've just not gotten around to it.”

“I would be happy to set an appointment for professional movers to come in and pack your belongings, which would allow you to focus on Sherlock.”

John knew any company that Mycroft used would be thoroughly vetted and closely watched, so he really didn't have any reason to worry, despite the warning his brain was trying to send him. Still, he didn't want to be out of the house when there were strangers around messing with his stuff. On the other hand, he didn't want to be away from Sherlock for any length of time, either. He was fairly sure this was the longest they'd been apart in almost six months, and John was already feeling anxious to see Sherlock again this morning.

“Well, there won't be any need for my bed, couch, or chairs in 221B, as the upstairs bedroom is already furnished.” That brought a raised eyebrow from Mycroft. Apparently he, like everyone else, had assumed that John and Sherlock were a couple. And what's more, he didn't seem to disapprove.

John frowned, and Mycroft resumed his neutral posture.

“I'd like to take my dresser to put up there, but that's the only large furniture I'll need. Everything I have here's pretty cheap, so I'll leave them for the landlord to sell or keep as he wishes. I really don't have much, just clothing, some kitchen items, my toiletries, and a couple of old Army trunks.” Those would stay locked. No need for strangers, or especially Mycroft Holmes, to be rooting around inside them.

Mycroft nodded for John to continue, as it was apparent he had more to say.

“I seriously doubt it'll take them more than a day or two at the most, and I'd rather keep my stuff here for as long as I can. At least, most of it. Could we put it off until the first week in November?”

Mycroft raised his eyebrow again, then nodded his head. “As you wish, Doctor Watson.” He said, rising to his feet and gathering his belongings. “If you change your mind, we can push the time forward. I will be in my car, attending to some business. Take your time taking a shower and eating breakfast. I will wait for you outside.” He turned towards the door and was gone a moment later.
John did take his time, using up almost all his hot water and making sure to cook a nice long breakfast before getting dressed, grabbing a few essential items and meeting Mycroft in his black car with the tinted windows.

Time to face the day.

And Sherlock, in whatever mood he might be in after spending his first night in a strange place and apart from John after the accident.

Chapter End Notes

At first, this might seem like an odd choice for a title and music video, but it's a beautiful and sad song, and I like the 'fall out of bed' lyric. Also, look for a VERY familiar face in the video. Even though I had a Faith No More song a couple of chapters ago, I - HAD- to find a place to put this one in. Interestingly enough, this is a cover of a Bee Gee's song. Faith No More also did a cover of Lionel Ritchie and The Commodores' "Easy". If you haven't heard it yet, do yourself a favor and listen. It's amazing.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPzDTflb0DU

Also, the night before posting this, I found another version of "I Started a Joke" with some extra dialogue in it. You get to hear a certain someone mutter "Bloody hell"- which made me chuckle.

You can watch it here- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o703ItRgOGw
The next day was a bit of a blur for John. That morning, Sherlock seemed to be mostly out of the funk he'd been in the afternoon before- he'd even re-arranged his clothing and belongings in an order which John assumed was more to his liking.

Sherlock, to no one's surprise, at first rejected the wheelchair that Mycroft pushed into the room as he and John arrived. He insisted that his brother pick either the chair or the walker he hated so much that he'd dubbed it 'The Contraption'. This ploy of Mycroft's to get him to use it seemed to work, since Sherlock announced that walking slowly was better than being pushed around like an invalid.

That sounded like the *Before Sherlock*.

Unfortunately for him, the grounds of the centre were rather sprawling, and his muscles were nowhere close to strong enough to be able to walk everywhere. It took about thirty minutes of standing, walking, and resting in various rooms before Sherlock had to admit he couldn't go on. To Mycroft's credit, he didn't sound or look the least bit smug when he retrieved the wheelchair and helped a disheartened Sherlock into it.

The orientation itself was pretty straightforward. He was shown a few rooms that they hadn't seen yesterday, and of course there was paperwork and ground rules and all the 'boring things' the head of
rehab they'd met yesterday had warned them about.

Yesterday, John had noted that Sherlock seemed to take the abbreviated tour in stride. He'd seemed a bit overwhelmed- that was to be expected from someone whose whole world just changed after half a year in the same location. God, thinking about it that way, it's kind of hard to believe we've gotten this far, John pondered.

Today, the former detective seemed a lot more on edge. He was looking around in quick glances, like something or someone was going to jump out at him. While he looked like he was listening to what Mrs. Broadberry was saying, John could tell it was going in one ear and out the other. And if he'd noticed, he knew Mycroft must have as well.

He gave the man a quick glance. The elder Holmes was quiet, but his slight frown seem to signal to John that he was just as concerned about what he was seeing.

When the tour was over, they took a late lunch in the cafeteria. As usual, Sherlock only picked at his food, just moving it around his plate. There was the slightest bit of relaxation in his shoulders, John noticed. It was obvious Sherlock was more than happy that the introductory formalities were finally over, and he was probably trying to process all the information that had been dumped on him today.

John, just as happy as Sherlock that it was over, frowned when he saw Sherlock wasn't eating. “If you want to build up your muscles, you're gonna have to eat better, Sherlock. You need calories to burn.”

Sherlock shot John a look, but he did actually try to eat a few bites. Even Mycroft ate some of what he had chosen, though John was sure he considered this well under his normal class of cuisine.

Most of the rest of the day was spent in Sherlock's room. Mycroft excused himself soon after they arrived back, stating that he'd send a car for John later in the evening. Sherlock, still tired from the exertion of the morning, took a nap. His therapy would start in earnest the next day, so John relaxed and went about his own business while Sherlock slept. The doctor kept himself busy for a while responding to emails and researching various aids that could help Sherlock when he returned to Baker Street. Even after Sherlock woke up, they were both mostly quiet until it was time for John to head back to London. He somehow made it back to his bed this time, and was out within a couple of minutes of his head hitting his long unused pillow.

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Being already used to a fixed daily schedule at the hospital, it was easy for John and Sherlock to fall into a routine at the rehabilitation centre.

Mycroft couldn't keep accompanying John to see Sherlock, with his ever busy work schedule. He arranged for a car to collect John at eight o’clock every morning outside his flat. John would join Sherlock for the rehab sessions he was allowed to attend- which was most of them. John was not allowed to participate in any therapies conducted in spaces where there were other patients, because of patient privacy issues.

During those activities, John would check his email or putter around online. He'd made himself a guest account on Sherlock's laptop, so he wouldn't have to haul his old, fragile computer back and forth every day.

Since there was nowhere for John to sleep at the rehab centre, he'd read to Sherlock practically every night until he was asleep, and then go back to his flat for a shower and some rest. At first, he wasn't sure if Sherlock would want to continue being read to, since he was doing so much better than he had been when they'd first started this routine, but he found that Sherlock relaxed more and fell asleep faster when listening to his voice- soft and steady in the darkened room. His therapy sessions were mentally and physically exhausting, and listening to the soft hum of John’s voice seemed to calm Sherlock and allow him to rest.

Besides the compulsory group peer support therapy and psychological assessments, the centre also implemented speech and physical therapy again, as well as a new therapy- neuropsychological rehabilitation. This entailed teaching a patient to compensate with issues such as memory problems, decision-making, and other such cognitive challenges.

These were one of the sessions John was not allowed into. Sherlock had made a point of telling John not to even ask about it. It made sense in a way- John had a hunch Sherlock wouldn't want him to know what he was having difficulties with. It seemed a bit counter-intuitive, since whatever he was having trouble doing, John wanted to try to assist him, and would have to do so after he returned to Baker Street. At least it showed that Sherlock was starting to try to be more independent, which was an excellent sign, so John didn't press the point.

Sherlock seemed to be progressing well with his physical therapy, but his group sessions left a bit to be desired. And while John was actually happy to see more of the Before Sherlock returning, he didn't like that he'd retained a low threshold for frustration. Traumatic brain injuries often exacerbated feelings of frustration and irritability- things Sherlock had previously had had in spades. Even through all of the ups and downs of the climb back from his injury, John had seen how easily Sherlock could get disheartened and upset- his mercurial mood swings had become even more volatile. That sometimes translated into lashing out at doctors, therapists, and other patients at the
Although John wasn't allowed to participate when Sherlock was in a group session, or the one-on-one sessions with his appointed neuropsychologist, the staff was able to talk with him afterwards about Sherlock's situation in general terms. They couldn't give any specifics about what had been discussed, but did offer progress reports on how Sherlock participated (or, sometimes didn't), and informed John when he'd been particularly hostile towards patients or staff, or otherwise in an abysmal or uncooperative mood.

This was information John appreciated, but in the long run it did him little good, as when he attempted to confront Sherlock about it, or even simply asked what they'd talked about, Sherlock almost immediately shut down. Most of the time, he resorted to what John started to dub 'the turtle defense', where he completely covered himself with the blanket on the bed and refused to come out until John either changed the subject, or more often than not, simply left. After a while, John gave up and stopped asking about the sessions he wasn't a part of. It just wasn't worth the fight. There were more important fires to put out.

The more Sherlock got into the routine of the centre, the better John started to sleep back in his flat. At first his bed was too soft. He'd been so used to sleeping in hospital chairs and cots, that adjusting to a real bed took some time. Eventually, he found that he'd almost always sleep through the night. Sometimes nightmares would wake him, and he'd shoot up in bed, panting and screaming Sherlock's name. Thankfully, those nights slowly but surely became fewer and further between as they both continued to improve.

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As October continued to ramble on, the air became crisp and cold. Trees began to shed their greenery and blazed into mighty pyres of oranges and reds and browns, before giving up their foliage and becoming stark and gray, much like the winter that was yet to come.

Sherlock continued to make great progress in many areas, but John kept having to constantly remind him it was important that he continue to work on his stamina and patience. That was how he was going to get back on his feet and walking without 'The Contraption', which was something John knew Sherlock wanted desperately. But no amount of progress seemed to satisfy him, and Sherlock's frustration had become a permanent companion to their days.
John found the staff at the centre very helpful and positive. Almost too positive. They were sickeningly cheery all the time, to the point that it almost seemed fake and put on. But the more John talked to them, the more he was convinced that they weren't taking the piss— they really were naturally buoyant. Somehow, the centre had found and recruited the most upbeat, positive, and friendly therapists, doctors, and staff in the entire UK.

Of course, it drove Sherlock up the wall, which only amused John even more.

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Sherlock had been settled in almost a week when the first major incident happened.

The former detective was at a group therapy session and John was in his room, checking his email when there was a knock at the door. John recognized the gray haired man as the doctor who was in charge of Sherlock's overall care.

"Doctor Jones. Come in, please. Sherlock's at group therapy, if you're looking for him." He opened the door and the doctor walked in, not taking the offered seat.

Doctor Jones' smile lessened. "I know. His therapies are what I came to have a word about with you. One in particular. Besides regular sessions with the neuropsychologist, we've sent him to the psychologist every day, with the hopes that he'll be able to work through what happened to him. He's refused every single day, either claiming he doesn't feel well, disappearing from his room at the appointed time, or simply refusing to get out of bed. We've decided to cancel those treatments for him for the foreseeable future. There are other patients who are more willing to put the psychologist's time to better use."

That sneaky bastard. John thought to himself. John hadn't thought much of it, when Sherlock either 'left early' for that appointment, sent John on an errand conveniently at that time, or did something else to get him out of the room so he could avoid that particular therapy.
He's going to get a piece of my mind on this, John thought.

“I'm sorry he's caused such a hassle, Doctor. I'll talk to him. I doubt I'll be able to change his mind, but I'm really disappointed he isn't going. I'll tell him as much.”

Doctor Jones nodded, the smile slowly coming back onto his face. “He's really lucky to have someone like you.” He said, before turning towards the door. “Not everyone has somebody who cares enough to visit every day and assist with their therapies. You two must really be close.” Before John could answer, he headed out the door. John sighed, running his hand through his hair. He figured he'd be used to it by now, people assuming that they were a couple. But it still sent a strange feeling to through his gut.

Mostly because he had no idea if it was true or not. Especially now.

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The 'conversation' went about as well as John figured it would. He asked Sherlock why he was refusing his psychologist appointments, Sherlock tried to change the conversation, and it ended up being a row where Sherlock eventually pulled the covers over his head and refused to talk for the rest of the evening.

John tried to write off the guilt that he felt for actually counting down the minutes until Mycroft's car came to pick him up. He knew his patience and reserves were wearing thin, and it was only a matter of time before something came to a head.

He wouldn't have to wait long.
It was inevitable that Sherlock's parents would visit. Of course, Sherlock fought it tooth and nail, but eventually it couldn't be avoided. On an appropriately cold and blustery day, Mycroft escorted them to the centre, giving them a quick tour of some of the more important areas before showing them to Sherlock's room. Both he and John were away at a rehab session, so they made themselves comfortable, and Mycroft got them some refreshments as they chatted amicably while waiting on Sherlock to return.

Almost an hour later, John wheeled Sherlock back to the room. The moment he saw his parents, he put his hands on the wheels, stopping John from pushing him any further. Even though he couldn't see Sherlock's face, John could imagine the embarrassment and horror of his parents seeing him in a wheelchair again. After watching him walk what seemed like a lifetime ago. John knew that to Sherlock, them seeing him like this must have seemed like a giant step backwards.

"No." He stated plainly, refusing to move.

"Sherlock." John warned, his ire starting to rise. "You can't sit in the doorway forever." Sherlock
silently crossed his arms and took his feet out of the foot rests, planting them firmly on the ground. 
**Well. John thought. I guess that actually is his plan.**

There was just enough room in the doorway for John to scoot past Sherlock and grab his walker. Sherlock hated that thing almost as much as being pushed in a wheelchair, but it was the lesser of the two evils, so John knew he'd use it when it was offered to him.

Indignantly, Sherlock grabbed the walker, stood up, and slowly made his way over to the bed. He didn't acknowledge or say anything to his parents, who'd been quietly watching the entire exchange. Beside them, Mycroft wore an exhausted look on his face. Sherlock crawled under the covers and pulled them and the hand crocheted duvet that Mrs. Hudson had brought from 221B over his head.

John sighed, running a hand over his face. "I'm sorry. He had a bit of a hard session. I know you two came from quite a distance. Why don't we find you guys a nearby hotel room, and perhaps we can meet tomorrow morning for breakfast before his therapies? He's usually pretty wiped by this time in the afternoon." John knew he could get away with suggesting that the elder Holmes find his parents a hotel on his bill, which was why he'd done it.

To John's eternal appreciation, Mycroft stood up and walked over to his parents, who were sitting on the settee that was set back into the wall, under the large window. "I believe that Doctor Watson may have a legitimate point. I think that Sherlock will be a bit more amenable to company if we meet with him tomorrow morning. If you two would kindly make your way to the car, please. I will follow in a few moments."

"Oh, alright." Mrs Holmes walked over to the lump under the covers and gently put her hand on Sherlock's lower leg. "We'll see you in the morning, dear. You get your rest." His father silently patted his foot a couple of times and they headed out.

When the door closed behind them, John practically ripped the covers down, revealing a surprised Sherlock staring at him in confusion, then anger. "That was rude." John said, fighting to keep his voice even and his temper under check. "Your parents drove a long way to see you, and you sit here and pout and refuse to talk to them. They know why you're here and why you need all this help. I know it's embarrassing, but that's just the way things are!"
Instead of responding, Sherlock grabbed the covers away from John and drew them back over his head, making sure to tuck them in this time so they couldn't be so easily pulled off again. John was not going to play tug-o-war over the covers, so he stood up and paced around the room, trying to calm the fires raging inside of him.

“John.” Mycroft started to speak for the first time since their parents left. He'd watched the rest of the exchange with what had looked like blank detachment.

John simply shook his head. He wasn't going to extend this argument into a two-front war with both Holmeses. He grabbed his jacket, and as quietly as he could, slipped away from the room- his destination unknown.

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The sun was on its way down, bathing the country sky over the horizon in swaths of fiery reds, golds and yellows, as though it'd been painted with a brush. It was beautiful, John thought, until the first wisps of cool late fall air hit his face with the force of a slap, and he pulled his jacket tighter around his body.

*It’s easy to forget that winter was just around the bend, he thought, when you've spent the better part of the year inside hospitals and rehab centres- only going outside for brief periods to travel, or do the chores necessary for existing.*

John had snuck out a side door, so he wouldn't have to see the car with Sherlock's parents. He knew it was sitting in the roundabout in the front of the building. After he left the centre, he wandered back towards the sleepy hamlet of Bagshot.

He was surprised it took Mycroft as long as it did before the first text came in.

Are you going to walk back to London, Doctor Watson? -M-
John hadn't even noticed that while he was walking generally towards town, he was also on the road that would eventually lead back to the capital. He hadn't thought about which way he'd been heading, perhaps his choice of direction had been a subconscious, instinctual urge.

He frowned after reading the text a second time. angrily stabbing a response on his mobile.

*Of course not. I just needed to get some air. JW*

It was a lame excuse, he knew. Sherlock's moods had been so up and down since moving to the rehabilitation centre, and John understood that things were going to boil over eventually. It still wasn't easy, watching Sherlock make such stellar progress with everything else except accepting what had happened to him and knowing that he needed to eventually process the way his life had changed.

He sighed, tugging at his hair slightly before responding again, this time with less stabbing.

*I'm on my way back. I'll visit Sherlock, then get a ride back with you. JW*

*I'll be waiting. -M-

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When John arrived back in the room, he thought it curious that Sherlock's parents hadn't returned, even though Mycroft had been delayed in getting back to the car.
The former detective's eyes wide as he saw who was entering the room. Maybe he'd feared that his friend wouldn't have wanted to see him after what had happened.

“John.” Sherlock's voice, deep and rumbling, never failed to coax forth a smile from his blogger. John couldn't forget—he'd been afraid for so long that he'd never hear his friend talk again. And now, despite everything, he couldn't stop appreciating when Sherlock spoke, no matter how small or insignificant a thing he communicated.

One look at Mycroft's face showed he was obviously not happy John had caused his brother discomfort, but he also understood that the elder Holmes knew how intransigent—his words, not John's—Sherlock could be, and that his brother excelled at pushing people away.

“Hey, Sherlock.” John said, ducking his head a bit. “I'm... sorry I stormed out. I hope I didn't worry you too much.”

“'M glad you're here.” He said simply. Mycroft silently nodded his approval.

And just like that, the matter was tabled. John was welcomed back into the Holmes fold.

XXXXX

October ebbed, and started to wane. Sherlock's parents didn't stay in town long, only visiting for a couple of days before heading back to Swindon, much to the relief of their younger son.

As October was starting to come to a close, another thought loomed in John's head— one which he'd tried not to let distract him as Sherlock continued to adjust to staying at the rehabilitation centre. Of course, it didn't take Sherlock long to deduce that something was bothering John, and one afternoon, when relaxing in his room between therapy sessions, he asked John what was wrong.
“My lease is up soon, Sherlock.” John told him.

Sherlock looked at him puzzlingly, but said nothing, so John continued. “That means it's time to make a decision.” He only paused for a moment. “Well, not really a decision, I guess. I'd already made the choice to move into Baker Street when the lease ran out months ago. It's just...” His voice trailed off.

This time Sherlock spoke. “It's been too long.” he said, quietly.

“Yes. It's been a very long time since I've lived there, and while I always considered it my home, it hasn't been so for several years now. I visited Mrs. Hudson once, and so many memories came flooding back.”

“You... can't live there?” Sherlock's speech was back to what most would consider 'normal', but he still lacked the eloquence of his previous manner of speaking. He tended to communicate in as small sentences as he could. It was something the doctors said could be a permanent change, and it served as a painful reminder for John how much Sherlock had lost, and how far he still had to go.

John shook his head. “I can live there. I want to live there again. It'll just take a little getting used to. Thankfully, I'll have Mrs. Hudson fussing at me and baking to help me along.” He managed a little smile.

“Just think about it, Sherlock. If I'm living in Baker Street, that means I'll have a constant supply of ginger nut biscuits. And since Mrs. Hudson always makes way more than I could possibly eat before they go stale, I'll have to find another person to share them with. I'm sure I can think of someone who likes them as much as I do.”

“Arse.” There was no venom behind the word, only humor. John started to chuckle, then outright laugh, and a moment later, Sherlock joined him.

Maybe, just maybe, John hoped, things were making a turn for the better.
I actually wrote Chapters 31 and 32 much differently, but after re-reading them, along with the chapters before and after, my betas and I decided that I might want to go on a slightly different track.

I did a total re-write, keeping some of the original chapters but changing the vast majority of it.

I'm not 100% sure why, but I kept a copy of the original Chapter 31. I am planning to post it in my companion to this story- 'In Absentia- Behind The Scenes (The Researchening)'. You can find it listed as part 2 of this series.

Interestingly enough, I ended up totally re-writing Chapters 36 and 39 as well. I will also post those up as they come around.

Just a forewarning though, those original three chapters will be a lot rougher writing wise, as they got less polishing, less editing and less beta-ing than the chapters posted here. So they are not nearly as good as what I ended up with.

Also, I'm very sorry that I have not updated 'The Researchening' for a long time now, since the end of August actually. I have more information to add, but I have been in an awful writing funk for months now. So hopefully posting the alternate Chapter 31 will give me a kick in the butt to post more there, or just to write in general.

So I will try to post the alternate Chapter 31 in a couple of weeks, since it kind of straddles what happens in a couple of chapters, and I don't want any spoilers.

Either way. I hope you enjoyed this chapter and will enjoy the other information I have to add to 'The Researchening'. Thanks!
The day after Sherlock's parents departed, John was surprised to see Mycroft sitting in the car that was waiting to take him home for the evening. A sinking feeling pooled in John's gut. *What have I done this time?*

“Doctor Watson. Please, get in.” Mycroft's tone of voice didn't bode well, John thought, but he did as he was told.

The car sped off, and John waited, stock still, while Mycroft typed a few things on his phone before addressing the man sitting across from him.

“It has come to my attention that my brother is having... difficulties using the new phone I have procured for him.” Well, that wasn't what John had been expecting.
“He opted not to inform you.” Mycroft continued. “The night you disappeared, he tried to text you, but was incapable of doing so. I was able to stop him before he threw the phone across the room, which would have most certainly resulted in the necessity of procuring yet another replacement.”

John felt awful. Shame flushed his cheeks. He should've taken that into account. He knew people with traumatic brain injuries can have issues with re-learning things they used to be able to do by rote memory. He'd been too busy dealing with everything else that came along with moving Sherlock to a new location and getting him settled in, that he hadn't even thought about the fact that Sherlock would most likely need help with his phone. He'd noticed it was a much newer model than the one he'd had before, so he should have realized that there'd be differences in how it operated.

Of course Sherlock wouldn't have said anything to him. It was just another example of him trying to exert his independence.

“Yes, I'll help him tomorrow.” Mycroft's reply was a satisfied nod. He looked back down to his phone, not uttering a word for the rest of the trip.

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John had given a lot of thought on how to approach the subject of the phone to Sherlock. He was fairly certain that trying to start a conversation about it would lead to a refusal of help in the form of an angry and embarrassed sulk. That was something John feared. He worried that he'd simply not have the mental energy to engage in any more arguments. He'd already lost his temper and walked out on Sherlock once- he couldn't do that again- he'd never forget how distressed Sherlock had been when he returned.

Thankfully, despite a short, halfhearted attempt at refusing, Sherlock gave in and took notes in his still messy scrawl while John explained what he'd need to do to make phone calls and texts. John showed Sherlock where the important phone numbers had already been programmed in, so all he'd have to do was press a number to speed dial- 1 for John, 2 for Mycroft, and 3 for his parents. And if he forgot which was which, he could go into his contacts and call or text from there.

John watched, spellbound, as Sherlock flipped through the notebook that held everything he'd jotted down so far to find the first blank page to write down what John had said. He was surprised to see
that Sherlock had already made many pages worth of notes on his own- small hand drawn maps of parts of the centre, lists of when and where different therapies took place, things he had to do in the morning, the locations of different items in his room, and other information that he'd thought important to add. It was equal parts heartbreaking that he had to do it, and encouraging that he was taking the initiative to manage his life. Maybe accepting help with the phone was a *needs must* thing—skills Sherlock considered so vital that he'd swallow his pride and just get on with it.

*Or, it occurred to John, maybe Mycroft had tried to help and Sherlock had proved that he didn't need his brother, after all.*

John knew that from now on, he was going to have to take more care and make sure Sherlock understood (without coddling him) what was going on, on a day to day basis. Before, Sherlock had been the master of multitasking, able to sift through massive amounts of data, organize and connect them into patterns, and remember it all. Now, it seemed that the simplest tasks could overwhelm him, especially when tired or stressed out.

It tore at John's heart to think about.

*XXXXX*

November decided that it wanted to make itself known by dropping below ten degrees and pelting the entirety of the Southern UK with a cold rain and wind chill that permeated even the thickest of jumpers, seeping in and leeching heat down to the core.

John had been spending the few precious hours he had in his flat to start the arduous process of organizing what he wanted to move, and what would either be given away or hopefully sold. He'd come to an agreement with the landlord- in return for leaving some of the furniture, which would raise what he could charge the next tenant, they'd forgo the moving fee that covered cleaning and repainting.

It was a win/win situation.
Mycroft continued to give John the third degree on when he wanted the movers to come, but he was attempting to wait until he was mostly done with the organizing and boxing himself. Unfortunately, time was starting to run out, so he finally informed Mycroft that the movers could come on November seventh. That would only leave John a few hours with minimal supplies in his soon to be former flat before he moved back to 221B Baker Street on a permanent basis.

Even a week into November, the cold snap had not let up, though thankfully, the rain had. The skies were still gray and dreary, as if the world lamented that winter was well and truly situating itself early around the isle and digging its tendrils deep, making it impossible for the sun to warm the land and its people any longer.

John had already begged out of going to visit Sherlock on the seventh and eighth, since he'd be busy moving those days. The timing couldn't have been much worse, sadly. Sherlock was continuing to improve his stamina using the walker, and was scheduled to attempt to move to a one handed cane-the type with multiple legs, which was a major step forward- the same day John moved into Baker Street. He wanted to be present, and could only hope that it'd be somewhat less embarrassing than 'the monstrosity', and Sherlock would take to using it with less vehemence.

The movers were quiet and efficient, which pleased John. They did their work quickly, with only the minimal of talking between themselves, or to him to ask a question on what something needed to be packed with. By the time they helped him with the last couple of small boxes that had needed to stay until John moved himself out, they all worked together like a well oiled machine, and it took much less time to finish than John had allowed for.

That night, after the movers had headed over to Baker Street with the rest of his belongings, and he'd signed the final paperwork with his landlord- who had given him a hearty handshake and wished him the best, John took one last tour around his now former flat. He ran the pads of his fingers over the little notch in the doorway where he'd not so accidentally taken a knife to it one night after he'd had too much to drink. He'd done that when he'd thought Sherlock had thrown himself off the top of Barts. It was a time he'd rather not be reminded of.

John could remember every little dent in the walls, every scratch in the floor. It was a record of the nearly three years he'd lived in this flat. It'd certainly seen the worst of him. But he knew now was not the time to get maudlin. When it was time, he nodded a silent goodbye, hitched up the backpack, and grabbed the little boxes that held the final vestiges of his life here, then closed and locked the door for the last time and hailed a cab.
“221 Baker Street, please.” He settled in, ready to start the next chapter of his life.

As much as John thought it would be strange living back in 221B, he found that he fell into old habits easily. Of course, Mrs. Hudson welcomed him with open arms, and a ready made plate of ginger nut biscuits that ended up being way too many for him to eat by himself, so he took the bulk of them to Sherlock when he went to visit the next day.

If the previous walker that Sherlock had used was a monstrosity, the cane that he 'graduated' to was more of a nuisance. The doctors explained that he'd be stepped down to one more cane- the type without the extra legs at the bottom- before the doctors let him walk on his own unhindered. But the bulk of the hardest work was over, they insisted.

John wasn't sure if he agreed.

While Sherlock was taking steps every day to approach a condition in which he could return home, John knew he'd never be the Sherlock that had run down a cabbie within the first 24 hours of meeting him. He'd never be the detective that deduced his life story in the back of cab while on the way to a crime scene.

He'd never be the Sherlock that John used to know.

What would happen when Sherlock saw 221B again for the first time? Would he remember it well, the way it used to be? Would he be sad that he didn't? Could it ever possibly be like it had been- two men arguing in a scruffy flat, like they'd always been there, and always would be?

John had nightmares about the terrible scenarios that could possibly happen when Sherlock came home- from not remembering anything, to breaking down and burying himself in his room and not coming out for days.
It was now more difficult than ever to try to guess how he'd react, because Sherlock, for his part, had surprisingly stopped asking about going back to Baker Street. John wasn't sure if he was concentrating on his therapies, or if it was something more disturbing. There were times where Sherlock had lapses of memory, and became increasingly frustrated when he realized what had happened. He hated it as much as John loathed seeing it happen to him.

The forgetfulness was so unlike the Before Sherlock, who might have deleted what he considered 'useless information' from his hard drive- such as the fact that the earth revolved around the sun- but he'd never fail to remember that Mrs. Hudson had visited the day before and had brought a fresh supply of Sherlock's favorite tea to go with the ginger nut biscuits left over from John's flat warming gift. Witnessing the vicious cycle that was now a part of Sherlock's life- Sherlock getting confused, then disheartened and angry- tore a hole through John's heart.

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Mycroft only waited a couple of days after John moved back to 221B to make his first visit back to the flat. John was sure he must have dropped by several times during Sherlock's hospitalization, when it had been unoccupied. The flat had definitely been cleaned and somewhat organized since he had seen it last. While John couldn't say if anything was missing, the amount of Sherlockian clutter that was still present made it look like nothing had been removed, only shifted around.

The visit came on an evening that John had left the centre a bit early because there were no more therapies to attend, and Sherlock had succumbed to exhaustion, so he excused himself early to finish unpacking and organizing his things. Of course, in true Mycroft fashion, he didn't knock. The front door was unlocked as usual, so he came up the stairs and walked into the living room like he owned the place.

Sometime John wondered if he did.

Thankfully, John wasn't in an embarrassing or compromising position. He'd been on his laptop in the living room, trying to catch up on the onslaught of emails that had been gathering over the past months. He was down to the less important ones that he'd left for later. That later had finally arrived.
“Mycroft. “John said in a flat, thoroughly unamused tone when Mycroft walked in the door, brolly in one hand and briefcase in the other.

“Doctor Watson.” His tone was equally serious.

“I'm assuming you have a reason for visiting me out of the blue tonight.”

Mycroft frowned. John could practically hear the smartarse comments running through the man's head, waiting to be spoken. But to Mycroft's credit, he simply nodded his head slightly.

“As you are obviously aware, Sherlock is making great strides in his physical rehabilitation.” John noticed how Mycroft had stressed the physical, and not the mental or psychological rehabilitation. The latter seemed to have hit a bit of a brick wall of late, as if he was forgoing the psychological to focus the physical.

“Yes.” John said simply.

“And as he progresses, he is also working towards leaving the centre, and moving back to Baker Street.” John nodded, his face showing the anxiousness for Mycroft to get to the bloody point.

“It is time that we prepare the flat for Sherlock's inevitable return.”

John leaned forward slightly. “So, what do we need to do?”
Hollow Man

Chapter Summary

In which the flat gets renovated, and John questions his relevance when it comes to Sherlock Holmes.

Chapter Notes

Warning: There is talk of suicidal thoughts and actions at the end of the chapter, so please skip the last eight paragraphs or so if you'd rather not read about it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hollow Man

R.E.M. - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=En6iGamLwso

It ended up that the renovations needed for the flat were pretty minimal. John hated to get rid of the old clawfoot tub in the loo, it had most likely been an original installation. But there was no way to make it safe for Sherlock. Physically, he was improving, but he was still going to need a railing against the shower wall to assist in getting in and out.

Besides that, the only other items that needed improvement were the railing going up the steps, and some additional lighting, especially around the downstairs foyer and stairs. Some higher lumen bulbs around the flat, and a couple of additional lamps in the foyer would take care of it- no complicated rewiring needed- which was a huge relief to John. Everything else had been deemed acceptable to the therapist Mycroft had gotten to inspect Baker Street.

An appointment was made for two days out for the construction crew to commence the renovations. This was one time John was glad for Mycroft's connections. He'd much rather get these renovations over with. The sooner it was ready, the better.
By the time John was able to get back to the rehabilitation centre, he'd endured three solid days of workers pounding and banging around the flat, getting little sleep and generally becoming a snappy, angry mess. Of course, he tried not to let his lack of sleep and annoyance at the construction affect him when he was with Sherlock, to a somewhat limited success.

Sherlock had been making good progress during John's erratic absences for the move and renovations. The further along he got, the more John realized that his friend was relying on him less and less. Sherlock was becoming more self reliant every day.

Ever since Sherlock had come to the rehabilitation centre, and especially after the rather spectacular row that had led to John wandering around town, Sherlock had been a lot more independent, speaking to John less. He didn't seem to miss John when he spent extra hours at Baker Street, or ran around doing his errands, or even spent time with friends like Greg and Molly.

John couldn't decide if that was the best thing that could happen, or the worst.

One one hand, it was wonderful that Sherlock was attempting to declare his autonomy, becoming more and more like the Before Sherlock. On the other hand, John had grown used to being needed by Sherlock- assisting him and being there when the man needed a shoulder to lean on- sometimes literally. As a doctor, he knew it was not healthy to be in what would look to many like a co-dependent relationship.

Any sort of.. 'relationship' that one had with Sherlock Holmes was anything but typical, and tended to defy labels. Even the people he considered friends were more than that simple word could convey. Sherlock was not one to dole out trust and friendship to anyone, just because they could stand being around him for any length of time. Trust, to him, was fragile, and was not given lightly. And when Sherlock trusted you enough to be considered a friend, it was a rare gift, something to be cherished and protected at all costs.

John felt the weight of that friendship acutely- it was an anchor, deep in his chest. The fact that their friendship was in the process of changing so fundamentally rocked John's foundation, undermining
how he viewed all of his friendships, not just with Sherlock. John had been gifted with the man's trust, and now having his friend no longer need to rely on him so heavily felt like the rug was being pulled out from under his feet.

He sighed and ran a hand through his hair. It was a habit he'd had all his life, but it seemed like the frequency of this nervous tic had increased tenfold since Sherlock's accident. John looked out the window of the long black car that was once again making the trip between London and Surrey. Trees whipped past him, rolling green hills dotted with sheep and homes that had been around since Queen Victoria's time, or before.

John tried to clear his mind, focus on the viridian blur outside the window, but he couldn't stop thinking about how he felt like he wasn't needed any more. He couldn't figure out if this feeling of abject and utter sadness was simply selfish on his part, or whether he should try to fight the inevitable- keep swimming upstream like a salmon fighting the current that it knew would eventually wear it down and spell its doom.

Suddenly, he wondered if moving back to Baker Street had been a good idea. Mycroft hadn't outright vetoed the idea, but he hadn't seemed particularly excited about the prospect either. Despite the indifferent front that Mycroft kept up, John knew deep down the elder Holmes wanted what was best for his little brother.

And it didn't matter one whit to the the man if that meant John was in the picture, or not.

John knew that no matter he wanted, if Mycroft determined that it'd be better for Sherlock for him not to live at Baker Street, and have nothing to do with Sherlock Holmes any more, the 'British Government' could make it happen, by hook or by crook. And that would spell very bad news for John Watson.

Thankfully, so far, Mycroft had determined that John had so far been a positive force in Sherlock's life, and had allowed him to continue the ongoing friendship with his little brother.

John was quite grateful for that. As much as it seemed like he had saved Sherlock, he knew that Sherlock had saved him as well. He was positive Mycroft knew about the service issue revolver John had had hidden in the little one room flat he'd been staying in before he met Sherlock.
He was also sure the elder Holmes knew that there'd been days- most days if John was being honest with himself- that the former soldier had taken the gun out of the desk drawer and held the Browning like an old lover, running the pads of his fingers over the textured grip, sliding up towards the barrel, enjoying the dichotomy of the smooth and rough surfaces under his calloused touch.

There were days that John put the end of the barrel in his mouth, tasting the cold, bitter metal on his tongue, letting it grind against his teeth. Those were the days he wondered if anyone would notice, or even care, if he was gone. He was estranged from the only family he had left- his alcoholic sister, who he hadn't been in touch with for months. He doubted she would be sober enough to identify and collect his body if he ended it all.

His mother had buggered off when he was just a small child, so she could be dead for all John knew, or cared. His dad- the one who had verbally and physically abused both him and his sister, had died of cirrhosis of the liver while he was getting shot up in Afghanistan- a fitting end, John thought bitterly.

If only my dad could see me now. He'd think, while fingerling the barrel in his mouth.

Some days, he'd never get any further than teasing his lips with the end of the barrel. But others- the days when the world was too much of a weight on his shoulders- he'd go as far as to put his index finger against the trigger. But he'd never had the bollocks to do it- to pull it, and end it all.

Every time, he put the gun away gently, almost reverently, back into the drawer. Then he'd go into his tiny kitchenette, pull out his bottle of scotch, and not bother to pour it into a glass- drinking until the hot tears didn't prick at the corners of his eyes any more, and the world looked and felt a little less bleak.

Or until he'd had too much and passed out on the floor- whichever came first.

The day he met Mike Stamford in the park had been one of those very bad days. He'd been on his way back to his flat with an unusually strong determination in his step. With that simple greeting, and
cup of coffee, Mike had pulled him back from the brink. The day he'd been introduced to Sherlock Holmes was the day that had saved his life. He knew deep in his heart that if he'd never met Mike and Sherlock, that would've been the day he'd pulled the trigger. But when the strange man with the strange hair and the even stranger ability to deduce him with one look came bursting into his life, John knew he had a reason to live.

A rather sharp turn pulled John away from the door and shook him out of his thoughts. The car jostled him around as it traveled over the slightly uneven cobblestones that led up to the front of the Rehabilitation Centre.

They'd arrived.

That old familiar feeling in the pit of his stomach- a mix of dread and nervous excitement bubbled deep within John. He nodded his thanks to the driver- and suddenly had a pang of guilt wash over him. Over the past weeks John hadn't even bothered to learn the man's name. He's had the same driver nearly every morning. Did he ever take a day off? John wondered.

He stepped out onto the curb and took a long, steadying breath, then headed inside, ready to handle whatever Sherlock would throw at him today.

Chapter End Notes

I know that I have said it before, but if you are feeling like you have no one to talk to, there is always someone who will listen. PLEASE, PLEASE talk to someone. There are people who care and who will help.

Also, as I didn't say it before, I hope everyone had a great holiday, and a happy new year, and an awesome 2019.

I will see you all next year!! Thanks for sticking with me through all of this so far in 2018 and I look forward to writing more next year!
Chapter Summary

In which Sherlock finally walks again, only John gets to see, and it wasn't even in a therapy room.

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*Blackbird*

The Beatles- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Kx4xVKn9z8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Kx4xVKn9z8)

Sherlock was already away at his first therapy when John arrived. Since it was one he couldn't attend, he took the time to have a late breakfast in the cafeteria- which consisted of a quite passable, though only partially complete fry up. It would've been perfect if they'd had beans and black pudding. Still, he enjoyed it with a strong coffee, purposefully eating slowly so he could get back to Sherlock's room about the same time as his friend as due to return.

As it happened, John timed it rather well, He was walking down the hallway as Sherlock- cane in hand- opened his door, pausing when he saw movement down the hall out of the corner of his eye. Sherlock flashed the slightest hint of a smile and nod, then went inside.

John quickened his step, reaching the door a few moments later. He didn't bother to knock, instead he stepped in to find Sherlock at his desk, on his computer. Most likely he's composing an angry email to his brother. John thought- it had become Sherlock's preferred method of communication.
with the elder Holmes. It'd been almost two weeks since Mycroft had set foot in the rehabilitation centre, and that seemed to suit Sherlock just fine. John had to admit he didn't mind terribly either, as Sherlock tended to be and stay in a fairly positive mood when his brother wasn't skulking around.

“John.” Sherlock said simply, looking over to acknowledge the man before turning back to his computer. He took the hint and settled into the comfortable chair by the window, his default place to sit in Sherlock's room. As he leaned against it and relaxed, his mind floated back to several weeks ago, when he'd left in a fit of anger and wandered around the tiny town that surrounded the centre.

John was so lost in his spiraling thoughts that he had no idea how much time passed before Sherlock closed the lid of his laptop and turned towards him. The sound and movement immediately snapped John out of his own head, and back into the present.

He knew Sherlock didn't have any more sessions until after lunch, which would start in about an hour, even though John himself was still thoroughly full from the large breakfast. That meant they had time to take a walk around the grounds- he was always reminding Sherlock how important it was to keep working on his strength and stamina. If he wasn't feeling up to it, John could keep him company in the room, perhaps he would update him on their friend, as the former detective hadn't asked about them in a while.

John had been keeping Sherlock informed about the renovations to Baker Street. They'd been completed the week before, and John found himself anxious to find out what Sherlock would think of them. So far he hadn't taken any pictures of the flat, and Sherlock hadn't asked for any- it was if they both knew Sherlock would rather wait and see 221B with his own two eyes.

“If you feel like going for a walk, the weather's a bit more mild today. Or if you'd rather, was can stay in and talk.” John said while Sherlock was already pulling on his shoes. Mycroft had somehow arranged to get Sherlock shoes that slipped on, but that looked like expensive loafers, so he would avoid the frustration of tying his shoes- something that most everyone took for granted, but he still struggled with. Knowing Mycroft, he'd probably had them hand made. Either way, Sherlock thankfully had taken to them almost right away, which meant one fewer headache for John to deal with.

“Walk.” Sherlock said, grabbing his cane and immediately standing up, slightly shakily at first- his balance was still not what it used to be. John tried not think about how it might never be the same. A part of John mourned for the fact that they'd never run across rooftops or chase criminals around London any more. It was something he was still struggling to come to terms with.
“You're remembering the past.” Sherlock deduced, John knew that to Sherlock, even as fundamentally changed as he was, his thoughts were written all over his face. He nodded his head.

“I was just thinking about how we used to run around London, chasing criminals.” He admitted.

There was the slightest hint of a frown on Sherlock's face, but it only held for a moment before his visage went blank again. “Walk.” he repeated, and started to head towards the door without another word. John followed behind, thoughts still racing through his head.

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Despite the crispness of the November air, the sun beat down on the backs of their necks, warming the skin that was exposed to the rays of the late morning sun. They walked in silence for a while, soaking in the sun's rays, and shivering when the occasional cold breeze rustled their hair and raised goosebumps on the backs of their wrists where their jackets didn't quite come down far enough to cover their sensitive skin.

It was a companionable silence, not awkward or strange. They enjoyed the rare, cloudless English day, absorbing the heat when the wind died down like the tiny lizards like darted through the flowers they strolled past, pecking away at tiny insects almost invisible to the naked eye.

Finally, John broke the quiet. “The doctors want you to try to walk without the cane soon.” He said, as if Sherlock wasn't acutely aware of this.

Sherlock made a low hum in his throat for acknowledgment, but stayed quiet otherwise. His eyes were glassy, like he was staring beyond the trees, towards something John couldn't even comprehend.

The air grew stagnant and still between them. Things were going to change incomprehensibly, and very soon. They both knew it, and neither of them quite knew what to expect. They'd been floating
in each others' orbits for so long now. Both of their lives had so irrecoverably changed.

And now, they were going to attempt to go back to what they'd had before- sharing a creaky old flat on Baker Street.

But it really wasn't going to be like before, was it? John thought.

They weren't going to be running around London, working with Greg to solve crimes, or meeting Molly in the pathology lab to gather evidence. John wouldn't be doing boring locum work at a clinic that was desperately understaffed and its staffers overworked.

A slight shiver from Sherlock brought John out of his thoughts. John suddenly snapped into doctor mode. He knew that it was common for TBI patients to have trouble regulating their body temperature, and they'd been outside for a while now.

“Come on, Sherlock. We should go in. They'll be serving lunch soon.” John knew they both understood why John was making an excuse to return to the centre, but John had realized fairly quickly that it was often best not to address the elephant in the room. If there was one thing Sherlock hated, it was being mollycoddled and reminded of what he used to be able to do, but couldn't any more. Even little things that were beyond his scope of control, like temperature regulation, could send him in a stroppy depression.

Sherlock made a move to ride, but he ended up accidentally knocking the side of his foot against his cane and sent it sprawling a couple of feet in front of him, clattering loudly on the paved path.

John was up in a flash, on his feet and already moving to retrieve it.

“John!” The snappiness of the single word stunned him into stillness.
The former detective got up onto his feet, slightly unsteadily. His fingers leaned on the stone bench for a moment to balance himself. He took one step, then another. A third step brought him to his cane, which he bent down, retrieved, and settled back into leaning upon like what he’d just done was nothing at all.

Sherlock. That breathtakingly brilliant man that never ceased to amaze John, was walking.

“Sh...” John tried to speak his friend's name as Sherlock settled back onto the bench to rest for a moment. It seemed that even that little effort had tired him.

“Sherlock.” John finally managed to stammer out. “How... Have you been holding this back from the therapists? You... You walked.”

As much as Sherlock tried to look bored about it, he couldn't quite keep the smile from his face. He nodded simply, as if that was explanation enough.

John shook his head and burst out into laughter. “You berk.” He said, a grin still plastered on his face. He felt like he was flying. Sherlock had walked. It'd only been a few steps, but he walked!.

“Are you planning on surprising your therapists today?” John asked, though he didn't expect a response. “Or Mycroft? You'd enjoy giving him a heart attack, wouldn't you?”

Sherlock’s smile was answer enough.

“Come on, you great lump. Let's get you inside. We can invite Mycroft to visit tomorrow, and I'll record the look on his face with my phone. It'll be great blackmail material.”

Despite the cold, John felt nothing but warmth spread through his entire body. Sherlock was almost
Chapter Summary

In which John visits the 'scene of the crime', and writes his first blog since the accident.

Chapter Notes

Just a quick warning, folks. I am going to the Happiest Place on Earth (also know as Walt Disney World) next week. So there is a bit of a chance that the fic might take a couple of week hiatus, as we will be traveling on those Saturdays. I will try my ABSOLUTE hardest to get the chapters posted, but please, please don't be mad at me if one or even both don't get posted.

I swear I'm not abandoning it this close to the end. Everything is done, it just needs to be posted. In may actually try to post up on Friday night next week, so I at least won't miss that one. But we shall see how it goes. Disney Fever may hit, and if it does, then I may just not think about this fic in the excitement of the trip.

So let me apologize in advance if take a week (or two) off.. I love you all and just stick with me a few more weeks, we are so close to being done!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

*Fall to Pieces*

*Velvet Revolver-* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9JhsUFuqbCM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9JhsUFuqbCM)

The day dawned bright and sunny. A few high, puffy clouds meandered their way across the sky. London bustled around John- traffic lights changed in one direction, then the other- pedestrians drifted like jellyfish. It was an ebb and flow, a ceaseless tide rolling in and out, crossing the endless rivers of asphalt.
It all seemed real, but not. There was a haze around everything— as though the world was ever so slightly off its axis, and John couldn't work out why. He could hear the roar of the cars in his ears, smell the pungent exhaust in his nostrils, and see the vehicles moving in and out of traffic, like salmon swimming downstream, ever anxious to reach their final destination.

He looked around, trying to get his bearings. It was obvious he was in London. But where, specifically, was he?

John knew the answer to that question would also solve the riddle of why he was standing in the middle of the some of the busiest traffic in the world.

Shielding his eyes against the glaring overhead sun, he looked up at the cross street signs.

He was on the corner of Bell Street and the B507.

Why was that important? The names sounded familiar, but John couldn't place why he was standing at this particular intersection. He looked around, trying to find a familiar landmark, or something that would explain his situation to him.

Suddenly, he spotted the vital piece of evidence that made everything else slot into place, and his heart skipped a beat.

There was a small piece of debris in the road.

Oh, God. It hit him with the force of a freight train. He knew where he was.

Even after all this time, the evidence remained.
This was where Sherlock's accident had taken place.

Now he remembered. Greg had briefed John about the crash while they'd waited on news about Sherlock. He'd been in a taxi going east on Bell Street. The taxi would have made a right turn onto the 507 for a block, before turning left on Melcombe Place, and then one more left would have brought the car onto Baker Street.

He'd been so close to home.

Sherlock had almost made it.

He was five minutes, and less than half a kilometer from the flat.

If the taxi had just been a little faster and not stopped at that intersection, or if they'd been just a little slower, then John wouldn't be here.

And Sherlock wouldn't be there, at Ascot, learning how to live again.

John didn't like to think about how he'd most likely not be back in Baker Street if this hadn't have happened. Of course he'd take living in his old, tiny flat if it meant that Sherlock hadn't had to go through what he did.

And there was still the question of what Sherlock had wanted to tell him that day- the day their lives had changed so drastically.

If Sherlock had come home (home, so strange to call it that), would that have changed things between them? Would Sherlock have asked him to come back to Baker Street? Would John have
helped on cases again? Would he have quit his locum job and assisted Sherlock full time? There's no
telling how John's life would have turned out, had their meeting taken place.

But none of that mattered now. John could play the 'what if' game forever. What's done is done, and
he must live in the now and try not to think about what could have happened.

After all this time, John had pretty much resigned himself to the fact that he'd never find out what
Sherlock had wanted to say that night. Neither of them had brought it up in a very long time. John
didn't want to frustrate Sherlock by reminding him about the huge gaps in his memory, and Sherlock
had either forgotten about it, or wasn't bringing it up on purpose, so John never pressed the point.

That ship had sailed, it seemed.

The roar of traffic shook John back to his surroundings. He had no idea why he stepped into the
street. Somewhere, deep in his mind, he knew this wasn't real. The cars kept going, driving through
him like he was incorporeal. People walked through and around him- John was not there.

With a shaking hand, John picked up the small piece of debris. Strange how he could interact with it,
and nothing else except the ground below him, he thought. He could tell it was from the front of a
Hackney carriage. The grills on the front of London's taxis were very distinctive. Somehow, he
knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that this had come from the cab Sherlock had been riding in.

Suddenly, as he held it, the piece turned into ash in his hands and blew away with a puff of wind. It
twirled in a brief upward spiral, then dissipated into nothingness. John watched where the ash had
been suspended in the air for a moment, his hand still reaching upwards, grasping at nothingness. A
moment later, he watched silently as his hand began to turn to ash as well.

There was no pain, no fear, as he felt his body getting lighter and lighter. More and more of his body
crumbled and blew away. His legs were gone, but the rest of him still floated. He thought for a brief
moment that it was like those Saturday morning cartoons where the coyote floated suspended for a
few seconds before realizing he was supposed to fall and gravity finally decided to work again.

He barely had time for those thoughts to fill his mind before his arms were gone, then his torso, and
finally, with the smallest whimper of alarm, he was gone, disintegrated into nothingness.

He woke up with a start, panting desperately for breath. His eyes were as wide as saucers, and he greedily gulped down air as if it would never be enough. His short cropped hair was plastered to his forehead in sticky, sweaty rings, and every bit of his body felt stiff and sore.

Finally, when he could get his eyes to focus, he realized with a glance around the room that he was at Baker Street. All his limbs looked intact, but he still reflexively wiggled his fingers and toes for good measure.

When John had gotten his breath under control, he ran a hand through his hair. It'd been months since he'd had a nightmare- it must have been before Sherlock had transferred to the rehabilitation centre. He had no idea what had set it off. The day had been generally good, albeit a bit tiring- and he couldn't think of anything that could have triggered such a vivid and frightening nightmare.

Unless..

Had something happened at the centre and this was some sort of premonition? He'd never believed in them before but...

His heart pounded in his chest, small beads of sweat re-forming in his still sticky hair. One look over at the clock on his nightstand told him that it was way too early to call Sherlock. Besides, if there had been an incident, he and Mycroft would have been informed right away.

But, what if something had happened to Sherlock and no one had gone into his room? What if he hadn't been discovered yet? Sherlock was far enough in his recovery that no one checked on him at night unless there was a specific reason. He had no need to be monitored, which meant that he could be lying in his bed, dying or already dead, and no one would be the wiser.

John could call the centre and have them do a wellness check on Sherlock. There were always doctors on call for emergencies, 24 hours a day at the centre. Then again, it was half three in the
morning- he didn't want to wake Sherlock if there was no reason to. The man had finally gotten into a fairly normal sleeping routine- well, normal by other people's standards. The *Before Sherlock* had not had any kind of a routine in any aspect of his life. It was awful to think that it took this tragedy to get him to sleep every night, and the last thing John wanted to do was to cause any interruption. Sherlock needed all the rest he could get.

John sighed. He had to trust that Sherlock was fine. There was no reason to think anything had happened to him. He was still on his seizure medication, and hadn't had any episodes for a long time. He'd exerted himself a bit more than usual yesterday, but it shouldn't have been enough to cause any complications. Sherlock had worked himself hard in the last couple of days with no issues at all.

Sherlock was fine.

John had to believe it.

He sighed again and drummed his fingertips nervously on his duvet. It was obvious he wasn't going to get any more sleep tonight, so it'd be best to make the most of his extra time by at least attempting to be productive. He padded into the loo and took care of the necessities. It felt nice to brush the stale taste of sleep out of his mouth. The sharp tingling bite of the alcohol in the mouthwash helped shake the last of the sleepy cobwebs out of his head.

The next stop was the kitchen. If he was going to be awake this early, he needed some caffeine to help him keep his eyes open. Tea was his usual pick-me-up, but as the sun hadn't raised its head over the London skyline yet, he decided on the strongest cup of coffee he could make.

Once sufficiently cafféinated, John flopped down into his chair, put his laptop on his legs, and opened the lid.

First up this morning on the computer, a blog update. A lot had happened in the past seven months- he hadn't updated since before....
Well, before.

He took a deep breath, letting it out slowly, and allowing the stress of the nightmare and the nervousness about writing something after a long hiatus bleed out as the carbon dioxide slowly left his lungs. He knew people would want to know why he'd been quiet for so long. The blog was the last thing John had been thinking about while he was keeping a vigil at Sherlock's bedside. After he'd woken up, updating it had flitted in the corners of John's mind briefly, but it was fleeting. He had Sherlock to look after and worry over, so everything less urgent had been banished to the recesses of his brain.

There was a part of John that wondered if he should wait until Sherlock was back at 221B to update everyone of his progress, but he decided against that. He didn't want to put it off too long. There were people who would want to know what happened. John was afraid he'd get too busy again if he waited until Sherlock came home- this time helping get him settled back into their lives at Baker Street.

Or possibly consoling a Sherlock that was faced with a home he remembered little about but could deuce how different things had been before.

Either way, John thought it was a better idea to go ahead and post about what had happened. He could always update it after Sherlock was back in Baker Street. This was a better way of getting information out to a large group of people at once, so they wouldn't be inundated with requests for help once he started to blog again. Of course, he knew Sherlock wouldn't want everything to be put out there for the public to dissect, so he had to be careful about how much information he gave.

He nodded, looking at the still empty blog entry, cracked his fingers, and went to work.

It was time to tell their story.
Sunday, November 25th

It's been a very long time since I've updated this blog, and for that I am sorry. To say that it's been a whirlwind last eight months would be a gross understatement.

I will not be going into details, but Sherlock was involved in a rather serious accident. He has been on the road to recovery for many months now, and he has not yet reached the end of his journey.

I hope you will all understand and respect our privacy in these tough times ahead. It is my sincere hope that one day we will be able to take clients again. But at this time, it is simply not possible.

Thank you all, and please stay tuned to this blog for future updates.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not sure if I did this on purpose or not, but I just noticed that I had the crash happen literally one block away from the Landmark Hotel, where John tried to propose to Mary in 'The Empty Hearse'.

Also, I can tell when I wrote the first draft for this chapter. It must have been shortly after watching 'Avengers: Infinity War', because why else would I have had John turn to ash?

I -NEVER- cry during movies, but I was freaking bawling when.. well I don't want to spoil it, but for the people who watched it, you can figure out what part I am talking about. “There was no other way.” Oh man, it still hurts me to watch that part. (And
watched it again in IMAX, Marvel was playing all 20 movies in IMAX for the 10th anniversary of the MCU).

An alternative song to listen to while reading this chapter is 'Black Hole Sun' By Soundgarden- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efc7njKAfgo
Why Not Smile

Chapter Summary

In which John and Sherlock share some time in a park, and talk about going home.

Chapter Notes

I just want to PROFUSELY apologize for not having an update for the last two weeks.

As I had said before, I was away at Disney World, and it just so happened that we left on a Saturday and returned that next Sunday. So I was away from my computer for 2 upload weeks in a row.

I am proud of myself that I actually DID remember to email myself a copy of the fic, and I DID have internet access (albeit GLACIALLY slow in our room, that's what you get for staying at a value resort, I suppose) so I couldn't use either of those as excuses.

Honestly, I was just too darn excited about going to and being at Disney to think about my fic. And by the time we got home Sunday, I was so beat that I went to bed at about 8pm. (For the record, I usually go to bed between 1-3am.)

So again, I profusely apologize. I see nothing that should stand in the way of me posting the last 2 chapters on time. I just hope you all can understand and forgive me.

Also, please stay tuned for an exciting announcement in the End Notes after the chapter!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

During the course of John's vigil over Sherlock, he'd seen spring slowly lapse into summer, summer turn to autumn, and autumn give way to the foggy chill of a London winter. November faded away and December loomed, cold and brisk, its icy tendrils threatening every time someone dared step outside.
Despite the growing cold, Sherlock and John had been taking increasingly more walks around the outer grounds. Mycroft had supplied his brother with a heavy woolen pea coat, a dark red scarf, and a knit beanie to protect him from the cold.

It had been an unspoken agreement between John and Mycroft that they weren't going to reintroduce Sherlock to his Belstaff or blue scarf- not yet at least. Sherlock hadn't asked about them, which surprised John, but then again, he'd been witness to some pretty large holes in Sherlock's memories. Every time they happened, John tried to hide the pieces of his shattered heart from his best friend.

Sherlock's razor sharp memory had been the best weapon he'd possessed.

And now it was gone.

It was one more reminder that Sherlock would never be the same.

When Mycroft had brought the winter items to the centre, Sherlock had accepted them with minimal fuss. John had braced for more of a fight, but even Sherlock had to- grudgingly- admit that they were necessary now that the temperature was regularly dipping into the single digits.

When Sherlock's stamina had improved enough, the doctors suggested John take him to Bagshot Park, across the street from the rehabilitation centre. They wanted to let Sherlock start to explore the larger world outside the centre before he was sent home.

*Home.* After such a long time of living in the strange limbo of hospital wards and rehab, the very thought sometimes felt completely abstract.

Bagshot Park was a huge green area, with cricket fields and walking trails. Most of it was closed off to the public, because it was occupied by the Earl and Countess of Wessex- making it a royal house, owned by the Crown. A small area had been opened to the public, so the common folk could enjoy
the well tended greens and occasionally watch the fallow deer as they traveled from one patch of forest to another in small herds of between half dozen and a dozen each. It was a photographer's paradise, and John found himself wishing he had a camera.

It was an easy trek across London Street to the park from the centre. Once inside, John quickly spotted a wooden and metal bench on the gravel path that had a food truck parked close by. They'd both already had breakfast, so he grabbed himself a coffee and ordered a tea for Sherlock. The doctors had advised Sherlock against too much caffeine, so John had always tried to steer him towards tea whenever possible while in rehab.

“Alright, sit down here, and blow on your tea for a few minutes to cool down. You don't want to burn your tongue.” The drinks released a thick white haze of steam that wafted sweet and bitter notes into the air, coating their noses in familiar scents.

“Like home.”

Sherlock glared at John- it was easy to tell why. He was far from an invalid, and John knew he hated it when he was mollycoddled. John, for his part, was trying to be better about it, but this was the first time they'd left the Ascot grounds, and he was nervous. There were so many things that could go wrong, and John's mind was racing, trying to plan for and avoid every possible negative outcome.

When they'd finally settled down with their drinks, and John was fairly certain an airplane wasn't going to fall out of the sky, or any other of the dozens of equally ridiculous scenarios that he'd conjured up in his mind weren't going to happen, he finally started to relax a bit, leaning back against the cold metal backing of the bench. He pressed hard, letting the icy chill of the metal leech through his coat, past his jumper, and into his skin, raising goosebumps in its wake.

He took a sip of his coffee and looked over to Sherlock, who had an unreadable look on his face. “So, what do you think?” John wasn't sure exactly what he was asking Sherlock about. 'How was your tea?' 'What it was like being outside again?' 'Do you like the park?' Or maybe- 'Are you ready to go home?'

Or perhaps, all of them at once.
He had to admit Sherlock looked slightly ridiculous bundled up with his pea coat over a thick woolen jumper (the Before Sherlock never would have worn that), a long red scarf and a black knit beanie. (he just doesn't look like Sherlock Holmes without his Belstaff!) John shook those thoughts out of his head. There would be time to introduce Sherlock to his beloved coat again—perhaps after he'd settled back into Baker Street.

All in good time.

“Okay, I guess.” Sherlock’s reply pulled John out of his thoughts. It occurred to John that Sherlock’s answer was just as ambiguous as the question had been. The former detective took a sip of his tea after letting it cool for a moment, then made a face. For a second, John was worried he'd burnt his tongue, despite the warnings. John shook his head and chided himself for being overprotective again when he saw that it wasn't a face of pain.

“Not sweet.” Sherlock clarified a moment later. “Needs sugar.”

John couldn't help but laugh. The Before Sherlock had always put way too much sugar in whatever he was drinking—coffee and tea especially. John had often playfully compared the man to a hummingbird sipping nectar. Sometimes, it seemed like it was the only thing that kept Sherlock going during the stretches where he wouldn't eat or sleep for days. Those times when they were in the middle of a particularly good case—an eight or nine on Sherlock's scale—he wouldn't sleep until it was solved. And when it finally wrapped up, he slept like the dead—for 14-18 hours, or more sometimes.

And woe be unto the man who tried to wake a post-case sleeping Sherlock.

John had purposefully only put a small amount of sugar in, less than Sherlock had taken in the past-hoping that his sense of taste had shifted and he didn't need as much. But that was apparently not the case.

The sandy haired man laughed quietly and held up his hands, palms facing towards Sherlock in a
mock surrender. 'Alright, alright. I'll get you some.” He got up and headed back to the truck, coming back a moment later with a few packets, handing them to Sherlock.

“Start off with one and then taste it to see...”

It was too late. Like a child opening their Christmas presents, Sherlock ripped all of them at the same time and dumped them in, using the thin plastic stirrer to mix his brew. His face was one of utter contentment as he sipped the now sugar laden tea. He let out a long breath, the warmth of it creating a soft fog that rose from his lips, dissipating into the cool air.

As much as John wanted to be mad at him, he couldn't find it in his heart. He had to smile at the face the former detective was making. The _Before Sherlock_ would never have let the pleasure of something simple like drinking a cuppa show. And yet, those unguarded emotions were something John had witnessed plenty of times since his injury.

A small slice of heaven, in the midst of his own personal hell.

“You know,” John started, after taking a steadying sip of his own drink. “It’s almost time for you to go back to Baker Street.” It was something they hadn't talked much about until very recently. Mostly they'd both been laser focused on Sherlock's rehabilitation, which meant that the subject of going home fell to the wayside- a conversation to be pushed back to a later date.

But later was quickly becoming now, and it loomed over both of them like a specter.

When he didn't receive a response, John prodded further. “Are you... nervous?”

That got a reaction. Sherlock whipped his head around to John, a deep scowl on his face.
“Why would I be nervous about going home?” He snapped.

*Ah, there's the Before Sherlock I know....*

“Because you haven't seen it for almost eight months.”

Sherlock opened his mouth like he was going to respond, then he put his cup to his lips and took another long draught of his tea.

When John was sure Sherlock wasn't going to say anything else, he continued. “I've been trying to get 221B in order.” He said softly, looking down at the froth whirling around in his coffee, unable to meet Sherlock's steely gaze.

“Mrs. Hudson, as usual, has been a bit too thorough in her cleaning. I'm trying to put things back in order.” He wanted to say 'like they had been' - but he refrained. Still, as he canted his eyes up towards Sherlock, he knew the heard those implied words, and they'd stung. It must have felt like an intrusion of his privacy that someone was reorganizing his belongings, even if it was just John.

John understood he had to approach what he was about to say very carefully. He didn't want Sherlock to think he'd gone behind his back, though if John was honest, that was really exactly what had happened. “I've... been talking to your doctors.” he started. Sherlock had a mix of surprise and confusion on his face, with a bit of annoyance thrown in. He didn't seem to be able to deduce what the connection between this and John sorting things out at Baker Street could be. John knew he needed to diffuse this quickly before it turned into a row, or a full on strop.

“They think you'll be able to go home very soon. I know they've talked to you briefly about it as well. They're saying you could be ready in as little as a week.” John paused and took a breath. “But... there are... stipulations.”

“Stipulations?” The creases at the corners of Sherlock's mouth that had been turning up into a smile at the mention of a discharge schedule suddenly reversed, and he gave John a frustrated glare.
“Well, there's only one, really.” John replied. “That you continue your therapy at home. I'm sure they spoke to you about that.” John knew his doctors had talked to Sherlock, in some of the meetings he was not privy to. But he wasn't sure if Sherlock had listened to, or fully understood what his doctors had told him. It was quite possible that the Before Sherlock had reared its ugly head, and he'd tuned them out. During his recovery, John had found himself tuned out by Sherlock on some of his not-so-good days- when he was tired and frustrated and didn't want any company, not even John's.

“I've talked to Mycroft.” John noticed how that made Sherlock's frown increase. “He's already arranged for a physical and occupational therapist to visit Baker Street three times as week. It's only one therapist doing both jobs, so that will cut down on the amount of visitors you'll need.”

John's 'good news' was greeted with an icy silence befitting the cool air around them. “I don't want new people there.” Sherlock said, his voice clipped and even.

John took a deep breath, his stern look matching Sherlock's. “Sherlock, this is important. You've come so far, but you aren't quite there yet. Please, will you agree to the in-home therapy?”

Though John doubted it was saying 'please' that finally swayed him, Sherlock's face softened ever so slightly when the word left his lips.

Sherlock sighed and closed his eyes. His nod was almost imperceptibly small, but enough for John to catch it. “If it gets me out of here and back home, fine.” His voice was a tiny whisper on the wind.

Home.

John was quite sure he'd never get tired of hearing Sherlock say that when talking about 221B Baker Street.
“Good. We can inform the doctors when we return, and they can start the discharge paperwork.”

Sherlock nodded.

John hesitated for a moment, not wanting to add to the tension that had already settled around them, but Sherlock needed to be told.

“Additional railings have been added to the steps up to the flat. A new shower has been installed, with a railing and a bench. The railings and shower bench can all be removed later, if you'd like. We added the least amount of assistance we could in order to help you day to day.”

John visibly flinched, ready for the verbal tongue lashing that seemed inevitable. For a moment, Sherlock did indeed look incensed, a scowl filling his face. But after a few long, interminable seconds, it faded into a resigned look, and a sigh left the man's lips. Sherlock said nothing, but John could read the defeat on his face.

And that was even worse than any anger Sherlock could have thrown his way.

A slight breeze kicked up a moment later. Though Sherlock tried to hide it, John saw the shiver that ran up his back. John had to remind himself that Sherlock was still not used to being out in the cold. People with traumatic brain injuries often had a hard time regulating their body temperature. It was time to go back.

John took a long sip of his coffee and looked over to Sherlock. “Come on, finish that sugar water. I want to get back, it's getting cold.” As much as John knew he needed to get Sherlock out of the weather, he wanted to make it sound like it was for his own benefit, not Sherlock's, so he wouldn't put up a fuss.

“Fine.” Sherlock downed the last of his tea and tossed the empty cup in the receptacle next to the bench, and John followed suit. “Just a few more days. I can survive.”
The smile returned to John's face tenfold as they got up to make the short walk back to the center. It felt like a giant weight had been lifted off of his shoulders. He felt like he could fly. Sherlock was coming home.

He was coming home.

Chapter End Notes

So, now for the (hopefully) exciting announcement!

I am going to be a part of the Fandom Trumps Hate Charity Auction this year!

For anyone who doesn't know what it is (and I didn't until a few months ago), it is run once a year. Writers, artists, podcasters, and other talented people from hundreds of fandoms (including BBC Sherlock, of course) get together and offer to do a work in their chosen medium- for me of course this is writing, so I'll explain it in those terms.

So I offer to write a fic for someone (I believe I chose between 5K-10K words, other authors can choose other lengths). And I chose from a list of charities that Fandom Trumps Hate are working with. People will bid on my fic offer, and the highest bidder when bidding ends will send that amount to whichever charity they wish of the ones I chose. I will get in touch with them and we will decide what they want me to write for them, and then I will write it. Simple as that.

I know that the Sherlock fandom was well represented last year, and some pretty big names offered up some works that raised a lot of money. Sadly, I found about it too late last year, but I plan on bidding this year, as well as offering a work.

I understand that I am not a big name (hell, I'm not a name at all, really), but I am very much hoping that I can at least get a couple of bids and help out some very worthy causes.

Here is a link to their FAQ that answers a lot of things I didn't cover here- https://fandomtrumpshate.tumblr.com/FAQ

And just an FYI, there is a week to "browse" all the offerings, from Feb 18th-Feb25th, then bidding is from Feb 26th to March 1st.

Even if you don't bid on my work, PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE support the wonderful
charities that Fandom Trumps Hate have chosen and get some awesome fandom work as well!
Find the River

Chapter Summary

In which December finally decides to act like December, Sherlock is reunited with his Belstaff (and it feels so good), and John gets to take Sherlock home.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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Find the River

R.E.M.- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1JGlTu5sEI

As much as his friends and family would have thought that Sherlock's excitement would increase as the days ticked down until he was allowed to return back to Baker Street, it turned out to be the exact opposite. He became more and more introverted, strangely quiet and non-combative.

That wasn't like the Before Sherlock at all.

Despite the fact that Sherlock had spent a bit over two months in the Ascot Rehabilitation Impatient Centre, he hadn't amassed a lot of possessions. In the days leading up to his release, John had filled up a small cardboard box of the items that Sherlock wouldn't need before his discharge and took them with him as he traveled back to Baker Street every night.

The flat had been looking way too clean and organized for John's taste since he'd moved in. The cleanliness practically telegraphed that Sherlock wasn't there. Now that John was piling all manner of boxes around the sitting room, it was starting to look more like... home.

XXXXX
The morning of Sherlock's last day at Ascot dawned. December had, so far, been surprisingly mild-if you could call six or seven degrees and mostly cloudy 'mild'. But that morning, the cold had decided to finally make itself fully known. The temperature was flirting with dropping below freezing, and the rain that came and went as new banks of clouds lazily floated across the United Kingdom felt like liquid daggers hitting the skin.

John cursed that he'd forgotten to replace his umbrella when it had broken, Several weeks ago, it flipped almost inside out when it was hit by a strong burst of wind while John was walking around the grounds, waiting for Sherlock to finish that afternoon's session. Despite the fact that November was traditionally one of the wettest months of the year in the UK, he'd managed to get along fine without one until that point, and with everything else on going on, replacing the umbrella had simply slipped his mind.

Unfortunately for John, his luck ran out weather-wise, as he was preparing to leave Baker Street for the last time without Sherlock. It was such a strange feeling, knowing that the next time he entered the flat, Sherlock was going to be by his side.

Finally.

John opened the front door to find that Mycroft's car had not arrived yet. A fierce wind was kicking up the icy cold rain that was coming down in hard, fast rivulets.

He had turned to close the door against the weather, when the howl of the wind through the entryway caught Mrs. Hudson's attention. She opened her flat door, shivered and pulled her nightgown tighter around her.

“John, you aren't going out there without an umbrella, are you?” She asked in her stern, motherly voice.

“Um... Mine broke.” He answered sheepishly.
“John Watson. You get in here this instant before you catch your death.” He obeyed, closing the door behind him and following her into her flat.

She rummaged in her closet, found an old, worn brolly and handed it to him. “I think this was Frank's.” She said, with a little bit of anger on the last word. “You can have it. I don't want it back.” He took it and thanked her with a nod.

“So, Sherlock's coming home today, then?” She asked, her mood instantly cheering at the mere thought of it. “Are you nervous?”

The tiniest flush of red came to his cheeks. “A bit.” He tried to downplay his anxiety. He and Sherlock were friends, and were going to be flatmates once again, but nothing more. Whether there would have- could have- ever been more, seemed to be a question that John wasn’t sure could ever be answered. John couldn’t even begin to pick apart whether Sherlock was now even capable of a serious consideration of the nature of their relationship.

Or, if he'd ever considered it before the accident, and wanted more. Still, John had sometimes wondered if… He shook his head. *Who the hell knows about Sherlock Holmes.* - he had to constantly remind himself of that fact. They'd become quite close through all of the trials and tribulations, and Sherlock was his best friend. He needed John now in more ways than ever, and that had changed their relationship. Was John now his live-in caretaker, or just a flatmate who occasionally helped out and kept an eye on the man? Only time could tell. There was no need to define their relationship further than that. They were friends, very close ones. Exceptionally close ones. That's all there was to it.

*Right?*

Mrs. Hudson playfully slapped John on the arm, shaking him out of his thoughts. “John.” It was the gentlest of chiding, said with a large, warm smile on her face.

“I know. I'm excited too. Now, go. By the time you two return I'll have a nice meal and a batch of
ginger nuts ready. I know there's nothing in that fridge of yours that would pass as food.” When John opened his mouth to thank her, she stopped him with an outstretched hand.

“Just this once,” she said. “I'm not your housekeeper, after all.” A soft honk let them know that the car had arrived.

“Go and get our boy.” John turned and walked silently back towards the front door, making no attempt to correct her this time.

XXXXX

When the last document was signed, Sherlock rubbed his wrist with his long, delicate fingers. It had been a day full of reading and signing papers, and going through the rest of the rigmarole that went with his release, and he was exhausted, both mentally and physically.

Sherlock's parents had wanted to be there, but he'd refused. He'd explained to his brother that he wanted to do this with no fanfare- just himself and John, and unfortunately Mycroft, since his brother had the Lasting Power of Attorney. It had been granted to his brother after Sherlock's first run in with drugs. Because of this, Mycroft had documentation he needed to sign as well. Technically, he was in charge of Sherlock's ongoing therapy, even though John was going to be the one to manage his day to day care.

“Are we done now?” Sherlock was nervously fiddling with the long, dark blue tassels at the end of his scarf. John had brought his scarf and Belstaff jacket from the flat this morning. He'd avoided showing them to Sherlock before because John had had no idea how his friend would react to seeing them. The scarf, surprisingly, hadn't garnered much of a reaction at all. John had no idea of the history behind it, but apparently it held little significance to him beyond a piece of clothing.

The Belstaff, however, was a different matter.

When John pulled it out of the long plastic garment bag he'd had it in to keep it from getting wet, Sherlock's eyes went wide, and his breath caught. It was apparent immediately that he remembered it. Carefully, almost reverently, he reached out for it, and John gently removed it from the box and handed it to him.
He could have sworn Sherlock’s hands were shaking ever so slightly when he took it, and after one little fumble, he managed to get it around his shoulders and threaded his arms through the sleeves.

The look on his face, that smile of contentment, was one that John wanted to burn into his memory, a treasure to keep until his dying day.

Even though he’d been fairly successful when it came to donning his coat, it had taken Sherlock a couple of tries to get the scarf tied around his neck the way he liked it- something he used to be able to do in a few seconds. This added to his already rather dour mood.

John’s face dropped into a frown when he remembered that moment. Sherlock had come so very far, but there were still small things that threw him for a curve. Though it had only been earlier in the morning, it already seemed like a lifetime ago. With a shake of his head, John came back to the present, where Sherlock had just finished signing the last set of papers and put the pen down on the desk none too gently. Between the frustration of the scarf, and the fact that it’d taken over an hour to go through the final release paperwork, Sherlock was in a right strop by the time the pen hit the dark mahogany desk.

“We are done.” John had gotten to know Doctor Jones- the man who’d been in charge of Sherlock since he arrived at Ascot, rather well, through the months that Sherlock had been at the rehabilitation centre. He’d always been a kind and patient man- something that was most definitely needed when it came to Sherlock- and a good doctor. Doctor Jones stood up, and John and Mycroft did the same, both shaking his hand as it was offered. Sherlock stayed seated, his arms crossed, looking down at his Belstaff like he’d never seen anything more interesting in the world, and picking at the heavy woolen coat with his fingernails.

“I wish you luck, Mr. Holmes. You’ve come a very long way. You should be quite proud of yourself.” Doctor Smith tried one more time to offer his hand to Sherlock, but when it became apparent that he wasn’t going to take it, he lowered his arm and smiled. “Have a good life, all of you. Good luck.” He walked over to the door of the small office and held it open.

Only then did Sherlock get up, and with long strides he booked it out of the office and down the hallway, not pausing until he’d gotten out the front door of the centre. He stood in the paved roundabout, wind whipping his curls which had grown too long. His head was tipped up to the air, like he was sniffing the wind.

John and Mycroft were only a few moments behind. “Well, brother mine. You are free.” Mycroft spread his arms out, his umbrella pointing towards the sky, which at least for the moment was gray and ominous, but presently dry. “I’m sure you want to get situated back in your flat, so I’ll let Doctor
Watson and yourself get to it. I will be keeping in touch to make sure you are keeping your end of the bargain. Fare well, Sherlock.” And with that, Mycroft set off towards the main road at the end of the centre's roundabout, where his customary black car was already waiting for him.

As it pulled away, another black car pulled in behind it. “It seems your brother got us a ride.” John had to chuckle. “Come on, Sherlock. Let's go home.”

John was surprised at how fast his heart was pumping, just saying those three little words. He'd already been staying in Baker Street for a while, so there was no reason for him to be excited about returning, but he was nervous for Sherlock. Would he remember the flat? Would he be happy to be back, or would it remind him of what he'd lost? So many questions plagued his mind. There was no way to know until they arrived, and that was going to take at least an hour, with the London traffic this time of day.

It was a slow, quiet car ride. Sherlock didn't say a word, he simply looked out the window, observing first the countryside, and then eventually London. Green pastures gave way to small houses, then larger ones, and then finally the urban sprawl of the metropolis opened up around them.

John silently but intently watched his friend. Sometimes he'd see a flicker of recognition on Sherlock's face as they passed somewhere the former detective remembered- a place they'd solved a crime, a restaurant they frequented, or one of the many streets they'd often walked down.

The closer they got to Baker Street, the more he saw those flashes of memories, and occasionally even a tiny, sad smile. Their drive took them around The Regents Park- a place they'd seen almost daily in the past. He could practically see Sherlock flashing back to their many adventures- he could read it on the man's face. One didn't have to be a genius consulting detective to deduce that.

The final turn onto Baker Street brought John slamming back to reality. His heart leapt into his chest. This was it, he thought to himself. He turned forward again and cleared his throat as the car slowed to a stop. “We're here, Sherlock.” For a moment he thought the man hadn't heard him. Sherlock made no move to respond or stop looking out the window. Finally he turned to John, his face a jumble of emotions for a moment, before he went back to an impassive countenance.

Ah, that's the Before Sherlock.

When his passenger side door was opened, John nodded his thanks to the driver holding it and got out. Sherlock hesitated, looking at the entrance to 221B through the open car door as if he'd never seen it before. For a moment, John panicked. Did Sherlock not remember the flat at all? John felt as though he was sinking up to his neck in quicksand, threatening to be sucked under.
He doesn't remember.

Oh God, he doesn't remember. What the bloody hell do I do now?

Finally, Sherlock crawled through where John had been sitting and exited on the sidewalk side of the road. He walked up to his door, and unstraightened the knocker. “Mycroft was here.” He said, simply.

John let out a breath he didn't know he'd been holding and laughed.

Oh, he remembers after all.

“Yes. He was here yesterday, going over the flat with the therapist.” John explained.

Sherlock said nothing. He nodded, opened the door, and went inside.

Almost immediately, the door to 221A opened, and Mrs. Hudson came out, bearing a tray of the ginger nuts that had been sustaining Sherlock for months. Her eyes were teary and red, and a smile filled her face. Even from right outside the entrance, John could smell the meal she'd 'threatened' him with that morning.

“Oh, Sherlock. It's so wonderful to finally have you home.” She sniffled and handed John the tray as he stepped inside, the small duffle bag with Sherlock's belongings slung lazily on his shoulder- it was the last few bits of clothing and electronics that he'd needed until the end. She hugged Sherlock tight. He hesitated for a moment, then returned the hug gingerly, as if he thought she was made of spun glass. She held it for a few seconds before reluctantly letting go.

“I know you want to get up there, so I wont keep you long.” Mrs. Hudson said, tiling her head towards the staircase, and the flat above. But if there's anything at all I can do, please don't hesitate to ask.”

“I thought you weren't our housekeeper?” Sherlock smirked at John's question.
“No, I'm not. I'm your friend.”

Sherlock nodded, and started up the stairs. The *Before Sherlock* used to take them two at a time, but this Sherlock was slower, keeping his hands on the railings that were now on both sides of the stairs, and taking them slow and steady, putting both feet on one stair instead of alternating.

John kept a smile on his face- one that didn't reach his eyes. It was heartbreaking to see Sherlock already winded and sluggish in his steps by the time he reached the first ledge. He let out a long sigh and shifted the duffle bag a bit so he could carry it and the tray of biscuits up the stairs without losing his center of gravity.

By the time John made it up to the top of the stairway with the precariously balanced biscuits, he was surprised to see that Sherlock had paused in front of the closed door to the flat instead of barging on in.

He stopped a few steps from the top to see what Sherlock would do, patiently waiting for the man to gather his nerves. His heart was beating a staccato rhythm, his throat felt tight. The next few moments, he knew, could be the best or the worst of both of their lives.

After what seemed like a lifetime. Sherlock took a deep breath, closed his eyes for a moment, and opened the door. John smiled widely behind him, stepping in a moment afterwards.

“Welcome home.”

Chapter End Notes

This is the first song that I chose not because of the lyrics, or certain parts of the lyrics, but just the overall tone of the song. I love how it sounds so soft and gentle and uplifting. And of course, since R.E.M. is my favorite band, I wanted one last chance to put them in. Sorry about putting two songs by the same band back to back, but I just thought that those two songs were the best for these chapters.

Just one more chapter, and this crazy ride will be over! I can't even believe it!
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

In which both Sherlock and John get settled back into Baker Street, and we finally learn what Sherlock wanted to tell John all those months ago.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

At Last

Etta James- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-cbOl96RFM

In My Life

The Beatles- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=En4fyOf-XlE

The moment Sherlock stepped into the flat, John could see the memories flooding back to him. He’d silently put down the bag and the tray and watched as Sherlock made a slow trip around the sitting room, reverently touching things. Never uttering a word, he let the pads of his fingers trace across the glass of his bee collection, and down the spine of one of the books on the shelf. When he got to the skull that sat on the mantle, he picked it up. John couldn't help of thinking about Hamlet, and wondered if he had named it Horatio. Sherlock cradled it lovingly in his palm for a few moments before setting it down exactly where it had been, right in the footprint of the dust that surrounded it. He turned to the side and touched the top of the back of his chair, but he didn't sit in it- not yet.

John had no idea if it was a few minutes or an hour before Sherlock was done with his tour of the sitting room. Next, he went into the kitchen, where he spent less time, but John did watch him pick up his RAMC mug and hold it, looking at the logo on it, studying it for a moment before his eyes
opened slightly in realization, and the tiniest little “Oh.” escaped, just a soft puff of exhalation.

Finally, it was time for the room John dreaded the most, Sherlock's bedroom. Before going there, Sherlock popped his head into the loo, but only for a moment. If he noticed the new shower and railings inside, he made no indication of it.

John stopped in the hallway, giving the man some space. Sherlock looked back over his shoulder, as if to make sure his friend was still near. So far, John had been following the former detective around at a distance, giving him space, but staying close for support if needed. But this- the bedroom- it felt deeply personal. John could count the times on one hand that he’d entered the room for anything other than gathering dirty clothes from the hamper next to the door, or returning clean clothes, neither of which technically required stepping inside.

He nodded, a soft smile on his lips, and Sherlock took the hint, walking into the room. John went into the kitchen to brew some tea for them while Sherlock explored this last bit of his home, apart from the upstairs bedroom. That was John's space, and Sherlock had very rarely ever gone up there in the past, except perhaps to rouse John in the middle of the night when a case couldn't wait until the light of day, so he knew those spaces wouldn't be as important to Sherlock.

John was sitting at the kitchen table, slowly sipping his tea when Sherlock came back, wordlessly sat down, and took a long draught of tea, heedless of the temperature.

A soft smile slowly grew across John's face as he thought about those times he'd been woken for a case by an excited Sherlock, like a kid at Christmas trying to rouse their parents so they could go down and open presents. He'd always been so excited at the start of a case, adrenaline pumping through his veins.

But that was most likely all in the past now, John had to remind himself. Having to worry about whether Sherlock could find his way around the rehab unit or manage to use a phone invariably meant that his ability to function in his chosen profession was likely gone. He was still observant, but putting the tiny pieces of a puzzle together required so much more.

This was their new life. John's smile faded, and he looked up from his tea to see Sherlock looking at him, his face radiating curiosity. John simply shook his head, in a quiet plea to just let it go. Sherlock seemed to understand, staying silent and taking another drink of tea.

The awkwardness held in the air between them, thick and oppressive.
In the days after his discharge, Sherlock continued to settle back into living in 221B with such ease that even John finally started to let go of some of his fears.

Considering his extensive memory loss, it seemed surprising to John how Sherlock almost automatically started to slip back into some of his old habits, like letting newspapers and magazine pile up into giant towers against the wall, and growing mold in some items in the refrigerator, then demanding that John not throw them out, despite the fact that the entire flat now reeked of old, rotten milk and moldy bread. It both infuriated and amused John, though he would never admit the latter, of course.

There were times when he caught Sherlock looking at something with an openly dejected expression, as if he was trying to recall something from the past that he couldn't quite remember, or simply didn't know. It had been Mycroft's idea while they were chatting about remodeling the flat to hide the deerstalker and his violin. The elder Holmes was worried that they'd dredge up too many memories of what he had been.

What he no longer was.

But there was still much left of the world's most observant man. It had taken less than a day for Sherlock to notice that his violin was missing. John tried to play innocent, but Sherlock didn't relent, and finally John admitted they'd put it away, fearing he'd be upset he couldn't play it any more.

Without Sherlock even having to ask, John went up to his bedroom and got the violin from where he'd safely stored it, coming back down the stairs slowly. His heart was pounding, dreading what was about to happen. He knew he couldn't stall forever, so John finished descending the stairs and walked over to the man. He handed him the case to Sherlock, who opened it reverently, taking the violin out like he'd held it just yesterday. He ran the pads of his fingers over the smooth wood and plucked the strings that were now terribly out of tune, which made his face scrunch up.

John had expected a tongue lashing for keeping it hidden, but instead Sherlock was quiet- not brooding, but contemplative. He took the bow in his hands and stroked the tropical wood longingly,
like one would do to a lover. But his expression was as distant as it was reverent, and something told John that he wouldn't attempt to play it.

Perhaps, this was a goodbye.

After a few minutes, Sherlock put the bow and violin back in the case, closed it, and put it on the shelf near the now empty music stand. He was quiet for a while, and John was worried that it'd been a mistake to bring it out.

“Thank you.” It was said so quietly, with his back turned towards his friends, that John almost missed it. Sherlock's voice was barely over a whisper.

*It was the right thing to do, after all.*

“You're quite welcome.” He paused. Perhaps it was his own distress that made John add “I'm sure we can find someone to give you some lessons. Maybe it's like riding a bike, yeah?” The hopeful look on John's face died when he looked at Sherlock.

He looked devastated.

“Hmm.” Sherlock made a small, soft noise, then headed towards the loo. “I'm going to take a bath.”

“Okay.”

And that was that. The subject of the violin was never mentioned again.

*XXXXX*

Of all the post-accident habits that John had expected Sherlock to continue when they were finally allowed to try to readjust back to life at Baker Street, the one he'd least expected was the former detective being rather... touchy-feely with him.
Throughout their time at hospital, John hadn't been shy about touching Sherlock's hand, or giving him a pat on the shoulder for support, helping him with his daily routines or consoling him. And in return, Sherlock had also been much more demonstrative in his touches, which was very unlike the Before Sherlock.

Still, this was one change that John didn't mind- at all.

In fact, as Sherlock became more independent during his stay at Ascot, the physical contact had become less frequent, and John found himself missing it. Sometimes one or the other of them would initiate a touch, but it seemed that Sherlock truly was starting to become more like he had been before the accident. John couldn't fault him, of course, and would never take up the subject. He wanted Sherlock to be as much like he had been before as possible.

Still though, those little brushes and points of contact had been nice, grounding, and John found himself craving them, savoring each time the pads of Sherlock's fingers touched his bare skin. Now, in the safety of their home, they seemed to be returning. Occasionally, John was even brave enough to be the one to initiate the touching, letting his fingers linger against Sherlock's just a bit too long as he handed the man a cup of tea, or pressing his body against Sherlock's as they walked past each other in the hallway between the loo and the living room.

Every time, he expected the brief initial tenseness in Sherlock's body that had marked such incidents before the accident- a fight or flight response, and then an inevitable relaxation.

It never came.

Now, they were both letting their bodies be drawn close as if by magnets, as though they had always acted this way.

If felt good; reassuring and familiar, but at the same time, a part of John was convinced it was wrong. He couldn't help wondering what their motivations were for it, and whether it was ethical of him to allow it to continue. Sherlock had never been very good at gauging what was socially acceptable, and those abilities may have dwindled even more due to the accident. Without knowing if Sherlock was aware of the change- and how others might perceive it- and whether he minded people noticing what they were doing, it didn't seem right to not address it. John knew he'd have to be the one to take it up, to be the responsible one, to make sure Sherlock knew what was going on and how John might interpret it.

After one such incident of Sherlock acting like intimacy was now a natural part of their relationship, John collapsed in his chair, his cup of tea forgotten on the small table to his right. The steam had long
since ceased it rise into the cool air of the flat. He had drawn a fire, but it never seemed to quite find the coldest parts of his core.

Before Sherlock had retired to bed- yet another strange, new thing, Sherlock keeping a regular resting routine- they'd shared the sofa, and Sherlock had nearly dozed off, contentedly resting his head on John's shoulder, hand on his knee. John had been careful not to acknowledge any of this; he simply allowed Sherlock to do what he wanted.

Now, after not reacting to such a breach of his personal space, John once again felt the odd and pressing guilt gnawing away at him

Is Sherlock like this because of the accident, or is it because he wants us to continue doing these things? Would he have wanted this before everything went to hell?

The conversation to address this was one that John dreaded, but he knew it had to happen, and soon.

The inevitable followup question would be this: did John want to continue doing these things? The touches, the cuddling- what else could it really be called, what they had been doing on the sofa? The brushes of hands and bodies against one another, intimate and familiar.

The answer came quickly and simply. YES. He did want it. And not just because wasn't currently involved with anyone else. He wanted it because he enjoyed it, he very much liked the idea of having a relationship- with Sherlock in particular.

John wanted it, but only if he could be certain it was also something Sherlock consciously wanted, and had willingly chosen- that he understood what it meant.

John had known that he was bisexual since he was in the army. On base there were very few women, so one learned to either love one's hand, or find someone who is just as desperate and willing to keep quiet about it and forget it the moment they leave the tent.

He had always found Sherlock... intriguing and attractive. He was outstandingly intelligent, with an unusual handsomeness to the way he looked. He wasn't good looking by the normal standards of modern culture, but there was something about those high, sharp cheekbones, and the Cupid bow lips...
John shook his head. That was the last thing he needed to think about right now. He wasn't going to say or do anything else until he spoke with Sherlock about where he- where they- stood.

XXXXX

It turned out that John didn't need to initiate the conversation after all. His questions were answered a few days later.

It was a therapy day, which always left Sherlock in a strop by the end. The poor therapist, a nice older man with short but curly gray hair and a mustache that looked like it belonged in an Italian mob movie, was infinitely patient with his new, reticent patient. He put up with the jabs and deductions- divorced twice, medium sized dog, ex-smoker, and so on- with what could only be called the patience of a saint.

When the therapist left, John already had the customary peace offering ready- a tray of Mrs' Hudson's freshly made biscuits, and two cups of tea. Sherlock was always sweaty and exhausted at the end of a session, but he was making good progress. His normal routine was that he would have a cuppa and a few biscuits while they either chatted, or Sherlock simply listened to John talk. Apparently, that was something the man now enjoyed. Of course he never would have admitted to such a thing before the accident.

For whatever reason, today, very little was said. There was something hovering in the air- a looming tension. A bubble covered them- oppressive and lingering- something that had to be burst. John needed to speak, and Sherlock seemed to sense that something had to be said.

But neither of them could bring themselves to start what they both knew to be an inevitable and difficult conversation.

When the biscuits were gone, and the tea drunk, Sherlock stood and brushed the crumbs off his shirt. As always, he left his empty tea cup and plate in the living room and started to head towards the loo, where he would take a shower or bath before retiring early for the evening. It was the same routine every day.

But, not today.

Sherlock took a few steps, entering the hallway, before he turned back towards John, as though he'd had a sudden revelation.
“I remember, now.” He said simply.

John cocked his head to the side a bit, confused. He had been in the middle of clearing away their cups and plates, but now he stopped mid-movement. “Remember... what?”

“What I was going to tell you, that night, when we were going to meet here at Baker Street. Before...” He paused for a moment before finishing his thought “... Before everything.”

John's heart leapt into his throat. It had to have been something quite extraordinary, if Sherlock finally remembered after all these months. But what was it? He put down the tray which now only held crumbs and two empty tea cups, and took a couple of steps towards Sherlock. His chest felt tight, his whole body thrummed with anxiousness.

“Oh?” He asked, trying to seem nonchalant, but failing miserably.

“It's something I should have said long ago- before I jumped from Bart's, something that I carefully considered and analyzed before coming to my conclusion. It took me being away from London for two years to finally come to the realization that you deserved to know. I remember feeling much more apprehensive about telling you then than I am now. I’m not certain whether that's due to the brain injury, or everything we’ve been through during the past few months, but it doesn’t feel quite so…daunting, now. I still don’t quite know how to say the words, but perhaps…”

John's face was a mask of confusion and worry. But before he could form any words to ask for clarification, Sherlock walked over to the doctor, put his right hand on John's left cheek, and gave him a soft kiss on the right one. It was long enough to be a bit more than merely chaste, but so light that it was almost a ghosting of lips on his suddenly flushed and heated skin.

The former detective turned around and without another word, walked into the loo and closed the door. He could hear the water start a few seconds later.

John stood there, his hand on his cheek where Sherlock had just kissed him.

_Did I just... imagine that?_
John was still rooted in the same place when the water stopped. A few moments later, Sherlock stepped out, with nothing on but a towel slung low on his hips. This was far from the first time he'd walked around the flat like that. The *Before Sherlock* had never put any stock in personal boundaries or appropriate behavior around others.

But for some reason, it felt... *different* this time. As though he was expecting John to watch him.

Suddenly, it all made sense. After everything they’d gone through, the revelation was much less of a shock to John than he would have anticipated.

He had his answer. Yes, they both wanted this, and now, he could be certain about Sherlock's motives and his understanding of the importance of the decision, because he'd decided he wanted this before the accident.

The words didn't need to be said. The two of them had never needed words to convey the most important things. When Sherlock could barely speak after the accident, they had communicated physically what needed to be said.

*I can trust this*, John thought. *I can trust us*.

Sherlock looked over his shoulder once, flashed what could only be called a mischievous smile, then headed towards his bedroom. The door closed a moment later, leaving John even more confused than he had been before Sherlock turned his world upside down a few minutes and a lifetime ago.

John decided to head up the stairs to his room. It had been one hell of a day, and he was mentally exhausted. A nice evening spent with a book in his room- trying not to think about his almost naked roommate and the kiss that he'd just received- sounded like a good way to end the day. He figured they both needed time to process everything that was happening. And yet a part of him was slightly disappointed at not being able to explore right away what they'd both denied themselves for so long.

He'd just put his foot on the bottom step when he heard the squeaking of Sherlock's bedroom door as it re-opened. He couldn't see down the hallway, but he heard the deep baritone rumbling through their flat.

“Well? Are you coming to bed or not?”

*Did... he really just say that?*

It took a few heartbeats for John's brain to catch up. A slow, warm smile filled his face.
“I'll be right there.”

-THE END-

Chapter End Notes

I just couldn’t pick one song to end this epic journey on, so I picked two out of my long list of candidates.

I want to once again thank my two betas for helping me through this. Without them, this fic never would have come to fruition. I’ve been working on this for close to two years now, and though it was tough at times, it was a labor of love. I was struggling for a while before I found Hoosiergirl81 (https://archiveofourown.org/users/hoosiergirl81/) and J_Baillier (https://archiveofourown.org/users/J_Baillier/). They made this fic came to life. I'm nothing without you two, and there's no way I can ever, ever thank you enough.

I also want to thank all of you who stuck with me. The ones who were here from the beginning, the ones who found me later and marathon read the whole thing, and everyone in between. Thank you for all your comments and kudos. It can never be said enough times that comments keep a writer writing. It's the fuel we need to continue doing what we love.

I already have several fics in the pipes- ones that have been put on the back burner for so long because this epic took much longer than I thought it would, for many reasons. I had quite severe writer's block and did not touch this fic for almost 6 months in late 2017. It was due to my wonderful betas that I was able to get back on my feet and start writing again.

My next project will be an AU Deaf!Lock fic full of happiness and loss, and of course John. The first part will deal with Sherlock growing up, and his struggles with deafness. Eventually it will meet up with canon, though it won't follow the story exactly. It will
have some medical bits to it, but it won't contain as much whump as this. It's already been fully written, but it needs to be edited and beta-ed, so it's far from being ready. But I don't foresee the process taking nearly as long as this one did.

After that, a bit of a passion project of mine that I've extensively researched and have a long outline written out. I'll start writing it for National Novel Writing Month (NanoWriMo) in November of 2018, so I don't foresee this seeing the light of day for a while. It'll be an AU Uni!Lock fic where Sherlock and John meet in college in Atlanta, GA. John has a secret. Will Sherlock find out, and what will he think if he does?

And finally, a fic that I've partially written, but it's stalled a bit with everything else I've been doing. It's a Sherlolly fic, set after Season 4, which sees them dealing with the ups and downs of a new relationship, getting married, and starting a family. I'm not sure if this one will ever be finished, because I've been struggling mightily with it, and right now it's low on my priority list.

There is also one other story that may or may not see the light of day. I was writing an RP online. It was an AU Johnlock where Sherlock was Hades, Lord of the Dead, and John was Persephone, Goddess of the Harvest. It was a really neat idea, and I'd love to put it into fic form, but it would need A LOT of editing and such, and I'm not sure how well it would translate from RP to story. So if that were to come about, it would be WAY far down the line.

Once again, I want to thank you all for sticking with me through the epic journey that was this story. I hope you all liked it, and I look forward to writing more stories for everyone to hopefully enjoy.

Thank you so very, very much!

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End Notes

I am going to endeavor to post one chapter up a week, at least. I am not going to try to stick to a schedule of days because my work schedules are so random that it would be nigh impossible.

I truly do love any feedback that I can get, as I am striving to constantly improve my writing. Comments and kudos are a writer's best motivator. Please feel free to send any comments, suggestions, or improvements my way. I make it a point to respond to every comment, if I can!

You can keep up with updates, ask me questions (even anonymously if you want) and see what's going on in my life on my Tumblr!

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