Summary

James Moriarty is fascinated with the psychological possibilities of conditioned behavior through extreme trauma and mental conditioning. He's taken John as his experiment, and has trained him to fear one thing above all; Sherlock Holmes. Please be sure to read the notes before you begin.

Notes

This is a study in trauma. The descriptions are **graphic** and the aftermath as realistic as possible, though artistic liberty with some medical aspects have been taken for the sake of the story. Takes place well after season three, through there is little mention of it. Please **heed the warnings**, there is **extreme** brutality and violence in this work. Tags may change as the story carries on.

This is a very, very long work of fiction. This story is exceedingly long and not always laced with action. If you find that it no longer interests you, feel free to stop reading, no need to let us know. Any other feedback, constructive criticism, or thoughts, we are very happy to receive.
Eight glorious months of constant training passed to get to this point. The consulting criminal's dark eyes gleamed as he looked over the broken man before him; Pavlov's dog. That's what he decided to call the experiment. He’d wanted to take the well known principle to the far extreme, see just how far he could program a human subconscious to fear certain triggers, and had practiced for nearly a year before perfecting it. John was a mess; his mind a hectic, anxious ball of terror and pain, too fragmented to operate beyond that exact moment in time, focused solely on minimizing pain.

His work was too genius to remain in the dark. Keeping possession of his little captive secret had been exhausting, but crucial, buying him time without the bother of rescue efforts. It was a shame he had to keep such remarkable work in the shadows, but now his project was utterly complete, and he could show to the world the marvel of his skill.

It would be one for the books.

He crossed his legs and reclined casually in the supple leather of his oversized armchair, one finger fondly caressing the glass screen of his mobile from which Sherlock’s picture glowed. He licked his lip, sporting a Cheshire grin as he savored the nearly arousing rush of the second stage of this little game. With deep amusement, he began an exchange with Sherlock over text.

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*Have you heard of Pavlov's dog, Sherlock? JMy*

As expected, Sherlock took the bait with little hesitation. Moriarty nearly laughed at the swift reply, shaking his head. Poor Sherlock was bored, if he was that fast with a return. So it began, and he jumped into the exchange with glee.

*Why, someone ringing your bell? -SH*

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*We both know I'm the type to do the ringing. Did you know that the psychology of blurring lines between two pieces of stimulus works well on humans? JMy*

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*I'm simply dying for the punchline, do get to the point. -SH*

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*You have no friends. JMy*

*It's official. EVERYONE hates you. JMy*

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*How kind of you to count for me, though your numbers are slightly off. -SH*

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*Oh? Do tell. JMy*
I'm entirely certain that's not your concern. You've been away for quite some time, what's made you crawl up from your hidey hole? -SH

No, please, tell me where my calculations were off. I know you love proving me wrong. JMx

I've one man who, no matter the distance or duration of time apart, would never abandon my friendship. -SH

Oh! Little doctor Watson! Care to place a wager? I'm willing to bet he hates you, despises you, even! JMx

I'm willing to bet that he is terrified of the very mention of your name. JMx

I do not care for gambling. John will be nothing of the sort, don’t be absurd. -SH

Mmhhmmm. Exactly. What if he was, though? Afraid of your voice, face, even smell... JMx

All irrelevant hypotheticals. What if the sky were purple? What if the grass were blue? John is not afraid of me. -SH

Sunsets and bluegrass, Sherlock. John hates you. Care to come see? JMx

Or, I could put him on the phone if you like, though he’s rather a poor conversationalist these days. JMx

Sherlock froze, his fingers hovering over the keys as the second text arrived.

Whatever it is that you want, your issue is with me. Where are you? -SH

Instead of texting back, Moriarty rang Sherlock's number. He’d grown impatient and wanted to hear the nuance of Sherlock’s tone when he finally caught on to the game. The line rang, and he waited with a smile of mild amusement, one leg crossed over his knee, foot bouncing to a rhythm in his head.

Sherlock answered the call instantly. "Have you harmed him," he asked, his tone flat and even despite the panicked cadence of his heart.
"Yeeesss..." Moriarty drawled happily. "I'll give you a little demonstration." Moriarty pressed a button on his phone and Sherlock's recorded voice played in the background. An ear piercing scream rang out, making the speaker crack on Sherlock's end.

Sherlock's vision tunneled at the sound, suddenly battling a sharp wave of panic. "Stop," Sherlock snapped, spinning in place and taking several strides to his waiting laptop, dropping the phone on speaker and dragging up Lestrade's number to send him an online text. The metallic tang of copper panic flooded at the back of his throat, though he refused to cave to it. "What do you want?"

"You're on speaker, Sherly," Jim trilled and clicked his phone to its loudest setting. "John will be thrilled to hear your voice. Then again, he has so many triggers now. It'll be like a little game for you to find them all!" Moriarty's voice was giddy with excitement, as though describing a delightfully fun game to the Consulting Detective. He dropped his foot to the ground and leaned forward as he carried on speaking.

“For example; ‘SHERLOCK!’”

His name had barely fallen from Moriarty’s lips when John began screaming in open, animalistic panic. Sherlock closed his eyes and forced his shaking fingers to be still on the keys.

Think. Stop and think.

He exhaled slowly, putting his focus to take in what he could of John’s surroundings, listening to the echoing feedback from John’s cry. Wherever John was, the sound echoed heavily; Mostly empty room, likely concrete

Sherlock dropped his voice low, dangerous. "You asked if I'd like to come see. Tell me where you are."

With a broad, wolfish grin, Jim replied in his bordest tone, "I'm in the abandoned car factory near the Thames. They shut it down last year, I think, dunno-" he stood and allowed his eyes to take in the room as though he’d only just now realized he was in it, “Bit dusty. You specialize in dust, don’t you? Dull.” He hummed and looked down at John, pleased with the state of him. "Oh, but Sherlock, love, I don't want you bringing your pet Detective Inspector and his adorable Yarders... I'll stick pins in precious Johnny’s jugular if you do." Moriarty giggled like a child at play. "That might be fun, actually."

Sherlock was on his feet, grabbing his coat and scarf, moving swiftly as he spoke. "Yes, yes, I'm coming alone. Do try to exercise patience until I arrive." He drawled at him, his voice dripping in calm collection while internally screaming, knees shaking as he rushed down to hail a cab. In his sloppy haste he was nearly run over as he used his body to forcibly stop one that was already flying down Baker Street. The car screeched to a halt, Sherlock’s fingertips splayed on the hood before he rushed to the side and barked out the address.

"Maybe just one pin?" Jim’s voice dripped through the speaker, saccharin and overly kind, "one in the front? Through the Adam's apple?" In the background John's screams had died down, but he continued to whimper each time Moriarty’s eyes touched on him. "Do hurry Sherlock."

Sherlock was nearly growling as he replied to him, most of his focus on the broken sounds John Watson was never intended to make. "I'd rather not waste time articulating all the threats you already expect. You've clearly already damaged him, there is no sense in continuing." John needed him focused, not fluttering about in agonized panic.

The line went dead and Sherlock closed his eyes, knee bouncing. His mind was a mess, racing in a
thousand different directions. When was the last he’d heard from John? Three weeks ago? He’d been in one of the more remote camps close to Kenya where contact was limited. How long could Moriarty have had him then? He shook his head, face cold and palms slick in his twisting panic.

John.

By the time they arrived, Sherlock had gotten himself somewhat collected. He hopped out of the cab and rang back the number, ignoring the chilled myst of the late afternoon drizzle. Loose gravel crunched under his shoes, nearly making him slip as he recklessly barreled toward the warehouse, unarmed and unguarded.

"You hung up on me." Moriarty answered, pouting and childlike in his tone. "That wasn't very nice, Sherlock, you've gone and hurt my feelings." his voice grew dark again. "Now I'm going to have to go and hurt yours."

He looked up as Moran snapped his fingers, indicating that Sherlock was on the grounds. "Ah, I've been informed you're almost in. I'll see you in a moment, Sherlock." He rang off on the sound of John screaming, Sherlock's name again inciting panic.

Moriarty had contrasted himself with the building completely. The dingy, grey atmosphere with dusty cement floors and broken windows provided a stark opposite to his crisp, clean suit. Bars of grey light spilled in through the broken, opaque windows, illuminating faintly swirly motes of dust and casting Moriarty's face in a sharp contrast of light and shadow. He perched in lazy arrogance on his leather armchair as though it were a throne. At his feet, John lay in a convulsing heap, the dusty pavement smeared rust-red where he’d been twisting in pain.

Sherlock followed the echoing sound of John's last cry, his rapid footfalls slowing as he came upon the scene. He slid his mobile in his pocket and clasped his hands behind his back to hide how terribly they were shaking. He approached slowly, eyes sliding over John and taking in his condition in as fast as he could. He did not speak, merely angling his jaw up at Moriarty in question.

"What's that, Sherlock? I didn't quite hear you." Moriarty was clearly enjoying himself. "Poor little Johnny-boy suffers from PTSD. Have you ever seen him have an episode? Would you like to?"

Without waiting for an answer, Moriarty took a white Oxford from beside the chair and tossed it over John's head. John's eyes flew wide open and he slapped it away, chest heaving and face contorted into a mask of utter horror. "It's yours," Moriarty explained. "It smells like you."

Sherlock was teetering on the edge of his mental barriers, his fists balled up tight, rage cracking the mask of calm. He took a few steps forward as his heart squeezed blood seemingly turned to thick tar though his veins. He ignored Jim and took a knee at an arm's distance from the nearly unrecognizable man. "John," he breathed, keeping his fingers to the floor to resist reaching for him, "it's a game, John, he's playing a game. It's alright, John." He was speaking just above a whisper, trying desperately to reach the man.

John screamed and would have scrambled away, but a compound fracture in his wrist made his arm buckle underneath him. Blood covered his arms and stuck to his shirt, ranging from several-weeks-old black to fresh, Jim-got-bored-waiting red. "Oh, don't bother," Jim said in amusement, shoving his hands in his pocket and absently scraping the sole of his shoe along the ground in front of him, "he won't answer. He was beaten for that, mute now. Brilliant work, isn’t it? Perfectly physically able to speak, but he never will again."

Moriarty walked around the pair in slow circles. "Do you still want him back?" Jim bent down beside John and grabbed a fistful of the man's short hair, forcing his head back to expose his neck, suddenly pressing a glinting blade just over his jugular. "Or, should I just end him here and now?"
John, hearing the option of death, tried to push his own neck forward onto the knife in a desperate bid for relief.

"Stop," Sherlock all but shouted, his stomach plunging, reaching out a hand to still Moriarty's. He was openly panting, fear threatening to get the better of him. The hand outstretched over John was trembling terribly, his own pupils blown wide as the physical state of John began to crumble his mental barricades. He could not distance himself from this. It was not a case, it was John in blistering agony, and Sherlock could scarcely breathe. "You've had your fun, leave him alone."

John appeared to be more afraid of Sherlock than he was of the knife. He shook violently and shrank away from Sherlock's hand. "Oh, look what you've done. You're upsetting him." Moriarty drew a thin line with the knife on John's neck and watched with delight as the broken man closed his eyes as if praying for him to go deeper. "He's been a bit suicidal recently. I can't leave knives near him. It's a hassle, really."

Sherlock lunged forward and grabbed Moriarty's wrist, applying pressure at the small, thin bones to force his fingers open, making the knife clatter to the floor. He grabbed it before Jim, or, god help him, John could get a hold of it.

He stood up and pushed Moriarty back, stepping over John and putting himself between the men. John could not possibly get up and flee, and there was nothing Sherlock could do for him there in that moment outside of removing Moriarty.

"Enough," he seethed, keeping one hand outstretched behind him toward John, the other blocking Moriarty's advance.

Now Jim was irritated. He had wanted Sherlock to get emotional, but he hadn't wanted to be physically pushed or handled. Moriarty raised his hand and little red dots peppered John and Sherlock's chests. "See, Sherlock-" Another scream from John, "-you've got heart. I'll give you that. But you're too rash. Too emotional. What did big brother always tell you about sentiment?"

Jim stepped forward until he was just a few inches from Sherlock. "Do you want to kill me, Mr. Holmes," he purred and grinned up at the detective. "Do you want to bury that knife into me for hurting poor little John?" He laughed, the sound bounced around in the high-ceiling room, hauntingly echoing around them. "Of course, I'll have you shot if you do. Or, perhaps I'll have John shot. Or," he tipped his head to the side, smirking as he considered his options, "I could have you shot in the shoulder and made to watch while they torture him." Moriarty shrugged. "Either way, I suggest you do as I've said and cut him."

Sherlock stilled his mind as his heart seized up in panic. Outwardly he'd gone calm, carefully collected. The single exit available to him was decidedly too far for him to make on his own; managing it with a screaming, struggling, injured John was simply out of the realm of possibility. His mind went back to the singular message he'd left Lestrade over the laptop.

'John's being tortured by Moriarty- SH'

If nothing else, his brother would have been alerted by now, which would have a team scanning CC footage as they spoke. He'd been very animated in hailing a cab, and the location was still within the city, likely they'd be tracked down within the hour, twenty minutes if Mycroft was in-office.

Sherlock glanced down at the screaming, bleeding man on the floor, quite sure he did not have an hour available to him. He stared back at Moriarty. "Drive that blade into me then. You've already got him down, already tormented him. Are you not interested in a new subject by now?" He was slowly crouching as he spoke, fingers closing around the blade handle, gathering it back up. He spread his
arms wide in obvious surrender, blade tip facing the floor, handle between his fingers. "Here, you see? You've an entire untouched canvas." Anything to pull attention away from John.

Moriarty's eyes flitted over Sherlock. The words 'untouched canvas' had indeed sparked his interest, and he had to remind himself exactly what sort of man Sherlock was. "If I torture you instead of John, that would defeat the purpose. I'm not going to harm you in the slightest." He glanced up at Moran and mouthed a theatrical 'sorry,' "No, that would make you feel better about what I've done to him." He licked his lips and stared down at the trembling mess of man that had once been something as noble as a military doctor.

Moriarty sidestepped Sherlock and crouched beside John, tilting his head to the side. If he didn't know better, it might look like the man was seizing. John shook so horribly that every muscle in his body was contracting rapidly from stress, fear, and panic. His breathing was labored and chaotic, wild in the echoing vastness of the room.

"Even once you take him back, he won't be the same." Moriarty stated with confidence. "He's always going to fear you. Even if he learns not to, he'll always look at you and remember me. He'll hear the tearing, remember the smell of his own skin burning at the sound of your voice. And in the end, he'll want to leave you. But you'll stick around to cause him more pain. You're selfish like that. Just like you're being selfish now." He tapped the side of John's leg where a bloody mess was hidden by his trousers. Red dots converged on the spot. "Now, Mr. Holmes, should I have his legs made useless or are you going to cut him and take him to hospital?

Sherlock had watched with a pounding heart as Moriarty stepped around him, going back down to John, who looked as though his heart was going to give out an any moment from trauma, if not pain and fear. His head bowed for a moment at Moriarty's question, finders flexing on the blade. "Alright," he breathed, nauseous with what he was about to do, "don't take his legs." The promise of taking John to hospital was enough to move him. Despite his efforts, he could find no alternate solution outside of complying with this. Allowing John's murder was out of the question.

He crouched at John's back, eyes scanning over him with the horrific purpose of finding some place on the man where the bite of the blade would be a fresh injury, not overlapping some other painful area.

His hands shook horribly despite himself, pulling John's sleeve up and exposing his forearm. He raced through the anatomy, sure that he was not in danger of any major vessels. The hand at the blade steadied and he held his breath, ready for the shout, and dragged the blade a good five inches across, watching the blood well up, praying to every deity ever mentioned in history that it would appease Moriarty.

John's eyes pleaded with Sherlock as he saw the man take hold of the knife. He tried desperately to pull away, though in his weakened state he couldn't do much to protect himself. John was already covered in deep, open gashes, but Moriarty had left a patch for Sherlock to work himself.

John’s scream was exquisite; a mixture of pain, hatred, betrayal and terror all mixed together. It lit up Moriarty's dark eyes with a manic sort of glee. "Good boy, Sherlock. You can take him back now. He can't walk, though. I cut his Achilles. Snap!" He popped his lips on the ending 'p' for emphasis, laughing at his own game.

Jim wanted Sherlock to have the traumatic experience of having to carry John. He wanted Sherlock to feel the blood heat of John’s blood, wanted him to face restraining John as he would inevitably thrash, injuring himself in his panic for release. With wicked glee, he nodded to Sherlock as though he were a hesitant boy at the sweets jar.
"Go on. Pick him up."

Sherlock was going to be ill. He dropped the blade and slid his arms under John, braced for what was to come and hoping against hope that John might simply black out. There was no way to get him off the ground without hurting him. Sherlock reminded himself that his primary goal was to get John the hell away from Moriarty and the snipers. Steeling himself, he gathered John up, fingers slipping in the hot blood, his stomach bucking on him as a shiver ran down his spine, and curled him in close so that he was limited in his movements, unable to thrash and hurt himself much more.

He bolted off as fast as he could manage, doing his best to mentally block John out in order to get them somewhere safe. John was feather-light in his arms, far, far too thin. Sherlock looked over his shoulder to make sure no one was pursuing them. In a blur he managed to get them out of the factory and towards the street where the cab had dropped him off, taking a knee as he struggled to get his Belstaff off without putting John down.

"John," he breathed, trying to wrap the panicking man up to shield him from the cold. His fingers slipped on his mobile, slick with blood, shaking horribly. He managed to dial Lestrade, simply shouting his location and his need for an ambulance before dropping the phone beside him with the speaker still on. He wrapped John up tight in the coat and dropped down to sit completely on the street, holding John in a tight, desperate grip on his lap, fully unaware of the silent tears that slipped down his cheeks. "Please, John, it's okay now, please."

John thrashed. The desperate movements caused him no end of agony, but in his panicked state the only option was to get away. His abused mind knew that Sherlock had, and would continue to hurt him. John screamed and shook his head, though he did not speak.

Once they were out of the building John blinked in the suddenly light, bright to him despite the overcast gray of the sky. The coat around him seemed to burn his skin as it made contact with the countless lacerations and degreed burns that marred him from head to toe. His stomach churned from the pain, but there was nothing to purge. John coughed hard, which caused the ends of the fractured ribs to grate together. He shook his head again, hands digging into his hair and pulling tight in a pathetic bid to soothe himself.

In the distance the faint wailing of sirens drifted between the buildings, a sign that Lestrade had called an ambulance and was on his way.

Part of Sherlock's mind marveled at John's strength. How he was even breathing, nevermind conscious and fighting, was completely beyond him. He held on, "John, you've got to be still, you're hurting yourself," he whispered, trying like hell to do anything he could for the man. The sirens were a welcome sound and he closed his eyes for a moment to settle himself.

In the end, he was left standing in the street, his coat gone with John, smeared liberally in his blood. John was terrified of him, and he dared not ride in the ambulance. It was a full minute later before he hit his knees, violently sickness up in the street, waiting for Lestrade to arrive.
“We’ve got to put him under.”

The medics struggled with their patient for several minutes, watching as the man managed to hurt himself further in his frightened attempts at escape, clearly not understanding what was happening. They managed to hold his frail arm down long enough to get a line started, through it was only after several attempts that the needle threaded into the vein. John’s bloodied face was covered with an oxygen mask, and soon they were pushing sedatives to give him some measure of relief and protect him from himself.

John fought even as the heavy pull of darkness began to pull him under, his last thoughts were crazed with panic in anticipation of the beating he would surely receive when he woke. His mind screamed at him to battle the sedation, knowing that even blacking out counted as escape, and escape meant agony.

*Not allowed to sleep, not allowed to sleep, I can’t sleep! Sleep is pain! PAIN. Don’t sleep. Don’t sleep.*

He sobbed as he lost the fight against drugs he had no chance of resisting; face dry despite his cries, too dehydrated to produce tears. He went limp against the gurney, enveloped in warm darkness, for the moment his panicked thoughts put to rest.

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Sherlock did not bother glancing up as the sound of Lestrade’s patrol car replaced the fading ambulance sirens. The vehicle came to a stop, followed by the sound of the door opening and the dinging warning of the keys left in the ignition. Lestrade’s boots crunched over the wet gravel, approaching Sherlock at a job.

"Jesus..." He murmured and surveyed the scene, wide-eyed with shock. "What the hell happened, is this your blood?"

For a brief moment he turned away from Sherlock, shouting for his men to secure and canvas the area, watching as Sherlock pointed to the old factory with a shaking finger, his other hand still splayed on his knee.

"Not in Africa," Sherlock croaked, the painfully obvious statement lending to how distraught he was.

Eight months ago, John had packed his bag and walked out the door with a smile on his face, ready to fulfill his lifelong goal of working with Doctors without Borders. He was off to Africa, taken hard by the tragedy in Darfur and Rwanda, determined to assuage his frankly irritating need to provide humanitarian aid and staunchly ignoring Sherlock’s snide clips of The Great White Hope.

*Charming, Sherlock. Very nice.*

*There is a reason the terminology exists, John. There is suffering in London, shall I take you on an outing and point you to the troubles at home?*

*It’s done, Sherlock. Throw all the fit you want, I’m going. I’ll send you letters, you’ll hardly know I’m gone, rarely do now as it is.*

Sherlock had done his best to ignore the brilliant ache of it, hostile around John in the week leading
up to his departure. John had ignored all the fascinating cases that Sherlock had found for him, having located every interesting medical anomaly in the area and offering them up in, what hindsight would show, a pathetic effort to keep John home. Sherlock learned then that ‘heartache’ was not so metaphorical as he’d always believed. When John was gone, and his flat empty of the life his small little military surgeon had breathed into it, Sherlock had prowled for his old dealers, restocked his Moroccan case, and thrown himself headlong into The Work, reading John’s emails without any further examination that a brief skim and the slam of his laptop lid.

Sherlock scrubbed the back of his neck with a trembling hand and managed to get off his knees, spinning awkwardly and landing with his backside on the kerb. Greg had asked him a question. He looked down at his bloodied shirt and shook his head slowly.

"Not mine,” he breathed, his voice wrecked, “He's...Moriarty's had John the entire time. He's-” he had to stop for a moment, his stomach locking up. "John’s...he tortured him...made him...John believes it was me- he’s- He's terrified. He’s...Christ, he’s dying. I-” he looked down at his bloody hands in horror at what he’d done. He carried on rambling, guilt taking control of his tongue, “Moriarty was going to shoot him, gave me an ultimatum. I was forced to hurt him to get him out of there. Take me to Bart's, Lestrade, we've got to go to Bart's." He was pacing fast, his hands trembling horribly, despising the physical distance from John at the moment. "Your idiot men won't find anything in there of use, Take me to Bart's."

Lestrade listened to Sherlock in open shock, his jaw hanging by the time Sherlock was on his feet demanding to be taken to Bart’s. “Sherlock...he’s been sending us letters, with pictures and video attached! How could Moriarty possibly-"

Sherlock cut him off, waving at himself, “Do you believe I imagined this? I’ll explain in the car, if you will not take me I will get myself there!”

Greg had never seen such a frenzied look in Sherlock's eyes in all the years he'd known him. He waved to his second in command as he opened the door for Sherlock, ushering him to the car.

On the way to Bart's, Sherlock explained what he knew and suspected of the Pavlovian conditioning John had undergone. He gave Greg a brief description of the serious abuse John had already endured and then went over the ultimatum he was faced with. "I had no choice. Add another superficial cut or allow his snipers to cripple John.” His jaw was set despite the breathy nature of his words, throat was closing in on him. "Greg," he said at last, using the man's given name to emphasize the gravity of the situation. "He's utterly terrified of me. I- it's John-" His voice broke over John's name and he looked sharply away.

Lestrade swore under his breath when he heard the extend of John's torment. "Breathe, Sherlock. He’s going to be okay, we’re going to get him the best care in London. I'm not saying that as a DI but as a friend. John's a good man. He didn't deserve this.” Lestrade reached out and nearly gripped Sherlock’s shoulder in support, though stopped just before touching him as he caught sight of how much blood was there.

They sped through London, lights and siren blaring until they roared up on the ambulance bay. Greg swore under his breath as he caught sight of the medical team that had transported John scrubbing down the blood-soaked ambulance. “Sherlock,” he called, trying to pull his attention away. Sherlock closed his eyes as his stomach rolled, pulling the car door open and getting out with Greg.

Together they made their way into the bustling hospital. Sherlock jogged up to the desk, snapping at the young woman behind the counter. “Watson, John Hamish Watson. Be quick.”
Greg walked up behind him, showing the woman who’d been frightened with Sherlock’s bloodied appearance and his stern, frankly frightening tone, his badge. “Please, we are in a bit of a rush.”

In the next ten minutes, they were shown to family waiting, where the pacing detective and Greg were met by a surgeon, who informed them that John was in surgery having multiple bones set and receiving a blood transfusion. “He has seven snapped ribs, we are fortunate none of them have punctured his lungs. There are poorly healed breaks that we are resetting, as well as a compound fracture at his wrist. He’s been allowed to heal, and then injured, and then healed again over several months. We’ve had to make incisions where scar tissue from second and possibly third degree burns have healed too tight, restricting his movement. He’s in very critical condition, severely dehydrated and malnourished.”

Sherlock was forced to take a seat as he listened, his knees going out from under him and ears ringing. He could not find his voice to ask questions. Greg spoke with the surgeon, who promised to alert them as soon as John was out of surgery.

Hours ticked passed without a word from the Consulting Detective, who sat right where his knees had gone out, fingers tented under his chin, ignoring the cracked blood sticking to his skin and following along the folds of his knuckles. On the fourth hour, the surgeon returned, informing that John had lived through his first surgery and was recovering in intensive care.

As soon as John’s room number had been spoken, Sherlock moved without hesitation. Greg apologized to the surgeon and rushed after Sherlock, catching up to him at John’s door.

John was heavily sedated. Sherlock walked into the room slowly, wrapping his hands around the cold bar of John’s bed and looking down at him. A sheet covered John to the hips, folded down neatly. John’s chest was bound tight, a tube feeding between his ribs to drain off excess fluid caused from the snapped ribs grating along the chest wall. Several drip lines ran up from John’s arms and the center of his chest medications and fluids trying to balance him out in addition to the transfusion line. A mask covered his nose and mouth, humidified air offered directly to him. His arms had been stitched and wrapped, and the leg where the Achilles had been cut was bound in plaster from where it had been repaired.

Much to Sherlock’s irritation, they had John fitted in full medical restraints. The doctor in attendance explained that John had been understandably combative and confused, and they did not want him to wake and hurt himself. For a patient like John, this was standard procedure.

Sherlock’s knuckles blanched on the railing of the bed and he turned his focus back to John. His mind raced, placing the scars he could see with possible methods of injury, painting a picture for himself of the hell John had been subjected to while Sherlock believed him in Africa.

Careless and stupid, Sherlock! Careless and stupid.

Greg startled him from his thoughts, touching his shoulder. When he looked up, a small nurse was standing in the doorway, having obviously been speaking to him though he’d heard none of it. Apparently Molly had been kind enough to have someone run down to the shop and collect a comfortable tracksuit to change into, along with a bag of toiletries and a thermos of coffee. He turned to Greg, his own voice much deeper and more gravely than normal. "Will you stay with him, or call up Molly? I don't want to be covered in his blood when he wakes up, and it will help if I don't smell as myself."

Lestrade walked over and sat down on the small chair, indicating his intention to stay. He wondered briefly what Sherlock meant by not smelling like himself, but decided that perhaps now wasn't the best time to be dealing with details. "That's probably for the best. You go shower, change, and
maybe get some sleep. I'll let you know when he wakes."

What they expected to be hours slipped to days. Sleep deprivation, blood loss and shock kept him in a comatose state for nearly a week. When he finally woke, it was violent. As soon as awareness pushed the warm darkness away, John’s lips parted in a blood-curdling scream, bringing with it a rush of nurses and orderlies. The padded restraints terrified him and dragged painfully to mind memories of the cold metal table on which Moriarty had dealt out some of his torment, keeping him bound at wrists and ankle. The tight stitches holding together what little skin remained on John's back were stressed to the breaking point as John fought. He managed to tear several of them as he made a panicked bid for escape. There was not a single thought in John’s frantic, scattered mind other than a sense of impending pain. He stared wide-eyed and horrified, focus darting about the room, before pinching his eyes shut tight in terror.

The nurses tried to reason with him, to calm him and tell him he was safe and in a hospital, but he refused to speak. Lestrade, who had been in and out for the past week, immediately called Sherlock.

Sherlock had not left the hospital for anything. He was crashed out in the waiting room, a massive krick in his neck from the chair he’d been sleeping in when his mobile startled him awake. He could hear John screaming in the background and immediately moved, rushing to John's room, shouting at passers by in the hallways to move. He came to a stop in the doorway and swept his eyes over the scene, suddenly barking at the staff to get out, grabbing the one nurse he trusted before she left and indicating that she should remain back to closely monitor John.

John’s primary focus at that moment was the restraints. They were doing the opposite of protecting him, making him panic and struggle desperately. Sherlock move to his side, shaking his head and holding up his palms, "John," he whispered, trying to keep the man from losing it entirely, "look, John, look at my hands, look what I'm doing," he said calmly as he freed one of John's wrists.

John looked directly in his eyes and felt his face contort in terror. The monitor beside him started to beep at a faster rhythm to match his elevated heart rate as it pumped blood to his aching muscles in preparation of a fight. Tears started to roll down his cheeks and he yanked harder at the restraints, causing stitches to tear free. Though the sight of the terrible man in front of him was nauseating, awful, and painful, John could not look away.

"Sir, you're upsetting him." The nurse said and got between them. "I need you to leave the room." She sounded firm and ever so slightly apologetic. "I'm sorry, I know he's your friend, but this isn't helping him." She took a mild sedative and added it to his IV.

After a couple moments John's eyelids fluttered and his struggling became erratic and weak. His eyes were still locked on Sherlock in the same manner prey stares at the face of a predator.

Sherlock put his palms up for John, his throat tight and his eyes burning as he slowly began to back away. "Okay, John, that's okay," he said as gently as he could. He dropped his gaze to the floor, not wanting John to feel challenged in any way, and carried on moving in reverse until he was out of the room. He dropped down into a chair just outside of view of the door, pressed a shaking hand to his eyes, and tipped his head back to the wall. Behind it, he could still hear John's screaming monitors. He licked his lip as his heart all but matched John's, leaning forward with his face in his hands in the next moment.

The drowsiness and pain that coursed through John's veins set him on high alert. Sleeping would get him beaten, and just the thought of being tired was stressful. He was utterly convinced that Moriarty was healing him for the purpose of further beatings, and that all the old rules still applied. He was not to speak. He was not to drink. He was not to eat. But he wasn't allowed to be boring either, so even within the security of the rules there was still terror.
He was put on several high-grade anti-anxieties to help calm him, but even in his drugged state he appeared unstable. His eyes darted around wildly, searching for the next instrument to be used on him. Each pair of scissors, each scalpel, and even the sight of an able bodied human being struck him with inconsolable terror.

The medical team had to sedate him to change his bandages or put up a sheet so he couldn't see the scissors, though the latter only worked when he was highly medicated, as the very presence of a doctor tended to set him off.

A psychologist had been called in to work the case, and after his initial evaluation, he went to find the patient's friend.

Sherlock was sitting in the waiting area with Mrs. Hudson, who'd brought him lunch and demanded in gentle but persistent tones that he eat. He was struggling with a bit of soup, no appetite at all. He'd dropped weight, heavy, tired circles under his eyes, a constant tremor to his hand. He was going utterly insane being so unable to help John, listening to him panic through the wall, his own heart breaking, wanting nothing more than to assure him and offer him protection.

The psychologist found them there. Sherlock stood up and offered his hand, for once being agreeable. He'd do anything to make this better for John.

"You're Mr. Holmes, I presume." The psychologist said in a voice that showed no ounce of compassion that would usually be associated with and expected of someone in his profession. He had ash colored hair, average features, and the hand that shook Sherlock’s was uncaused from a slightly soft life. "I'm Dr. Askins. Lets sit down for a bit." He gestured to the chairs and began the explanation of John's condition.

"The problem with his case is that whoever inflicted this damage did so with the intention of making the pain permanent. It's obvious that they weren't trying to get anything out of him, as he seems to fear speaking." He'd worked cases where patients had gone mute from trauma, which was common, but John was far different. He had things to say, clearly, but the fear in his eyes when asked questions was beyond any form of selective mutism Askins had yet seen. “I've written a list of his triggers, ranging from major to minor, that I've discovered so far."

The doctor handed Sherlock a list.

**Major:**
- Sherlock Holmes
- visual
- auditory
- trigger word
- Speaking
- Sleeping
- Eating
- Drinking
- Restraints

**Minor:**
- Metallic objects
- Questions -triggers speaking-

Sherlock read the list, finding nothing included a surprise, despite the way it twisted his gut. He ran a hand over his face and pushed the list back to Dr. Askins, curling a fist to hide his shaking fingers.
After a moment he looked up at him with a sharp nod. "What can I do? He has no family outside of an estranged, unstable sister. He has lived with me for years... I will do whatever is necessary. Are you the best in your field, or should we have him moved? Expense is not a concern."

"I thought you might ask that," Dr. Askins said in an easy tone, as if pleased Sherlock was willing to fight for his friend’s recovery. "Obviously, I am not at liberty to discuss my previous cases but I can tell you I've done extensive work with prisoners of war. I've dealt with torture, though this is a bit different. And as for what you can do, the current answer is nothing. He needs time. The man thinks he's still in the control of his tormentor. He'll need to recover physically before we can start on his mind. The absence of pain will likely cause a mental shift that we can work with."

Dr. Askins flipped through the files once more. "He appears to have a few trigger words we don't know of yet. There are times where he will become petrified about the most seemingly innocent things. I plan on watching the security tapes and looking for any repetitions, but it could be tedious. He could hear a word years from now he hadn't been desensitized from. It could revert him back."

Sherlock shook his head, getting to his feet and tightly pacing. "That is an unacceptable answer. He cannot simply be locked away to mend on his own without help. I can alter my appearance...something. Do not sit there and tell me he must simply be left to suffer."

He was going to be sick. His mind raced, tripping over the possibility that perhaps he had made a terrible mistake in not allowing Moriarty to cut into John’s jugular and let him slip away into the calm, painless dark. His hand fisted in his hair as he swore, forgetting Dr. Askins for the moment. His stomach flexed and his knees threatened to go out on him, making him abruptly sit down.

The doctor had seen his fair share of psychotic breakdowns, and Sherlock's behavior, while upsetting, wasn't new to him. "I'm sorry. I've requested an observation room with one way glass. He's being moved there now. You should be able to watch him for a bit, if you want."

Dr. Askins guessed that Sherlock would likely want to, so he led the way. John was still strapped down, but the restraints were on a short length of soft braided rope which allowed him some movement. They could, however, be retracted if he had an episode.

The expression on John’s face was that of supreme hypervigilance, and he seemed to have a routine of movement and visual pattern. Check the door. Check the restraints. Check the door. Check the glass mirror which was surely a window. Check the door. Check the restraints. Check the door. Check the glass mirror which surely had Moriarty behind it...

"We have two options; allowing him to recover naturally, or desensitizing him to what he's afraid of."

Sherlock had a hand pressed to the glass, taking in every tiny detail of John's condition. He hardly looked any different than when he'd taken him from Moriarty.

"Which is faster? He would want whatever got him better faster. Must he be restrained? What is he doing during his episodes? He's afraid, look at him, what you're doing now is frightening him." Dr. Askins wrote in his file. For a brief moment, the only sound in the room was his slightly dry pen scraping on the paper. To Sherlock, it was deafening.

"Desensitizing him is faster," Dr. Askins began in a slow, hesitating way that demonstrated his knowledge of adverse effects. "It's very simple, and we can go gently, but it will still frighten him. Say he's afraid of...metallic objects. Obviously, that stems from torture instruments. If we start with simple things, something like a metal toy or jewelry, we can work our way up to letting him see the scissors when we cut the bandages off."
John wasn't moving, but didn't appear to be relaxed. He was frozen, like an animal trying not to be seen by a hunter, save the occasional and methodical jerk on his restraints and his counted glances to the door and glass.

"Then there is no question, that is how we proceed." Sherlock could not tear his eyes away from John and his distress. "Can you not perhaps lower the lighting, put in something calmer? Lamps? Perhaps something on the walls so that he doesn't feel as though he's in an institution? He enjoys music, anything but leaving him like that. Look at him, he expects to be attacked at any second."

This was killing him. He could hardly separate himself from John; his chest incredibly tight as he watched his dearest friend so horrifically taken down.

"Tell me about what sort of conditions you found him in. We found evidence of concrete in his palms, knees, and the side of his head, indicating he fell onto it several times… But he had previous medical treatment, and done by people who knew what they were doing. Old injuries, mended bones, stitches, but no hospital. If we can make an environment contrary to the one he associates with pain, it could help him." The doctor called an orderly in and requested the lamps instead of overhead lights.

Sherlock shook his head. "I did not see where he was tortured. I do know who tortured him. I was called to an abandoned auto factory." Sherlock went through the process of explaining yet again, what had occurred when he found Moriarty and John, about his ultimatum, how he had to move John away. "I've already thrown out everything I typically use to wash with. Changed as much of my sent as possible. I can wear my hair differently, anything that needs doing."

Dr. Askins looked a bit put off. "You mean you actually carved him?" He shook his head sadly and made note on the files. "This might take a while. Honestly, it might be easier if he never saw you again." It was harsh, but the doctor had the well being of his patient in mind. "Or, at least not until his other issues are resolved. Perhaps once we've got him talking we can figure out what's going on in his head."

Anger swept through Sherlock before he deflated, his head hanging. "It was that or let them shoot him in his back. It was the only option." His voice was quiet, brittle.

"The only thing about desensitizing is that it can be psychologically damaging. Fear leaves an imprint on the brain even after you've gotten over it. Intentionally showing him something we know he fears, even incrementally, could send him over the edge. He could become unrecoverable and need to spend the rest of his life under care."

Sherlock took a deep breath, considering what the doctor had warned. "He won't break like that. He won't. John is the strongest man I know. He cannot go through years of," he waved his hand in John's direction, "this. What if we brought in things from his room? His personal blanket and pillow? He doesn't have many personal effects, but he has a stack of CDs he rotates constantly and a tea he adores. I can have my brother bring in anything you would think helps for the walls, even if it's simply swaths of fabric in gentle colors. Anything."

He watched John look around the room every so often, checking for dangers. It was pitiful to see a man reduced to such a quivering state of perpetual fear.

"Yes, some personal items could help. We'll introduce them slowly, just in case one is a programmed trigger. But either way, it's best we begin desensitizing him so he does not react so terribly every time someone goes in. He can't continue like this."
He held quiet for a while, eyes closed, knees threatening him again. "If...if that's what needs to happen to help him, then that's what I'll do." He dragged a hand over his face and looked back at John, nodding tightly. "You believe the effects- I" he slowly sat down, knee bouncing. He stared at his hands, feeling more out of control of himself than he had in a long time.

"When the time comes," he finally said, his voice rough and tight, "please tell him I did everything I could to protect him, even though that was clearly not enough. I had no choice."

"Yes, I'll be sure to let him know as soon as the mention of your name doesn't terrify him." Askins’ voice had a bit of a bite to it, and he quickly became more gentle in his approach. “Perhaps I can get him to write," he said in a hopeful, but not confident voice. "I'm going to go work with him for a bit. If you'd like to stay and watch, be my guest."

At this point, John was openly weeping in a sickening combination of despair and pain. Dripping with fear and acutely aware of his restraints, John cried with his eyes locked on the door. Surely it would only be a few minutes now. Moriarty had never left him alone this long. Someone had always harassed him to make sure he didn’t sleep. Even when he had been left to freeze on the blood crusted table, there had been the voice, his voice, there’d been the bite of a whip, just once, to keep him awake and afraid. This was new, and new was terrifying.

John let out a sharp cry of distress when he heard the latch on the door click, and though it caused him great pain, he pulled at the restraints frantically. One arm was far more painful than the other, and John worked with his legs for a moment, which were also strapped down. And apart. One to each side of the bed, as if he were standing shoulder width. John tried to turn his knees in to get them together, tried to draw them up to his chest to be protected, but all his effort gained for him was pain.

Before entering the room the psychologist took off his tie and did his best to look informal, as he had been told Moriarty did the opposite. John was wary and jerked away anyways. The doctor quickly realized that the phrase; 'I'm not going to hurt you,' was, in fact, another trigger. He made note and moved on.

It took nearly a quarter hour for John to stop screaming once he started. Dr. Askins had came too close too fast, and it set John off. In the wake of his distress he lay sobbing in pain and confusion, with Dr. Askins directly beside the bed.

It was another half hour before John looked at him without breaking down. He accepted in his mind that this man was going to hurt him, but not yet. He had no instruments, and his hands were weak. Soft. His knuckles didn’t look like they’d ever hit anyone. With this quiet acceptance of delayed abuse, John began to look attentive. Perhaps the man would give him a task or a way out of his punishment.

Dr. Askins began with asking a few basic questions, after reassuring the patient that he was in a hospital where there was no torture. He had to dance around several phrases that were already proving frightening.

When it was made clear from a panicked look and a desperate, but hopeless attempt to escape that John was not going to speak, Dr. Askins handed him a crayon and a piece of paper. John refused it at first, shaking his heart rate spiked.

It was another trick. He was going to be tortured. This new man, the new one to come work on him, was clearly trying to trick him into speaking so he could give him a punishment. John was used to mind games at this point. With Moriarty, some had lasted weeks. This man was an amateur. There was no harm in simply taking the crayon, and his small amount of lead on the restraints allowed him to move his wrist with the paper on the bed below.
Dr. Askins left him the paper and crayon and exited the room.

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Sherlock lingered for the rest of the day before caving and leaving. He could do John no good, perhaps ever again. He'd never felt his own heart before, but it was shattered brilliantly. He took himself home, walking slowly, trying to wrap his mind around the fact that Moriarty had indeed burned the heart from him.

He slowly entered Baker Street. He spent the night gathering anything and everything he thought may help John, going so far as to wear gloves to handle his things, not wanting to risk putting his own scent on anything. The box sat at the base of the stairs, and Sherlock at the top. He had no idea what to do with himself, lost in a tangle of useless anguish.

John got to the point of holding the crayon -the only writing utensil they had on hand that he couldn't hurt himself with- and putting it on the paper, but each time before he wrote, images would flash in his mind and he'd throw the crayon as if it were burning him.

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“Answer me!” Moriarty’s voice rang out and bounced off the distant, bare walls of the warehouse in an ominous, cold and commanding way. John whimpered. He’d been expressly commanded not to speak. It had been clear that it was one of those ‘from now on’ rules, that never died out. He’d been told to stand swiftly after, and his shaky ‘yes, sir,’ had gotten him severely beaten.

John looked up from his blood crusted patch of cement he had been lying on for the past hour. He was freezing, stripped of all his clothes, and attempted to curl himself in a small ball. Tight stitches on his back made it difficult, and he settled for wrapping himself in his arms in an attempt at comfort. If he answered, he would be breaking the new rule. If he did not, he would surely be punished. “I-I d-didn’t...y-you s-said n-not to-” John’s halting, broken attempt at an answer was cut short by a swift kick to his bandaged stomach. He screamed in response to the white hot pain that ripped his vision away and rendered him unprepared for the battering he received. It was too heavy to be just a boot now, and John got his eyes open just long enough to see a crowbar crack across his shin.

Ten minutes later, John was a writhing, screaming mess on the floor. Cuts had been ripped open, a rib was broken, his legs were bruised and twitching in pain. John hid his face behind his dirty, gnarled hands and due to his pain was denied even the simple comfort of rocking himself.

John screamed on the hospital bed and shook his head. No, he would not be writing, speaking, any time soon.
Bounded in a Nutshell

On the other side of town, sitting on a grand leather chair in a sharp, pressed suit, Moriarty listened to the recap of what had happened at the hospital with a faint grin. He was in possession of all the surveillance footage, and enjoyed occasionally watching Sherlock ball his hands into fists and pace about. He enjoyed it so much so, that he decided to tell Sherlock.

*You don't seem to be handling this well. JMx*

Sherlock refused to answer Moriarty. He was set in on his third sleepless night, digging into every bit of research he could find, anything that would refute what the psychiatrist had told him. He was making himself sick in his focus, but he was transfixed, the need to do something utterly overwhelming. He had, in response to the text, requested extra security for John from Mycroft's men specifically.

Moriarty rolled his eyes when Sherlock didn't respond, and sent a few more messages. Not that he particularly anticipated a reply, but it was fun to torment the already fragile man.

*How is he? Still terrified of breathing? JMx*

*Has he eaten anything? I doubt it. I broke his wrist last time he tried. Had to force feed him after that. Got a bit irritating. JMx*

*Oh, don't ever take him swimming. JMx*

*He might also be afraid of bathtubs. JMx*

*And large sinks. JMx*

*Maybe buckets. JMx*

*Perhaps just water in general. JMx*

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Back at the hospital, Dr. Askins tried in vain to get John to write something. Each time he was close to a breakthrough, John would have a meltdown. It took hours to return to anything close to his new state of *normal* any time he was pushed too far, and progressively he seemed to grow more and more exhausted.
It took countless hours, multiple combinations of medication and tremendous persuasion to get him to write. When he did, there were only four, messy little words:

please let me die

The letters were sloppy as shaky as his hands. John, terrified at what he had done, threw both the crayon and paper away once he had dared to write, to communicate. Twice he screamed when his mind provided for him a visual of Moriarty coming walking into the room, corporeal as anyone, all Cheshire smile and glinting steel. Despite this hallucinating, the doctor working with him had been so persistent that John had begun to fear punishment if he failed write more. John shook his head — a sign that most of John's regular medical staff had come to associate as a silent plea for mercy — and begged with his eyes not to be tortured.

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Sherlock picked up and dragged himself back to the hospital, seeking out Dr. Askins. He traveled through the hospital, for once observing nothing, allowing his feet to take him there without attention. Soon enough he was in the large observation room, hands locked behind his back where he stared at his broken friend while waiting for the doctor to come speak with him.

"I've been sent a list of further triggers," Sherlock said to the psychiatrist. "He looks...terrible," he remarked without apology, exhausted and wrung out, "has he spoken yet?"

The doctor ran his fingers through his short hair and looked down at the piece of crinkled paper with the blue writing on it. Perhaps it wasn't a good idea to show Sherlock the latest development, but it was progress, no matter how upsetting.

"We managed to establish communication," Dr. Askins said in a very formal manner. "After several attempts, he managed to get past his fear and write a few words. He had a few setbacks..." He looked through the glass to John, who was pulling frantically at his restraints and crying, despite his weakness and heavily drugged state. “But he wrote.”

Sherlock turned sharply to look at the man, furious that he’d not been called. To Sherlock, this was huge, a massive hurdle behind them. He snapped in irritation, caring nothing for this physician outside of what could be done for John. "Well? What has he said?" Sherlock stared him down before realizing his error. It was so difficult to manage people without John there to kick him in the shin. This was likely not the way to get what he wanted. Gentling and deflating. "I apologize. John Watson has been..." Sherlock cleared his throat and looked back through the glass to the man on the bed, "my entire world is in that room.”

He took a slow breath and pinched his thumb and forefinger over his damp lashes before turning back. "What is he writing?"

"It's not really important what he wrote, more that he's opened the lines of communication." Dr. Askins was skirting around the subject. He took the paper and folded it, placing it into the pocket of his white lab coat. "I understand you're attached to Dr. Watson. We will do our best to make sure he recovers completely."

Sherlock decided then and there that he was not fond of this Askins at all. "Do not stand there and
belittle me, Dr. Askins. 'Attached' is an effort to undermine the nature of my relationship with John Watson. Perhaps you yourself need reminding that I was not a party to his torture. You're rather detached for your line of work. Has anyone other than yourself tried with him? I'm not sure you're the proper fit here." The last thing he could imagine John needing was some indifferent, cold psychiatrist. Frankly, it was difficult to accept that John needed a psychiatrist at all.

"He has been seeing a therapist since returning from his last deployment. Would she not be a benefit here? Dr. Ella Thompson, I have her contact information."

"I've researched Dr. Watson, sir." The psychologist responded indifferently. "He had a psychosomatic limp which you cured. His therapist was able to do nothing about it. That means he was more open to your advice and your methods. Now I don't look at you and see a man who coddles, so that's obviously not the sort of treatment that Dr. Watson responds to. I have a job to do. Right now, he is too panicked to tell if I am kind or the devil, and frankly he doesn't care." Dr. Askins reached into his coat pocket and shoved the paper John had written on at Sherlock.

"I also learned from his blog that you're the reason he met Moriarty in the first place. I know you're upset, and I know you're probably blaming yourself for not protecting him. You feel useless, and that's normal. But it's pointless to take it out on me."

Sherlock's sharp retort died on his tongue as he looked down at the small scrap of paper. The words seared across Sherlock's brain, the pain of it so visceral he was sure that when he died, they'd see them burned into the matter like a branding iron. He stared at the shaky letters for several minutes, his mouth dry, throat closed.

Before he realized himself, he began to speak. "He offered to kill him. If I hadn't cut into his arm, Moriarty would have simply killed him, and that's what John wanted." His voice was a rough whisper, vision gone blurry. He turned back to look at John, eyes jumping from detail to detail. "I couldn't. I couldn't. You're right, of course. Had John not met me, he'd never have been exposed to this man. The fault is mine, as you say." Sherlock exhaled slowly and nodded again. "I'll keep away. I won't interfere any longer. If you require anything you know how to reach me."

His heart had seized up in his chest and he found the simple act of walking away nearly impossible, feet turned to led, dizzy and nearly disoriented. His hands were shaking as he pulled his phone from his pocket, sending a text to his brother.

Need a ride home. SH

Watching Sherlock leave the room in a daze put a smug grin on Dr. Askins' face. Before walking back in to work on John, he disabled the security cameras he had been using to track his progress. They would be on a perpetual loop of John looking around nervously if anyone checked, and since John had a habit of repeating actions, nobody would notice.

"You thought you had gotten away." He said to John rather calmly, "or maybe, you didn't. But this," he held up the paper he had taken back from Sherlock, "this counts as talking. Now, I can't give you any new cuts, but I can take you off all painkillers and add a few more bruises."

John shook his head desperately, silently pleading that he was sorry and wouldn't write again. His heart rate spiked and he burst into sudden, panicked tears in anticipation of impending agony.

"SHERLOCK!" Dr. Askins shouted as he began to tear at the careful suturing that covered most of John's arm.

The name ripped through his shattered mind, enough to send John into a panic all on it's own. Paired with the white hot agony radiating from his arm, John spiraled into a fit of terror. John began to
scream, his voice raw and grating over strained vocal chords, and the doctor clamped a hand over his mouth. John arched his horribly damaged back off the table and jerked erratically against the pain as his mind left him and a primal fear took over. "SHERLOCK, SHERLOCK, SHERLOCK!"

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I'll send a car. Do you wish me to come myself, or are you not in the mood for company? M

Sherlock stopped midway down the hall, tilting his head slightly at the sound that caught his attention. He shuffled back, heart dropping as he heard screaming from John's room. He couldn't help himself, moving with a heavy heart to the observation room. He dragged a hand over his face and forced himself to look, fully expecting John to be battling demons in his own mind.

It took three seconds before he was moving again, shouting at the nearest human he saw to call security. He flung the door to John's room open and had Askins, or whatever the hell his name was, on his stomach, nose shattered against the tile, arm wrenched hard behind his back. John was thrashing on the bed, their proximity making it impossible for him to see what was happening. Sherlock dug his fingers in the man's hair and lifted his head up, only to slam it back down hard enough to knock him out.

He sprang up then, eyes wide at the sight of blood on John's arm. He snagged a cloth from the bedside table and pressed it over the wound, looking at John's ashen face. "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry John I know you're scared. I'm so sorry." He raked his mind through the triggers that he knew and shook his head, deciding to talk about something else entirely as John panicked.

"Mrs. Hudson misses you," he said roughly, his voice a shadow of itself, "She's kept your room up, and is looking forward to you coming home. I don't have to be there, you don't ever have to see me again. Mrs. Hudson learned to bake that Shepard's Pie you love so much, she's very eager to see you."

He looked over his shoulder, waiting for Mycroft's men to rush in. They were going to have to move John. He'd been under torture the entire fucking time he'd been in hospital. Sherlock hadn't saved him, he'd just handed him to a new abuser.

John was relieved and confused when his tormentor was so violently pulled off of him, but he was still too blinded by terror to make any sense of it. His arm was searing in pain, as it had been for quite some time, but it was a new wave of mental agony that washed over John when he saw who was in the room. It was him. Desperately, with all his strength stemming from adrenaline, John tried to pull his arm away when he started touching it, but it was restrained too fully. Then he was speaking and he was standing over him, and John could feel himself close to blacking out. He fought against it, as safe as the blackness was, for with him in the room, it would surely be disastrous to fall asleep.

A few of Mycroft's men walked into the room, drawn by the sound of screaming to the scene. They saw the doctor unconscious on the floor, John thrashing and bleeding, and Sherlock standing over him. "Step away from him, sir." One of them said, but was silenced by a more authoritative voice from behind.

"What's happened here?" Mycroft asked as his men stepped to either side to allow him to survey the damage. John was still thrashing violently and screaming at the top of his lungs, which made hearing difficult.

A small bit of tension bled out of Sherlock at his brother's voice. He kept hold of John, trying to keep the arm from bleeding. "They've been torturing him," Sherlock said over all the sounds in the room, namely John. "Was screaming my name and ripping out John's sutures. We have to move him,"
Sherlock explained as well as he could, turning his attention back to John as he figured Mycroft had enough to be going on with.

"John, please.” His voice was clearly weighed down by pain.

"He's gone, he won't touch you again."

The sound of *his* voice sent waves of panic through John and he desperately tried to cover his ears. His hands, being tied as they were, offered no help and the vulnerability of his position, with so many men in the room, all standing over him, heightened his terror.

John let out a strangled sob when his voice became too raw for screaming. There were so many people in the room. So many people there to hurt him. His heart rate spiked to a dangerous level and his breathing came in short, shallow gasps. He was close to blacking out once again. It was terrifying.

John looked directly into Sherlock's eyes, his own wide, glassy orbs transfixed with terror. Tears poured down his cheeks and he shook his head violently.

*No. No. No. Please, no.*

But he couldn't speak.
The Arrow and the Song

Sherlock let him go as soon as John's eyes locked to his. He stopped talking, snapping his fingers to get the attention of the men. With distress clear on his face, he thrust a finger at the door to get them to leave. Once the room was empty save Mycroft, himself, and John, he flicked out the overhead lights so that it was just the soft lamps. His hands were shaking as he pushed Mycroft forward to John, whispering softly, "Please, brother, help."

He wasn't about to let anyone else in the room, as he no longer trusted the staff. Mycroft would have to provide people. Sherlock moved out of the room so that he wouldn't scare John, a heavy hand pressed to his heart as he dialed Greg. "We need help at Bart's," he managed to say before simply ringing off, then dialing Mrs. Hudson. "Please come, he may be more calm with you."

Sherlock's knees finally gave out from under him and he slid down the wall, still keeping guard at the door, snapping at every single person who made the unhappy mistake of coming near.

John was crying now. No longer screaming, nor flailing, simply weeping in defeat and terror. His body lay lax on the bed, muscles limp and eyes pinched shut tight against whatever was to come. This was acceptance.

His head was tilted back on the pillow as if inviting someone to mercifully slash his throat and relieve him of this nightmare. Tears slipped down his face, accompanied by the occasional whimper. He was done struggling. Perhaps, if they cut him enough, he would finally be allowed to bleed to his death.

Lestrade and Mrs. Hudson both responded that they would be over as soon as they could. Nurses and doctors began to crowd around the room in response to the chaos. The head of the hospital himself came down and demanded to know what was happening.

Dr. Askins had been on the payroll at Bart's for years, which led Mycroft to the realization this was a bribe, not a planted henchman. Bribes could not be caught with background checks. Anyone could be bribed or blackmailed with the right pressure, as one of his nemesis used to so fondly say. There was no doubt that Moriarty had access to that information for every breathing soul in the hospital.

Sherlock stood guard outside the room, struggling with a wash of emotion that slipped through his careful mental defenses like water in a sieve, useless to this sort of personal agony. His John was yards away, terrified and hurting, and there was fuckall he could do but stand there after the fact and keep anyone he did not personally know from entering. He held an intimidating, unwavering posture until the sight of his tiny, wonderful landlady -and wasn't that such an inadequate term for her- approached.

At the sight of Mrs. Hudson, he relaxed considerably. If anyone had any hope of soothing John, it was her.

When Mrs. Hudson had hugged Sherlock and listened with extreme distress as Sherlock explained to her the full extent of what he knew, and how crushingly severe John's case was. She very quickly
got herself together, nodding bravely, willing to do anything and everything for her boys. Again she hugged Sherlock, nearly making him cry, before turning to enter John's room. When she came in, John responded the same as he'd done when anyone came to see him; he pulled desperately at the cuffs, shook his head, and whimpered. The sight seemed to break her heart, as a hand flew up to cover her mouth and her brow drew up and together.

John's chest heaved and he watched her warily. She didn't seem threatening, but then again, neither had the psychologist. The psychologist had pretended to be his friend and then hurt him. He had pretended to be his friend then tortured him.

No, John Watson had no friends, or at least it was so in his mind. To John, his only hope lay in escaping.

Sherlock watched from observation with Mycroft quietly at his side. He dragged a hand through his hair and swore, unable to keep his composure as he saw that even little Mrs. Hudson failed to provide John with any relief.

"He wanted me to let him die, Mycroft. I wouldn't let him. I'm a selfish fool and I wouldn't let him. How the hell am I supposed to help him now?"

His mind tumbled from thought to thought, creating and destroying plans at record pace, distracting him from how harshly he was pulling at his own curls. Reality was so overwhelming in that moment, watching Mrs. Hudson bravely try her best with John, that he was nearly ready to black out.

Mycroft watched the situation unfold with a grim expression. His heart broke for his little brother, who he had grown increasingly worried about in John's absence. Sherlock had started an observable decline even before John left for Africa, desperate to get the man to stay. It had been...difficult in the extreme to see his brother's mental well being so heavily dependent on John, who obviously loved Sherlock in his own way, though not as Sherlock so desperately needed. "He asked to die? I wasn't aware he was speaking. I'm going to have the best people question Dr. Askins. We'll find Moriarty. Sherlock, the fault here does not lie with you. James Moriarty is to blame. Do not allow him to play with your mind, or your emotions. You are better than this."

Sherlock set his jaw and held quiet as he watched John in open agony. Mrs. Hudson was speaking to him, though he was not responding. Sherlock's voice was a quite, low rumble as he explained. "He asked to die through a written note today. He wanted Moriarty to cut his throat when I rescued him, leaned into the blade to the point of breaking skin," he held a finger across his own throat and leaned forward in pantomime without realizing he was even doing so. "He's not playing my emotions, Mycroft. He's too busy destroying John."

Mrs. Hudson was doing her best to calm John down. She sat at his bedside and simply began to retell the story of the day she'd met him, her impression of him. "Oh, you were such a dear boy. Such manners, well, unless I spoke of your leg. Bit touchy over that, but that's understandable isn't it, dear?" Her voice was steady, if not heavier with grief than normal. She reached out and lay frail, shaking fingers on a bit of his shoulder that was only bruised, speaking quietly of Christmas and Baker Street. At one point, it looked as though she might have reached John as he stopped thrashing and seemed to calm a bit. But after a moment his focus clouded and he was pulling at the restraints again.
Sherlock watched Mrs Hudson with a spark of warmth, impossibly glad for her efforts. He pulled out his phone and sent a mass text to everyone, Molly, Greg, and she, which included all triggers he knew.

"He can't stay here, these people can be bought, the building isn't secure. He cannot stay here."

Mycroft watched with a stoic expression as John jerked away from Mrs. Hudson as though burned. "You can't take him home. Everything there will remind him of you. He needs medical attention for his injuries, further surgery, anti-anxieties and pain medication, constant monitoring. Perhaps once he's more stable I can arrange something."

John sank down into his pillow. He wanted to cover his face with his hands to avoid the light and sounds, but they were strapped down. He wanted to run away, but he couldn't even sit up. Not that he would be able to run, anyway. On the left side his Achilles' tendon had been severed. Moriarty had pulled on it with pliers whenever John tried to speak. John thought that perhaps if he could pull the IV out, he could dehydrate and die. But they would notice that too. It seemed hopeless, and he started to cry again. Tears poured down his face and he prayed for the merciful, sweet reprieve of drifting slowly off to death. Never had John prayed for anything harder than when Moriarty worked near his arteries with a knife. He prayed for one slip in those skilled hands, one mental lapse of his sharp mind that would momentarily remove Moriarty’s precise knowledge of the human body and send John sailing blissfully away.

Sherlock moved out of the room and opened John's door, silently gesturing for Mrs Hudson to follow him out, lowering the lights in the room and very quietly closing the door behind him.

He swept his eyes over the distressed woman and wrapped an arm around her shoulders, whispering his thanks.

He returned to the observation room with Mycroft. "If you've nowhere safer to have him moved, then I'll simply stay here and keep an eye. Will you at least run better checks and give authorization for a team around him? I cannot verify every medication pushed into his IV. My eyes in will only keep another assault at bay."

Sherlock dragged his hand over his face, starting at John through the glass. "How can he hope to recover after this, after a psychiatrist..." his throat went tight on him and he touched the glass.

Moriarty took the opportunity to communicate with Sherlock after such a fantastic show. He leaned with his elbows on his desk, watching the entire thing play out on the screen of his computer, grinning ear to ear as his thumbs flew over his phone.

Oh, Mrs. Hudson tried to help! How cute!
JMx

But you know, now that he's afraid of writing, I'm afraid you've lost John forever.
JMx

This is your fault.
JMx

You should have just played the game.
JMx

This is why you can't have friends. You're a monster. You destroy everything you touch.
I would never have hurt him if you hadn't been his 'friend'.

Sherlock turned the phone to Mycroft, enraged. "We are moving him out of here, Mycroft. You are the government, you can do better than this."

Sherlock stormed out of the room, determined not to let this carry on. He slipped into a staff door and threw on scrubs, pulled his hair back in an elastic, slipped a surgical cap on and then slid a mask over his mouth and noise. He looked as all the hospital personnel did.

Five minutes after the last text, Sherlock was in John's room. He kept the lights low and moved quietly, taking up a chair at the far end of the room where John could see him but he was not physically close. Sherlock had a clear view of the door and no intention of moving.

Mycroft informed Sherlock via text that he couldn't commission an entire hospital for one man, but that he would do everything in his power. He watched Sherlock through the glass as worry mixed with irritation at Sherlock's deep attachment. How many times had he warned his brother against caring, against sentiment? It was dangerous, and here Sherlock was learning the lesson yet again.

John lay there in a swirl of drugged panic. He knew he was afraid, could feel it under the surface of artificial calm. Despite the shift from foul smelling, freezing cell to this crisp, white room, he was still deeply nervous. Any change at all made him nervous. He'd been taught, time and again, that new was always worse, and people were always painful. When he watched a new physician walk in, mouth covered with a mask, he shook his head frantically and whimpered in a desperate bid to silently plead mercy.

When the doctor didn't go about any of the normal procedures, John became increasingly worried. He had stopped crying, though his body quaked in terrified trembling, anxiously awaiting whatever hell this man was going to put him through. He was beyond exhaustion, but sleeping had earned him beatings, so he avoided thinking about it.

Sherlock ached to say something, to assure John he was under protection, but he did not dare. John wouldn't believe the words anyhow.

Time would show John that he meant only to protect him. Sherlock was a chemist, he knew enough that he'd do his best to verify every medication given before anyone touched John. If a nurse came in with a pre-drawn syringe, he'd demand they return with the original vial and draw it up in front of him. No one would be putting their hands on John without Sherlock directly beside them.

He settled in, clearly intent on staying for the long haul.

An hour later, a nurse quietly entered, intent to change John's bandages. She was surprised to see Sherlock there, but Mycroft quickly walked in and pulled her to the side, explaining that Sherlock was vetting everyone and everything that came through the door. She nodded in understanding, it was unusual, but so was the entire case. Quietly she approached Sherlock and leaned in, whispering to him. "I'm going to be changing his bandages. I'll be sedating him to keep him calm. It's a very mild general anesthesia, so he won't be completely asleep, just a bit subdued."
She held out the bottle for his approval, but seemed quietly resentful of a friend being able to get in the way of her job.

Sherlock studied the label and held the vital up to the light before nodding at her.

He watched John nearly coming out of his skin and an idea struck him. He grabbed up a clipboard and a pen and began the slow process for John of tapping in Morse code, which John knew well, spelling out the name of the drug for him. It was a long shot, but it was hopefully unlike anything Moriarty had done.

John whimpered and shook his head violently at the woman. When she drew close, he was about to scream, but he heard a tapping. His expression changed to that of fearful curiosity and he looked over to its source. At first he only heard the sound of tapping, but then letters began to make themselves clear. He narrowed his eyes as he listened, distracted from his fear for a moment, putting the letters together. Recognition dawned slowly. It was a drug. It wouldn't make him sleep, just not feel the pain, so he wouldn't be beaten, and wouldn't be hurt.

John wanted to tap back on the rail, but that might be considered a form of speaking, which would get him beaten just like writing had. He relaxed a bit though, and let the nurse give him the injection because God, he wanted this drug.

Relief so powerful it nearly took his knees out washed over Sherlock. He set the board down and waited before trying again, hesitant to push it but unable to withhold anything that might bring John peace.

He ran the broad side of the pen over the board to get John's attention, painstakingly tapping out 'simple bandage change.' Even if it didn't work now, eventually John would learn to trust the code.

John heard the words but didn't trust it. He didn't trust the person tapping, or the person doing the changing, or any of it. Besides, bandage changes hurt when his entire body burned, there was nothing 'simple' about it. As the drug slid through his veins, John began to weep in relief. He'd hardly ever been allowed painkillers with Moriarty, and only when he paid for it, or did something to deserve it.

With a horrified look on his face, John looked to the woman who had given him the medicine. Was something going to be demanded of him in return?

The woman brought out a sheet and draped it over the area as she worked so he couldn't see the scissors. The lack of visibility further scared him, as he was convinced she was going to cut him. John whimpered and began to thrash. He struggled with every ounce of his strength now that the pain had been dulled and in a loud, hitching voice he screamed.

Once the first bandage was changed and the woman had backed away, he looked up at the man in the corner in surprise. He had been right. John’s eyes were still wild and his breathing ragged, and he quickly dissolved into chaotic panic again, but very briefly he had understood.
Sherlock stood there calmly, his body language relaxed and non-threatening through sheer force of will, keeping a close eye on the nurse. A small flicker of hope lit in his belly that perhaps John was still there, could still be reached under all that damage.

He waited until the nurse was done, following her to the door and leaning in very close so his voice would not be heard, asking for John's schedule.

The nurse showed him John's file. "We have to change the bandages twice a day, as they were all left open for quite some time and there's a major risk of infection. He will start physical therapy as soon as he can tolerate it. Normally with patients like this we would give them the option to leave in a few weeks, given they had someone to care for them, but John might need to be transferred to a clinic more suited to his individual needs." By that, she meant a mental rehabilitation clinic.

What confused John the most, once he had come down from his blinding terror, was that the Morse code had been true. It had happened exactly as it was predicted, just a bandage change. But he still had his doubts. The tapping could be a ploy to get him to speak, so they could beat him again. It could be a way to make him cooperate so he talked faster, so Moriarty could cut into him again.

Sherlock nodded, ignoring the comment about the transfer that surely would be a few months off, at the least. He returned to his chair and watched John for a while, letting him settle.

Finally he gently tapped the board again. At first, he simply said 'daily schedule' letting that hang for a moment, not wanting to rush him. Slowly Sherlock spelled out the times John could expect medication, and which ones. He let him know when to expect bandages changes, and told him he was at Bart's.

Next he tapped out a message to Greg, asking that he write the schedule down so that it was not in Sherlock's handwriting, and to bring John a clock didn't look like it was from a damned institution.

More tapping.

It frightened John at first, as did all forms of communication. But once the times started to be proven accurate, as the new clock on the wall suggested, he decided he could at least trust that it provided dependable information. He did not, however, plan on replying. This was another one of Moriarty's mind games. A clever one, but a mind game nonetheless. He couldn’t be hurt for believing those times. Moriarty couldn’t possibly get mad at him for that.

The new clock gave him something to do. He could count the clicks. He could focus on the rhythmic progression of time and not of that terrible voice that sometimes played in his head. Tic. Tic. Tic.

It took an hour for the ticking to drive Sherlock insane. He got up and went to one of the boxes carried in from Baker Street, moving very slowly, and pulled out John's antiquated little radio CD player.

There was already a CD inside, one of John's favorites, the melodies calm and quiet. He plugged it in and turned the volume low, sighing as it covered the sound of the clock.

He then returned to his chair, waiting calmly with John.
John jumped at the music and his jaw tightened. He didn't know what this meant. Usually, when something new was introduced to him, it was for the purposes of torture.

Ten agonizingly slow minutes dragged past while John listened to the music as if trying to decipher what threat it held. When nothing happened and John remained unmolested and unharmed, he slowly released the tension in his muscles. It had taken him nearly twenty minutes to finally accept that this music was not going to hurt him, and he heard that the song was actually one he enjoyed. That was more than surprising, and he wondered what type of cruel trick the man with the mask was going to play on him.

Sherlock spent the next few hours dozing in the chair in the corner. When the music would stop, he slowly got up to put it back on, leaving the same twelve tracks repeating. He set a vibrating alarm to wake him before the next nurse was due to come in.

As the day went by, John slipped in and out of panic attacks. He was still trying to figure out how the tapping was going to hurt him, as everything always hurt him in the end, and as the time went on with no punishment, he grew increasingly wary. If Moriarty was letting him heal, it meant he was planning something big.

Sometimes the tapping sent him into a fit, and sometimes it did not. After a while though, John listened intently. He’d never been asked to tap back, which was the only thing keeping him from viewing it in the same way he now viewed writing. Months of mental games had warped John’s mind against anything new or foreign, but as the tapping persisted, he slowly began to accept it would not actively cause him pain.

He found himself wanting to tap back, but again, each time he had tried to speak before he had been punished. The recent incident with the psychologist had set him even more on edge.

Sherlock texted his brother at the end of the day.

*John is responding well to Morse code, when is your psychiatrist going to get here?*

Mycroft's reply was swift:

*I'll have someone sent in by the morning. Background checks aren't immediate.*

Sherlock stepped out twice the entire day, once for the lav and a swift shower, and once to power down a sandwich. Each time he left a different police office Greg had personally vouched for in observation, and he timed it for when no medications were due.

Sherlock stopped one of John's doctors outside of John's room. "He's not sleeping. Surely it would be better to sedate him than to allow this?"

The doctor looked into the room around Sherlock. "Sleeping seems to be one of his triggers. He hasn't slept once on his own and each time he starts to go under he panics." The man looked back sadly. "But when he wakes up its worse. His heart rate spikes, he stares at everyone like we're going to beat him... It's not pleasant. We prefer to keep him on a heavy medication while he's waking to ease him into it, but we can't do that all the time. He had one yesterday."
Sherlock was aware of John's deep fear of sleeping, but he just couldn't see how John could still be awake. He had to sleep. He nodded at the physician and walked back in with John, nodding to him calmly, giving him a wide berth so that he wouldn't feel threatened.

He sat there and started for a little while, thinking. Finally he picked up the clipboard and started tapping.

*Attacker arrested. Sleep is allowed. You are in Bart's.*

It was a risk, but he had to try. The lights were low and the music soft. No painful things had been done to John in twenty four hours. It might work.

John looked up warily. Sleep is allowed? This was another one of Moriarty's mind games. He would pretend like he was allowed to sleep, then beat him once he woke up. Simple. It had been done over and over to concrete in his mind the fact that no matter what was said, sleeping was, and always would be, a precursor to torture. John shook his head stubbornly and tried to wiggle his wrists out of the restraints.

He wanted to ask if it was a game, and moved his fingers to the metal rail to tap out a message. Just before the tips of his marred, mangled fingers touched the cold metal, John flinched hard and curled his hands into fists. He whimpered and thrashed hard once more, but he was held fast, and swiftly gave up. He glared sullenly at the man he did not know, the man playing a new sort of game.

Sherlock watched John's fingers move to the bar, only to stop in hesitation. Sherlock frowned and paused a moment. John had not dissolved into panic, so there was that.

He tapped out another message, slowly and with caution.

*You may respond.*

Sherlock leaned back and held his breath, hoping he wouldn't set John off.

John whimpered. That's exactly what they said last time and then they had pulled out his already sore stitches. He knew this game very, very well. He was given permission to do something that was contrary to his former instruction, and then beaten if he did it. Or beaten if he didn't. It depended on the rule.

He turned his face away and took a few deep breaths. Maybe this was new training. Maybe, since it wasn't writing, or speaking, he wouldn't be beaten. John squinted at the man in the corner, who wasn't big enough to be Moran, or short enough to be Moriarty. Someone new then.

With tears in his eyes and a quiet resignation that if he was tortured for this, he could know for sure that all communication was out, John lowered his fingers onto the bar. The metal was cold and he pulled back, whole body shaking, and when he finally managed to get the dots and dashes out, he was openly sobbing.

*Why?*

Instantly John flinched away and started pulling at the restraints. He shook his head and kicked his feet in one last desperate bid to escape the torment. What would it be? Burns? Cutting? Whips? Water? Would Moriarty make him do it to himself?
Sherlock’s heart soared when John responded. He frowned though, there were so many ways to respond to that.

*I’m sorry, I do not understand. I will answer. Why what, John?*

John was trembling. He was going to be beaten for this. He could already see in his mind what would happen. They would start by ripping out the stitches, pressing on his cuts and bruises, then claim he had injured himself while struggling. He knew how this worked. Moriarty would come in, all gentle words and soft tones, and let Moran pull out his stitches. Moriarty never did that part himself. He didn’t like to get his hands dirty. Now the cutting he had a fondness for, but bloody fingers was far more Moran’s style. John let out a wretched sob and heard only the tail end of Sherlock’s tapping, which was enough to convey the question.

Even though he was terrified, he reasoned that since he hadn’t been hurt yet, either the punishment was delayed, but would happen anyway since he’d responded, or there was no punishment. He guessed the former. Either way, tapping again couldn’t make his situation worse.

*Why is everyone hurting me?*

Sherlock closed his eyes and absorbed the question, the words ripping through his chest. He wished he could write, anything other than the tedious process of tapping out code.

*You were kidnapped. The psychiatrist here was on the hit. He is gone, there will be no one else hurting you.*

He pulled out his phone and texted Mycroft.

*I need a tablet for John to use, so that he may text with me and his doctors.*

John was getting more, not less, nervous as the process went on despite his bit of logic regarding the punishment.

*Why aren’t you hurting me? I’m not supposed to speak. I’m not allowed to speak. I’m-*

John’s hands started shaking and he pulled at the restraints again. Even though they were padded, they were starting to rub the insides of his wrists raw from the constant struggling.

Sherlock frowned under his mask and put his palms up where he sat, a position of surrender to John, waiting for him to naturally look over at him as he held himself like that. He let a moment stretch out to several minutes, trying to let John settle slightly before replying.

*John. Calm. I’m going to stop for a little talking if it upsets you. The hurting is done. It has come to an end. You may communicate with me at any time. There will be no punishment.*

He was desperately trying to skirt any of the trigger phrases, put things in terms he hoped Moriarty had not used before.

John was confused now. It had been simple before. He obeyed the rules, and wasn't beaten too much unless there was a trigger word being trained. Now, it had less structure. This person could beat him
any moment for talking, and yet, he didn’t.

*Why should I trust you? You’re just saying the same things… then you’ll… they all did. They said that and everyone hurts me. Everyone.*

John wanted to cover his face with his hands, or at least move them in closer. The position reminded him of a dissection table or the metal one Moriarty had used.

Suddenly, an idea came to him. If he wasn’t being beaten for talking, and this man claimed to be on his side, perhaps he could get what he wanted.

*Let me go*

Now that, Sherlock would abide.

*I can let your arms loose so long as you do not harm yourself. You may not take out your lines, and you must keep aware of your injuries and not hurt them. Will you agree to this?*

He got up slowly, moving closer to the bed but not yet in proximity to touch. He kept his hands where John could easily see them, his posture calm and non-threatening. The doctors could scream and holler at him all they wanted. If John was going to comply, he wouldn’t leave him bound.

John had every intention of running for the door.

*Ankles too.*

He watched the doctor warily, but with a flicker of hope. He had been allowed to run away before, but was dragged back to be punished for trying to escape. He’d been allowed to taste the sweet promise of freedom before being pulled back into hell. Perhaps, since this was a hospital, he would have a better chance of getting to someone who could help.

Sherlock frowned at him.

*First you must agree to the terms. You are not physically able to walk, John.*

He remained exactly as he was, watching John closely.

John glared at the doctor, then his expression fell to fear and he bowed his head.

*Fine. I agree.*

John didn’t believe that he couldn’t walk. He *would* be able to walk and he would run out the door. He would find police or someone to help him.

Sherlock hesitated a moment before moving forward. He carefully reached out, letting John’s dominant right hand go first. He let his fingers linger for a moment, wanting John to feel a touch that did not hurt, before moving carefully around the bed to let loose his left hand. He gave up the tapping, there was too much to say to hen-peck out in code. Instead he picked up a pad of paper and
a pen, refusing to allow himself his own handwriting, carefully keeping to blocky primary school print.

*John, would you like me to call anyone for you? You are allowed to see anyone you want. You may use the phone yourself if you'd like. The rules are different here.*

John looked flighty. Sherlock kept himself between John and the door, and had not yet let John's feet loose.

John shook and let out a small scream when the doctor touched him. Once the restraints were loose, he looked up in surprise and hesitation. Gradually he moved his hands out of the restraints and immediately used them to guard his face. His elbows shielded his chest and his forearms protected his neck. Sweet relief of being allowed the basic pleasure of covering his body rocked him so hard that John began to weep. Softly he rocked himself on the bed and mumbled things he found comforting.

John peered through his fingers and the paper then shook his head. There was nobody he trusted.

Scared to leave himself unguarded, he moved his hand slowly back to the metal rail.

*Let me go. I want to leave. Let me leave, or let me die.*

Sherlock nodded his understanding, backing away from John enough that he'd be able to catch him if he tried to get up, but not close enough to be within striking range, trying to keep John at ease.

*Where do you want to go? I will try to make that happen. You don't have to die, John. You are not a prisoner.*

How he wished he could expose himself, make John feel comforted, anything. As it was, this was the best he could do.
John scowled at the man, the one who lied, the one who would hurt him. His eyes were wide and wild, without a trace of the old stoic calm that he had always been noted for. Here was John, the soldier, with frail hands and a body heavy with scars. He looked at him with fear, mistrust, hatred, and pain. There was a time when he would have looked at this man with love. But that was long, long ago.


His hand returned to its place guarding his face as soon as the sentences were done. John was more than grateful to have some semblance of protection, even if his arms were weak, trembling and full of stitches. Being prone on his back was hellish, and John turned slightly on his side.

Sherlock moved to his chair and picked it up, very slowly moving it closer to John so that he wasn't standing over him. He sat down close to his head, but not in arm's reach. He slid paper on the clipboard and tucked the pen into the grip, moving very cautiously, and sit down on the bed beside John, not touching him. He continued to write on his pad.

*You are understandably suicidal. I don't want you to kill yourself, this is why I will not give you a gun. You cannot walk, your achilles is damaged and it would be incredibly painful for you to stand on it. I will get you a wheelchair and I will take you anywhere you want to go. I will work with you, but you must make requests I can abide.*

John tried to kick his feet, but pain shot up his leg and a scream tore out from between his clenched teeth. Perhaps running wasn’t the best option, but he didn't trust the doctor to move him in a wheelchair. He could take him straight back to Moriarty.

*Letting me die would be humane. He paid you. Shoot me. Run.*

There was no tremor in his hand now. John was determined not to live another day like this. He’d been tortured for trying to kill himself, but if someone else did it, Moriarty wouldn’t hurt him. Probably. He would not write, but he would tap. That didn’t count. Probably.

*Thames.*

*He's going to come back. Always comes back. Games. Please. I need to go. You say no pain and he is pain and he is coming. Please. Please. Please pleasepleasepleaseplease*

John tapped the word repeatedly until he grew too frightened, then drew his hand back to cover his face.

Sherlock kept calm, impossibly glad to see any fight in John. Wildly glad to see fight in him.

*I am unarmed. He stood up slowly, palms exposed, and lifted up the hem of his shirt to show his trouser waistband before slowly patting himself down, showing John that he had no weapon anywhere on his person.*
I know you do not believe this, for understandable reason, but no one has harmed you again since I removed your attacker and have stayed in this room with you. I will not allow it. I will not leave, and he will not come back again.

John crossed his arms in an X over his chest and never took his eyes off the man. The fact that he was unarmed helped, but then again, so had the psychologist. Knives were easy to conceal. He could always be thrown down and kicked.

Please let me go. Please. If you are helping me, end this. Lies. Let me go, or kill me here. Games. Games. I don't want to recover for him. If I recover, he'll hurt me again. Doesn't hurt me when I'm dying. Dying is good. I need to stay dying, or die.

A thought occurred to him, and he gave the man a curious, panicked look.

Why are you helping me?

Sherlock went back to writing, having to pay close attention not to use his own handwriting.

John. You cannot walk. As I have said, if you tell me where you'd like to go, I will do my best to get you there. Would you like to go to the courtyard? You know the way, this is Bart's. Or just up and down the hall? Anywhere. If you are afraid, you can always tell me where you'd like to go and then divert us somewhere else at any time. He will not break you again. You will never go to him again. I am helping you because I care. No man should have to endure what you have.

John tossed the note on the ground when he was done reading and resumed his position of defense. His arm already ached from the movement and he whimpered while drawing it back up to his chest. He looked at the stranger again, this time with more intention to study than to figure out how he was going to be hurt. John narrowed his eyes.

You want to help me, but you won't give me what I want. Its a game. Another game. You're sentimentally attached or weak-willed. No. You're pretending. I remember. Kill me. Let me die. Thames.

I will help you in any way I can. I will not help you die. I know that makes you angry and I am sorry for that.

John was angry, which was fantastic. Anger would push John through this, if nothing else. Well deserved outrage could decidedly help.

John growled in irritation, which he hadn't been allowed to do before but thought he might get away with now. As soon as the sound was out of his throat, he cowered and ducked his head down. Very slowly, he attempted to curl into the fetal position, but his back was too torn and stitched for him to properly protect himself. John whimpered again and tapped slowly.

There is no other way to help me. You don't want to help me. The others said that. I don't believe
you. Prove it. Kill me. There is nothing else. It's what I want.

John had mostly gotten over his fear of tapping, and accepted that if he was going to be punished for speaking, he would already have grounds to do so. Little point in going back now.

Sherlock nodded and tapped his pad.

*Please write. You will exhaust yourself with the code. Or speak if you'd rather. I am sorry I cannot give you what you want. I am.*

Sherlock itched to pull the mask off his face. Damn Moriarty and whatever he'd done to John to make him so deeply afraid.

John reached out and took the pad with a shaking hand, then dropped it as if he had been burned. His chest began to heave again and he shook his head rapidly.

*No. No. No. Game. I know this game. I’ve done this one. I won’t play this game again. Not this one. The last doctor told me I could write then beat me. I know how these games work. You’re making it seem safe then hurting me worse. I know this game.*

Yes, that wall he’d expected.

Perhaps they could climb it. He looked around the room for a moment, letting his mind race. There really was no other way around it than to just keep pressing, keep trying.

*No more games. I dislike games. You are talking to me now, and I am not hurting you. Would you like to sit up? You’ve been on your back a long time.*

John put the pen on the paper and his hands shook. Tears welled up in his eyes and he prepared himself for the pain. He so desperately wanted to sit up and be allowed the basic human dignity of being upright, but he didn’t trust it. The mention of being on his back sounded vaguely like a threat he’d received many times before, and John started to write once more even as his mind tossed up images of bloody instruments.

*I said I know this game you're going to rip out my stitches and tell them I was struggling you'll hit me where I've got bruises so they don't see you'll stop giving me pain killers*

Once he had written his fears, he dropped his head back onto the pillow and covered his face with his hands. He screamed, very loudly, then flinched at each and every sound that came to him, whether perceived or real. John curled into the tightest ball his stitched back would allow and shivered in violent, blinding fear. Silent sobs wracked his body after the first few screams died in his throat and he turned away. After a moment, remembered that he wasn’t supposed to try and protect himself when being given a punishment, so with his face still buried in the pillow, he held out his arm for the doctor to rip out the stitches.
Sherlock's heart seized up and he simply held his position. He wrote out, thank you for writing with me.

He was not going to move. John had to feel as safe as he could.

John looked over at his arm, held out to the doctor, and slowly retracted it.

you aren't going to hurt me now?

Who are you? New doctor? New Moran?

Sherlock shook his head and wrote again.

The very last thing I want is for you to hurt. Would you like to sit up?

He was trying to give himself some time to find an answer that was not a lie.

John nodded and struggled to sit up. Being on his back was mentally uncomfortable as well as physically painful. The stitches and bandages that held together what skin was left on his back made movement like trying to walk barefoot down a hallway full of broken glass.

After a moment he fell back and scowled.

I can't.

Sherlock wrote again.

That's okay, I didn't mean to imply on your own. I am going to approach you, I will not touch you.

Sherlock got up slowly, his palms out as he moved very slowly forward. He pointed to the part of the bed he was going for, and only came close enough to reach out and press the button to elevate the head of John's bed, pausing for him to adjust, knowing his back was very sensitive. When John was at a reclined angle, just high enough that he could easily drink from a cup should he want to, Sherlock backed off and settled back in his chair.

Would you rather be on a morphine pump, instead of the nurses coming in to give it? They will still have to come to give antibiotics and to change out your fluids, but it would give you more control over your own care. It is okay if you'd rather not.

He wanted to hand John back every ounce of control possible.

do i have to pay for this? are you going to hurt me for this?

The psychology of being on ones back with all your vital organs on ready display is part of the reason torturers used tables. Vulnerability and loss of control breaks people faster than actual pain.

Once John was sitting up and could cover himself with his arms, he felt less need to be defensive.
John wasn't sure what type of elaborate game Moriarty was playing, but at least it granted him some time to relax. He'd earned morphine in the past, through obedience and proper thinking, but this was the first time he'd gotten it for nothing. He hadn't been ordered to hurt himself, or reacted properly to something. Maybe he had and didn't know it. John began to pour back through his memories to find the test that he had passed. Confusing mental games were a part of his life now.

*how long do i do this?*

Sherlock relaxed more than he had before when John responded. He looked better, looked more settled. He nodded and then replied.

*I'll let the staff know right now. As far as time, as much time as you need. When you've recovered, you can go wherever you like.*

Sherlock stood up slowly and went to the door, flagging one of the nurses that was constantly monitoring John. "He needs a morphine pump. Do not load it until I've seen the vial to be used. I want you to bring one that has not been opened yet, with the pharmacy seal."

John was past the point of pride. He was broken, terrified, and in pain. In his mind this was all part of Moriarty's game, and the anticipation was killing him.

It was at this time that Moriarty, who had been watching on the security cameras thanks to his tech-savvy pets, decided to text Sherlock again.

*He wants to die, you know. JMx*

*Every second is agony. You should do the nice thing and end it. JMx*

*It's cute how you're using the code. You must be really desperate to talk to him if you're willing to hurt him like that. JMx*

*Nothing's changed. He's still going to hate you once he finds out. More so probably, since you deceived him. JMx*

*Oh, you heartless bastard. You’re afraid to be alone, aren’t you? You can’t stand life without John, and so you’re willing to hurt him to keep him around. JMx*

Sherlock's fingers flew over the keys as he stood by the door, waiting for the staff to bring in the pump. He texted Mycroft first;

*He's in the security camera feeds. Shut down access to John's floor until you can figure out how to stop this. If he times John's care, he will figure out how to hurt him. Text me when you've done this.*

Next, he looked over to the blinking observation camera in the room and then back to John, picking up the pen and writing fast as he could while still covering his handwriting.
John, I don't trust that the cameras are safe. I am going to block the camera, but I am not going to touch you. Please try to stay calm. Just keep your eyes on me and you will see what I am doing. I am not going to touch you.

He moved to the far corner and dragged a chair over, flipping the camera the bird before covering it with another surgical mask, using the elastic to keep it in place. He turned back to John and simply sat down at that distance, trying his best not to frighten him.

I'll kill the camera feed, but the floor has patients that can't be moved. I'll boost security. M

John shook his head desperately. The cameras, he had believed previously, would offer some semblance of accountability. He scribbled desperately on the paper then threw it at the liar.

NO

Now that he was sitting up, John realized something. He could reach and unclasp the restraints on his ankles. The thought struck him with a bolt of adrenaline and terror. Escaping always brought horrible consequences. Moriarty could leave the doors wide open and John unchained and unattended, and he would stay right as he was to avoid punishment.

John began to cry once again with the hopelessness of it. Surely, this was another game. John hated games, but he was very, very used to them.

Now, with the cameras off and his hands untied, John was very certain this was a test.

Jim was not happy that his little show had been canceled.

That won't protect him. And keeping tabs on the medicine won't either. Don't you think I can forge a pharmacy seal if I wanted? JMx

I heard you say you loved him. That must be difficult for someone like you, the one person you let yourself love now hates you entirely. JMx

Sherlock Holmes, alone again.JMx

I own the world, Sherlock. Everyone and everything has a price. If I wanted, I could put ANYTHING in those sealed bottles. But I won't. You can trust me. JMx

Sherlock closed his eyes and gave a dejected exhale before slowly looking back to John, trying to address him first. He held up his slightly shaking hands and then began to write.

John, I know you are afraid. I am doing everything I can to protect you. That camera feed was compromised.

He then texted Mycroft.

The Palace has it's own pharmacy. I need you to courier over the following medications in a sealed container directly to this room, and Mycroft I need secure medical staff to work on John only. He's been watching the feeds, he knows John's schedule, about the Morse, everything. If he gets in now I'll lose John entirely. Do this for me, Brother. I need a solution. Help me. Please. I have him communicating. Sitting up. Unrestrained. Please. Could we not move him to MI5's medical unit?
Sherlock was in a full-blown, numbing panic. He'd not had anything affect him so deeply in his adult life and it took everything he had to remain outwardly calm. Mercifully, John was not due for more medications for another two hours. That was enough time to find some safe solution. It grated him like hell to all but beg his brother for help, but for John he'd do anything.

Moriarty was a puppet master. He knew what strings to pull to make people dance for his amusement, and he knew just how to affect Sherlock. How lucky he was that Sherlock had put his heart into something as fragile as another person. It was delightful that he had attached himself to something that bled, bruised and screamed. Moriarty could imagine the panic that Sherlock would have now that he couldn't trust the medical staff, and it was thrilling. The constant boredom that plagued him faded as the fruits of his tree planted so many months ago grew ripe and sweet.

Sherlock nearly swore, having to keep himself calm in front of John as sweat beaded along his forehead. He scrambled to text back Mycroft.

That's not good enough by half and you very well know it. If something slips past, I'm holding you personally accountable.

He then read the following texts, his heart hammering horribly against his ribs. His eyes flicked up to John before finally replying to Moriarty.

You have my attention. What do you want? What will make you stop this game? SH

Jim was delighted that Sherlock was responding. His game became so much more interesting when he could talk to the devastated little detective.

How do you like my game? I'm having loads of fun. You know, he'll never recover. He tolerated you before, I dare say he cared a great deal about you, but now? After all this? He'll blame you. He'll
hate you. That is, if he can even look at you without a full blown psychotic breakdown. JMx

Mycroft was doing his best, but pulling favors for your little brother tended to look unprofessional. Instead, he wrote up the case file for Moriarty, including the previous information. He labeled him as a threat to national security -as he very well was, if he wasn’t happier playing with Sherlock- and stated that John was their only lead to understanding and finding him. That would make the resources flow a bit more freely.

Stay calm, Sherlock. Stay calm. Don't let him get to you. He's inside your head. He knows your mind. Do not let him make a toy of it. M

Sherlock nearly threw his phone across the room. He was going to risk panicking John. He dragged the back of his gloved hand across his forehead, fingers shaking. He closed his eyes and took a few slow, methodic breaths. If John could never stand to look at him again, then so be it. The pain of that resolution was white hot as molten metal, and it twisted in Sherlock’s heart. All he gave a damn about at the moment was fixing him, getting him back to where he could have a life, despite desperately wanting to be a part of it.

To his brother, he replied,

He's threatening to poison the water or blow up the hospital. He's threatening to taint the food and the medicine. He’s threatened shootings and poisoning the air. He's damned well capable of delivering with very little effort. How am I to remain calm, Mycroft?

To Moriarty, he tried a tactic that would cater to the childish psychopath’s ego.

So you say. You were very clever, contacting me impersonating him, just enough to make me believe he was alright. SH

Big Brother Mycroft’s reply came soon after.

Detach, as you always have. There's a high possibility that Moriarty is bluffing just to upset you. Don’t let him. That's how you can spite him now; by being calm. You stay calm, and I’ll employ every security measure I am capable of. M

When posed as a threat to national security, the issue with Moriarty was taken far new seriously. Mycroft was able to head the project and use any assets needed to help John.

Now, now, Sherly, I do love compliments, but let’s keep the subject on my pet. Have you seen the cuts on his chest? Those are some of the worst. Maybe they’re keeping them covered. He’s got a JM on there too. He won’t be able to even look in the mirror without remembering me and panicking. JMx

Jim wanted to hurt Sherlock. He wanted to see how close to a mental breakdown he could push the man. He’d always loved breaking things as a child. Pushing things to the point where the springs broke and the pieces flew off was delightful to him. Sherlock had a ways to go, though.

Care to play hide and seek? JMx
Mycroft's suggestion was one hell of a gamble. Sherlock closed his eyes and tried to settle and calm. He could not trust himself as stressed as he was, as affected as he was. The question then remained if he should trust his brother.

He swallowed and replied to Moriarty with his heart in his toes.

_Not particularly._ SH

---

_But I love hide and seek! Don't you want revenge? Doesn't it upset you that I took poor little John and cut him up? JMx

Doesn't that make you angry? Or are you still feeling guilty since its your fault? I did some truly horrific things to him. It's all on video, too. I'm sure you'd love to see that. JMx

---

John shifted slightly and watched the man text. Perhaps he could slowly undo his ankle restraints without him noticing. He knew he couldn't run, but he very much wanted to be able to bring his legs together. John wasn't going to take a chance just yet, and instead thought of possible ways he could get the man to leave.

Sherlock pulled in a deep, slow breath and tried to put himself in the mentality he would use on a case. This wasn't John, it was a case. He wasn't attached. It was just a puzzle. Perhaps if he told himself enough, he might start to believe it.

_What I want is for you to get to the point._ SH

---

Hundreds of miles away, Moriarty chuckled to himself in the lavish room he had acquired for the week. He wanted to see Sherlock broken and stumbling after him.

_My point, Sherly dear, is that you aren't in control of yourself anymore. I am. I control John, and you so foolishly invested your heart in him. John is my bitch, and you are my puppet._ JMx

_The only one who can make John speak again is me. The only one who can make him eat is me. If I gave him a gun, I could tell him to shoot you, and he would. He'd shoot Mrs. Hudson or his sister. And he wouldn't shoot himself, because I told him not to. In short, I'm riding shotgun in his brain._ JMx

---

Sherlock rolled his eyes. It was so predictable it was nearly painful.

_Yes, through the genius of textbook psychological manipulation you've manipulated a man. Bravo._ SH

---

_Do you bother you how easy it was for me? JMx

I mean, you're right. It's textbook. Anyone could have done it. This wasn't just easy, it was_
predictable. You had to have known I would do it. JMx

And yet, you failed to protect him. JMx

I tortured him. It’s so stereotypical! You’re the hero in this fairytale, I’m the villain, and John is your lovely damsel in distress. This plot has been played out by everyone, but you didn’t catch on. JMx

Yes to the four. All of those points are clear. Thank you for stating the obvious. SH

He looked up from the phone and eyed John, setting it aside and picking up the pen.

John, do you need anything? You are allowed food and water.

Oh, you’re so stoic. How adorable. I’ll have John back, you know. I’ll cut him again once you’ve got him nice and healed. JMx

Yes, and I’m sure you’ll cut out his heart and eat it for dinner. You’ve gotten to him spectacularly, bravo. SH

John read the note and tossed away as if it would bite him. He shook his head violently and put his hands up on defense. He wasn't allowed to eat. He wasn't allowed to drink. He would be beaten for attempting either. His offer only proved without a shadow of a doubt that this most definitely was a game.

John was defending himself and Sherlock mentally abused himself. He’d pushed too far, he knew that was too far. With a gentle sigh he settled himself, loathing the hell they were trapped in.

No, no, no. Once I get him back, I’ll go through this whole process again. Then I’ll let him go, give him back to you for you to rehabilitate. Once you're done patching him up for me, I can break him again. It's like you're scrambling my rubix cube so I can play with it again. JMx

John grabbed the pillow behind him, the special foam one without zippers, and held it between himself and the doctor who was most definitely trying to trick him into getting himself punished. He was so very tempted to reach down and unbuckle his ankles, but for now, this small barrier was absolute heaven.

Sherlock watched John dissolving into panic as he licked his lips, trying to still the heavy tremor in his hands. He'd pushed far too hard. In a fit of pique, he returned the text to Moriarty.

He’ll likely kill himself before you have the chance. SH

No, he won’t. That’s the lovely thing. You won’t let him kill himself. You’ll save him for me. JMx
You'll keep him safe and MAYBE even get him trusting you again. It's like setting up a sand castle
for me to jump in again. I love it. I've never had this opportunity with any of my other pets. JMx

John's breathing was irregular and choppy. He coughed hard and thought he might be sick, but there
was nothing in his stomach.

Sherlock ignored Moriarty, getting nowhere with him. He got up and walked over to John, keeping
himself slow and steady, and reached down, gritting his teeth and bracing for the fallout. His hand
wrapped around John's, holding his hand even as he gripped the pillow.

"NO!" John screamed and ripped his hand away like it had been burned. Suddenly his eyes went
wide with dread and he realized he had spoken. Fear trickled down his spine and his heart hammered
in his chest like a caged animal as John screamed and made a mad scramble for the restraints on his
ankles. The tight stitches on his back tore apart as he reached, causing blood to soak the bandages. It
felt very much like the lashes that had put them there in the first place, and John believed his
punishment had begun. The clasps slipped from his shaking hands, and John had his eyes squeezed
shut on reflex, but he got one, then the other, while being vaguely aware that someone was trying to
stop him.

Sherlock calmly put his hands on John’s shoulders and pushed him back, holding him hard back
against the mattress. He dared not speak, shaking his head at the nurses who rushed in, keeping them
back. John was thrashing desperately against him but he simply carried on holding him down where
his hands were not pressing on wounds. He was not going to restrain him again. He could hold until
John tired himself out.

Tears streamed down John's face and he let out a long, drawn out, agonized scream. He struck at the
man he believed to be attacking him, though he knew he wasn't allowed. Being held on his back sent
images ripping through his mind and John alternated between shocked silence and writhing
screaming. He looked up with wide, panic stricken eyes at the masked doctor hovering right above
him, keeping him from escape.

John choked and shook his head pleadingly. He wanted to shout, to accuse the man of lying, but he
wasn't allowed to speak. He wasn't allowed to speak. He shouldn't have spoken. The doctor was
going to hurt him now for trying to escape.

A passing nurse heard the screaming and called in an emergency sedative. She couldn't tell if the
man was hurting or helping, but knew that the last had been torturing the patient. "Sir, step away.
We're going to sedate him."

"No!" Sherlock barked, glaring at her and bodily keeping them from John. That would just amp him
up more. He dared not use his voice again, hoping the swift snap wasn't enough for John, in his
panic, to recognize. He simply kept his hands on John, watching him panic, knowing he'd have to
wear out soon. John got a few half-measured blows in and Sherlock happily took them. He'd let John
John froze. It was that *sound* again. That terrible *sound* that told him something agonizing was going to happen. He went deathly still and his eyes slowly moved to lock with the doctor's. *Him.*

Of course it was *him.* He’d never left. John was never free. He had just been lurking, trying to trick him into doing something wrong. It was a clever trick, but not the most elaborate John had been subjected to.

John struggled harder than he thought was possible now, drawing on his training in the army and blind panic to strike out with his elbows and fists. He brought his knees up and tried to kick the attacker away, but mainly succeeded in ripping the fragile skin on his back to pieces. His mind could not think in words, only in the primal instinct to escape that which injured.

Sherlock swore and shot out a hand to the team, shaking his head again as he tore the mask off his face. "Leave him!" He called out to them, gentling his features as much as he could. He cringed as he put John back down to the mattress, leaning his weight down to keep him still, using his Jiu Jitsu expertise to pin the struggling man without harming him.

"John. I know you're scared. John, JOHN!" he shouted the man's name, hoping to use the panic to shock him still for a moment. "It was never me, John, It was never me hurting you. A trick, John. It was never me." Tears were beginning to burn his eyes and he prayed desperately, without hope of success, that John believed him.

John was hyperventilating. His breath hitched in his throat and his lungs squeezed painfully. If he wasn't terrified of sleeping, he might have passed out. The *voice* was there again, and John heard within it the sounds of ripping flesh, the hiss of hot metal on his skin and the snap-crack of a whip against his back. His face was a distorted mask of terror and he struck out at his throat and diaphragm.

Orderlies rushed into the room and tried to pull Sherlock away from John. "Sir, you're upsetting him!" One exclaimed and prepared a needle with sedative. "Step away, and we'll calm him down."

"No!" Sherlock shouted at them, simply refusing to leave. He shoved the orderly off him violently and returned his hand to John's chest. He would lose all that progress, all of it, if they took him away now. "Let me have time, give me *time.* He loathes being sedated."

He let John go and held his palms to him as he had. "John please, John look at me, just look at me. Look what is happening to you!" Pain cracked his voice and Sherlock stared into his friend’s eyes with the hope of finding some glimmer of recognition.

John managed to wrench one arm free and shoved the heel of his hand directly into his attacker's nose. He used the small bit of time the strike had given him to wiggle away and free his other arm. In a desperate attempt to get away from *him,* John scrambled backwards off the bed and fell onto the floor.

His right wrist couldn't support his weight, and he tried to stand, but orderlies were already
surrounding him and trying to force him back onto the bed. Blood was starting to drip from the wounds on his back and he fought harder, screaming all the while like a crazed animal.

Sherlock swore and nearly fell over himself in his retreat, letting the staff at him. He tore his hands through his hair and retreated to observation, making it to the bin before violently sicking up. He hit his knees, hands trembling hard as John was sedated on the floor and then moved back up to his bed, his wounds being treated.

He'd done everything he was afraid Moriarty would do, all with his own two hands.

His hands shook as he took to his phone.

*What will it take for you to release him? SH*
To Die, to Sleep

John was only vaguely aware of his body going limp and the orderlies lifting him back up into the bed. After one last weak burst of resistance, he slipped into merciful darkness.

Jim decided not to answer Sherlock's question, just to irritate him.

*How's John doing? Has he figured out you're the kind doctor in the mask? I would kill for a video of that. In fact, I already have. But you so rudely covered the cameras that even if I could get the feed - which I am in the process of doing- it will only be audio.*

Sherlock tossed his mobile aside and let his head fall into his hands. He couldn't remember the last time he'd cried. Likely when he was a boy. He was exhausted and stressed to the breaking point, no solutions, and the few he'd come up with were dead and gone now. He needed help, and he had no one to turn to, left on his own to handle this. John wasn't safe here without him, he wasn't safe with him. He dragged the bin over and lost it again, groaning and tipping his head back against the wall as he tried to breathe.

Moriarty took Sherlock's question then lack of response as a sign that things had been going exactly as he planned. He decided to torment Sherlock's mind just a bit more with other options.

*I could help him, you know. I could so easily train him to fear something else, and not you. I could make you his friend again. I have that power, obviously. What if he hated me instead? What if I conditioned him to view you as comfort and peace, instead of pain and terror? He could associate you with everything good and happy. He'd probably fall in love with you. Would you like that? Would you like your dear little John to sit in your lap and feel safe in your arms?*

Sherlock read the text with blurry eyes and then simply pressed the call button next to his brother's picture. He held the mobile to his ear with shaking hands, using both to keep from dropping it. He was utterly useless like this, his mind chaos. It was never, ever chaos. He'd slipped, and the one tool he could likely use to save John was gone from him in that moment.

Mycroft picked up the phone and mentally prepared himself for his likely hysterical brother. "Yes, Sherlock, what is it? If you're calling to fuss at me its not going to help. I've already got Moriarty as top on our nation's watch list. John is going to be put under constant surveillance on a direct wire that cannot be tapped. All medicine will be directly from our stores, and all personnel will be provided personally."

Moriarty continued to text.

*Would you like him to love you?*

*He would associate you with safety. The initial clingy-ness will wear off, but he'll always feel safe*
around you. Plus, it won't be that painful for him. JMx

Wouldn't that be what's best for him? Who cares if he's scared of me. He should be. JMx

Sherlock nodded to himself. John was safe. He exhaled slowly and pushed himself up, simply hanging up the phone. Likely he'd lost John forever, but John had a chance. He'd have help, and he'd recover, and Sherlock would never do this to him again. He dragged a hand across his eyes and walked out slowly, telling a passing nurse to toss the CD they'd been using and replace it with another.

He did not go to Baker Street. Instead Sherlock walked himself along the Thames, letting his mind run over the situation. There was no sense tracking the texting phone, nor were there any further clues to where Moriarty called home. He let his mind run on it before he came up with an idea.

Why don't you and I just have a little face to face, I do miss you so. SH

Moriarty was instantly tempted. He wanted to see how ragged Sherlock simply must look after all of this. He wanted to watch him struggle to keep composure. He wanted to pull out one of the knives he had used on John, or the pliers or whip, still coated in dried blood. But no, that wouldn't be the best way to hurt Sherlock the most. He had to milk this for everything that it had.

No. How about instead, you tell me what you think of my offer. I'll re-train little Pavlov to hate and fear me. I'll need you to be there for some of it, to comfort him. He'll learn that if he's with you, he doesn't get hurt. He'll be happy with you again, and I'll fade away. JMx

Sherlock's stomach turned. He knew exactly what that would entail.

Decidedly not. I'd far rather hunt you down. SH

He was sitting on a parkbench now, watching the water flow and tapping his lip.

Surely you're up for a challenge. I thought you didn't like playing with broken things. SH

Oh, how it grated to call John a broken thing, but he had to goad the man into action. He had his small torch taken apart next to him, gathering up the tiny battery and wire.

Hunt me down? Like as in.....hide and seek? Accepted! Start at once. JMx

Jim was confident that he was invisible to the world. Besides, he had his criminal web keeping tabs on the streets. If Sherlock moved in, he would know. This time, he would be like a ghost.

But if you don't have me train him, he'll never be able to look at you again. But then again, we both always knew he'd run away from you in the end. Freaks don't keep friends. It was only a matter of time. JMx

Then he never looks at me again. So be it. SH
He was calm as he set his device aside and got to his feet, starting to walk along the Thames again. He knew where a patch of Moriarty's lackeys liked to get drinks in the evening, down by the warehouses in the divide between the London underbelly and proper. He took himself to one of the pubs there and settled in at the bar, no attempt to blend in, ordering himself a drink.

Ah, so confident. That doesn't sound like something you really want. I watched most of your display. You're quite attached. Its obvious the way he looks at you in terror pains you. Are you sure you don't want me to fix it? For his sake? JMx

Jim sent another one of his workers to the hospital. She was a young nurse he had picked up a while back and was waiting to place her. She wasn't to interfere, only keep tabs on Sherlock's mental state - it would likely reflect John's so there was no need to monitor that.-

Sherlock had slipped his little device into one of Moriarty's runner's pockets without notice. He lingered at the pub, getting as much as he could from the careless chatter of low-level operatives. Several hours later the pull to go check on John became too great, and he slowly made his way back. He spent the walk mentally settling himself, setting to mind the unmovable fact that John was lost to him now, and everything he did for the man would have to come from behind the scenes.

The hospital was mostly empty when he returned, moving back into observation and sitting down quietly, taking in John's state.

John didn't wake for several hours. The drug they had given him was strong, and kept him under for quite some time. They had him on a steady morphine drip now, but didn't put it on a pump.

Moriarty had decided to give the two of them a bit of time to recover before interfering again. He had three operatives in the hospital now, as well as having most of the lower ranking workers paid to inform for him. If they moved John, it would be challenging, but he could infiltrate again. Or he could count on Sherlock to mess it up once more.

Are you going to try and kill me? JMx

Or are you still going to keep the option of me fixing him open? JMx

Sherlock was exhausted by the time the text came in. He blinked at the screen and slowly replied.

Your idea of fixing him requires great harm. No. SH

It was far too civil, but his plan had a while yet to be of any use and he was strung out to the dregs, brittle and drowning in a rare dose of self-loathing.

What if I promised you I wouldn't cut, hit, or whip him at all? JMx

Let me add 'pinch with pliers, burn, break bones, dislocate joints, and clamp ribs' to that list. JMx

Fine. Water boarding too. JMx

When John started to wake, he had the same reaction he always had. This time it was a little dulled
by the medication though, and he only managed weak tossing and whimpering.

There was a catch. There was always a catch. Always. This was a trap and he should ignore it.

_I'm holding my breath for the punchline. SH_

When John started to wake, he had the same reaction he always had. This time it was a little dulled by the medication though, and he only managed weak tossing and whimpering. Sherlock watched John with a sinking heart. It didn't matter if he would reject Sherlock. All that mattered was that he have a sodding _chance_ to live his life again.

_Punch line? I suppose I should add 'punching' in there too. There's no catch. None at all. I want him to be healed too, remember? JMx_

_For different reasons, of course, but I want him to love you again. JMx_

It was risky to offer to fix John, as Moriarty was having _sooo_ much fun messing with them. But he knew he would get bored of it eventually, and once he took John for the second time after giving him some quality time with Sherlock, the man's mind would likely turn to pudding. Sherlock might try to hide John or protect him, but Moriarty was confident he could track them down.

Sherlock stared at John through the glass, his hand resting on the one way. It was an impossible thing. Moriarty would do nothing but hurt him, there was simply no way this came without a catch.

Sherlock called his brother once again, managing to ring him more in that week than likely in the last two years combined. He ignored the irritation in his brother's tone, knowing it was in the small hours well after midnight. His own voice was ragged and gravely, a shadow of its normal self.

"I need to hear from you that he can recover from this. I am not asking if you believe he will ever tolerate me again, I already have that answer. What I need to know is if you think him possible of ever returning to any sort of life."

Mycroft didn't like the question. He was inclined to be honest, as he always was, but his brother was fragile to begin with. This could destroy him. "I don't know, Sherlock. He seemed to be making progress before, right? He was writing. Perhaps you can make that progress again." His voice was tired and heavy. "But a normal life doesn't seem likely. He might end up in a psychiatric ward, or in some sort of assisted living. If we don't know everything that triggers him, we can't know when it'll crop up. He might have some semblance of normality, but I don't think he will ever be completely sound."

While expected, the words were as hard hitting as a physical blow. Sherlock's breathing stuttered out of him in a harsh rush. He swallowed hard and tried to draw in a proper breath.
He looked up at John and tried to grab hold of a thought, watching as his memories tumbled down chaotic and without direction. He'd had a chance, and Sherlock had destroyed it.

"Thank you, brother," he breathed into the line, his voice cracking just as he hung up.

*What do you propose, and what assurance will you give not to harm him? SH*

*I propose something you won't like at first, but will work nonetheless. It will require you to act out a series of rescues. I can Pavlov him into associating you with comfort. JMx*

*The guarantee will be that you have literally no other option and even if I were to kill you both he'd only be getting what he wanted. JMx*

*And if that isn't good enough, I'll promise that if it doesn't work, I'll turn myself in to the police. JMx*

John had woken up by this point. A nurse came in to check his stitches, which they had to almost completely redo after his incident. She put a tent-like sheet over the area she was working on to avoid letting John see the scissors. In his heavily drugged state, he wasn't a danger to himself, and did little more than whimper.

Sherlock watched the nurse work, watched John in his drugged horror. Of course he had an option. He could walk in and overdose his John, send him quietly off. He could watch the life drain from the only friend he’d had, watch his suffering end, his heart stop.

He stood there for a long time, the nurse had well finished, John seemingly sleeping. He pictured it, walking in with the syringe, posing the morphine quietly until his breathing slowed, stopped.

He pictured John on Molly's table, battered and lifeless. The image tore at him and he slowly sat down.

*A series implies multiple captures. He won't survive that, his heart will give out. SH*

*Fine, I'll only take him once. I'll start by using fear, not pain, mind you, to teach him to fear my voice. Then, I'll play yours and give him a small shot of morphine. Doesn't that sound painless? JMx*

*Eventually, it'll start to work. He'll know what's coming when he hears your voice. It might take a week. Maybe more. But he'll know to expect relief at your voice. Then we'll start with you. You'll come in when I'm being particularly menacing, acting as if I'm going to cut him. You shield him, I'll leave the two of you alone. Speak to him, and give him morphine. Then you leave, I come back, and within another week he'll be running to you. JMx*

*If his leg heals, that is. JMx*

*For the sake of realism, I will amend my statement. Within another week, he'll be crawling to you. JMx*

John let out a groan as he started to come back into the realm of the conscious. He didn't thrash this time, as he had not the energy. Instead he let tears fall down his face and stared up at the ceiling, wishing that this game would be over. Sherlock dragged his chair as close as he could get it to the window, watching John cry. All that
Jim's plan would do would be to wrap John up in Sherlock artificially. The man would still be living in fear. He'd bear the scars, he'd likely not walk properly again. He'd never love Sherlock, he'd cling to him in desperation for safety. Weeks more of fear, of being subjected to Moriarty.

*Shall I stick a pin in his throat?*

Sherlock's hands began to shake terribly as the simple, horrible reality began to set in. He couldn't save him. He'd been too wrapped up in work to even realize John wasn't where he said he was. He couldn't save him.

Except that he could. He could spare him *this*.

"I'm sorry, John," he breathed alone in the room, watching the man soaking in his own fear, broken down and reduced to a cowering bundle of triggers. Sherlock pushed himself up, resolved to it. He'd send John off, find himself a dealer, and float away with his needle in some forsaken den. He was out of the door, appearing to turn for the lav, sitting wait out of sight as a nurse passed by. He slipped into the medication storage room and pocketed the morphine.


There wasn't even a checkup from his nurses at the hospital. Apparently, nothing interesting was happening. Harassing Sherlock was somewhat entertaining though, and Jim was sure the man would read them.

*The effects will wear off, of course. He'll be normal again. He might not cling to you lovingly after about a year or so if he's had the proper therapy, but he could revert back to the way he was just a bit. He could laugh again. Come on, just give it a shot. What do you have to lose? JMx*

Sherlock ignored the message. Weeks in Moriarty's care, with Sherlock playing along, intentionally terrorizing him? It was intolerable.

He watched the clock as he drew up the dose, dashing obnoxious tears off his cheeks. He tripled the max dosage for a man of John's overly thin statue and put it in his pocket.

When the nurse left, Sherlock pushed the door to John's room open, quietly moving in.

*Do you want him to be normal or not? JMx*

John snapped to attention when Sherlock came in. His heart rate spiked and he pulled feebly at the restraints, same as he always had. The same irrational horror twisted his face into a pitiful, barely recognizable shell of what he once was.

He was shaking his head again.

Whatever *he* was going to do, John didn't want it. He had almost escaped. He had been so close.

Sherlock held up his hand to John, tears sliding down his face despite himself. It destroyed him to see John like this. The ache was impossible, worse than any pain he'd come near.

His voice was breathy, wavering when he spoke. "I'm so sorry, John. I'm going to make it stop, okay? I'll stop it all."
He waited, not sure what he was expecting, selfishly greedy for any hint of relief on John's face. He drew out the syringe and held it up. "Morphine, far too much."

John's breathing was still ragged, and his voice hurt. He saw the needle and let out a pitiful, choked sob that tore it's way out of his scarred chest and shattered in the air. When he heard it was morphine, his spirits rose the smallest amount. Surely, he would have to pay for such a gift with self mutilation or other terrible acts, but nonetheless he looked at the needle with a tiny flicker of hope. When he realized it contained death, his eyes widened. The offer of an end was there, right there, that is, if he chose to believe him.

Slowly, John nodded. He looked down at the crook of his arm then back up. Dying wasn't something to be afraid of anymore. It would mean no more pain. It would mean he didn't have to worry about being beaten. No, dying was not something to be afraid of, but something to yearn for.

To die, to sleep. No more.

Sherlock nodded slowly, dashing tears off his face with the back of his hands. He moved slowly and spoke softly.

"I should have checked to make sure you were in Darfur. I should have checked. I should have called." He took a deep breath, moving as calmly to John's bed as he could, the soft music still playing, nearly choking on his words. Pain, brilliant and blinding, twisted in his chest and tears rolled unrestrained down his face. "I love you, you know. I should have said so sooner. You didn't deserve this, John. You deserved the rest of your years. I'm so very sorry I failed you."

He had no expectation of the words getting through, but he had to say them. He kept his hands in clear view of John and showed him the dose. "This should be enough, yes?"

His words confused John. They terrified him, but confused him. It had to be lies, of course, but John was on several heavy painkillers and nothing was making sense to him anyway.

He squinted at the needle and nodded again. If that went into his veins, he wouldn't be waking up. John strained his arm against the restraints again, this time towards him, begging, pleading for relief with his eyes.

The 'I love you' was unexpected, and John shook his head. Even with his muddled mind, he knew you didn't torture people you loved. Perhaps he meant...

John's eyes widened and he shook his head. He was acutely aware of his ankles being bound as he struggled feebly, though it was all the strength he had.

Sherlock nodded, staring at John as he reached for the IV port. His fingers were trembling horribly, all the color drained from his face and his breathing fast and shallow. He dragged his sleeve across his eyes, trying to clear his vision, making a go at the port and missing, the needle sliding past into the air. He reached back and grabbed a chair, moving it close and sitting down. He exhaled a quaking breath and tried again, leaning his arm on the rail for support. It took him four pathetic tries before he managed the needle in the hub.

Sherlock's stomach rolled and he looked back to John, whitewashed with stars cracking along his vision.
"Are you sure," he breathed, his voice cracking, desperate to hear anything else, "I want to help you so badly, John. I love you. Are you sure?"

John leaned his head back and tried to calm his violent shaking caused by the man's voice. He still couldn't say the name, even inside his own head. He wanted it to be over and done, lest Moriarty run in at the last second and rip away his chance at peace. If he was about to die, then they couldn't hurt him anymore. Even if they punished him, he would only feel it for a moment. Perhaps that is why he chose to speak.

"I-" he tried and at first failed to manage his trembling voice. The spasms in his lungs weren't helping, and when he spoke, only the trained ear would recognize the voice as belonging to John. "P-P-Please..." he flinched. "Y-you d-d-don'-nt l-lo-love-" he coughed hard and jerked at the restraints, panic starting to cloud his mind once more.

John, of course, dislodged the needle that had take Sherlock fairly forever to place. The sound of John's voice ripped through his chest. He closed his eyes, pushing building tears down his cheeks, and exhaled, his voice dripping with pain. "I do love you, and because of that I will do this if you want, John. Look, I will, here and now. I don't want to, I so terribly don't want to, but I absolutely will if it's what you want."

He tried for the port again, missing as he had been, his hands shaking terrible. "I'm so sorry John, but I n-need you to hold still so I can do this." He was going to be sick. This was impossible. He doubted, if he ended up stopping John's heart in this room, that he would ever be able to get up and walk away again. He was sure in that moment that his own would sense the stilling of its match, and go quiet without his hand stilling it.

John was crying without shame. Crying from fear is generally something regarded as childish. Adults don't cry when they are afraid, they tense, run, flinch, or even scream, but it takes a high amount of terror to make a grown man, a soldier no less, openly weep.

When John saw him struggling with the port, tears falling down his cheeks, he had to look away. Something was wrong. The sight of someone he hated so terribly crying shouldn't upset him. "I-I-I th-think...." He began and his breath hitched with fear. If he was about to die, speaking wouldn’t matter. But the response of pain was so programmed into him that he began to flinch and cry as if in very real agony. Still, the sight of his torturer crying upset him. John searched his mind for an explanation as to why this situation should distress him at all. "I-I-I...I th-think....I th-think a l-long....a l-long time.... time ago," and indeed it felt like years, "I m-might h-h-ha-ha-have...I had... l-loved y-y-you. But then you...y-ou..." His mind flashed back to the torment and he screamed loudly again. The worst of it was the betrayal. He'd known the man who was cutting him had meant something to him. But as it was, it was far easier to label him as something terrible and be done with it. Here was death, sweet, inviting, and calm. Here was his chance, his way to escape. Here was his tormentor’s hands about to push the morphine to send him sailing away.
Sherlock nearly came out of his skin when John suddenly screamed. He shook his head, his voice agonized, "No, no they'll stop me," he panicked. Simply panicked. His fingers found the port and he tried again, sticking himself in his haste, "They'll never let me near you, I'll never have another chance to save you!" His stomach rolled and then gave a violent heave, forcing him to twist to the side where he threw up up into the bin. "I'm sorry, it was never me, it was never me John!"

But of course, he was too late. He'd not managed to get the needle into the port in time before he heard the rushing feet. He capped the needle and shoved it into his pocket, resting his face in his hands and simply breaking down. "I'm sorry, God, John I'm so sorry. I'd never hurt you. I'd never hurt you."

"No, no PLEASE!" John shouted when he saw the needle vanish. His fear of speaking was overpowered by his desperate need to die. "Please! You h-have to kill me!" He screamed as loudly as he could and sat up, straining against his restraints even as nurses rushed in. "PLEASE!" His voice was raw, crackling and dripping with anguish. John's eyes locked on his and he let out a choked sob. "Please... I-I-I c-can't...I-d-d-don't w-wa-wa-want to...t-to go back! He'll t-t-take m-m-me back! You...Y-You h-have to... Y-YOU HAVE T-TO!" Words ceased to function properly in his mind and John slipped into hysterics. He knew he was going to go back, and he let out a long scream that shattered into agonized wails.

The nurses pushed him back down onto the bed while he sobbed out pitiful pleas for death that no longer had any cohesive structure other than crazed rambling.

Sherlock hovered at the back of the room, watching them push John back down through blurred vision. He was moved out of the room by the staff, moving in a daze. He stood outside the door, ready to collapse, shaking from head to toe. He'd nearly killed John. His own finger was still bleeding slightly from where he'd pricked it, shoved deep in his pocket, wrapped tight around the syringe.

Again he'd failed John.

He leaned a heavy shoulder against the wall, legs shaking, blind to the foot traffic, entirely and completely overwhelmed and lost. Sherlock did not do feelings. He could hardly navigate them, and here he was dropped in the proverbial ocean, failing completely to swim.

They had to sedate John yet again. The doctor in charge of his recovery made the executive decision that he was to be kept on an anti-anxiety 24/7 to minimize his need for anesthesia. The doctor, who had replaced Dr. Askins and was one that Mycroft had recommended, stood in the hallway trying to get Sherlock's attention.

"Sir? Sir, if you could tell me what set him off, it might help us. I would also like to inform you that Dr. Watson's room will no longer be open to visitors." Which includes you.

Sherlock blinked at the man. "Oh, marvelous plan," he tried to snark, tears still sliding down his cheeks and his voice cracking over gravel. "He's already certain he's a prisoner, why not confirm it?"
His breathing hitched horribly and he was nearly sick again, pressing a trembling hand to his eyes. "I set him off you idiot! Have you even read his file? He's terrified of me, and I am a perpetual idiot. I set him off." His voice trailed off and he closed his eyes, tipping his head to the wall. He'd saved him from one hell only to fail to keep him from another.

"Has my brother not given you the list? He has dozens of known triggers. Be careful with him, he's afraid." Sherlock's composure snapped to nothing at that point. He wrapped a hand around his middle and covered his face, trying to get a grip.

The doctor had indeed read the file. "You're Sherlock Holmes?" He was even familiar with one or two of the stories that had been told about him from one of the nurses into blogging. He didn't seem to fit the description.

"If you don't mind my asking...why the hell would you go in there if you know he's terrified of you? What could you possibly hope to gain? My god, I was just going to start out with pictures. You do know that only makes it harder for him, right?" The doctor wrote on the file and added another incident to the report list.

Sherlock absorbed the words like blows, simply turning away and walking down the hall, his breathing hitching hard. He paused before he was out of earshot. "Well, if n-nothing else, I got him talking, and now he knows you won't beat him for that." He turned away and made for the exit, brushing past the few in the halls, ignoring their stares.

The walk to Baker Street was incredibly long, and twice his knees failed him. He climbed the stairs in a daze and collapsed on the sofa, curling up tight, not bothering to take his coat off. Sleep eluded him, John's pleas ringing in his ears until he could not help but get out, digging for his moroccan case. He drew up the solution, years and years left he'd gone without, and tried to shoot it into his veins.

The needle sailed through the air when he failed to manage it, his hands failing him. He managed to unseat everything on his desk, sending papers flying in his agonized rage, finally dropping back to the sofa and completely blacking out despite himself.

John blinked very slowly and his subdued mind tried to figure out why he was so terrified. A nurse checked him from the window and took out her cell phone to inform Moriarty of the incident, who promptly texted Sherlock.

So, I heard he went bat-shit insane again. How cute. Still think the re-training is a bad idea? JMx

Even if it never happened, Jim still wished to torment Sherlock with the idea of it.

By the way, I have another game for you. Think of it as an Easter egg hunt. I've got twelve bugs hidden in John's room. Ready, set, search!! JMx
He only had ten, but the idea of Sherlock scrambling madly for two more delighted him and he had no reservations about lying.

Sherlock read the texts several hours after he'd blacked out on the sofa and simply forwarded them on to Mycroft. He'd only physically approached John with the intent to slip the morphine in his veins.

He'd never make John scream like that ever again if he could help it. Sherlock closed his eyes and set the phone down, no plans in his mind to ever get up again. If John had bugs in the room, it meant Mycroft's men in on the cut, and they were well and truly had.

Jim listened to Sherlock’s desperate pleas on a recording device. The phrase 'I would never hurt you', spoken in Sherlock's voice, made him chuckle. A trigger phrase and a trigger sound. He hadn't been able to replicate that, meaning John would be unused to that level of fear. Fantastic. But Jim was bored of just listening and texting, and wanted to escalate just a pinch.

He sent one of his workers over, a man with some training who mostly ran grunt work, to deliver a package. Inside were a few of Moriarty's favorites. A dull serrated knife, a coiled leather whip with bits of glass imbedded in the end, a small metal rod with short spikes and a pair of pliers. Everything was, of course, coated in a crimson-black layer of John's dried blood.

The operative dressed like a postman and rang the bell at 221b.

The door went unanswered. Sherlock hard the knock and the buzzer and ignored them both. They had woken him and for a split second he thrilled at the idea of Lestrade with a case, before his memory slammed back into him and he dragged the throw off the sofa and over his head. Sherlock was done.

He rang, and rang again. Eventually Mrs. Hudson came other door and let the man in. He smiled amiably and explained that the package was for Mr. Holmes. He handed it to her and had her sign the slip.

Up the short flight of steps to Sherlock's flat and to the door Mrs. Hudson shuffled, package in hand. She knocked softly and gently called out. "Sherlock? You've a package here for you." She read the label and sounded surprised. "It's from Doctors Without Borders."

Sherlock did not move at all. He did not open his eyes or shift. Moriarty was sending him trinkets, likely, and there would be not a scrap of data on them that would bring Sherlock any closer to doing John any good.

That, or it was an explosive. The idea momentarily startled him but he just let it go. It would be the easiest way for them all, ultimately. John would have been lucky.

Once his delivered man texted him, Moriarty started to turn his attentions back to Sherlock. He had been relentless with texts so far, and didn't plan on stopping.
I tortured him in the same place where I am now. There's bound to be particles stuck to the blood. Didn't you say you wanted to track me down? Don’t you want revenge? JMx

Sherlock's hand was shaking on the phone as he held down the power button, shutting it off. His brother had been right at the start. He was being toyed with, and he'd allowed panic to overtake his mind, severely wounding John. He was done. John would live in a drugged stupor until well enough to find a way to kill himself, and Sherlock fully intended on becoming a part of the sofa.

He closed his eyes and attempted to shut off his mind, the copper scent from the box slowly twisting into his nostrils. It hurt, and that was exactly as it should be.

Mrs. Hudson had set the box down outside Sherlock's door and resumed tidying her sitting room.

Meanwhile at the hospital, a psychologist, a kind hearted one this time, was surveying John's situation. If they took him off the medicine, he might panic and physically injure himself. He decided that he would wait until John was physically healed to start working on any major psychological help. Perhaps once John was free of pain and medications his mind would start to clear.

Sherlock spent the next week in silence. He moved the box to his room, never opening it, and otherwise remained in bed, bleeding his Moroccan case dry. His phone remained off until he was forced to turn it on to dial his old dealer, promising pay for a door delivery.

He sat on the steps waiting, answering the door with his hair everywhere, dressing gown hanging limp. He shoved cash in the man's hand and then returned to his room, falling into the bed and starting at the drugs.

Keeping John on the anti-anxieties had allowed his stitches to heal well. He lay in a stupor and listened to the beeping of his own heart. Sometimes he would think it had stopped, that he had died, but it always beeped again, and John was given the painful reminder that he was still alive. Often, he cried.

About another five days later they sedated John fully and replaced his heavy stitches with dissolvable ones. They even opted to taking off his restraints, though he hardly knew the difference.

Shock broke two weeks in. Frustrated, defeated rage pushed him up off his bed and he utterly destroyed his room. He was a whirlwind in the sitting, handing his desk and breaking various odds and ends, leaving nothing save John's chair intact.

He made his way up to John's room and sat down on the floor, his back against the wall, wondering when all this would be packed up and taken away. He couldn't take the silence.
He grabbed his phone, a constant tremor in his hands, and texted Mycroft.

_Have you had an update on him?_

The reply was swift.

_He's recovering physically. He still hasn't eaten or spoke, but they've kept him calm and comfortable. No restraints._

Mycroft preferred to call, but doubted Sherlock would answer. He went to 221B on his own, without bothering to inform Sherlock, and had Mrs. Hudson let him in. The state of the flat appalled, but did not surprise the worried brother. "Sherlock, what have you done to the place?" He drawled in his usual, bored tone.

Sherlock hardly acknowledged his brother, folded up on the sofa, knees drawn to his chest, bare feet exposed and moving from time to time. "What does it matter? It's over."

Mycroft walked over and set his umbrella down. "It's not over, Sherlock. Don't be so dramatic. You act as if this is the end of the world." He sat down next to Sherlock and stared straight ahead. "There's still hope for him. And if not, you need to focus on catching Moriarty instead of sitting in here with your seven-percent solution. Honestly, is that what you think John, the old John, would want you to do? It's selfish." Mycroft was deeply, profoundly worried for Sherlock, but the brothers had left their pleasant relationship in their childhood.

Sherlock set his jaw, resting his head on his knees and closing his eyes. "You and I both know he's lost. You confirmed yourself. He'll never come home, never function on his own, never properly heal. They'll get him well enough that he'll clever out a way to kill himself." The words were numb, dead pan. He'd screamed himself hoarse over the last weeks, his voice clipping in and out, harsh and rough.

"If I could catch him, Mycroft, it would have already been done." He abruptly jumped up, stalking to his room, swaying like a drunk and navigating the wreckage. He returned with the box. "I've been sent this."

Mycroft reached out and took the box from Sherlock. "Have you opened it?" He asked, but already knew the answer. What he wanted to know was if he planned to, and why he hadn't already.

Mycroft tore off the packaging tape and peered inside. His expression didn't change, and after a moment he quietly shut it.

"It's just an intimidation attempt. Though," he ripped off one of the folds on the lid and flipped it over. In black marker, scrawled in a fancy yet somehow messy script, was a note.
"If you want to find me, I'm in the same place I was when these were used. Particles. Go crazy.

"He won't be there," Sherlock murmured, a touch green from the smell of the open box. He could not detach himself.

_Caring never helped anyone, John._

"There will be some foolish clue leading to yet another and another until I trip off some series of events that manages to hurt John terribly, again." He turned his face away, unable to stand it.

"That is most likely the case," Mycroft admitted and moved the terrible smelling box away. "But you can not just sit here and do nothing all day. Get a case. Get revenge. Do something."

Mycroft grabbed Sherlock's arm and looked at the inside of the elbow, which was bruised and spotted from the needle. "I don't want to have to worry about you overdosing."

"Go home, Mycroft," Sherlock said as he pulled his arm away, "he's just one man, if you will recall. As am I. Cannot stop your work for one." He dragged a hand over his face and tucked in on himself. He could care fuckall about the ills of London.

Mycroft stood slowly and walked to the door. "You need to start thinking about getting on with your life. I know you don't like the idea, but it's a reasonable request. It's been nearly five weeks. He's healing. You should too."

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The nurse informed Moriarty that Sherlock hadn't come to visit John recently. He thought that perhaps they needed an emergency to spark his interest.

Instead of hurting John -Moriarty still wanted him to heal- he decided to have a little panic at the hospital. Jim killed the power to the building for a bit, just to give them a warning. People on machines would die. Next, he sent a hit man to shoot a few people in the waiting room. Perhaps that would get Sherlock's attention.

Sherlock came awake to Greg pounding on his door. He groggily shifted up, a used needle rolling off the side of the bed and falling to the floor, his own sick stale in the bin just next to the bed. He pushed himself to his feet in a daze, unwashed and unshaven by several days, a proper beard on his face now.

He pulled his door open, blurry eyed and confused.
Greg swept his eyes over Sherlock and swore. "Active shooter at Bart's. Power is down." His face was pulled with lines of worry and distress, but over it all was a professional mask of calm that came from a lifetime of dealing with this sort of thing. Still, there was an armed gunman loose in the hospital where John was staying. The power was out, and Sherlock looked more strung out than Greg had seen him in years. “Clearly you're not fit to go.”

Sherlock watched as the detective rushed off, leaving him behind without another word. Sherlock began to strip in a daze, changing into his clothes, stumbling out of his room and down to the street to hail a cab. He looked nothing of himself, in jeans of all things and a pullover hoodie he'd stolen from John months ago.

He had John's Browning tucked in his trousers, dragging a hand over his face as they rode.

Perhaps John was already gone, dispatched by a bullet. It would be kind. It would be alright.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The hospital was chaos. Sherlock slid through the officers and the shouting crowd, the nurses evacuating who they could, CPR in progress on the more machine-dependent patience. Sherlock slipped in through a back door and maneuvered through the halls with foolish ease. He looked a mess, it was absurd no one was stopping him. He simply walked up the back stair case to John's floor, half convinced this was some drugged hallucination. He'd been hitting the needle hard, starting to hope he wouldn't wake up and being painfully disappointed when he woke to find his own heart still beating. Mycroft wanted him to move on, as though that were possible.

John's room was infuriatingly poorly guarded. Mycroft had been all talk. John was background, a detail for him. Sherlock slipped in, fully expecting to find John shot dead, nearly hoping for it. He pulled out his mobile as a torch and softly illuminated the room.

Moriarty sent another shooter with very simple instructions. He was to kill a few police, injure the DI, and make a scene before getting out. Or die. Moriarty couldn’t care less. Dying would likely be better, as it would show that he had men at his disposal. His goal wasn’t to kill John, or even take him back. No, he only wanted John and everyone else involved utterly shaken.

John was more than shaken. He knew damn well what the machine gun in the background meant. It meant he was still within Moriarty’s hold, and that his torment would begin again soon. He had been left unrestrained at the hands recently, due to his nearly comatose state that was induced by heavy medication and his own loss of purpose. Besides, his heart rate was monitored. If he began to struggle, they would be notified. Or they would have been, if there wasn’t a crazed gunman in the building.

John was crying into the pillow he’d drawn up to his chest for comfort. The blankets were bunched around him for protection and he rocked himself slowly without making any move to escape. That would be against the rules. The torch startled him further and he threw up his arms to protect himself with an agonized, panicked wail.

In the background, a machine gun started to rattle off again, drowning out screams and shouts of pain and anger.

Sherlock directed the light to the floor, snuffing most of it out, hopefully hiding his face from John. The gunfire outside reached him slowly. Modified M4, extended clip, likely shipped in from some slinger in the states.

A few of the rounds were clearly landing in flesh. Sherlock dragged a hand over his face, sussing out what to do. He’d hurt John if John knew who he was, and he’d risk simply taking a round if he went into the hall. He couldn’t give less of a damn if that happened, only he’d fail to ensure John was not captured again. His brother said he'd been healing. Moriarty had promised to take him again.

He drew the Browning and kept himself between John and the door, wildly debating simply shooting the man there in the dark and having done with it. He rolled his eyes at himself. He couldn't manage to push a calm, gentle needle and here he entertained firing a shot and violently dispatching the man.
Instead he opted to keep quiet and keep guard.

Moriarty sent in a third. It was a full blown attack now, and each time they shot a killer down, he sent another. This one had a mission though. He was to walk in amongst the crowd, a seemingly harmless, panicked civilian. The man made his way to the back of the hospital with unnoticed steps as chaos ensued behind him.

When he reached the almost empty, completely dark west wing, he started to shout. "He's coming back for you, John. He's coming to get you. Moriarty and Sherlock are coming back to hurt you again."

His words echoed off the walls and tore directly into John's mind. He let out a pitiful cry and tried to raise his heavy limbs to flee. He knew it. He'd known! He knew it was another game! It was always a game! John wailed pathetically and scrambled to pull the blankets higher up over his chest. His legs were still held firmly down and, to John's great distress, apart. He wanted to draw his knees up, but if Moriarty was coming, he did not want to be caught trying to escape.

Sherlock closed his eyes as the sound echoed down the hall. He nearly spoke, nearly moved to John. A brilliant, crisp flash of memory at John's terrified face, his desperate pleading against Sherlock's arms stilled him. John wouldn't physically make it anywhere, and likely a fall to the floor would do less harm than his panicked thrashing against Sherlock's restraint. He could not help soothe John's fear. All he could do was stand silent guard and wait.

John's desperate sounds of fear settled heavy in Sherlock's mind, coating his thoughts like mud, heavy and terrible. He clicked the safety off and remained just inside the door, ready to put a round in anyone who opened it.

John's limbs were sluggish and his mind covered in what felt like a wet blanket, weighing down his thoughts and making thinking impossible. It did not help when the man shouted again, this time reading off a litany of torturous devices Moriarty had been practicing with. A jolt of fear dispelled the fog in John's mind and he knew escape was imperative. The promise of torture seemed to dispel his fear of punishment. Fumbling hands made his work difficult, but John managed to remove the restraints on his ankles. He threw himself to the edge of the bed and tried to stand.

His leg gave way, and he was in too much pain to crawl. After looking longingly at the door for a moment, John was struck with a dozen memories where he’d attempted escape, only to be beaten horribly for it. Moriarty had dangled it in his face like food to a starving man, an action the psychopath had done literally as well as figuratively. John pulled himself behind the hospital bed instead and tucked his knees to his chest in a protective position.

Sherlock breathed in relief. That would do. He felt terrible for the man, but it was honestly the lesser of all the terrible options.

He was tempted to venture out and gun down the speaker, but there was no way he was leaving John alone.

"C'mon out, John." The man shouted and fired a few rounds into the ceiling and possibly the people
on the floor above him. "There's no use fighting it. He's coming for you." A few more shots were fired.

John knew he should stay silent, but couldn't help the whimpers that escaped him involuntarily as he crouched behind the bed. He grabbed the pillow down from the edge and pressed himself against the wall with it in front of him, one corner locked between his teeth in anticipation of pain. He felt all too much like a cornered animal, defenseless, scared, and cold against the floor.

"He's going to tear your skin off bit by bit..." The man called and waited to hear a reaction. "He'll beat you within an inch of your life. He'll leave water for you and cut you if you drink. He'll pull out your tendons with piers and stick pins in your eyes." The eerie darkness coupled with screams gave the man's already rough voice an ominous quality.

John clamped his hands over his ears and screamed. That's all the man needed to find his target.

Sherlock growled low in his throat and widened his stance at the door, listening intently. The threats were beyond horrific. Sherlock loathed knowing that John believed himself alone and without defense. He bit down on his tongue when the urge to speak, to comfort him became nearly overwhelming, drawing blood as he waited to spring.

John's screams made it impossible to listen to the activity in the hall. His eyes were locked to the door and he killed the light from the mobile, sliding it in his pocket. His finger rest on the trigger, hammer back, a breath away from discharge.

The man latched onto John's screaming, which were wild and panicked above those of the other people in the hospital. He crouched just beside the door. The boss had told him to be prepared for a defense.

"Come now, John." He shouted, his voice bouncing in the narrow halls and making it sound to John as if he were surrounded. "You knew this would happen. SHERLOCK!"

John screamed and the man closed in inches away. He wasn't to kill John, or even take him back. This was a terror tactic. He wanted John shaken.

"You know what," the man with the rough voice called suddenly, "I've changed my mind. You have one week."

That flared life back into Sherlock, shaking him from his fog of inactivity. No. That would not stand at all. Sherlock lunged out of the door, taking a gamble and choosing correctly when he swept his eyes right. The man was trying to level the weapon at Sherlock, but he was faster. He had the barrel pressed to his head and Sherlock swiftly kicked the man's weapon away. It clattered to the floor, a single shot popping off and, by happy accident, catching the man in the leg.

He grabbed the man and dragged him into John's room. In the next moment he was calling Lestrade, the phone on speaker tossed to a chair, face up, illuminating the room in a wash of soft blue.

Sherlock started speaking in the need for John to see. "John," he rasped, wondering if he would even recognize the sound of Sherlock's voice with it so scratched and fading. He shook the captured man who was grabbing at Sherlock's jeans, warning him off, pistol to his head. "look John, I have him. No one will come for you in a week, he lost." God but it hurt to speak, he wondered absently if he had an infection of some kind, his voice breaking as he made sure he was in view of the terrified
John heard the commotion and looked up cautiously with eyes full of tears. The man had been taken down and subdued, but he wasn't sure he was safe. A week. He had a week. One week before he went back. But that said nothing about the terror right before him. *He* didn't need to bring him to Moriarty to torture him. Moriarty orchestrated it, but *he* was the one who did the hurting. John knew this.

John looked up into his face. It looked different, which was possibly why he didn't scream immediately, though he did go very, very still. With the eye of a trained man John studied his body posture for any signs of aggressive gestures. He didn't see any. John's eyes darted from the man with the hole in his leg and back to Sher-

John flinched. The name still held terror, as did the voice. Even in his own mind. Not that it was a safe place, anymore.

Sherlock could not believe what he was seeing. John wasn't screaming. John had not broken into a panic at the sight of him. He slowly crouched down, taking a knee, keeping the weapon pressed so hard to the assailant's temple that it was sure to bruise.

"He's not coming for you, John. You are not alone, you are defended." He was trying to keep away from common terms, the usage sounding odd to his ears and his literary training, but he didn't care. Anything to get the point across. "See? He cannot even manage to protect his own operatives. He's lost."

Sherlock's heart was nearly pounding out of his throat, his chest aching for this to work, for the little spark of hope to survive.

John flinched at the voice, but a combination of things kept him from screaming. He was exhausted, first of all. Though he couldn't walk, he had recovered a bit physically. The restraints were gone, and he wasn't spread out on a table. And most influential, *he* had injured someone who had threatened him. John nearly swore at himself. It was another game. Clearly, another game. Like the time a police officer had come and rescued him, or the time when Moriarty had dropped him off in some back alley to cry for help for an hour before picking him back up. No, John was no fool. This was another game.

Here was the voice, like an alarm siren going off, warning him of impending agony. Here was the man who had tortured him, the man who had-

John let out a pitiful cry of sorrow and turned his face away. He clapped his hands over his ears and squeezed his eyes shut. Shaking his head, he silently asked the man to stop speaking. It was hurting, and John was desperately trying to remain calm. A deep breath in, and a slow exhale helped just a bit. He still trembled violently, but seemed to be containing it a bit better.

Gunfire started anew as Moriarty sent a fourth, and last. It was sort of a grand finale, as the fast paced rattling seemed to suggest.

Sherlock shut his mouth and dragged the man away from John's line of sight, slipping out into the
hall and closing the door behind him. His mobile was still in the chair next to John's bed, casting soft
lighting to the ceiling. Lestrade or his voice mail still on the speaker.

Sherlock blocked the door with his body just on the other side, holding the man with a bullet in his
leg as a shield. He still had a nearly full clip. One of the gunmen moved across the hall, not toward
them but in view, and Sherlock took the shot, dropping him as well. He fervently hoped it wasn't a
kill. Mycroft's men could get them talking. If not, then he would on his own.

The gunfire slowed until the assault was down by half. The man Sherlock had a hold of gave
struggle, and Sherlock viciously cracked the grip of the pistol across his temple, knocking him out.
He lay in wait, his whole focus on keeping John protected.

When the first two gunmen failed to report, Moriarty sent the last after John. One last scare
 technique. He instructed the man to shoot into the room, but not to actually kill anyone. If something
went wrong, he was to shoot Sherlock in the leg or shoulder.

The operative advanced around the corner, fully automatic gun held in front of him as he crouched.

John was pressed into his own corner, which hurt the marks on his back, but didn't cause any
bleeding. Another series of threats echoed in the room, much like the ones before. These, however,
replaced the name 'Moriarty' with 'Sherlock', and after a moment John found himself screaming again
despite his best efforts.

Sherlock needed to silence the man. He was having a hard time focusing his eyes, squinting and
trying to force his hand still. He was fatigued after so long not properly caring for himself, the weight
of the unconscious man bodily shielding him becoming incredibly taxing. He was sweating along his
hairline, adrenalin lending him a bit of strength. He took aim as the man advanced, and suddenly
squeezed the trigger.

The next minute was a dizzying exchange of chaotic gunfire. Several rounds hit the man shielding
Sherlock before there was a searing pain at his side, which he did his best to ignore, cracking off
three more shots. He adjusted and refocused. John was the sharp shooter, not him. He grit his teeth
and popped off a fourth, nearly out of rounds, dropping back against the door and letting the
shielding body go as soon as the active shooter fell to the ground.

His breathing was frantic as he staggered to his feet, turning with a plunging heart to see a line of
bullet holes sprayed across John's door and wall. He pushed the door open, holding his right side, hot
rivets of blood seeping between his fingers and making him lean heavily over the wound. Still,
despite his own pain, Sherlock's only focus was John. He was careful to hold his tongue, eyes wide
with fear as he moved around the bed to see if John was harmed.

He made it right into the man's line of sight before his legs buckled, dropping him to his knees. His
left hand splayed out in front of him on the cold, tile floor to keep him from going down. He looked
up, his vision too blurred, the light too low, and spoke with pain and desperation in his voice. "Are
you hit?" Sherlock asked in a rush, right before his vision tunneled and he blacked out completely.

John thought he should be glad that the man had fallen and ceased speaking. He should be very, very
glad. John looked down at him and began to cry bitterly. He drew back one leg to kick at him, the
hateful man who had tortured him. Despite his terror of the man, which raged beyond his fear of punishment, John could not kick him.

Going against everything his fear-stricken mind begged him to do, John inched closer to the fallen man. This definitely should be a good thing, he told himself. If he died, there would be no more pain. He would be free. He could have blessed, sweet death.

With movements that hurt his tormented body, John reached out and rolled the terrifying man onto his back to assess the damage.

It was nearly ten minutes later that the paramedics found John, whimpering, crouched over Sherlock's unconscious body. He had one hand rolled in bed sheets and pressed over the wound, and the other gripping a gun with white knuckles.

"Sir, put the gun down. You're safe now." They had no need to fear being shot, as John had the gun pressed firmly to the side of his own head.

Chapter End Notes

Poor John. He's a bit traumatized as it is.

Perhaps it would be easier for him to die. Thoughts?
Chapter Summary

As ever, please heed the story warnings.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He trembled and the gun faltered. His finger tightened on the trigger possessively like a snake coiling around a meal. At the paramedic's words, John let out a small cry of pain and jerked his other hand off Sherlock to cover over his ear instead, wanting to shut out their voices. The medics inched closer, and John curled into a small ball reflexively, the shaking gun to his head. He decided that if they took one more step, he would fire.

Sherlock had been fading in and out, aware that John had moved closer, aware that he continued to lose his grip on consciousness despite his best efforts. He caught a glimpse of John with the Browning to his head. There were five rounds left, more than enough to end his life. His heart leapt into his throat and he cursed himself for not unloading the weapon before stumbling in to check on him.

There was a massive rush of relief at the sound of Greg's voice, clearly in person and not over the phone.
"Easy mates," Greg said gently at the edge of the room, speaking to the medics, "clear out, let me handle this." He flashed his badge at them with his left hand, his right arm tightly bandaged at the bicep where he took a round. He waited as they cleared out, moving just deep enough into the room for John to see him. He sat down and held his badge up before sliding it softly across the floor towards John. It skidded over gently and stopped just shy of John's knee.

"John," he said softly, keeping his eyes low and his shoulders rounded, "I'm sure this is all a bit scary, mate, but you are alright. You know me, yeah? Can I talk to you?"

Sherlock listened with bated breath, managing to hold on to his own consciousness a bit better, expecting that the wound at his side was more glancing than anything else.

John's eyes darted to the badge then back up to Greg. He had the gun pressed firmly to the side of his head, and every fiber in his being screamed at him to pull it. There were too many variables. It could be empty. It could be loaded with blanks. Anything. Moriarty was too clever to let him die, and he knew damn well the sort of hell that waited for him if he tried. He squeezed it just a bit until he felt the catch. A millimeter more and he'd finally be free of this.

Slowly, John stopped and looked down at him.

John gritted his teeth and shook his head. He didn't want to talk. He wasn't allowed to talk. But for some reason, even though he remembered all the anguish and agony the man had caused him, John didn't want the man on the floor to die. "Help-" he began and had to suppress an immediate wave of fear. He had a week, didn't he? And he was clearly unconscious. Probably. It could be a game. John decided he would take that risk. "H-H-Help h-him," he managed to stammer. John pushed him across the floor towards Greg. Although he wanted this terrible man safe, John did not want him
"G-go. Go a-away." He had put the gun down to move Sherlock, but quickly snatched it up again.

Greg nodded, not yet reaching out for Sherlock. He kept his voice soft and calm as he spoke to John again, though his heart nearly seized when John's finger flexed on the trigger.

"Alright John. I need you to put the gun down before I can help him. Come on, John, look at me, you know who I am. Just Greg, you know me, yeah?"

He looked down to Sherlock, who had his eyes open at the least. It gave him time to secure John if nothing else. "Please mate, I know this is bloody awful for you. Please. Put that gun down and I'll go away, alright?

John suddenly pointed the gun at the wall and fired. He was angry and scared and prepared to shoot anyone in the room if it meant they would leave him alone. "Y-you've got to h-help him!" John screamed the demand and stubbornness replaced a bit of fear in his voice. "A-and don't l-let him c-come back. He'll h-h-hurt me." With a now broken voice and frayed nerves, John crawled slowly away from the two men, back to the safety he found behind the hospital bed.

The gun was still pointing in the vague direction of his face, but he seemed more confused. John so genuinely believed that Greg could stop him from killing himself at the last moment, just as Moriarty had. "L-leave," he commanded and slowly put the gun on the floor. Once he was gone, he could pick it up again and be done with this.

Greg hardly flinched at the shot. He kept his posture calm and tried again. John was complying, albeit with difficulty. "I'm not going to help him or leave until you slide that over to me. I won't let him come back, John. He'll stay away. Slide the gun to me."

"NO!" John shouted and clutched the gun again. "You'll h-hurt m-me. I can j-just escape.." He put the gun to the side of his head again before looking down at his injured enemy. John’s chest heaved and his eyes were wild; nearly inhuman in their look of pure terror.

"Y-you've got t-t-to p-p-prom-mise h-e'll -b-b-be okay. H-H-Help h-him. Go! GO!" His hand shook violently and he almost lost hold of the gun. There was hope. This wasn't like last time where Moriarty had given him empty rounds. These worked.

Or had he known? Had Moriarty known he would fire one round into the wall? This could easily be another game. The thought was dizzying, and it made John’s resolve weaken.

Greg took a slow breath and showed John his palms, making no indication of movement. This was not his first threatened suicide; he'd been doing this sort of work a long time.

"I'm not going to help him while you've that gun, John. Look at me, I'm a police officer, you've my badge. Greg Lestrade. You know me, John. Look at me."

John's breath hitched and he looked down at the badge, then back to Lestrade. Yes, he knew the man, and once might have considered him a friend. That was before everyone tried to hurt him. "G-get h-h-him away," he stammered and indicated with the gun towards the man on the floor before pointing it back at himself. He stared at Greg, waiting for a response. If he tried to kill himself but failed, he would be punished. John wanted to be sure that there was nobody around to hurt him.

Sherlock's heart was thundering against his chest, making his side ache terribly. He held himself as still as he could, his mind laying out a thousand different ways this could go with each course of
action. John inexplicably wanted him helped, to the point that he was delaying pulling the trigger to ensure Sherlock was seen to. He licked his lip and hedged a bet, groaning low in pain and very gently rasping, "Help."

John’s face contorted at Sherlock’s word into a combination of fear and unexplainable sympathy. "H-help him," John half demanded, half pleaded. He even went as far as to lower the gun to the ground, though he didn’t push it over.

Greg looked to John, his expression calm and sad. "Please, John. There is a difference between being safe, and being dead. Has anyone hurt you today, in all of this?"

John immediately pointed to the man on the floor. "H-he hurts m-me." John stammered. "He always hurts m-me." The gun was lying close to John's reach, so he could snatch it if anyone tried to hurt him. The man on the floor was a threat. He’s beaten him. He had done unspeakable things and John was not about to let it happen again, but for some reason, he couldn’t stand the idea of that man in pain. "Take him away a-and help him."

Greg gave John a moment before speaking again, very calm, very slow. "John, think about this for a moment. Can you tell me the last time that man," he pointed very slowly to Sherlock, who had been spurred on by John's reaction to his plea and was now vocalizing his distress openly, groaning from time to time, "not his voice, not his name, but his hands. Can you tell me the last time he hurt you?"

John stared at the man's hands and tried to force his mind back. He wanted to answer obediently and correctly, as was part of his training. It had a habit of becoming rather muddled and confused, which made thinking like trying to knit strands of smoke. Most recent? Did the burning count? Would being whipped count as hands? What of being kicked? Starved? If he were going for hands, and most recent... "He held me d-down. I wanted to escape b-but h-he pinned me."

John coughed hard and swallowed. He was nauseous from stress and the color had drained from his face. "And h-he a-always cut m-me. I...I saw him, and...and h-he.... and bb-before that h-he b-beat m-me and I-I didn’t m-mean t-to do the w-wrong thing but I-I g-get c-confused and s-stupid, stupid John! I...the...the b-beatings and- and- he...t-touched-" John let out a pitiful, choked sob and reached for the gun again.

Greg paused, licking his lip, watching the color draining from Sherlock's already poor complexion. How Moriarty had pulled off making John believe Sherlock had been torturing him, he had no idea. He stared at John and exhaled slowly, deliberating.

Sherlock cut him off. The man curled more to his side, trying to guard it as he tried to push himself up off the floor. His hand, slick with blood, slipped on the tile and sent him crashing back to the tile. He lay on his stomach panting, honestly trying to get his voice back. That had licked fire up his side, but it wasn’t the worst of his pain. John’s words were unbearable, that he believed even worse. Greg hardly recognized Sherlock’s voice when he spoke. "You should shoot me, John. Just shoot me."

Sherlock grit his teeth and shifted so that he could look at him. "I can't stand you believing I hurt you, and you can't stand my being alive. Just point it at me, and pull the trigger." He was gentle, his voice breathy but steady and more kind than he’d ever been able to sound, trying to calm John. If John shot him, it would buy Greg time to get the weapon away from him before he could shoot himself.

John had aimed the gun to the left side of Sherlock's chest the second he started moving. His hands were shaking terribly and he cursed his own fear. Never was more conflict held in an expression as the one that drew John's eyebrows together in contemplation. "I-I." He was pressed against the wall
again, jaw clenched, hands holding the gun in an impossibly tight grip.

"This is s-some kind of….of game! I-I know it's a-a trick." He accused wildly, "So y-you can c-cut me again." If this was a trap, then the best way to go would be to point the gun back at his own head. But if it was loaded with blanks, he would be beaten for his disobedience. John pointed the gun at the bed and pulled the trigger. Bits of stuffing and threads were torn out of place by the bullet, and a small smile played on John's lips for the first time in weeks. "Is this a game? Are you g-going to find some way to hurt me if I shoot myself?" He was still incredibly unsure of himself. Fear of retribution was the only thing keeping him alive at this point.

Greg held silent, jumping at the shot that hit the bed. His heart raced and he left it to Sherlock, who knew more of John's triggers than he did.

The sound of pure, hopeless distress that tore out of Sherlock was utterly authentic. He dug his hand into his side and grit his teeth, fingers curled in a fist where they lay against the floor. "Think, John! You are smarter than this! See through your fog and think!" He groaned in pain again, his voice tight with stress and sadness. "John, you've the upper hand. I'm shot, bleeding at your feet, unarmed. You've a loaded weapon and a police officer here. If it was a game, I am clearly the loser. If you are going to put a bullet in the body, make it mine."

For a moment, John thought he was going to shoot. The sights were even with Sherlock's forehead now -just in case he was wearing a vest under the hoodie- and John's finger was on the trigger. He staggered to his knees with the help of the hospital bed and used it to steady his arms. "I should k-kill you f-for what y-y-you d-do to me." John spoke with genuine anger, fear and pain in his voice. "I should. I-I should. I should k-kill you!"

For one tense moment, there was silence.

He recalled what would happen if he tried to kill his torturer, or tried to escape. Blood, water, pain, bruises, terror, screaming, knives, burns, clamps, pliers….

John trembled and his eyes dropped down from their defiant stare. The gun clattered to the floor and John slumped down, back to the ground, back into a ball. "I c-can't." He whimpered to himself and put his hands over his head. "I-I don't w-want you d-dead. P-Please j-just go."

The hatred in John's voice was hard to hear. Greg swallowed hard and then suddenly lunged, grabbing the gun. In the next moment he tucked an arm under Sherlock and just dragged him, ignoring Sherlock's shout of pain, and pulled him into the hall leaving John to himself. He moved Sherlock around the fallen men, one still alive though barely, and into observation to keep an eye on John.

Hospital generators finally kicked on, throwing the room in dim lighting, and Greg began to pull at Sherlock's shirt to get a look at the wound as Sherlock struggled to keep from blacking out.

John shouted at Greg as he left, begging for the gun back, screaming obscenities and calling for help as pure desperation mixed with white-hot panic.

A nurse walked into the room some time later. Most of the paramedics from different hospitals and the remaining ones from Bart's were frantically trying to give those who had been shot medical attention, and therefore weren't going to the closed off back room where John had been set up. She gently tried to explain to him that he was safe now.

John screamed at her. He pressed himself against the back wall and kicked at her each time she approached. His mind was a chaotic mess of terror and stress, and while he fought valiantly, she was
able to wrestle him down and administer a mild sedative.

He still cried and struggled weakly, but was much more manageable and she got him into the restraints again.

As there were other, more injured people to deal with, she left shortly after, but not before sending a quick text to Moriarty, telling him that John was shaken but recovering.

Sherlock and Greg managed to get a good look at his side. It was a deep graze, bleeding heavy and wanting stitching, but far from lethal. Together they bandaged it and Greg armed Sherlock again, handing him a spare clip. He'd called for swift help, wanting the surviving shooter seen to straight away so that he could later be interrogated.

Sherlock left Greg, slipping into John's room quietly and sitting down in the floor by the door, Browning hidden but in easy reach, no intention to leave until John was secured one way or another.

John began to scream as soon as Sherlock entered the room. His panic, while intense, burned out fairly quickly and left him exhausted and weeping, rather than panicked and screaming.

It was quite some time later, just over an hour, that John gathered up enough nerves to speak. "I-I-wanted t-to ….to kill y-you, but I-I couldn't." He spoke in an almost disappointed manner, but the main tone of his voice was unwavering. The idea was still confusing him. "I...I h-helped...I helped y-you!" The statements were more for his own benefit than informing the other. "I-I shouldn...Should h-have...I..Let me go! L-Let me GO!" Immediately John began to flinch. Jesus, it was hard to talk to this man.

Sherlock had his head back against the wall, eyes closed, breathing through parted lips somewhat audibly. He hummed low at John's words, licking his lip, honestly shocked to hear him speaking at all. He held quiet for a long time, not sure if words would send John back into screaming panic.

At last he took a slow breath as he scratched at his beard, his shoulders shaking with the effect of coming down off the sharp adrenalin and heroin. "Something to think on," he whispered, knowing he could not possibly hope to explain how he'd never hurt John, how it tore at him that John was so terrified of him. "I doubt you'll ever want to see me again, was trying to respect your wishes. I came to protect you, and when I am sure someone else is doing so, I'll leave you alone again. Much as I don't want to."

John’s breathing picked up at the sound of that voice, and he shook his head. It took him another ten minutes to calm down, during which time he pleaded incoherently for his life to be taken.

When he came down from the panic and realized that he wasn’t being beaten, John turned his head away from Sherlock and pressed his face into the pillow beside him. He would very much have liked to cover his face, but his hands were restrained. John cried into the crisp, white hospital pillowcase until he gathered strength to speak. “Pain." John whimpered sadly, and tapped his temple. "P-P-Please, n-no more. No m-more. I-I...I'll b-be good...I'll b-be good...I p-promise." John gritted his teeth against the waves of mental agony. "D-Didn’t shoot y-you...I-I didn’t shoot m-myself. I-I did g-good, I-I p-promise." His hands were clenched into fists, nails digging into his palms to help him manage the fear is speaking. Utter betrayal washed over him and his lower lip trembled.

"I'm trying....I-I’ll b-be good! I’m being good! I...Didn’t shoot...didn’t shoot...Why? I-I didn’t...d-didn’t..." John let out a choked whimper and tugged the sheet up over his head. “Why d-didn’t I-I shoot?"

Sherlock opened his eyes, hardly believing what he was hearing. John wasn't screaming, he wasn't in
stark panic, he was actually engaging Sherlock in conversation with intent. He was confused, lapsed into begging, but there was a question behind it.

He took a deep, slow breath and began to speak in the rasping whisper that had become his voice, calm and slow. "Do you remember Baskerville, John?"

John took a deep breath and began to sob openly once more at the sound of that voice. The high amount of anti-anxieties he was on kept him from becoming too animated, but he was in great distress nonetheless. Sherlock’s voice was like whips and screams and Moriarty’s laughter, but he would push through this. Besides, he had been asked a direct question. It was the same as an order. He knew well enough to answer truthfully and immediately. "I think so. A little." He told himself to look around. Nobody was hurting him. The voice, of course, assaulted his nerves and sent an uncomfortable spike of panic through him, but he was being asked questions. If he broke down now, he would be punished.

"You d—drugged me into being afraid. I-I remember that. You fucking p—poisoned me." He tried to think clearly. "Sorry…M sorry…don’t hurt…p—please, I didn’t mean t—to, I—I’m s—sorry!" He tugged hard against the restraint and whimpered. The fear of being unable to form an articulate response outweighed the sound of his voice and the fear of speaking. “You h—hurt me then a—and hurt me now. Trusted…I—I w—was…y—you hurt…hurt me…I—I don’t. I—I don’t know! Please don’t!"

Sherlock hummed to himself again at that. "I did frighten you then, yes. Was perhaps, in hindsight, not the ideal course of action. I bring it up to remind you of how very sure you were that a massive creature was in the room, ready to attack at any second. Do you remember, John? Yet, it was not reality." He paused, letting that settle in.

"You left our home ten and a half months ago to work with Doctors without Borders in Darfur. I was not thrilled with the idea, obviously, but you were quite stubborn. I believed, for eight of those months, that you were in Africa. I received email communication, which you are welcome to see, and otherwise was heavily occupied with a larger than normal caseload. The reality, however, was that you never made your plane. Instead, you were abducted by James Moriarty and horrifically tortured, led to believe it was I who inflicted the pain."

His voice was cutting out on him, the pain at his side shouting for his attention, withdrawal fraying his nerves. He paused, expecting a violent rejection.

John reacted immediately and negatively to that voice, so calm and normal, going on for such a long time. He let out a clipped sound of fear and shook his head frantically. His eyes were wide and wild as he looked around the room for some sort of instrument to be used on him.

Again, it took him quite some time to recover enough to form a response. There had been no clear question, and therefore no order for him to respond. But he was sure he was supposed to. Or maybe it was another trick. John whimpered.

"N-No, no..liar! I know wh—what h—happened! I..I am..I know…I have…” John looked down at his hand, still cuffed. “I h—have scars! I…the hurting and… You w—were there. I know you were!” His voice was indignant and he cast Sherlock a hateful scowl.

At the mention of time, which had become rather abstract to him, he grew ever so slightly curious. "No m—more. No more. H—how long? H—How long h—have you b—been…” He couldn't finish the sentence and dug his fingernails into his palms to fight away the panic. John couldn't think about what had happened. He couldn't put what happened into words.

"H—How l—long? No more. P—Please n—no more."
Sherlock flexed his hand, loathing this entirely. He wanted to get up, to shout at John to think, to be reasonable. Wanted to provide him the plentiful data that supported his innocence. That, of course, would be entirely unhelpful and John was not intentionally avoiding reality. Trauma had a decided effect on how the brain functioned, and the combination of prolonged terror and excruciating pain were responsible for this.

That knowledge did not make it easier.

He took in another slow breath, exhaling through his nose to calm himself down, settle the anger, before speaking again. "James Moriarty has been attempting to ruin me for several years now."

The voice sent him into another five minutes of panic, but after he began to consider how long he had been in hell. The lines had started to blur between days and weeks. It was a strange phenomenon where the minutes dragged on and the days flew by. Perhaps he had been there his entire life.

"Y-Years?" He shook his head. No, years didn't sound right. How many more until he died? How much longer until Moriarty was bored? John realized with a sudden explosion of relief that he would die, someday, whether Moriarty liked it or not. John glanced up with trepidation in his eyes. Perhaps he should be fighting harder. The sudden urge to scream rose in him and he crushed it at the last possible second.

Sherlock scrubbed a hand over his hair. Nothing of what he was saying was sticking with John. He debated just going silent, but did not want to discourage John's new acceptance of speech. The days of tapping out in code had made communication tedious.

"Moriarty had you for eight months, John. No one is going to hurt you. That is why I'm sitting here, I'm keeping the threat at bay until someone you find less...grating...can come and sit with you. The plan is to get you healed, so that you can go and live your life. I do not know how long your leg will take to heal, you are free to ask your doctor once this chaos settles."

He shifted, wincing as he flexed his abdominal muscles to do so.

John was in full panic by the time Sherlock was finished speaking, and he nearly blacked out from the shallowness of his breath. "Too long." John finally said, and what an understatement it was. It had been Hell for months. Each minute of pain felt like a full day, and when he had no track of time, when Moriarty could go sleep while Moran or an apprentice beat him, sleep deprivation made it seem longer. "I'm n-not go-going back. He's g-going to...he'll...h-he'll t-take me back! Game! I-I know this g-game! I know it! I-I...Oh, G-God.. I've b-b-been sleeping... And...and...and talking..." John's voice rose to a high, panicked sound as the realization of how severely he would be punished for his disobedience hurt him almost physically. "B-but I haven't eaten! Or drank... P-Please n-no water. N-no! NO! I-I don't w-w-want it!" John's breath hitched and he began to hyperventilate. "He can't... He can't... He said..." John coughed hard and tears started burning his eyes. "Oh god... Please, no! God, NO! PLEASE! I-I'M S-SORRY!"

Sherlock watched as John's mind assaulted him, helpless to stop it. There was nothing he could say or do to help him. The hospital was down, and honestly, John was mostly correct. How many people had died so that Jim could remind him how tenuous John's situation actually was? Sherlock took a slow breath and spoke softly.

"What would help you feel protected, John? What can I do to help you feel better?"

John squeezed his eyes shut. "L-Leave! G-Go! S-Stop! Please! P-Please, I-I'm SORRY! I...I want...I'm sorry...I...never hurt me again!" John's voice shook and he was close to another breakdown, absolutely certain this would get him beaten.
"I-I want a gun. Or a knife. Or a rope. For real! N-No games...Please, no games!" His breathing was coming in rapid, short gasps and he longed to cover his face. "I'm sorry... I'm sorry... Please... Please, d-don't... d-don't h-hurt me."

Sherlock's heart squeezed painfully in his chest and he swallowed hard. He'd allowed himself to imagine hope. Foolish, he knew, but where John was concerned his higher thinking abandoned him, leaving him stupid and vulnerable.

He slowly got up, using the wall to help him, no where near his full height as he gained his feet. "Okay, John, I'm leaving," he said gently, moving himself the short distance to the door. John had no means inside the room to hurt himself, restrained and unable to walk anyhow. Sherlock would defend him from the other side. He pulled the door open and hesitated, just before leaving. He did not turn around as he spoke once more to him. "I'm sorry," and oh, how many times was he going to say those words to him? They were useless. John could do nothing at all with I'm sorry, and yet Sherlock could not help himself.

John watched the horrible man rise to his feet and came undone. He screamed in blind, raw panic until his voice went hoarse.

It wasn't for four hours that all the wounded had been taken to a different hospital and an emergency staff was fully operational. The patients who couldn't be moved were tended to where they were by a different set of nurses and doctors.

Mycroft had men in the area immediately after he heard. A few of his envoys came to the room at which Sherlock had been holding guard.

"Sir, we're from Scotland Yard," they held up badges. "Mycroft sent us."

Sherlock personally handled every single badge, authenticating each before nodding to them. That was it, then. He'd done the pathetically little that he could. John had been in hospital five weeks without eating or drinking, his weight was down catastrophically. They were force feeding John through a nasogastric tube, though it seemed to be doing very little to keep weight on him.

He pressed a hand to John's door, eyes closed, pausing there for a moment in as much of a goodbye as he could give without hurting John. After a minute of silence, he began to move away. He moved carefully, his left hand wrapped tight around his right side, guarding the wound as he got into an elevator and down to the lower levels. Perhaps if he was lucky it would infect and take him down.

He shrugged to himself and made his way out of the lower level and out to the street, hailing a cab to take him home. He'd bled through the heavy dressings, the side of his shirt stained. A extra few bills stopped the driver from worrying about it.

When he pushed past the glossy black door, Sherlock did not bother with the stairs. He sat down in the chair just beside them, just at the entrance of their..his home, and closed his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

We get a bit more Sherlock-Centric in the next chapter.

John's still breathing, it's fascinating to hear your feedback. What are your thoughts?
A week passed in much the same cycle for John, panic leading to worry while drugged, bouts of unintentional sleep, bandage changes, and care for his terrible wounds. The last of his more serious bandages had been removed. The restraints however, were always on given his suicidal tendencies, which only added to his feeling of vulnerability. He’d healed without infection due to the heavy medication, though they left terrible scars forming in their wake, leaving him with a macabre latus work across his entire body.

John had started to panic when they touched him, and it went swiftly downhill from there. He was nearly impossible to dress when in such a state, as the restraints made putting on a shirt difficult.

No matter how calm he became, the ragged JM carved into the flesh on his chest reminded John of to whom he belonged, and to whom he would return.

Presently it came time to transfer John to a psychiatric care hospital, as he no longer had any major medical dangers. He had to be wheeled out, screaming and yanking at the restraints like a man going to his hanging. In his mind, he was being taken back. It didn’t matter what the doctors said. John believed himself to be going back, and every fiber in his being rebelled. He screamed, shook his head, and ceased speaking. They managed to get him into the ambulance, though not before the entire hospital sounded like a torture hall due to his desperate pleas.

Sherlock received information that John had been transported to a psychiatric hospital and sat the rest of the day fixed in place. It was the death knell. John was lost, and whatever Sherlock had "saved" would just sit in that god forsaken place and rot. He’d assigned John a fate worse than death. It was two months since he’d stopped Moriarty from cutting open his throat.

Twice Mrs. Hudson came up and tried to feed him. Twice he dismissed her entirely.

His conversation with John had given him hope. It had been a sign of improvement, had it not? But that man that was in that bed, that wasn't John. He didn't have John's memories. He despised Sherlock, feared and hated him. Sherlock stared at John's chair. He was to have been home by now, back from Africa, running cases and being the singular voice of praise and kindness ever directed toward Sherlock.

Where others spat freak, John quietly whispered brilliant.

Where others turned in disgust, John came running. When Sherlock's mind spun into chaos, John sat calm and steady.

And now, John was gone. There was no grave. There was no body. Just the burned remains of a mind trapped in a terrified skull, and Sherlock had selfishly kept him breathing. How he loathed himself for it.
When John woke, he was in a soft white t-shirt and matching sweatpants with the drawstring cut short. He found himself in full restraints again, spread out for Moriarty to cut. He started to cry bitterly, and soon one of the caretakers appeared to give him his medicine.

John's first thought was that it would be poison, something to make his stomach burn with pain, and he spat out the pills they gave him. This prompted the use of a nasogastric tube through which they force fed him the medication crushed up with a high calorie meal.

The psychiatrist was getting nowhere with him, and was ready to chalk him up as a lost cause. He had gotten John to say a few words, but nothing seemed to stick past the reset button of a heavy panic attack, and he still refused to eat, drink, or sleep on his own.

The power to 221B blipped off the next week. Sherlock hadn't opened the mail in so long that the post only delivered when Mrs. Hudson happened to be around, and he'd just failed to pay the bills. He began the slow burn of fever, infection set in. Occasionally he'd change out the bindings, but he didn't really care. His dealer made a face at the next drop. Sherlock had taken to moving without a shirt, finding it less painful. He burned wood in the fireplace and decided that otherwise, he had no need of electricity.

Greg showed up at the psychiatric facility on John's seventh day of admission, asking after him. He knew he'd been one of John's emergency contacts, and perhaps they would let him see him, or at the least, give him an update.

A caretaker directed Lestrade to John's room and warned him to be careful with his words. There was a list of triggers outside each patient's door along with a brief write up of their condition for convenience, and she reminded him to read it prior to speaking.

John absently yanked at a restraint, which he had taken to doing when he was nervous. The skin on his wrists was red and constantly shifting between raw and scabbed over. When he saw Lestrade he flinched, as he did with everyone, but didn't scream.

Greg stared at Sherlock's name on the trigger list for a long time. He knew the fact of it, but the sheer cruelty of it printed out on such neat black and white was difficult to see. He walked in slowly, hands where John could see them, being as non-threatening as possible. He saw John flinch, took in the state of him, eyes fixed to the tube in his nose. John was a shell of himself. It was horrific.

"Hello, John," he said softly, sitting down in a chair beside John's bed. He looked around the room and then back down to the man himself. What was there to say?

John hadn't spoken since his last panic attack, which had been particularly nasty. The workers weren't even quite sure what had triggered it, as they were just attempting to engage in seemingly normal conversation when he started to scream.

John remembered Lestrade, he remembered how the man had come in and taken his gun, but also had taken Sherlock away. The name still made John cringe and he almost screamed just thinking it. The broken shell of a man nodded up at Lestrade and felt the tube down his nose move. Did that count as eating? He hadn't been beaten for it yet, so he had to guess it didn't.
Greg exhaled slowly in relief, just sitting calmly with him. After a few minutes, he spoke softly to him again, just random things in an effort to give John a bit of company, a bit of information. "Christmas is coming up, about a month out from now. December first, today. Yard's all decorated from the little old ladies that like to come in every year, hang baubles and whatnot. Caseloads been heavy. Not getting any help there. It snowed, there's a nice blanket of it outside, took me far too long to get here. That's alright though, worth the trip." He carried on, speaking softly about current events that were mostly frivolous, mentioning what movies were about to begin in the theaters, gossip from the Yard, that sort of thing. His voice was steady and calm and he didn't bother much with looking at John, not wanting the man to feel observed. Poor beggar probably felt that all the time, anyhow.

After a few minutes, the conversation slowly came to an end on its own. Greg licked his lip and looked back down to John.

John was intensely interested in and also disgusted by the events going on in the outside world. It surprised him to remember that there was one, that there was something in the world other than fear, pain, nurses and restraints.

The idea of Christmas was foreign to him. It sounded strange and unnatural, as if Christmas was supposed to stop because he wasn't the same anymore. John ventured to speak, the first time all week. He hadn't gotten in trouble last time, though he suspected speaking to Sherlock was what got him put in this new observation room where Moriarty was surely lurking behind each corner.

"Can-" his voice was rough and scratchy, "can y-you let me out?" He spoke weakly and gave the restraints a tug. "H-He's g-got me...I'm on...on medicine... I can't..He d-doesn't w-want m-me to struggle much. I promise I won't try to escape."

Hell.

Greg gave John an honest expression. "One second, mate, let me ask the doc if that's alright. I don't like seeing you in those, let's see what he says, yeah? Just getting up to ask, I'll come back."

He moved slowly out into the hall and flagged down a nurse. "He's asking if I can let him loose of the restraints. Surely while I'm in there with him it won't hurt, yeah? Give him a minute to stretch at least?"

John looked up hopefully. He'd not been let out of his restraints since the first day, when he'd made a desperate bid to escape. It was excruciatingly painful, but he managed to stagger halfway down the hallway before they realized he had gotten out. Being dragged back into his room and fitted with restraints had been nothing short of traumatic.

"John Watson? No, he's been a danger to himself recently. We let him stretch but only when medicated and guarded. He's often combative, though more so suicidal. The nurse shook her head sadly. "I'm sorry, sir, it's not a good idea. If you like, next time we plan on giving him time without them, we can call you."
Greg shook his head and tried again. "Look, I know he's a danger to himself, I talked a pistol away from his head last week. But he's talking, yeah? He's not screaming, he's not hiding or begging. Come now, surely there is some way for me to accomodate the first request he's made in a while? Just for a little bit? I won't leave him for a moment while his hands are free."

He did not at all want to walk back in there and tell John no. Not after John had been calm with him, had spoken to him.

"We'll give him something to keep him calm," she relented. "But there will have to be someone in the room with you, and only the ones on his wrists." She flagged down a caretaker who followed Lestrade back into the room.

John didn't want the man anywhere near him, but when instead of an injection he was released, he stared up in surprise. "Thank you," he said in a voice just a bit too empty to be John's. The binds on John's ankles were tempting him, but he saw the futility of it with two people in the room. They'd have him pinned again before he even reached them. "I d-don't like being strapped d-d-down."

Greg eyed the orderly until the man backed down and retreated to the far end of the room, sitting down in a corner and putting his focus to a mobile phone. He then settled down at a seat by John's head, understanding painted across his features.

"I don't blame you one bit there, mate. Don't imagine I'd like it myself." He looked down at John's wrists, mentally cringing. John was still suffering terribly, still trapped in a world of fear. "You know, John," he said softly, keeping his voice as though speaking to a frightened child, "they only keep those on you because you try to hurt yourself. I know you're frightened, God knows I don't blame you, but if you can try and stay calm, they won't keep tying you down."

At the words 'stay calm' John threw his head back and laughed. It was a manic, humorless cackle that made him sound more than a bit unstable. John reached out and grabbed Lestrade's wrist with a motion that hurt his arm. "That's what want! H-He...It's a game. All a game. Wants m-me calm so I'll be good. Wants me healed. New places to cut. It's a game. I know this game. H-He wants it to be a surprise when h-he comes back and starts again." John held out his arm to show Lestrade the puckered white scars that marred his skin. "Look. I'm healed. I'm a blank slate again. He's just waiting for me to heal up here. He wants me to forget the rules. Makes rules then tries t-to make me f-forget. I know the rules. I know them." He tapped his temple. "Once things stop hurting in here, he'll be back." John leaned back onto his bed and released Lestrade's wrist.

Greg had nearly come out of his skin when John grabbed him. He went perfectly still, allowing the handling. He listened to John intently and held still after he was released. He couldn't blame the poor man for feeling that way.

"That's understandable, John. I won't pretend to understand what you are going through, but what you say is understandable. Though...I didn't allow him at you last time, did I?" He slowly pulled up his sleeve, tapping where the bullet had ripped through his arm. "I don't want to see you hurting. You are important. How can I help?"
John saw the scar and his face twisted in despair. "He hurt you too?" His voice, broken and small like a child's, was hardly above a whisper. "I'm sorry. I thought you were...I don't know what I thought..." John slowly pulled up his shirt to show Lestrade the scars. "This one," he tapped the initials, "means he's coming back. It's just a matter of time." He laughed again, in desperation and confusion. It was a ringing sound, devoid of all humor, like a smile that doesn't touch the eyes. "He's going to be soooo angry with me," John giggled, staring up at the ceiling, "He'll probably break my arm and make it heal crooked then straighten it. He did that once. It took months to heal. I was there for months. I think eight. Someone said eight."

He twitched nervously and looked at the worker in the back corner. In a sudden change from manic to utter terror, he grabbed Lestrade's shirt and pulled him down close. "They report to Moriarty," he whispered into his ear. "They don't think I know...I'm p-playing along. Been playing along. Best w-way to do it. B-But don't get fooled. It's a game."

Greg nodded to John, indicating that he would stay quiet. John was so scattered. It had only been a week, but he had no memory of Sherlock talking to him. Greg slowly drew out his badge and handed it to John. "Do you remember that I'm a police officer?" he kept his voice very low, as though hiding from the orderly, "I protect people, yeah? People like you. I don't want anyone to hurt you anymore, John."

John snatched the badge, partially because he was thrilled he had use of his hands and partially because he wanted to see it for sure. "I remember that. I remember...officer. I know that. You protect people." John's eyes widened suddenly and he spoke in hushed, urgent tones, throwing the occasional worried look to the orderly. "Are you going to help-" His eyes widened and he drew away. He knew this game. He'd played this game before. He'd been 'rescued' by cops before. He knew just what cops would do once they were finished 'rescuing' him. A small cry of pain escaped him and he leaned away, a scream forcing it's way from his teeth, before an idea came to him. He would play along. Clearly, in this game, he was meant to be fooled. If he pretended to believe, he might not be caught off guard when Greg started to whip him. There would be no heartbeat in it. "You could kill Moriarty, or take me out of here, or...or kill me. Kill me. I'll believe you if you kill me. No more p-pain. I want no more pain."

Greg looked at his old friend with sadness in his eyes. "I'm doing everything I can to help you, John. No one is going to cut you again. No one. No more broken bones, none of that. But I can not kill you." He made no move to take the badge back. John could damn well keep it if he wanted. "I can't give you a gun," he said sadly, keeping his voice very gentle, "you gave me a scare the last time. But I will protect you, keep you from all the rest, yeah?" He hoped to hell he was saying the right thing. It was incredible to see John Watson reduced to this.

"Last time?" John asked and tilted his head to the side. There was a fantastic wall being built in the mind of John Watson. His subconscious decided that it couldn't handle its memories without snapping, and started shoving things it found painful behind barriers and into pockets in his mind. "Last time... I tried to shoot myself." He nodded, as though approving of his decision. "I almost shot...I almost... He said to shoot him..." John reviewed flashes of images of Sherlock, of when he held him down, of when he cut him, and of all the countless times he had been blindfolded and beaten with Sherlock laughing and talking while he hit. John went rigid and his eyes widened,
staring unseeing at the wall behind Greg as his pulse steadily quickened.

Greg very gently called out to him. "John...hey, stay here with me, yeah? December first. Nearly Christmas. Snowing outside." He itched to reach out and put a hand on his shoulder, though he dared not touch him. "Protected, okay? Right here with me. Come on back."

John whimpered and started to shake. The orderly stood, ready to strap him back down if the need arises. "He hurts me." John said through gritted teeth and told himself not to scream. If he screamed, the orderly would restrain him and then he'd never escape. John let out a small sob and held his pillow to his face. *Don't scream. Don't move. Just stay still, and they won't strap you down.*

Greg's hand shot out towards the orderly, trying to still him. "Give him a minute," he whispered to the man, waving him off. He turned his attention back to John, trying to tread lightly with him.

"Who hurts you, John?" he asked, all policeman at the moment for the man's benefit, trying to remind him he was safe without dare uttering the phrase. "I'll make whoever it is go away. Who hurts you?"

It took a moment for him to steady his breathing, though he kept his face buried in the pillow and the tremor never fully left him. "You know who hurts me." John said as though it were obvious. "Can't kill him...C-Can't...I should h-have...I didn't...I should h-have killed..." He still couldn't bring himself to say the name. That was a trigger word he might not ever get over. "Why didn't I kill him?

Greg fantastically wanted to back out of this conversation, bring it back shallow. He did not want John to fear him, or to think him lying.

He was there now, though. He was there and he had asked him a direct question. Not answering could be as detrimental as answering. Maybe one day he'd believe the truth. Greg's voice was sad, resigned as he spoke again. "Because, John, I know for a fact that he didn't do any of those things. He was set-up, and you were likely drugged and made to believe it was him."

John glared at Greg with distrust burning in his gaze. "Liar! You're a bloody liar. I know what happened. I know what he did! I w-was bad and they h-h-hurt m-me!" John's voice cracked and he tried to understand why this topic should confuse him. John didn't want to believe that he had been drugged or deceived. If he couldn't trust his own mind, then there was no certainty in any aspect of his life. "Was it a game? Another game? I c-could have shot him! I could h-have him dead!"

Greg put his hands up and slowly leaned back. Moriarty had done a bang up job of destroying John Watson's mind. "Alright, John. I'm going to go. I'm upsetting you, and that's the last thing I want to do. I'm sorry for doing so, I only wanted to help." He looked over to the orderly, despising what he knew would come next. John had been forcibly held down and restrained far too many times
already. It made Greg sick to think on it. "Can I come visit you again, or would you rather I not?"

"Answer me!" John shouted suddenly and gripped Greg's arm. "Why didn't I just shoot him?" He made a gun with his hand and put it to the side of his head. "I could have easily! Why? That w-w-wasn't part of the r-rules! W-Wasn't a rule! C-Can't h-hurt M-M-Moriarty! N-No rule..No r-rule about... I could have been rid of him!" John pretended to pull the trigger and, in another violent mood swing, fell back onto his bed where he stared up at the ceiling with what looked like mild interest. "You should come back sometime."

It took Greg a moment to re-adjust to John's sudden, violent mood swing, and he lowered his voice. It had been a long, long while since his heart had been so deeply saddened, and his heart weighed heavy in his chest. "I wish I had the answers you wanted, John." He moved away slowly, "I'll... I'll see you later. Keep the badge."

He moved out of the room as fast as he could, not wanting to watch them tie John back up.

"No, don't leave, please," John's voice raised in desperation as Greg left. "Please! They're going to-" he was cut off by the orderly who gently tried to get him to lie back down. "NO! I won't! I want to leave!" The orderly, who was a kind man just trying to do his job, assured him that he could leave once he was feeling better. John took this to mean that once he was recovered he would be going back to Moriarty and Sherlock, which sent him full force into another episode of hysterical screaming.

Greg wasn't a smoker, but on his way back home, the man was nothing short of a chimney. He'd left a note with the staff and John's doctors, asking that he be called if they needed anything, or if he could help in any way. He honestly didn't think he could.

Three days later, Greg broke down and called the hospital to get an update with John. He had a new badge on his hip, and he'd started putting a file together for John that proved, with many sources confirming the other, CCTV footage stills and the like, that Sherlock had never been unaccounted for in all those months John was gone. He printed off the emails from John's address, all date and time stamped. The official case reports with Sherlock's signature on them, everything he could find.

When he didn't get much of an answer by phone, he simply got in the car and drove there close to supper time, asking for John's primary doctor when he arrived.

John had hit an orderly he'd mistaken for Sherlock while in a fit, and now they had him in restraints at all times unless he was so heavily medicated he couldn't move. With his arms free for just a moment, as they had been released to allow him to stretch, John had tried to unbuckle his ankle restraints. He wasn't going to escape, but just wanted to test his leg. The orderly had gently pushed him back, and John had punched him straight in the nose. He was weak, so it did little damage, but it was still considered violence. To John, it had not been an orderly, of course, and the restraints only further proved to him that his torturer was coming back.

The primary doctor was glad to see that someone was caring for John other than the staff, and brought out his file. "John has been a particularly rough case, as he is utterly convinced we all work for his tormentor, and that the tormentor will come back for him soon."
Greg nodded at that, "Yeah, can't blame him. His tormentor shot up an entire hospital just to have a
laugh. John's not entirely crazed to still believe there's a real threat, as there is a real threat. That first
psychiatrist of his was on the payroll, hurting him terribly just as he thought he was safe. Give the
guy a break." He'd not meant to get touchy. Greg took a deep breath and shook his head. "I'm sorry.
John is- that's not John in there. John is...stoic, he's rational and down to earth, brave, he endures and
he..." he shook his head and shoved a hand in his pocket. "But when he first came to Bart's...when
Sherlock first found him...saved him...John wouldn't speak. He's speaking now. He's going to see
you doping him to the gills and tying him down as a punishment for speaking and trying to defend
himself. Tough corner, that."

He tapped the file in his own hands. "Listen, I've put this together for John. It's extensive evidence
that Sherlock wasn't with him while he was being tortured. I'm not an expert, nor do I pretend to be,
but I think this could really, really help."

The doctor took the files and gave Lestrade a skeptical look. "His main point of stress isn't even
being tortured. I'm sure you know of his irrational fear of Sherlock Holmes. This file is all about him.
It could damage him mentally. It's commendable that you think he can still see logic, and I think it's
kind that you're trying to help, but that could make us lose all the progress we've gained."

At that the doctor stopped. They hadn't really made all that much progress. "Though, at this point we
have reached a standstill. I'm willing to let you have a chance. A very small chance. Show him one
example from that file and see what his reaction is."

John didn't know what he had done wrong, but two orderlies came in and put something in his IV
that made the room a bit too fuzzy.

Greg ultimately selected an email 'John' had sent in the middle of his captivity, complete with a
thumbnail of himself with a pack of locals smiling at the camera, a lengthy missive of what he'd been
doing attached. The top had the official red seal of EVIDENCE.

He walked carefully into John's room, pausing and knocking on the door before entering. "Hi John,
it's Greg Lestrade. Is it alright if I visit with you?"

After the initial fear of his door being opened subsided and his breathing returned to normal, John
looked up with a small trace of a smile on his face."Oh, hey, Greg." His voice was a bit slurred from
the medicine they had recently administered. It had taken him about ten minutes to calm and adjust,
which somewhat diminished the familiarity of his response. "Are you going to let me go, or hurt me?
What game is this? I don’t know what game this is. I've been strapped down since you left." He
pouted and yanked at the restraints, pulling a bit more skin off his wrists. It was painful, but not a
bright pain. It was a dull pain that he was used to. In fact, John couldn’t imagine life without pain.
He could not fathom what it would feel like to lie in a nice bed, free of pain, and to be warm without
having to pay for it. Throw an absence of agonizing hunger in the mix, and John would count
himself in heaven. If he could escape from the torment that was still happening in blinding detail
inside his mind, that was.

Greg winced at that. He walked over and sat down by John's side. "I promise I am not going to hurt
you. This is not a game. You're free. I'm not allowed to untie you, though. I wish very much that I
could."

He swept his eyes over the man and gave him a soft smile. "John, I've been doing a bit of work for
you. I don't want you to believe I'm a liar. When you're ready, I've a paper to show you. But first,
let's talk outside, yeah?"

Great pulled out his mobile and held it where John could see it. He showed him pictures of London from yesterday, all covered in snow. He talked about the last movie Greg had seen, about the Queen's latest fusing, and a touch of world news.

A good half hour passed before he tapped the paper on his lap. "Can I show you this, John?"

The red EVIDENCE seal caught John's attention and he leaned over as best he could. "What's that? What's inside?"

Greg opened the folder, drawing out the email he had selected. He held onto it for a moment, looking over at John. "This is part of the evidence file from your case. One of the shooters from Bart's survived and is starting to wake up. He is under arrest and charged in your case, and will be heavily questioned. The other three were killed."

He stared at John for another moment, smiling softly at him. "This was sent from your email account approximately four months into your captivity."

He slowly moved, holding the paper up where John could read it, ready to snatch it away at any moment should that be required.

John stared at the note and studied the picture enclosed. "That...that didn't happen." He said indignantly. "I never did that!" The nature of this game was more complex than he had realized. John started to read the letter, but looked violently away when he saw; Dear Sherlock, written at the top.

John let out a startled cry and squeezed his eyes shut. "Stop it! I didn't send that! I didn't. That wasn't me! I don't want it!" John tried to wiggle his hand out of the buckled restraints with no success.

Greg pulled the email away and slid it back into the file. "No, it wasn't you," he agreed seriously, nodding to John, "I know it wasn't you." He waited, hoping John would calm down and settle. He leaned away, wanting to give him space. John was talking, but Greg was starting to wonder if this was all that was left.

"John, in this file here with me, I have proof for you that he was here in London, always accounted for. Those emails were being sent to him to keep him from looking for you."

"But..." John stuttered like a lost child, "I have proof he was with me!" He strained his forearm against the restraints and nodded to a five inch scar. "And I could hear him. He kept me blindfolded when...when..." Greg tried to interject gently in order to stop John from spiraling. "He was around me the entire time. He never would hurt you. I have all the proper evidence right here."

"That's a lie! You're...He was there!" John's breathing started to spike again and be inhaled rapidly through his nose. "He couldn't have been with you solving cases because he was with me holding my head underwater!"

The orderly was standing now, and took careful notes of the exchange. John had previously refused to speak of the events to the therapist other than block details such as 'beating', 'cutting' or 'hurting'.

John coughed and bit down on his to his tongue keep from screaming. "He couldn't have been at both. Y-You're lying. I-I know it!"

Greg very gently pressed forward. "That's right, John, he couldn't have been both. You were
blindfolded, John. The entire goal was to make you afraid of him, to use you to get to him. You were horribly treated, but it wasn't by him, it was by someone who very much wanted you to believe that, though."

He hated pushing John to panic, wanted nothing more than to help John feel calm and safe. "I know this is hard, John, I'm so sorry."

John started to shake his head again. "It was him. I remember. I know it was! I-I was hurt and it w-was bad and I-I hurt and..." At this point, the only thing that John was sure of in his dilapidated mind was that Sherlock had hurt him. If he didn't have that, then he had nothing. He was sure of nothing.

"I saw him cut me," John almost shouted, eyes looking betrayed in a face otherwise twisted with fear and rage. "I felt it. How can you...You're playing a game! Y-You can't tell me that wasn't real!"

Greg pressed forward. "John, it was James Moriarty, and I'm sure at times some of his lackeys, that were doing this to you. It is impossible that it was him, I have pictures, many of us were physically with him working on police cases. He believed you were in Darfur. Do you remember that you were scheduled to go to Darfur? You were very much looking forward to it. You just didn't make it to the flight. James Moriarty did this to you."

"Doctors Without Borders," John muttered and looked up at Lestrade with surprise. "I was supposed to go to Dafur. But...I..." This was starting to become physically painful. The restraints that Moriarty had placed in his mind constricted his thinking to a set path.

"That isn't...No, that's not...we...It w-was Sh-" John let out a sharp cry of fear and struggled against his restraints again. "Him! It was him!" John screamed loudly to try and handle the pain that seemed to radiate outward from his mind. If he believed anything other than the rehearsed line he had just given, he would be tortured without restraint or mercy.

Greg pushed to his feet, backing away. He looked to the orderly and then back to John, aching for the man. Maybe he'd bring in Molly sometime with him. She'd not been round to see John or Sherlock, too upset as it was. Perhaps now that John wasn't so injured, she could help.

"I'm so sorry, John, I'm so sorry." He started to move for the door. "I'll go, I'll leave you alone. I'm so sorry," and he was, he truly was deeply sorry, right down to his core.

"No!" John exclaimed, but he couldn't reach out. "Please, don't leave! I-I'll be good! He's coming back, Greg, please!"

John started yanking at the restraints and flailing. "Don't leave me! Please! I'll look at the pictures. I'm sorry. I'll keep looking at them if that's what you want." Tears rolled down his face and he stared at Greg imploringly. Maybe Greg was like one of the guards that Moriarty left with him to make sure he didn’t hurt himself. They were never allowed to do any of the beating themselves, nor were they to interfere. They simply alerted Moriarty if he did something against the rules. Eventually, John came to know that their presence meant his beating was over.

Greg moved swiftly to sit down, noticing his badge on the side table next to John and grabbing it, gently pressing it into John's closest hand without touching his skin. "I'll stay, it's alright John, I'm staying." He kept his voice calm and steady, sitting a bit closer. "No one is going to cut you, John. Police officer, yeah? No one is going to come and get you."
He stayed well within John's line of sight, setting the file down on the floor so John couldn't see it. "Breathe, John, can you breathe for me? Nice and slow, just give yourself a minute."

John took a faltering, hitching breath in and held it for a moment before exhaling just as shakily. "I want to go home," he whined pitifully. "I'll look at the p-pictures. B-Believe them. H-H-He'll know if I don't b-believe. I'll look at the pictures if thats what you want. Would that help? Can I go home if I look at the pictures and believe what they say?" Believing Moriarty had been the key to getting out of pain in the past, but it didn't work if he pretended. Perhaps the nature of this game was just to get him to believe the pictures. If that were the case, John would readily do so. "If I look at your pictures and believe you, do I get to die?"

Greg wished the psychiatrist had come into the room with him to help navigate these things. He took a slow breath and eased forward, putting his hand on the bed by John's, right where John could reach out and touch him if he wanted to.

"John, you don't have to look at the pictures. That's not why I'm here. I'm just trying to help you. I'm sorry that was so upsetting to hear. You let me know if you are ready to hear more, and I'll tell you, but you've done really well for today, you have."

"For today? That means you're leaving." John started to panic again, but didn't scream. Screaming made Greg leave. "P-Please don't leave yet. I'll l-look at the pictures. I'll listen to your stories and believe them. Please d-don't leave me with them." John tried to wiggle one hand out of the restraints to grab hold of Greg's jacket, but only succeeded in ripping open a scab.

"I'll believe whatever you say," John claimed, and meant it.

Greg went ahead and very loosely wrapped his fingers around John's as the man tried to reach for him. "Not leaving, John, I'm not leaving. I only meant that we don't have to talk about this anymore if you don't want to. I can just sit here with you, or I can read you the paper. We can talk, or we can be quiet. Whatever you want, John. I'm not going to leave."

John was obviously trying very hard not to lose his calm. Greg kept his fingers very, very gentle on John's, his only hope in it to simply let John know he wasn't alone.

John held his breath for a moment, afraid an exhale would come as a scream and make Greg angry. "I-I want to go home." He seemed to think better of this statement a moment later when he remembered who was at his home. "No, no, not home... I want to go somewhere not here... and not the warehouse..." He knitted his brow together and tried to think of someplace he could go to be safe.

His eyes lit up after a moment and he leaned towards Greg. "I know where I want to go, if you promise not to tell him."

John had, much to his deep surprise, not pulled his fingers away from Greg's. He kept hold of John's hand and nodded. "Of course, John, of course." It was hard watching John sit squarely in the realm of mania, nearly in hysterics.

John whispered low as to not alert the orderly of his plan. He leaned as close to Greg as his restraints would allow, and in a voice so serious it might have held the secret of the birth of the universe, John whispered; "The Thames." He declared it quietly then flopped back down onto his pillow. His eyes
darted around for a moment as he was still very worried that an attempt to escape would be overheard and punished. "That's where I would be safe. It's cold this time of year, isn't it? Very cold. Hypothermia."

Greg's eyes closed and he swallowed, taking in a slow breath before opening his eyes again. He stared at John, really looking at him, holding eye contact for as long as John would allow. He was searching for the man he'd known, the man that had been taken from them. Any sign at all.

"John, do you feel safe with me?"

John looked a bit perturbed. "No. Not safe. Never safe. You're his game. New game. New thing to figure out. But you've got a gun. You can use it. Maybe on me. That would be nice of you." The logic seemed sound to him, in his disorganized mind, where means to not be in pain were the only thoughts worth holding.

Greg squeezed John's hand lightly, then stopped when he flinched. "Can you remember anything before you signed up for Doctors without Borders? Remember you and I? We were friends. Greg Lestrade and John Hamish Watson. Detective Inspector and former Military Combat Physician of the Northumberland Fusiliers. If it were me lying there, and you sitting where I am, I firmly believe you'd be doing to same thing. Is that true?"

For god's sake this was difficult, navigating the shattered slivers of John's mind.

I remember the Fusiliers." John stated absently. "I was a Captain, wasn't I? And you're a Detective Inspector." That seemed to fit in with his internal narrative of what had happened for the past year. "I don't want to remember anything else." John stated firmly. "I'm not supposed to think about it. I'm not supposed to remember. It's not right. My memories are wrong." He was started to grow irritated with himself for his own confusion, and gave the restraints a frustrated jerk that rocked the bed a bit. "He'll know. He'll know if I've been thinking. Stupid John. Stupid."

Greg let go of John's hand, wanting to give him space as he started tugging at the restraints. He turned to the orderly and suddenly got up, walking over to the man and whispering to him, asking him to leave. John was restrained, there was no harm in it, surely. They were likely recording he and John's conversation. He moved back and sat back down next to John, leaning in close.

"You were a Captain. A very good one. Injured in Afghanistan. And you are quite right, no one will know if you've been thinking. John..." He hesitated a moment before starting in again, "You've been away from him for nine weeks now. It's December fifth. Mrs. Hudson would like to send a few things to brighten your room. Is that alright?"

John looked up and nodded. "I remember Afghanistan," he whispered and looked around again. "I remember Mrs. Hudson too. I remember that she doesn't hurt me." He spoke as though he were discussing plans for high treason in the midst of the Queen, all hushed tones and furtive glances.

"And if you say I don't need to be afraid of thinking, I'll keep thinking. But..." John leaned away and made a face. "Some things hurt to think about. It hurts...He'll know and...I shouldn't even be talking and.." John let out a pained whine and dug his fingernails into the palms of his hands.
Greg nodded his understanding, touching John's hand lightly again. "I'm sure it hurt when you started using that shoulder again after you were shot. But it became strong again, yeah? Worked properly for you when you put it to use." He shrugged and kept his expression gentle, glad that the orderly had agreed to leave them alone. He looked up as the door closed, noting his departure, before looking at John again.

"My shoulder... yeah, it got better, I suppose. Just like all these did." John looked at his arms then back to Greg, who gave a small smile then spoke again. "I've a little ice, right there on the counter. Just little chips. You and I are alone. You don't need to fear having a bit of ice, and I bet it will make your mouth feel so much better."

"No!" John’s response was immediately and without hesitation. "No ice. I can't have ice. That counts as eating. Or maybe drinking. Or both... no, I can't." John shut his eyes and shook his head, mouth closed tightly. Tears filled his eyes again and he let out a small sob while trying to pull his arms across his chest.

Greg wasn't having it. He stood up calmly and walked over to the little cup filled with ice chips next to the water. This couldn't go on. His mouth had only been cared for when he'd been sedated, moistened and cleaned, but it had to feel horrible. "Not to be rough, John, but that's what you thought about talking not long ago. Come on now, a bit of ice. I promise you, it will be alright. I won't leave, you are going to be alright."

He sat back down with the cup in his hand. "Try this for me, John. Please."

"NO!" John shouted with genuine hatred. "I know what you're doing! This won't trick me! I know this game! G-GET AWAY!." He kicked at the braces and arched his back off the bed. "HELP! HELP ME!" John looked and saw Greg near the door and his stomach knotted. "No, NO! I'm sorry! I-I didn't mean to scream! P-Please d-don't go."

Greg had been seconds from leaving, heart sinking as John started screaming for help. He was close to the door, his heart thundering in his chest. He looked between John and the door, incredibly torn.

"John," he said softly, his voice rougher than it had been, "I'll stay if you'll try a bit of ice. I'm not lying to you. Please."

John's lower lip quivered and he gave Greg a desperate look. "No!" John screamed it this time, all raw panic and fear. He’d been threatened with far worse than someone leaving when being told to drink. He knew what horrors lay in wait for him if he conceded. The thought of it drove him very swiftly into a full blown attack, and John lost himself to the whirling fear, the phantom pains mixed with real ones that hadn’t quite healed, and the sound of Sherlock speaking calmly over his own screams.

It was another two days before Greg returned, and the pattern was repeated. There was pleasant, if a bit disturbed conversation for a bit, something would set John off, and he’d be panicking again. It took nearly two full weeks before John was finally comfortable with Greg in the room, and only knew that when Greg left, there was more pain.

Once again, Greg tried with the ice chips. He’d made progress in other areas, and knew that once John had it under his belt, as he did speaking, things would start to improve. They had to.
“Nobody is going to hurt you for this, John,” he said for the hundredth time that day. He held the cup of ice chips in one hand where he held it a respectful distance away.

John kept his lips firmly pressed together and tears streamed down his face. He knew damn well what happened if he drank something and would do almost anything to avoid it.”He'll hurt me,” John whispered with a pitiful sob. He was done arguing loudly. He’d given up on that.

Greg sat back down slowly and picked up a small bit of ice, leaning forward and offering it to John. "He won't. I promise he won't. Police officer, remember? I'll stay. This is what you are supposed to be doing right now."

He very gently touched the small ice chip to John's lip before trying to get him to take it.

John turned his face away and shook his head, as he had countless times the past few days, but Greg persisted. “I promise nothing will happen to you,” he said softly. “Please? Just this one, then we’ll stop.”

John let out a whimper, but slowly opened his mouth and took the ice chip. The shaking reluctance with which he did so made it seem as if he were accepting a hot coal onto his tongue. Once it dissolved, John became suddenly aware of all the cracks in his dry mouth, all the places he had bit his tongue, the tooth missing in the back, and the open sores where he had chewed the inside of his cheeks. It melted quickly and he swallowed, wanting this to be over with.
Realization of what he had done hit him like cold water and John screamed loud enough to alert everyone in the east wing.

Over the next few days, Greg returned, each time with light conversation, news of the outside world, and ice chips. John accepted them now most days, though it still brought him full force into a dizzying panic attack.

On the fifth day, he’d already had three before he started to sweat, shake his head, and feel the promise of a scream building in his chest. “H-He’ll h-hurt me,” John whimpered and twisted his wrists in the restraints. That was another thing they had learned. John tended to hit the ice chips away from his face if not restrained.

Greg shook his head, reaching out slowly and very gently touching the side of John's face at his temple. He pulled his hand away and picked up two more of the small chips. "You're allowed, John, it's alright. I'm not upset with you. You're doing wonderfully."

He brought them to John's lips, hoping that this would somewhat soothe his discomfort.

John closed his mouth and shook his head. Tears slipped down his face and he let out a broken sob. "I-I had some. Thats all you said I had to do." He turned his face away and strained every muscle, thinking maybe the bed would break and the restraints snap. "Y-you said some. I've had four!"

Greg pulled his hand away and put the ice back in his cup, obviously saddened by John's response. "Okay, John. Okay." He leaned back and laced his fingers together at his knees. This had likely been a mistake. "I'm sorry," he said gently, settling in to stay.

John forced himself to be calm. He took a deep breath in, then another, then another, and eventually remembered to exhale. "Don't... don't be mad... please don't be mad...” He coughed hard and moved his tongue around in his mouth. As much as it terrified him, the ice had made it feel better.
"I didn't mean to panic. I didn't mean to... I'm sorry..."
"I'm not mad, John," he whispered softly, shaking his head, "I'm not mad with you, John. I want to help, and I'm very sad that you are so afraid. I feel useless. I want to help you." He figured honesty may help, perhaps if John knew that he himself felt rather low it would put them on more even ground. "You are a brave man. You are scared, but you tried anyhow. That's how you always are. You always try. I'm proud of you for trying."

"You're sad?" It didn't seem to make sense to him. "I am sad too, I think." He looked up with dull eyes. They had been blue once, but were shadowed by dark circles and set off by the dark hollows under his cheekbones. "I'm very sad, Greg. I'm very, very sad."

Chapter End Notes

Our poor John!
He's so broken. Perhaps beyond repair.
Or, perhaps not.
John turned his palm up to show a bruised, almost bloody center of his hand to Greg. He had been digging his fingernails into it when he got nervous to keep externally calm. "That way I don't scream. If I don't scream, they don't sedate me. If they don't sedate me, I don't have to sleep. If I don't sleep, he won't be angry." His childish A-B-C logic was the highest amount of reasoning that he could manage at the time.

Greg slid his hand over John's palm, closing his fingers around his hand. John seemed to be alright with him touching after weeks of proving himself, and Greg would keep at it as long as he could.

"No, John, he won't. I'm sorry you're scared. You can talk to me about it, it you want to, talk about what makes you sad. John, would you be able to sleep if I was here, sitting with you, keeping watch? You can't go on not sleeping, it makes everything so much worse."

His voice was gentle, and Greg was itching to give Sherlock some sort of update, anything to get the man speaking again.

"I can't tell you what makes me sad. If I talk about it, I have to think about it. And if I think about it, I start to panic and-" He cut off and let go of Lestrade's hand so he could dig his fingernails into his palm.

"And I-I'm not afraid of sleeping," John said quietly. "I'm not allowed. Last time I fell asleep bad things happened. I will not sleep. I can't. I know the rules, and that one stays. I won't get tricked."


Greg sighed and left John alone for a bit, the situation slowly but surely making him more and more unsettled.

"What will it take for you to understand he's not in charge of you anymore, John? Because he isn't. He's not the boss, and he's not got any power here. How do I show you that?" He dragged a frustrated hand over his face. "You've not been beaten for speaking. He's not coming back, John. He's not."

John wanted to believe him, he really truly did. He ached for security and peace, but his frantic, frayed mind wouldn't accept it. He’d been tricked far too many times for him to even begin to consider his safety. "I want to see him dead. Even then...He can... I won't be safe. H-He has people. Bad people. Very, very bad people. Trains them. Bad people. Hurt me. He has pupils."

Greg nodded and said softly, "Alright, John. Alright." He leaned back, wanting to give John a bit of comfort. The blankets were at the foot of John's bed, including his own from home. He stood up, "Just...just breathe, John, just breathe." He carefully pulled the blanket up to John's shoulders, hoping it would help him feel protected, and sat back down.

John stared up at the only spot he’d found on the ceiling. "And then, even if his web is still gone, there's still him. I don't want him dead. I want him dead. I.." John broke off with a pathetic whimper.
and tried to squirm further under the blessed blanket he’d been given without having to pay.

A few minutes later, Greg had his mobile out and had started reading, his voice soft and low, starting in on, of all things, the first Harry Potter book. He'd not read them yet, and had on a whim downloaded it nearly a year ago, forgetting it was on the phone.

John’s attention turned to Lestrade and he very slowly began to relax. He latched on to the words and used them to escape from his tormented mind. He found himself breathing slowly as the buzzing pandemonium in his mind died down.

John ventured to close his eyes, as he wasn't really sleeping, just listening. He jolted into alertness a few times, frightened that he had fallen asleep. After several stressful episodes, John decided he would just keep his eyes open. That lasted for another five minutes and eventually, with his mind fixed on the story and not the impending slumber, he drifted off.

Greg did not dare stop reading. He marked where John likely drifted off, in hopes of starting there again when he came back next, and he just continued to let his voice move through the room. John instantly looked younger as he properly slept, and Greg’s vision blurred up on him more than once.

He kept at it for nearly two hours before he was gasping for water with a scratchy throat. When he put his phone away, he simply sat there, watching John, fully intent on staying there until the man woke on his own. Visiting hours could go right to hell. He wasn't leaving.

An orderly was going to inform Greg that visiting hours had, in fact, ended some time ago, but the word ‘sleeping’ was on John's trigger list and the sight of John fast asleep made him think otherwise.

It was several more hours before John finally woke. He felt better, almost rested, and blinked blearily at his surroundings before realizing what he had done. Immediately the terror of it jolted him and he let out a startled scream. He’d not fallen asleep on his own yet. He’d blacked out and been sedated, but he’d never let himself sleep. John tried to sit up, but the restraints held him down. He whipped his head around and saw Lestrade, and another frightened cry escaped him."Fell asleep! I-I’m sorry! I..Oh, G-God...Oh God…” John’s eyes darted around the room furtively. "He's going to... he's..”

His fingernails went back in his palm again and arched his back off the mattress in a drawn out scream.

Greg leaned forward and slid his fingers over John's hand, stopping him from scratching himself.

"No, he's not, John. He's not." It occurred to him then that he wasn't exactly clear on which he they were discussing. When John said 'he,' Greg automatically thought Moriarty, but it registered to him then that he might mean Sherlock.

John jerked his hand away and let out another scream. He had absolutely no concept that this was a hospital, and he could already hear the cart clinking as it rolled in with various instruments to hurt him with. “No, no, PLEASE!” John kicked his legs, which sent white hot pain shooting straight up his spine. His heart rate rose to a dangerous level and the orderlies came rushing in, drawn by screams and blipping equipment.

Greg was hurried out despite his protests, and John was given a heavy tranquilizer that left him
sobbing and shaking, but otherwise quiet. He was left like that for the rest of the day, alone, with only the occasional visit from the psychiatrist, who quickly realized that his presence was in no way welcomed. John alternated between sobbing, whimpering, begging, and screaming when he had the energy. In addition, he kept himself absolutely wide awake.

It was nearly another week later that Greg pitched an idea to John that he had been thinking about for quite some time.

"John, what if you could always see where he was, what he was doing? Like a little TV and you could watch the feed? Would that help? He doesn't have to be a shadow to you, you can have that control. Would that help?" Most of John’s anxieties seemed to stem from the fear that someone was about to come hurt him, and Greg hoped that if he could prove that the threat was at home, far away, he might branch out of his learned behavior easier.

John’s immediate expression was that of fear. Greg had been telling him about the recent movies that were in theater, about outside and other nonsense that was easy to listen to. This was unexpected. This was frightening. John shook his head and tried to wiggle his hand from the restraints. They were so frail now, broken lumps of scar tissue, and the only thing that kept him from easily slipping out was that his wrists were equally thin from starvation. “I d-don’t want to see him,” he whimpered. “Hurts me. He’s a bad p-person.”

Greg shook his head in silent disagreement, but Sherlock’s innocence was too much to tackle all at once. “He is very far away right now. Would it make you feel better if you knew he was far away, and not in the building?”

John gave a small nod, but did not look sure of his choice at all. Greg took a long breath and scrubbed his hands over his face. “It would help. You could watch it and make sure he wasn’t coming for you. You could be sure you were safe.”

John looked up at that. It would take some of the heavy, ever lingering panic if he didn’t have to watch the door for a long shadow. “O-Okay,” he whispered. “Alright. Not here. He w-won’t be here.” John had gotten used to this place by now, and while he frequently flashed back to his places of torture and forgot the white walls, he knew when lucid that he had not been hurt inside the white walls yet. Yet.

Greg gave an encouraging smile. “Good, that’s really good. We’ll be able to see that he’s not coming, yeah?”

John gave another shallow nod. “H-He could make it fake. It’s a game. Make a fake video then play it then come hurt me when I-I think he’s far away.”

Greg nodded, already putting it together in his mind. "He's not left the flat in...he rarely leaves the flat. You can watch the feed and we will set a little real time GPS tracker with a map on the screen, which is attached to his mobile. You can see both, it will help you know it's an authentic feed." He was energized at the idea of doing something, and John sounded a touch more like John. He sounded paranoid, but at least he was thinking rationally.

"I'll have to leave to go set it up. You tell me when you're ready, okay? I know he scares you. This will give you more control, okay? It will help." Sherlock likely wouldn't be keen on it, but Sherlock could stuff it. They were doing this for John.

John nodded for the third time. He was determined to be strong and handle this. It was just a monitor. Its not like he could jump through the screen and hurt him. "That's alright... Y-You've been here for hours. But please, Greg, promise me you'll come back." He looked up pleadingly. "And maybe you
can get them to let me go for a bit. Maybe just so I can sit up. I don't like being tied. It's stressful." John forced himself to articulate every little thing. He wouldn't just say that something hurt, or scream, he would say *why* it hurt and ask for what he wanted. Perhaps that would work better. Still, it was painful for him to articulate clearly, as he found a disconnected sort of safety in his blanket terms.

Greg nodded, understanding. "John, they only have you tied down because you try to hurt yourself or others. If you can stop doing that, they won't keep tying you down. I would love for you to stay free."

"I would like to not hurt people," John replied. "But it's not that simple. It hurts... And then I can't think..." He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "It's not under my control! They want to... They come in here to hurt me and I d-don't want it! Anyone would fight! They come to hurt me, and I try to escape, and... Not allowed t-to escape." He calmed his breathing again and put pressure on his palms. "They work for HIM. I have to at least try and get away."

Greg sat down and, without asking, unlatched one of John's hands. He took it in both of his own, leaning in close to talk to him. "John, please try to stay with me for a moment, okay?" His heart was thundering in his chest, this was the closest he'd come to any hint of the man John used to be.

"I want you to really think about the last few weeks. Really, really think. No one has hurt you, and when people were sent in to do so, they came guns blazing and you were *defended* from them. Any time anyone has made an effort to hurt you, what's happened to them?"

John tried to jerk away from Greg's hand. "Don't...don't touch me right now." He said through gritted teeth. "I can't... Can't." John was slipping again, his mind starting to spiral down into a chasm of disorganized panic. "The last time.." He winced and attempted to keep wretched images out of his head. "The last time they tried, *he* was there, and you were there, and they didn't hurt me."

Greg let him go and spoke softly, trying to settle John back down, deeply worried they would block him from visiting again for loosing John without asking. "Not going to touch you. No one is going to touch you if you can just breathe, John. Just breathe. With me, look, follow with me."

He took a few exaggerated, deep breaths to pace John, trying to get him to follow along.

John put his hand over his chest and clenched it into a fist. Oh, it was heaven to be able to move his stiff, painful joint into some semblance of protection. He pulled the covers up and took the pillow from behind his head to place over his chest. Tears of relief flooded down his face and helped calm the flickering fire of panic in his stomach. "I can't think... M'sorry.." John squeezed his eyes shut and curled towards his one still restrained hand in a twisted fetal position. His mind lost what small semblance of control it had gained and he started to hyperventilate again.

Greg abandoned his plans of leaving and carefully adjusted the comforter over John's shoulders again without touching him. He sat right back down, pulled out his mobile, and, in the same calm
tone picked up where he believed John to last have been awake, and began to softly read to him. His hands were shaking slightly, and he tried very hard to keep himself steady enough to hopefully talk John back down.

John coughed and thought he might be sick. Behind his tightly shut eyes he saw flashes of the torment; smears of blood covering a pair of pliers as they were withdrawn from under his skin, a steady stream of water pouring over his nose and mouth, and odd, disconnected scenes containing pictures of people and trigger word training.

It took almost an hour for John to regain control. There was blood on the sheets next to him from where he'd bitten his tongue and scratched his palm, but he didn't scream.

He lay shuddering, the sheer energy it took to regain control leaving him exhausted.

Greg stopped reading long enough to send Mycroft a text, asking him to set up what he and John had discussed. He was actively debating taking off the next day, loathe to leave John while he was making such progress. He risked breaking the peace, wanting John to know. "John, you've done wonderfully. Really. You are incredibly strong." He said it with conviction, deeply meaning the words.

John only nodded. He didn't think that he could speak at the moment without saying something unfortunate, so he turned over and looked up gratefully, though tears still ran down his face.

Mycroft texted back saying that if it was good for John's improvement, he would speak with Sherlock about it.

Greg smiled at him. He open the book and simply carried on reading. Sherlock would agree. He had to. Greg paused an hour later, asking Mycroft if he could please obtain special permissions for Greg to stay beyond visiting hours, explaining his progress.

Mycroft informed the staff about Lestrade and told them he was to have open access to John any time he saw fit.

He also texted Sherlock, briefly explaining the situation and requesting a meeting.

*He's making progress with Lestrade. He would like a live video feed on you as well as a GPS locator to be sure that you aren't on your way to hurt him. We believe it will help him get over some of his fear of retribution with his action based triggers. M*

Sherlock read the text several times before replying, his mind heavy and sluggish. He was well underway with the entire stopping living plan, no longer caring for himself, still rolling with fever, his side a furious red and incredibly painful.

*He's progressing? Put the cameras in.*

When Mycroft relayed Sherlock’s acceptance, Greg looked back to John and gave him a gentle smile. "Alright if I just keep reading to you?"

John nodded and mouthed the word 'sorry' before curling up again. He was infinitely grateful to
Lestrade for letting his arm free and keeping him calm without medication. The last waves of panic rolled over him and he shivered. The effort it took to stay logical was exhausting and drained him even though he had only functioned somewhat properly for an hour. The rest of his time with Greg was easier, as he was able to curl in a tight ball while he listened.

Mycroft set about getting the cameras. A small team of workers accompanied him to the flat and he knocked on the door with a heavy sigh. "Sherlock, open up. It's me."

Sherlock dragged himself down the stairs, shivering with fever, his hair too long and his face scruffy. He pulled the door open and stared at his brother for a moment before turning away, gripping the railing hard as he began the journey back up the stairs. "Stay out of the loo," he called over his shoulder, wishing for the first time in a long while that he could move faster.
He went back to his room, very carefully settling himself back onto his bed and closing his eyes.

The sight of his brother dismayed Mycroft, but he didn't show any signs of being upset. "Sherlock, come down here." The flat looked utterly filthy and Mycroft had to watch his step.

"One right there," he said and pointed for his workers, "So he can see the door. It's best not to have that part of the kitchen in view, unless we can move the knife block." The men started to drill the cameras into the juncture between the wall and ceiling and Mycroft went to find Sherlock.

He knocked on the door before pushing it open. "You're a mess."

"Brilliant observation," Sherlock said into his pillow, otherwise not at all moving. He had an arm guarding his side, knees drawn up slightly, a thin blanket up to his shoulders. "Put in the cameras and let me be, Mycroft, I've not the energy to have it out with you today." He exhaled slowly and tried to sink back into the headspace he found, where the boredom and the physical discomfort did not so much bother him.

Mycroft pulled the blanket away. "Your bullet graze is infected, Sherlock." He grabbed Sherlock's arm and turned it over for an example. "And you're going to overdose if you aren't careful. You don't have the same tolerance you used to, and your body is stressed enough as it is." Mycroft wrinkled his nose and took a step away. "This is pitiful. It's been weeks! You should be recovering by now."

"Sir, would you like one in here too?" One of his workers leaned around the corner tentatively and knocked on the door even though it was still open. Mycroft looked to Sherlock. "I think it would be for the best, but it's your privacy we're invading."

"I've only asked for the loo, put in the damned cameras and be done." He pulled his arm away from Mycroft and flinched at the movement. To Mycroft he simply replied, "Call it what you will, I honestly don't give a damn." He tried for the blanket, incised at Mycroft's continued insistence that he carry on with life.

Mycroft looked down the bridge of his nose at Sherlock. "You've got one month to get clean and get healthy. Remember that he's going to be watching and this-" he gestured around at the mess, "is not going to help him. In my opinion you should shave, go see a doctor, clean the place up, and go back to your normal life. The point is to get him to remember you as you were. You look terrifying."

Sherlock turned to look at his brother, enraged. "The point is to let him see I'm not coming to gouge out his eyes or snap his bones. John is lost. What nasty threat to you have for me at the end of the month, brother? Rehab? Prison? My normal life is done. John is never coming home, and I could
"This is why we don't get attached to people, Sherlock," he hissed and pulled Sherlock up by his arm. "You're moping around while he recovers. He's speaking. He's not screaming as much. He needs to remember things the way they were, not be force fed another violent, painful reality." He shoved Sherlock back down and went to the door. "Clean the damn flat. Shave. Put on some decent clothing and get a haircut. Look like you did while the two of you were inseparable. He needs that, and you owe it to him."

Sherlock bit down hard on the inside of his cheek to keep from screaming as his brother wrenched him up. Tears sprang to his eyes, much to his irritation, and stars exploded across his vision. He had to hang his head, panting, speaking through his grit teeth. "Then he will see that I've forgotten him." He shook his head, stomach rolling as sweat broke along his brow.

He pressed a shaking hand to his eyes and forced himself to breathe. "Tell me you honestly believe he's still in there, still inside that fractured mind, that you think he'll actually recover." John had been his sobriety, his motivation. He'd been an addict until the day John had moved in, and then he'd not touched a needle again. He'd been a touchstone in Sherlock's chaotic life, and he found that he just could not bloody well care anymore. How was he to carry on when John was locked away in an, rotting out the rest of his days?

"I'm not asking you to be okay, Sherlock. I'm asking you to pretend." He took out his phone and texted -even though he preferred to call- one of the personal physicians he had at his disposal to come to the flat. "I will send you to rehab, not that you care. But you should know that this is the only hope for John to recover. He might not recover enough to see you again, but you can relieve him from the crippling fear he's currently having to live with." Mycroft believed that if John got better, perhaps Sherlock would too. He needed Sherlock to be better. Despite the petty feud they'd been harboring, Sherlock was the closest thing he had to a friend. He was his brother, and Mycroft intended to help.

"And if you choose not to help, you must never have cared about him at all. This is about what you can do for him, not yourself. He might not ever be head-over-heels for you but he could be somewhat normal." Mycroft clipped out each word in an irritated tone, then left the room. "I'm sending a doctor. Try not to be an insufferable ass."

Sherlock looked up to the new camera in his room and back to the door. His jaw set, and he laid back down. It was a foolish, pointless effort. At best, John would believe Sherlock had forgotten him, was utterly unaffected by his plight. He lay back down and closed his eyes, seriously debating a massive dose and being done with it all.

Greg carried on alternating between reading to John and going quiet. He'd been at John's side nearly twenty six hours when he finally spoke again. "John, I've got to go home for a bit. I've taken a bit of leave from the Yard, and I'll come back in a few hours, yeah?"

John nodded slowly. "Okay. Come back. Thank you." His voice was far smaller and more broken than it had ever been before the incident. Too exhausted to speak again, he waited for the orderly to come back in and strap his arm down.

It took an incredible amount of willpower to allow such a thing, but he managed with only mild
whimpering and a few tears. In John's mind, he was being strapped back down to take the knife again, which made complacency difficult. But he'd been practicing this for nearly three months now, and he knew that if he started screaming they would take longer to let him out again.

Greg was exhausted. He got in his car, starting to head home, dialing Mycroft on his way. He wanted to update the man and ask after the tablet. John had done remarkably well, shockingly, stunningly well. He was going to give his update and go the hell to sleep, hopefully returning with things that would help John feel safer and more at ease. He put the phone on speaker and waited for Mycroft to answer.

Mycroft picked up the phone instantly. "Lestrade, I need a favor." He said before the other could speak. "Sherlock is using again. He hasn't eaten in days, hasn't taken care of the bullet wound, and is wasting away. I've got the cameras set up and can get a monitor to John by the morning. I need you to convince Sherlock that he needs to get his act together to help John."

Greg swore and diverted his car. He'd been afraid of that when he'd seen Sherlock at the hospital, but life had just been chaos. "Well, that might actually help, to be completely honest. John's expecting a vicious mastermind, not someone wasting away, but yeah, I'm on my way to the flat. John's...well, he's talking, so there is that. I'll feel better when eating a spoon full of ice chips isn't his Everest, but it's better than it has been."

Mycroft reclined in the chair at his desk and breathed a long sigh. "If you think it's better for John to see him shooting heroin all day, I'll tell him to continue. But if he's the same Sherlock as before, staring into microscopes and shouting at the telly, John might remember." He waved away an assistant who tried to inform him about a meeting. "Whatever you think is best, I'll have Sherlock do. If you're neutral, tell him that you strongly believe he should come off it for John's sake. I'm using that as a motivator."

"Christ, Mycroft, I'm not suggesting that. I'm not about to sacrifice one for the other. I'm on my way to talk to him right now. I know he hasn't been well since this happened. Hell, you should have seen him the day he found the man. I'll try, I will. He's not been keen to listen to me either." He took a slow breath and shook his head. "This is, without a doubt, the cruelest thing that maniac could have done to them. I've never seen Sherlock anywhere near this before. Bloody awful. Are you anywhere closer to finding him? He's going to keep at this."

The events at Bart's had shaken Greg to his core. He'd not anticipated an attack of that magnitude, just to get at Sherlock.

"Moriarty is insane. We're pulling every available resource to find him, especially after the event at Bart's." Mycroft arranged for a telly to be taken to John's room through which he could keep an eye on Sherlock. It was being delivered that moment. "Whatever it takes to help John. I'm beginning to think Sherlock's recovery is absolutely dependent on John's. You talk to him. If he thinks he's helping John, I'm quite certain he'll do anything." Mycroft ended the phone call and set about the arduous task of tracking Moriarty down.

Moriarty had taken a short leave of absence. Not that he wasn't busy, he still had his web and various criminal engagements, but soon he came back to his favorite game; tormenting Sherlock.

Helloooooo, Sherly. JMx

Did you miss me? JMx
Oh, no.
Sherlock stared at the phone with shaking hands. His side was seen to, properly stitched and bandaged, a massive antibiotic jab stinging his hip, and a large bottle of pills on his nightstand.

He swallowed thickly as he replied, convinced now rather completely of what had to be done to keep John safe.

*If I die, will you be satisfied? SH*

Moriarty weighed his options. He wanted Sherlock to die in the end, out of grief and by his own hand, but now wasn't the time.

*I would be very satisfied for about fifteen minutes. Then I'd be bored. Without you around, I'd have to entertain myself in other ways. I wonder if I could make John fear breathing. That would be hilarious. JMx*

*And it wouldn't be terribly hard. He was so affectionate to you before. I told him my plan for you before we started the training. He was so angry with me. Not because I was going to torture him, but because I was going to hurt you by doing it. JMx*

Sherlock shouted in a rage. Forgetting his infected, newly stitched wound, he sat up, only to cry out out at the pain of it and wrap a hand around his gut. He loathed losing, despised it to the depths of his proverbial soul, and here he could not just *lose*, he had to be dragged about by horses through the coals. Hot tears stung at his eyes, his impotence to do *anything* for John far beyond his ability to contain.

*Then come fetch me and entertain yourself to your delight. If my pain is your goal, come have it properly. John's already gone, you'll find no pleasure in torturing a shell. SH*

Moriarty grinned. It would be lovely to have Sherlock come to him willingly, to have him ask to be cut to spare John, but that wasn't the point. It was tempting, but not the point.

*I'm going to burn the heart out of you, remember? John is your heart. You so foolishly inflicted your heart on another human being and this is what has become of it. I bet he wishes you had just let me kill him. A gash across the throat would be less painful than what you've forced him through. JM*

*How are you still alive? Is it the drugs, or the knowledge that I'll keep him forever if you die? JM*

Greg basically kicked in the door when he arrived, hearing Sherlock *screaming* at the top of his lungs. He had his weapon drawn, jaw locked tight, fully expecting to find Sherlock under some sort of attack.

What he did find was a husk of the man, unshaven and sallow, pulling at his own hair, staring down at his mobile. Greg moved over and snatched it up, reading the texts, quite suddenly understanding. Sherlock had been passively killing himself, and Moriarty just took away that option. Sherlock kept
on screaming, a guttural, anguished sound, reminding Greg of the mothers he'd seen crying for their dead children. It was nothing short of horrific.

"Hey," he said softly, reaching out and grabbing Sherlock's too thin shoulders, "Stop, stop. Just breathe, Sherlock, take a breath for me." Sherlock dragged in another breath and screamed it out. His side flared with pain, but it was welcomed. It was deserved.

Over the course of the next few hours, Greg and Sherlock went in circles through bouts of screaming anger and panicked frustration. Greg would begin to think that they’d found something close to peace, only to watch Sherlock shatter back down into raw, base reaction. It reminded him terribly of the years he’d continuously responded to Mycroft’s calls to go collect a strung out Sherlock from some god-forsaken den. Those were the only times he’d seen just how deeply Sherlock Holmes was capable of feeling. It was always a shock to remember the man in such an unfiltered state when compared to his typical aloof indifference.

Sherlock had managed, at the three hour mark, to hit his knees and scream himself physically sick, retching until he had nothing left, leaving Greg to awkwardly hang at his back, finally reaching forward to sweep the man’s curls from his face. He shook his head as Sherlock’s violent sicken up settled to pained, pathetic tears.

In the end, Greg was forced to push him bodily into the shower, taking a seat on the closed lid of the toilet and texting Mycroft as Sherlock went quiet under the downpour.

_That maniac is going to kill your brother without laying a hand on him. This must stop. GL_

Moriarty sat up from the lavish pillows in the mansion he had acquired for the day and let out an irritated growl.

_Answer me, Sherlock. Don't be so ordinary. JMx_

_Sherlock, you know what I'm capable. Don't make me bored. You know what happens when I'm bored. Maybe if you were more clever, more entertaining, I wouldn't have had to take your pet. JMx_

_Killing yourself really would be the easy way out. Just do it, so I can take John all to myself. I'll make him oh-so obedient, like a little puppy. Maybe I'll let him fear me less. Maybe I'll get him eating and drinking properly. I could keep him like a little house pet. Force feeding him is a bit of a pain. Not that I do it myself. I digress.JMx_

Mycroft was in the car on his way back to Sherlock's flat. If he had to drag Sherlock to a care facility himself he would do it.

_Keep him calm. See if you can get him to clean himself up. MH_

_I have him showering. John needs ironclad security, Moriarty is sharply upping the chatter right now. GL_

He found a razor amongst the scattered counter and walked over to the shower, handing it over. "Go on, have all that off, you'll feel better for it. I know this is hell, Sherlock. We're trying."

Sherlock nearly came at Greg, finally having a physical body to react to. "Like you were at Bart's?" He growled, though he took the razor to his face for want of something to do with his hands. In the end, he went through two of them before sitting back down on the shower floor, arms around his knees.
"I tried to kill him at Bart's. I should have let him die when he had the chance, before I rescued him. Moriarty had a knife to his throat, millimeters from his jugulars. Slight application of pressure and John would have been free. But no. No I had to care and look what I've done to him!"

Greg dragged a hand over the back of his neck, incredulous. This was not how Sherlock handled things. This was not Sherlock talking to him at the moment. Greg was having a conversation with an embodiment of despair, and it was horrible.

Mycroft was at the flat fifteen minutes later. He didn't bother knocking, only walked in and surveyed Sherlock's condition. Though clean and shaven, he appeared to be in a worse state mentally than he had before. "What's happened?"

Out of all things on Earth, Moriarty was bothered by very few of them. He could brush off attempts at his life, death, tragedy... But being ignored was not something he would tolerate.

So instead of texting Sherlock alone, he sent a mass message out to Greg, Mycroft, and Sherlock, to ensure someone with their wits about them answered him.

Hello, boys! Are you having some sort of intervention? Can I come? JMx

Greg pushed Sherlock's mobile into Mycroft's hands when he arrived. "He's been forwarding these to you. How could you think this wouldn't get to him? Christ, Mycroft, do you not-" he shook his head, seething on behalf of them all. "I'm sorry, I know this is your brother and you care about him, but both these men are good men, and this entire situation is indescribably horrific."

Sherlock piped up from the shower floor. "Right here, I can hear you, you idiots. Is John secure?"

Mycroft checked his phone and saw the message from Moriarty and the ones from Sherlock. "Yes, these all look very distressing. Has he considered not reading them?" He spoke directly to Lestrade, not Sherlock, who despite his good intentions didn't appear to be capable of rational thought.

His phone lit up again, as did Sherlock's and Greg's, as they were bombarded with message after message from the maniac himself.

Why wasn't I invited? JMx

Do you have tea? JMx

Have you considered letting me re-train John? JMx

That does sound like a good option to me. I could fix him right up. JMx

Course, I would want money for it. Or maybe the Queen's dog. Would that upset her? JMx

"Are you being intentionally obtuse? Look at the dates of his last major sting like this, Mycroft. You advised Sherlock via text to disregard, and he did. The next day, we had thirty six fatalities at Bart's. He's begged you for better security each time this starts and you've simply been glib. Shall we ignore these as well? Hope no one shows to the new facility?"

"Do you honestly think we'd make the same mistake twice?" Mycroft’s voice was a snap, as he intended. He’d worried himself sick when Sherlock just dove into a building with several active shooters. “Half of the caretakers in that place are trained by the crown! Half of them aren't even nurses! They just watch for us! The place is under 24 hour surveillance with someone in the area at
all times. Just because you go visit John doesn't mean you're the only one working."

Sherlock stood up and killed the taps, wrapping himself in a towel. He was distressingly thin, his skin sickly and off in color. He brushed passed the both of them and began to dress, hands still shaking terribly. He was clearly intent on leaving the flat.

"Sherlock, where are you going?" Mycroft asked in an 'I don't have time for this' tone. "John is going to be getting a live feed of this any hour now. You'll want to actually be here when that happens."

Sherlock stilled as Mycroft spoke. He'd not known any of that, had assumed John had the same security as last time. Mycroft hadn't seemed troubled at all. "I was going to go sit watch. It sounds as though the thirty six put pull to John's 'one man,' status." He stopped and sat down on his bed, in trousers and an undershirt. Feet bare. "What is it that you want me doing, Mycroft. Just tell me what you want me doing." The fight had bled out of him, clearly, and Sherlock was in surrender.

Greg took a deep, slow breath. "I've got Sherlock, Mycroft. I apologize. I'm tired, as well all must be, and was not at all aware of John's security."

"Well why wouldn't I have security? It's not just the matter of John getting scared. We had casualties. Did it ever occur to you that I often need to give a reason before locking a building with such tight security? The area is secure and John in particular is being monitored." Mycroft pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed. "I'm sorry about John, Sherlock, I truly am, but you need to start living again. He'll be watching soon. I don't need to tell you not to do anything threatening, but I would like to say that if you are going to continue using, do so in the bathroom. Needles still frighten him and I don't want to guess why."

Sherlock snapped at him, his docile nature kicked away. "Stop telling me to live, Mycroft. You are not sorry about John, this is an inconvenience to your position and nothing more. I still have my mind. What life do you expect me to return to? This is what I did before him. This is what's left of my life. John was not some-" he waved it off, bitter anger lacing over the festering hurt. How he loathed the complexities of emotion. "I wouldn't worry yourself overly much on it, brother. The way this has gone, we will surely be out of your hair soon enough, you can read the sad story in the papers, and go back to your daily routine." Sherlock glared at Mycroft indignantly for a moment then turned his back in blatant refusal. He did, however, get up and start to gather the needles in the room to ensure John would not see them.

Mycroft tried one last ditch effort to turn Sherlock's depression into rage that could be channeled. "Sherlock, listen to me. You're upset. You're depressed. You loved John and Moriarty used that against you." He walked over and was as gentle as he was capable of being. "But you're letting him win. He is winning right now! You're an idiot for letting him." He sat down on the couch and took a deep breath. "Go after him. Go after him and kill him. Make him pay for what John has gone through."

Sherlock shook his head, flinging the needles into the bin before wheeling on his brother. "Do you not think I've tried? He's already won! John is lost. You've seen him, he cannot think, he cannot hear logic or put his mind to any sort of use. He's worse than dead, and the game is over. The king tipped. I cannot track Moriarty, and he will not come to me. I am at a wall, Mycroft, to which there is no solution. Every push I give just drives another blade into John! The situation is hopeless."

"How do you know he won't come to you? He texted me asking if he was invited to the intervention just ten minutes ago!" Mycroft drilled Sherlock with a stare. "Find a way to track him down. Lure him in. Something. John is heavily guarded. He's safe. Honestly, he's making you paranoid about John's safety so you don't do anything! Your hesitancy and fear is his safety net!"
Mycroft's phone buzzed once more with texts and he glanced at them.

*Please? JMx*

*Come now, don't be stubborn. Lets play a game, shall we? JMx*

Sherlock covered his face with his hands. "I've put the best bait I have on a line and dangled it in front of him. He will not shift. He will explode after this, if we all continue to ignore him. This is the aggrandizement, as there was last time. You have watched every step I've taken. When there is an error, he pays terribly for it. Not you or I, John. Go on, tell him yes, the door is open. Just watch how he responds. I have caved to his offers and he retreats. There is no course to navigate, we are already at the end."

To prove his point he snagged up his phone and responded:

*The door is open. SH*

Moriarty was delighted by the response. Sherlock must truly be getting desperate now.

*Is it? That's nice. I do love being invited to parties. But... There's the small matter of John. You're still upset with me. Admittedly, it's taken longer for him to heal than I thought. Would you like my help? JM*

Mycroft saw the text and took the phone away from Sherlock. There was no need for him to be reading such things. "Alright. Fine. But when the cameras are rolling, just remember not to speak, use knives, needles, or do anything threatening. Maybe just play violin and cry if you want to show your feelings." Mycroft was well aware that he was being harsh, but he would rather Sherlock be pissed than depressed. Depression was not constructive.

"Mycroft," Greg snapped, utterly puzzled with the man's behavior. Sherlock was facing an impossible and his brother was behaving as though he'd manage better, "ease off." Not for the first time, he situation wondered at the man's true feelings towards his younger brother. Even Mycroft had run out of ideas. They were at a complete deadlock.

It was one of the worst things Greg had ever seen.

Sherlock just stared at his brother, for once his defensive mask slipped and the true depth of how severely Mycroft was wounding, evident. He looked away, gathering himself. "As you say," he replied, deadpan and nodding. He could remain silent, had been for weeks anyhow. Greg watched as Sherlock moved through his room, slowly setting things to rights, picking up the shards of glass and ceramic from various odds and ends that had met their demise recently.

Moriarty had gotten to Mycroft too. As much as he held his brother in contempt for his behavior, he utterly despised seeing Sherlock in so much pain. He eased off and held up his palms to show he had not wished it to escalate that quickly. "I'll leave you be," he said quietly and turned to leave. "Just, don't do anything stupid, Sherlock. If not for yourself than for those who would rather not attend your funeral." Mycroft left without another word.

Moriarty, however, hadn't finished speaking just yet. He was upset that the game wasn't being played anymore.

*I should just go get him now. He was supposed to be getting better by now. Maybe there's no point in letting him recover. JM*

Sherlock read the text in agony, looking to Greg. His voice was less than steady. "Pack a bag and
stay there, Greg. Stay with him. I'd go myself but..." he waved to the cameras. "Text if I can do something that will help, or if I'm hurting him." Greg winced at Sherlock's tone and nodded slowly, taking in a deep breath. He agreed and then paused, right before leaving. "What your brother said...please at least listen to that. Don't...don't hurt yourself, Sherlock. If John comes back, if he's in there and he comes back..." He shook his head and slowly moved out of the flat.

The next hour was a mess of packing and ensuring he had everything he needed for a few days stay. He was back at the hospital, armed and exhausted, requesting at the front desk that a spare cot be brought just outside John's room. He'd ask the man before he started bunking in there.

He walked in after chatting with the head nurse, gently knocking on the wall. "John? It's Greg."

The telly had been brought in a half hour ago and John hadn't yet gotten the courage to flip it on. He knew exactly what would be on the screen, and had already driven himself into a panic attack by thinking about it too much. When Greg came in, he hardly responded. John muttered something under his breath and kept his eyes on the dark screen.

He ignored Greg for another twenty minutes, silently staring at the telly, working his courage up. When he finally clicked it on he flinched and looked away. There was no audio, but even the small click had frightened him.

Another twenty minutes passed before he could shift his eyes to look at the screen. He didn't scream immediately, but froze instead, not breathing, not blinking, and he was certain his heart had stopped. Then life came suddenly, violently back to him arched his back off the bed in an agonized scream that ripped from his chest. John thrashed violently and turned his face away with a straining neck. Raw panic, so pure it made his heart skip in his chest, sawed at John's nerves and he jerked erratically. "No, no, NO! PLEASE, NO! Please!

Greg stood up, blocking the view before clicking it off. "John, I'm right here, mate, you're not alone." He held his hands out, trying to keep things calm. "Look, here, we'll move it out," he offered, shifting the TV towards the door, the hope of earlier slowly sinking back down. Sherlock had simply been sitting on the sofa, face diverted from the cameras, clearly defeated and just...waiting.

"It's alright, John, look it's alright," Greg insisted again as he pushed it out of the door, just on the other side of the wall. He took up the little tablet computer below it, wondering if a much smaller view might help, returning to the chair by John's bed.

John whimpered and continued his frantic attempts at escaping. "H-hes... g-going to-to-" John couldn't form words and nausea rolled over him. Dark spots appeared in his vision and somewhere in his mind he knew he should calm, but it was lost in the hectic whirlwind of his panic.

John wasn't sure how long it was until he calmed. Perhaps it was an hour he screamed. Perhaps less. In the end exhaustion dragged him down, and he sank into the blankets and trembled. His screaming turned to desperate sobbing once more, and he turned watery eyes to Greg, who he had failed to recognize all through the episode.

Greg shook his head, his own lashes damp from watching John struggle. It was, perhaps, the worst idea he'd ever had. "I should not have suggested it, John. I apologize. I'd hoped it would help. Would you like me to read to you again?" His voice was a bit tight and his chest tightened at the idea of Sherlock sitting perfectly still in Baker Street, believing any movement he made could be upsetting to John. He drew out his phone and nearly sent a text to him, but then remembered the look on Sherlock's face when Mycroft had gone after him, and thought better of it. He wasn't likely to kill himself while believing John watching.

"N-No... No, its fine.." John let another pitiful sob shake his shoulders. He noticed Greg’s eyes wet
with tears, and decided that after all these months, Greg was not part of the game. Or if he was, he was a pawn, not a player. He wouldn’t hurt him.

John cried quietly for another twenty minutes before he was finally still. "I don't want to b-be afraid,” he said in a mouselike voice still raw from screaming. “I want to be alright s-so I can leave.” John leaned over to Lestrade again. "They think I-I’m insane. I know what this is,” He sounded like one who had found out a grave secret he intended to keep. "Its a mental hospital. They think I'm insane. If I can prove I'm not... they've gotta let me go, right? Y-You say this isn’t Moriarty’s. So if y-you’re right, he's got me somewhere normal. If these people aren’t his, then they gotta let me g-go once I’m sane." There was a slightly wild look in John's eyes, but it wasn't fear.

Greg blinked at him and nodded slowly. "Yeah...John, yeah. That's about right." He licked his lip, wishing like hell that he'd had the chance to sleep a little, exhausted and worried he'd make the wrong move. He set the tablet in his lap and tapped the edge of it, leaving it off. "Smaller screen, this. Might make it easier? You don't have to watch this if you don't want to, I just wanted to help make you feel...more in control."

"I think... I think I might need some time alone." John said slowly and forced himself to articulate. "If you could put it on and give me some time... I need to get out of here. I'll do this and then they’ll let me go." John's plan was as well thought out as it possibly could be. He would stop screaming, pretend to be alright, then drown himself in the Thames as soon as they let him out.

Greg slowly complied, not liking John's tone but doing as he asked anyhow. He clicked the feed on and set it just to the side of John's bed, propped on the stand. "Be right out there if you need me," Greg said carefully, moving to the door and walking out.

He was on the cot for a full sixty seconds before finally dropping heavy into sleep.

Sherlock sat on the sofa, his mobile constantly going off and tears on his face as he absently plucked his violin.

John ventured another look at the screen. In the brief time he was able to keep himself looking, he didn't see a criminal mastermind. He saw someone playing an instrument and looking utterly broken. And yet, just a second later, he saw the face of the man who had tortured him nearly to death and the screams poured forth.

He repeated the process four times before he couldn't stand it any longer. He had watched the screen for just about two seconds each time, and he thought that maybe he didn't scream as long the last try. In the end he was left shaking, crying, and exhausted, but fully unable to sleep. Each round took over an hour, and the last dragged on for longer as his control snapped.

Greg managed four hours before he got back up, blurry-eyed, stumbling after coffee. One of the staff showed mercy on him, handing him a bagel as well, offering the staff shower. He took the time to clean himself up before changing and returning to John's room. Sherlock was dozing on the sofa, his breathing rather shallow, violin beside him, small in that way the tall man was somehow able to make himself. Greg shook his head and looked to John.

"I can read again, if you'd like?"

John had blood on his lips from where he had bitten his tongue more than once. He was used to the metallic taste of blood, and hardly noticed it. He noticed it as one might notice the taste of one’s own tongue. "It hurts to look at him," John said in a defeated, childlike voice. "I just want to leave. I just want to go." A small sob escaped him and he looked up pleadingly. "Please, tell them I can leave."
Greg reached over and clicked the screen off, sitting down with a low sigh. "John, it's been months and you've yet to have a sip of water. You've got a bit to go yet. Look, you're so tired, sleep helped you so much last time. No one hurt you for that, yeah?" He was incredibly grateful for the coffee in his system. "I'm not leaving, just like last time."

"I just want to go," John had meant that he wanted to die, but leaving the hospital would effectively mean the same thing at this point. "N-Not allowed t-to drink." He forced down a wave of panic, which took several minutes to do.

"I don't see why you can't just let me go down to the river," he whined once his calm was restored. "Its easier that way. It's less trouble for you. I'm in pain, Greg. Please, I'm in pain."

Greg shook his head. "I know you are, John. You don't want to die. You had a gun in hand for more than fifteen minutes and you didn't shoot. You just want to stop hurting. We are working on it. He is not going to hurt you. You've been talking. You even spoke in code with him, he never hurt you. He protected you, do you remember John? He will not hurt you. He's so sad. " He exhaled slowly, watching John with tired eyes.

"Y-You know what's worse than the pain?" John asked, and sounded dangerously close to another breakdown. "H-He's in my head now. In my head. Makes me scared of things. Scared of normal things. I..." He started to sob again, speaking in between lamentations. When he spoke again, it was in a hushed whisper. "I don't think I'm really supposed to be afraid of food." The thought seemed to rip at everything in his mind and he let out a cry of fear. **Believe Moriarty. Always believe Moriarty. Moriarty says food is bad. Food is bad. But why?** He cut off then, thinking that perhaps if he made his wrists raw enough they would bleed to the point of letting him slip out of the restraints.

"Hey, hey," Greg said, pointing at his hands, "easy there, John. Easy." He dragged a hand through his hair and exhaled slowly. "You've suffered tremendous trauma, John. This is your brain trying to break through what was done to you. Do you want to talk about it? I will answer any of your questions, I've the evidence file, or I can read to you and we can just put it on pause tonight. You said you feel safe with me, is that still true?"

John nodded and blinked to clear the burning tears from his vision. He didn't think that Lestrade was going to hurt him, though there was still the nagging worry that he was informing to Moriarty. "I can't talk about what happened." He said in a voice that left no room for argument or persuasion. "But you can tell me one thing. Him. When I saw him on the video, he looked sad." John started to scrape the skin off the insides of his palms with his nails. **Act. It had to be an act. Of course it was an act. Don't be stupid!** "And that upset me. And I couldn't kill him before."

Greg nodded. "He's incredibly sad, John. That's right. What is your question? I'll tell you anything you want to know." He glanced to the monitor, watching Sherlock sleeping restlessly.

"Why?" He demanded. Blood had started to drip down onto the floor from his hands, but that's what it took to keep the panic at bay. "Why does that upset me? I shouldn't care if he cries."

Greg hummed and gathered up a bit of gauze, setting it under John's hand, not at all willing to risk breaking the relative calm. "Perhaps because you know it wasn't truly him, somewhere deep down. Perhaps you remember how angry you were when you were told how he was going to use you to get to him. You've known that man a long time, and you know he's not someone who would do that to you."

The idea seemed to go against everything in his mind. It was a nice story, and he was sure Greg believed it, but it simply could not be true. He had very little that he held as true anymore. Eating, drinking and sleeping would bring pain. Sherlock brings pain. Believing Moriarty is the only way to
not have pain. These were facts.

"I knew him. I remember that." John whispered it almost to himself. "Don't tell Moriarty that I remember. I'm not supposed to. But... I remember..." It was difficult to try and recall Sherlock as he was without remembering the torment. "I remember the violin... and the experiments..."

Greg nodded, "Yes, you used to fuss at him for the state of the fridge and the kitchen. John, you know I don't work for Moriarty. I have a bullet in my arm, and I'm...you know me. I loathe that bastard, I'm not one of his." He hoped the honesty would help. "Nothing you say in here will get you in trouble, nothing."

"I was his friend," John said with a hitched breath. His eyes filled with tears again and he looked at his mangled hands. " I didn't hate him... No, far from that... I think, once, before he started hurting me, I might have been attached to him." John shook his head at the ridiculous notion. "He hurt me. He knew I was afraid of waterboarding. I told him forever ago. He knew how to hurt me. He knew what I-I was afraid of and then..."

Christ. Greg mentally added that detail to the list of things John was letting slip. "Wasn't him, John. It was James Moriarty. Wasn't him. This is how Moriarty is torturing him, and believe me, it's working."

He took a slow breath and itched to touch John. "I'm so sorry you've suffered so horrifically."

"You keep saying he didn't hurt me," John began and looked utterly confused. "I don't believe you. I don't. If he were here, and you left, he would start to cut me. He would get the water or needles or whips or..."

He coughed hard and gave Greg an inane smile. "But you... you're helping me. Could you take me to the Thames? You've got a gun on you usually. Could I have it? I promise not to hurt anyone."

Greg countered him, ignoring the request for the gun. "He was in that room twenty-four hours with you after he protected you, John. Don't block that out. He was dressed as hospital staff, tapping Morse, getting you soft light and calm music, wasn't he? And he never once hurt you. He kept letting you go when you would beg, because he couldn't stand to see you suffering. You have to remember that, John. That was him, and he was alone with you. Stop looping, you are strong, you've got to try."

It might be a bit much, but coddling was getting John nowhere.

John flinched and tried to cover his ears in his hands. "No! He hurt me. He hurt me. He hurt me..."

John calmed himself and spoke in an even, measured voice. "He tapped and then he held me down. I was going to escape!" He did try to think despite his protests. He went quiet for a bit and tried to shuffle his way through the terrible events in his mind.

Some time later, he wasn't sure how long, John finally spoke again. "You want me to believe that I was kidnapped by Moriarty and made to believe that it was Sherlock who tortured me?" Not that he believed it, but it would be nice to know what Greg was saying.

Greg hummed again, shaking his head. "I want you to believe the truth, and that, John, is the truth. If you had a patient with an injury to their leg like yours, and he was trying to get off the bed in panic, what would you have done, Doctor Watson?" his tone was gentle despite the words, "imagine yourself for a moment in his shoes, supposing what I'm saying of the whole situation is true. What would you do?"

"If it was just the leg, I'd pin the back down." He said without hesitation. "But if I knew what they had been through, I'd draw and shoot them in the head. It would be the merciful thing to do."
John was silent for a bit then, cursing himself for not using the gun when he had the chance. He had been convinced Moriarty had found some way to rig it against him, to make it a trap so he could punish him again. "Can they legally keep me here against my will?"

Greg deliberated pushing the next point, following that up. "John...do you not remember the last time you saw him personally?" He did not want to tell John that yes, he had to stay, even against his will, he wanted John to follow his leading questioning.

"I think... I remember he was shot. I didn't like that. I wanted to shoot him, but I also didn't..." He followed up with the same question. "Can they keep me here if I don't want to be? Is that legal? I know my rights. If this isn't run by Moriarty I should be allowed to walk out."

Greg shook his head, forgetting himself. "That's right, and can you recall the time before? The time Sh- the time he approached you before, John? He asked you something important, do you remember?"

John, now that he was at least trying to think clearly, was upset that he couldn't remember significant events. He had a smattering of small details; the song of a violin at night, a various body parts in places that body parts had no business being, late nights, the occasional bit from a case, but no large events. "I...I don't remember what happened..."

Greg nodded and sat back down. "That's okay, John, don't stress over it. You can't leave here by law while you are a danger to yourself. I'm sorry, you have to stay."

"You said that he asked me something," John started quietly. "I don't remember what it was. What was it?"

John made a mental note to stop being a danger to himself so he could succeed in killing himself.

Greg sat down next to John and nodded. "He...He was so sad watching you suffer, John. He tried to help, and then lost hope, and he, John he came in to overdose you on painkillers. Do you remember? He asked you if that's what you wanted?"

He quieted and let the silence hang, watching John carefully. "Apparently something scared you, and you began to scream before he could."

"He was going to let me go." John nodded and began to claw away the confusion. "He had the needle in and I screamed." John's face clouded with anger and self-loathing. "I just couldn't stay calm. I wanted to but..." He pulled at the restraints. "Please let me out."

Greg frowned and shook his head. "I'm so sorry, John." He sat back, watching him. "I wish I could."

John considered shouting at him, but Lestrade had been good to him, so he controlled himself. "I want to be better. Lets try the video again. If I can watch it without panicking, will they let me go?"

Greg looked at John, watching him carefully. "Let's try a bit if ice again, yeah? Got to get you back eating and drinking. Didn't that ice help a bit? Can we try?"

He held his breath, hoping John would not scream at him.

"I don't... I don't want water." John closed his eyes tightly. Water had been given to him in a very cruel way with Moriarty. He was given the opportunity to drink when and only when he was being water boarded or held underwater. John could feel it. The dry mouth, the headache, the shaking. He could remember so clearly the feeling of blood drying in his mouth as he panted in pain. He remembered what it felt like to have his tongue sticky with thick, black blood. He knew what it was like to be thirsty and fear drinking. It had started out simply, as one would expect. John would grow
thirsty, and Moriarty would leave him water, but warn him not to drink. John, dying of thirst, would do so regardless. He’d then be beaten and left to bleed on the floor. Later, it had grown more complex, as Moriarty stopped leaving water out. He would force John to go without water for days then make him ask for it. It was about that point that the water-boarding and boiling water treatments began, and just a few sessions later that John abandoned the idea of ever drinking again. "Please, no water."

Greg tilted his head slightly as he watched John. He'd not said no because he was afraid of angering anyone this time. No, now it was something else entirely. He let the silence settle for a little while, just keeping in John's company as he thought.

"Little spoons of ice, John. Can you just try little spoons of ice chips? Just like the other day, only a bit more. I'll let one of your hands loose and you can hold the spoon and cup. You've been trying so hard, I'll give you one of your hands. Can you try?" His voice was soft and gentle, very quiet in the heavy stillness of the room.

John fought down waves of fear. But it wasn't water. It couldn't be forced down his nose and throat and he couldn't drown in it. He could sit up, he could breath, and there would be no rag or bucket involved. Slowly John nodded. If he was to be given one of his hands free, it would be worth it. "Just don't give me anything breakable." He muttered in a terribly dejected tone.

Greg nodded and moved a bit closer to the bed, "I'm just going to sit this up as high as it can go, okay? Here," he held the button to ease the head of the bed up high and then pointed to John's right hand before reaching down and letting it loose. He then walked over and filled a styrofoam cup with little chips of ice, walking back with a plastic spoon as well. He sat down beside John, his head now lower than the restrained man's, and handed it over.

"As much as you want, and at your own pace, okay? Everything is alright."

Pain radiated from John’s too tight back and his joints protested to moving, but it was wonderful to not be lying prone. However, John did not like the look of the cup. It could contain water. His eyes darted around but he saw no rag or bucket. Perhaps this wasn't a bad thing. It had at least gotten his arm untied.

Tears poured down his face and John reached out to take the ice as one might take a hot coal. He whimpered when the water touched his skin, but it wasn't hot. At least it wasn't hot. Eventually he managed to get the chip in his mouth, but as always, fear hit him straight in the gut.

Greg watched John, observing his reservation. "John, breathe. You are in control here. I'm right here, you're okay. No one is going to touch you. It will feel nice, just relax. You're okay."

Two hours, three panic attacks and two bloody palms later, John had managed to eat half of the ice. It was tedious, exhausting work that took quite a good bit of patience on Greg’s part. He was constantly having to assure John that he was safe, and it was alright for him to continue.

"Why c-can't I just have an IV?" He choked and looked to Greg for answers after what felt like an eternity of hell.

Greg shook his head. "You're a doctor, John. Diagnose yourself. You have been hydrating through a drip you've got a tube down your nose to keep you fed. Would you ever discharge a patient like that?" He took a moment to let the silence stretched out like a grim reminder of John’s physical state. After a moment, though, he asked a question he was afraid to know the answer to. "John, when Moriarty had you, what happened when you wanted water?"
John curled up towards his left arm; the one that was still immobile, and let out a small whimper. "He gave me water," he responded simply. To John, asking for water was synonymous with asking to be water-boarded. That's what water was. Moriarty hadn't just changed the outcome, he had changed what water was in John's mind, just as he'd done with Sherlock. "I can't..." John waved his hand and tried to signal that he didn't wish to discuss it. He had used up every last bit of his mental strength on taking the ice and was left feeling like an empty husk.

Greg nodded and simply pulled out his mobile, starting to read. He picked up where he and John left off and settled in for the long haul.

John faded in and out of pitiful crying for the next few hours. He was too exhausted to speak but too afraid to sleep, so he simply stared at the ceiling. His mouth felt a little better from the ice, but go John, who had to suffer through the terror of water, it was far from worth it.

Sherlock eventually could no longer stand simply sitting there, taking abuse via his mobile from Moriarty. He left his violin on the sofa, and walked into the lav with his case and the box that he'd ultimately ignored.

Over the next half hour, he injected himself with a lighter dose and sat down, looking inside, pulling on gloves and selecting first one of the smaller knives. A little while later, he was at the kitchen table, preparing slides from various samples he'd taken off the blade. His hair was dragged back in a band and his fingers shook, the remnants of sick still clinging to the back of his throat from the episode in the lav where the reality of John's torture had become too great. He scrawled a note on the pad next to him and set in studying.

It was some time later that John managed to look back up at the screen. This day was turning out to be exhausting, terrifying and utterly hateful to him. But maybe if he could prove he could eat ice and watch the telly, they would let him go. John set his jaw and stared at the small moving picture. He jumped each time the man moved and could do nothing to stop the tears that rolled down his face and pitiful whimpers that escaped him.

It was about five seconds before he lost control and the panic won, but before it had only been an instant, and John hoped they would see the progress.

Greg turned the screen away from him, deeply saddened by the day but impressed with John's efforts. Nothing seemed to calm the man down, nothing settled him. He did, however, refrain from screaming. John had done a great deal of crying, but Greg imagined that was likely cathartic. Sherlock seemed to have some sort of focus at the moment, which took a bit of the edge off for Greg, who was wildly concerned for them both.

Chapter End Notes

Oh, no. Everyone is deteriorating. Except Moriarty, of course, who's having quite a bit of fun with this.

Now, we've got a game for you lovely readers. As you may or may not know, there are two of us writing this. 
YOUR GOAL is to figure out which of us writes for which characters.

John, Sherlock, Greg, Mycroft, and Moriarty.
Try and figure it out, if you can. We have two distinct writing styles.

Also, tell us what you think of the work so far!
-Dem
Around noon the next day, John's door opened with a slight creak and the physical therapist and her assistant came in to work on John's leg. Greg took the moment to slip out, intent on finding the psychiatrist, wanting to talk strategy with him.

John looked up hopefully, though he didn't trust any of the doctors in this place. Or anyone, really, except Lestrade. "Are you going to let me out?" John said, then shut his mouth tight. He didn't want them to know he had the desire to escape. When he learned that he would likely be monitored and in a locked room, he sank low into the sheets. Of course, he still wanted to rehabilitate his leg, so he could run when he got the chance.

Greg moved out into the main area of the hospital, walking over to the nurses station and asking for John's doctor. He also sent a text to Sherlock, letting him know that John really wasn't doing much of watching the screen, but to carry on being cautious with his actions. When the doctor came to fetch him, Greg gave him an update with John's efforts. The man thanked him, suggesting that Greg take a few hours and rest. He gladly agreed.

He sat down in the waiting area, beyond exhausted, debating going home for a little while as he waited for John's doctor to come talk to him.

John was back on the bed -though to him it felt like a table- within minutes. He had learned that he couldn't walk yet, and that even when he tried his hardest, he couldn't control his fear of being touched by the doctors. They had started by checking his range of motion, which they found to be limited by a few degrees but not debilitatingly so. They’d all been exceedingly gentle. Still, he’d panicked, and they’d been forced to strap him back down.

Once John was back in his room, the psychiatrist and trauma doctor came in to evaluate him. John was given a sedative and the psychiatrist took up a chair beside his bed, the one Greg typically sat in. He watched as the doctor charted, changing a bit of the formula they were giving John through his nose, doing his best not to touch him.

"Doctor Watson," the psychiatrist said calmly, "I'm told you were somewhat combative with the occupational therapist today."

John looked away miserably. "I'm sorry... Don't tell Moriarty. He'll be angry..." John remembered that these people had said they didn't work for Moriarty, and that they wrote in their notebooks whenever he claimed they did. Perhaps if he played along, they would relax their guard and he could leave. "I'm sorry... I must be confused. I was scared. Please don’t hurt me." This amount of composure was taking far too much effort to keep up.

He rose his brows slightly and set his pen and pad down, lacing his fingers and leaning back in the chair. "Nothing to apologize for. Your fear is understandable. I'm told you fed yourself a little ice today. How do you feel about that?"

All the while, the medical doctor was doing his best to examine John without putting his hands on him. He stopped moving as talk of John's oral intake came up, highly interested and ready to chime in if needed.
John shook his head. "No. No, I don't like it." He gave the doctor a pleading look. "I've got a tube. That's fine. I don't need to drink. I don't need water. I don't want water. I don't want-" he had to stop himself as his voice had started to raise with fear.
"No water, please," he whispered and kept his eyes down.

The doctor nodded and held up a hand. "I'm not asking you to drink, John. I'm simply trying to see where you are in your progress. Now, doctor Miller here," he nodded to the medical doctor, "has informed me that we need to alter what you are being fed and how often, and I'm sure I do not need to explain to you that this method of feeding is not sufficient over the long term. If you continue to struggle with feeding yourself, we are going to have to implement a longer term solution. What I'd like to do is work with you to come up with a plan to get you back to eating on your own."

Miller nodded and let himself out of the room, leaving the men alone. "John, daily fluid intake is vital for you. I'd like for you to work with me on this. Would it be easier to try you on juices? Or frozen things, such as popsicles?"

_They're trying to get me to eat so they can punish me._ "No, no, I don't want to eat. I'm not supposed..." He squeezed his eyes shut. John detested speaking with them while strapped down like this. "I'm not hungry. I don't want to drink. I don't care what it is."

He looked up and the dark circles under his eyes were apparent. "What sort of longer term solution?" John feared the answer.

The psychiatrist stared at John for a moment before nodding and making a note in his chart. He hummed and shook his head. "You are a physician, John. We'd have to surgically install a PEG. Port to your stomach. That is not at all the outcome I want to see for you, and you will still have to take something by mouth or your membranes will suffer. That's not to say anything of the damage that your teeth will experience, either. If you continue to refuse liquids, at the least, then we will have to carry on handling this for you while sedated."

He gentled and looked over at John once again. "John, no one is going to punish you for eating or drinking. Just as you've not been punished for speaking, or the night that you slept on your own. I want you to say that back to me. I want to hear you say, 'I will not be punished for eating or drinking.' This will help set the way in your mind."

John stared up at him with wide eyes. This was just like his training. He was to say something, repeat it back, and believe it or he was to be beaten. "I will not be punished for eating or drinking," John said in a rush and cringed away. "I won't. I'm sorry. I'm sorry." He turned his face towards the pillow and braced every muscle in his body for the impact. He dug his nails into the sore, inflamed skin on his palms until it was bleeding again.

"M'sorry. Sorry. Don't..." Even with the medications in his system he had already started to panic. His breathing was hitching and rapid, eyes wide, logic evaporating from his mind.

The psychiatrist watched him closely and marked down a few things in John's chart, standing up slowly and walking over to the locked cabinet in the room, keys jangling as he drew out a sedative and got it ready.

A moment later he was back, speaking softly to John. "Just relax," he said quietly, pushing the sedative as he pressed the call button for the physician to come back. "You have done fine, John, just relax." He was pushing enough to put John under, wanting him to have some sort of rest.

By the time Greg was allowed to return, John had been given antibiotics and his hands wrapped up tight to protect the now cleaned injuries he'd put to his own palms. His wrists had again been seen to, and John had been out for several hours. The staff had bathed him, cleaned his mouth, and changed
his bedding as they always did when he was down. Greg came over and sat down next to him, having rested a bit himself, settling in to wait for John to wake up.

John came to rather slowly. He blinked and found his eyes were open before he was consciously aware of actually seeing anything. He knew that he had slept, and that that was a bad thing, but he didn't have the energy to do anything about it.

He looked around after a few minutes and saw Lestrade. He was grateful it wasn't the doctors. "Greg," he said with a scratchy throat, "they were going to train me. They had me say things. They were going to train me again."

Greg frowned at that, leaning forward and putting his hand on the bed where John could reach and touch him if he wanted to. "Were they hurting you, John?" He asked seriously, already knowing the answer but wanting John to know that he'd do something about it if they were. "I'll take care of it if they were hurting you. Are you alright?"

John shook his head. "No... they.. they didn't hurt me." He tried to dig his fingernails into his palms but found they had been cut and his hands wrapped. "But they would have! They were going to! I said I believed them so they didn't have a reason to hurt me. But they would have if I hadn't of said their words."

Greg just kept his hand where John could reach him, and nodded his understanding. "Okay, John, alright. What did they want you to say? Did he threaten you?" He'd had a little talk with the psychiatrist before coming back in to speak with John, knowing a bit of what happened. They'd conquered getting John speaking, the next would be getting him drinking water and sleeping.

"They told me to say that I wouldn't be hurt for eating or drinking," John confessed as if it were a terrible occurrence. "But I'm supposed to say that I will be hurt for eating and drinking and I can't say both because that means I don't believe one and if I don't believe one he'll be upset and..." Greg carefully touched the back of John's hand. "John, I'm right here. I've never allowed anyone to harm you. He's not coming here and he isn't going to send anyone in here to harm you either. You don't need his words anymore, John. He's not in control here." His tone was as gentle as he could make it, speaking as honestly as he was able.

"No, you don't understand," he retorted indignantly, "If I don't believe him, he'll know. I need to believe him to keep myself safe." He had turned his hand over and grabbed onto Lestrade’s as tightly as he could manage. "I need to believe him."

Greg blinked at the sudden shift in John's demeanor, holding on to John's hand. He leaned in, his face open and easily readable, his voice painfully honest. "You don't anymore, John. You need to believe him, but you don't any longer. You don't. I know that you had to before, I understand. But now you don't."

"Believing Moriarty is the only way to keep myself safe. Believing Moriarty is the only way to keep myself safe. Believing..." John repeated the words to himself in a mumbled voice. That had been all he had to protect himself, and when one is as vulnerable as John was made to be, one takes to heart any small semblance of protection one can get.

Greg listened to John, just holding his hand, wondering exactly how to tackle this. John needed more control over his situation, but it was a dangerous gamble. Perhaps if John could see the logical fallacy he'd been forced to believe.

"John, you were never safe with Moriarty, were you? No matter what you did, you were never safe. He's fed you a clever lie. Those words are not true, John, they aren't."
"They have to be true or nothing protects me," John muttered and let go of Lestrade's hand. "There’s nothing else. I know you say you'll protect me, and I believe you'll try. But he can do anything he wants. He could blow up this entire facility if he wanted. Nobody is safe from him, and you know it. The only thing you could do was shoot me when he comes for me."

Greg nodded, quite serious. John's words were true to a point. "And I would, John. I would before I ever let him have you again. But if you think that believing his words, which you've already shown you don't because you've been audibly talking for weeks, will keep you safe, you're wrong. He won't decide not to hurt you because you've chosen to believe him. He would happily go about whatever he wanted to do without a care in the world as to how good you've been, or how much you believe him, and you know it. I protected you last time, I will always protect you."

John looked surprised that Greg was willing to shoot him. Surprised, and infinitely grateful. "Thank you, Greg," he breathed and laid his head back. He exhaled slowly as if a great weight had been taken off his chest. "Thank you."

After some time, his brow furrowed again. "You're saying he's going to hurt me not based on my behavior...but his own whims..." John shook his head. "That's not how it works. I remember. That's not how it works at all. If he wants to hurt me, he'll trick me into doing something wrong or train a new trigger word. It's never for nothing." And indeed, it had not. Not once had Moriarty hurt John unless he'd broken a rule.

Greg shook his head. "The game has changed, John. And he was hurting you for nothing. The things he banned you from are not possible to abstain from. You have to eat and drink to live, and hurting you for doing so is just headgames, it was for nothing. His rules were erroneous, his rules were his whims. Were you ever really safe? When he wanted to hurt you, was there really anything you could do that would stop him from doing so, or was he just giving you the illusion of protection?"

He wasn't at all going to just let this go, not with John actually walking through it with him.

There was a mental block in John's head, built out of cuts, blood, bruises, terror and pain. It refused to budge and allow him that all of this had happened for nothing. There must have been something he could have done. "H-he didn't beat me when I obeyed him. One day he didn't beat me at all because I put a spike through my arm when he asked without hesitating."

Greg shook his head. "Breathe, John. Take a moment and breathe. You are never going back to him. Close your eyes and breathe for a moment." John was touching close to panic again. "All those things...they are done. They are not going to happen again. He's not going to hurt you again. That was just another way of him hurting you, you had no choice in it, he may as well have driven that spike into you himself. He was a liar, John. He lied to you over, and over, and over again."

"He didn't LIE!" John shouted, though he had no idea why he was defending his tormentor. "He never lied. Everything he said was true!" John shook his head and tried to think back to all the things Moriarty had said. He had said Sherlock would hurt him, and John felt pain each time he saw him. He had said escaping would get him tortured, and it had. He said eating and drinking would cause pain, which it also had. The only thing that hadn't been true was the speaking, and that had only recently been disproved. It was a chink in the wall, but only a small one.

Greg went quiet, leaning back in his chair with a slow exhale. John clearly wasn't going to hear this. His eyes cut over to the screen, expecting to see Sherlock over the microscope, instead finding him back on his bed, curled up tight on his side, looking incredibly small. Likely he found nothing, then. Sherlock never took it well when he found nothing.

He dragged a hand over his face and tapped the armrest with his finger, loathing the walls they
continued to hit again and again.

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John continued to make very small steps in the right direction. He ate ice occasionally, and recovered from the mental breakdown it gave him a bit quicker. The physical therapist was able to get his range of motion back and he could almost put weight on his leg, though a walker was usually needed.

The only thing keeping him going throughout all this was the idea that if he obeyed everything they said, made progress, and proved he could function on his own, they would let him go. If they let him go, he could find somewhere safe. And, since Moriarty’s reach extended from the ends of the earth, to the depths of the ocean and back, John knew that death held his only safety.

It was another three weeks that he was able to eat ice without screaming, crying, or making himself bleed. He even got up the courage to ask for it once, though that had proved to be a bit too much for him to handle.

Sherlock had taken the weeks to slowly wean himself off the heroin, and he'd called for someone to come in and cut his hair. He'd set the flat somewhat to rights but otherwise had done little else. He occasionally ate, but mostly he slept or stood at the window, picking at the violin, always under the eyes of the cameras.

Greg had stayed with John the entire first week, and then had taken to visiting him every single evening for at least an hour when his shift ended. John was finally able to take in ice, at the least, and was calmer than he had been. He walked in as he did every night, not at all sure what he'd get, but this time he had a stack of medical journals, the most recent on top, and the day's paper. He greeted John and sat down at his side.

"John," he greeted warmly, noting John's focus flicking to the screen but saying nothing of it. "I've brought you things to read, if you'd like. Few of your medical journals and the day's paper. He set them on the night stand, behind the little tablet that showed Baker Street. "How's your day been?"

John’s eyes glanced back to the screen. He held for two seconds then jerked away. That was a bit too much, and he had to take a moment to collect himself. "I asked for ice. I broke down a bit after," he admitted, "but I still asked. I asked and they didn't hurt me."

Greg smiled at him openly. "That's wonderful, John! Very good, that's really very good." He meant it as well. That sort of progress was massive. Sherlock, of course, did not measure things like that very accurately, but to Greg, it was wildly encouraging. He sat quietly then, watching John as John watched Sherlock, who was presently at the window, plucking at the violin, shaven but in the same clothes he'd been in the last three days.

John nodded and a faint smile graced his lips. It was wonderful to see someone actively pleased with him. "I hate trying so hard. It hurts. It's exhausting." To John, it wasn't worth it. It wasn't worth existing this way. He would rather just get well enough to get away. There was a moment of silence that hung in a comfortable, if a bit noticeable way. "He hasn't come to beat me," John said to break it and cast another glance at the screen. That had been confusing John, and another chip was added to the wall in his mind.
Greg shifted so that John could see him looking at the screen. "He won't, either. Last thing in the world that he wants, I promise." He leaned back, not sure how much to push with the whole Sherlock issue, letting John lead them in that if he wanted. "I hear you're making progress with that leg as well."

"I can almost stand," he said with a small smile. "They should let me go soon." John gave a long, slow sigh. "How long has it been? How long have I been here?" Time was passing in strange bursts. One minute he would be in a fit of panic, and the next he would be lying still without remembering the time between.

"This facility about three months, you were in Bart's for two." He hummed at John's comment of being released, knowing for a fact that was not anywhere close to reality. "I'm sure it feels good to be nearly on your feet. Do you want some ice?"

John shut his eyes. "Yes, it will be good to stand again." He processed the time, musing that this entire ordeal had taken over a year by now. He wondered what his sister would think, though she must still think he was with Doctors without Borders, or ignoring the incident. John continued to throw sideways glances at the telly. "I remember the violin."

Greg hummed at that. "You used to enjoy his playing, mostly, unless he was in a mood." He looked over at Sherlock, who seemed to be at the same string again and again. "Sometimes he would play long, beautiful pieces, sometimes dark and sad. He'd drive his brother from the flat with it," he said that with a faint smile of fond memory. Greg had lost them both, and he missed them terribly. The memory made his throat tight and he had to clear away the emotion, touching his lip as he tried to cover the moment.

John nodded and tried to remember the violin playing. Moriarty had covered a lot of bases, but either hadn't thought to destroy his love of violin music or deliberately chose not to. John guessed the later. "I think I used to enjoy the violin." He recalled once waking up from a nightmare to hear the soft tones drifting up to his room. He had found Sherlock sitting on the base of the stairs, playing a simple, light melody. The thought hadn't occurred to him before, but perhaps Sherlock had been playing for him. "I used to love it."

Greg nodded, clearing his throat. "You used to use it to gauge how he was feeling in the days he'd go quiet. Used to irritate you to no end that he'd play and not speak. Did it between cases when he was bored, when he wasn't pestering you for smokes." He gave John a gentle smile.

"I could bring you some of the music, if you'd like? You can play it in here when you want."

John pointed to the monitor. "The mute's on so I don't hear him speak." He locked eyes on the screen for another three seconds then looked away. "But he's playing now. Not talking." John didn't want to hear the man speak. It was terrifying to think about, but the music could be nice. "D-do you think it would help me get out of here?"

Greg stared at John for a moment before looking to the screen. He had his mobile back in his lap and shot off a swift text, leaning forward so that John would not see him send it, asking Sherlock to play something for John. He started speaking as it was clear that the text had gone through, Sherlock moving over to his mobile, violin in hand. "I think it would, yeah," he agreed, watching the screen as Sherlock's posture changed and he tucked the violin under his chin, dragging the bow across the strings as though preparing for a song.

John would have reached for the remote but he couldn't move his hands. "Could you turn the volume up enough so I can hear?" He asked very quietly. He was afraid of his own reaction. What if Moriarty had programmed this as a trigger? What if he panicked? John gritted his teeth and prepared
for pain. When he heard the first few notes, he let out a soft "Oh..." It was beautiful. Very beautiful.
John closed his eyes and tried to recognize the song.

Greg watched John as Sherlock paced the flat, playing soft and low, the piece light and calm, if not a
bit sad. Time ticked on slowly and Greg finally began to allow himself to relax as well, just listening.
Sherlock wasn't able to keep his feet as long as he'd been able to in the past, and he ended up in his
chair, staring at John's, playing his heart out.

John breathed a slow sigh as the music played. It sounded sad to him, but he wasn't overwhelmingly
happy at the moment, so it seemed fitting. He found himself watching the screen again, this time for
longer before he had to look away. "He's so sad," John said with genuine despair in his voice.

A faint glimmer of hope roused in Greg's chest, though he knew better than to foster it. He just
nodded softly, speaking very quietly as the melody shifted. "He is," he agreed.

Sherlock's fingers slid across the violin, shifting into one of the melodies he'd often played for John
when the man was in the throws of a night terror, his feet naturally taking him to the foot of the stairs
that led to John's room. He closed his eyes, leaning hard against the wall and sitting on the lower
steps, chest aching as his fingers worked from the violin a tune he'd not played in more than a year.

John's eyes darted back to the screen and he saw Sherlock sitting at the base of the stairs. The song
seemed to calm him to his core. "He does that...." He said softly, eyes still on Sherlock. "He does
that when I'm having night terrors." He could remember it so clearly now, and wondered why in the
present he had overlooked something so blatantly obvious. Repeatedly he'd been called out of
nightmares, out of hellish situations and death and sand and fear, to the sound of that exact song. The
gesture of it hit him hard. John was able to look at the screen for almost half a minute before having
to avert his eyes, though there was no swell of panic this time. "I don't want to hate him," John
admitted quietly, with tears brimming in his eyes.

Greg mentally lept in triumph, keeping himself calmly in the chair despite the soaring relief in his
chest. To hear that Sherlock played for John when he was having poor dreams was an honest shock.
He honed in on that. "You've been someone that he let in closer than anyone else, John," he said
softly, going quiet again and letting Sherlock's music swell up around them. Sherlock's fingers
paused for a moment and then he dipped into another melody that John used to enjoy, one of the few
that he would request when he wasn't feeling well, or stress had weighed heavy on him. He did not
move from the stairs, oddly comforted at the imagining of John up in his room, simply needing a bit
of comfort.

John looked back at the screen. In the three weeks the television had been there this was the longest
he had been able to look at it in one day. "He does that... That song when I was upset or not feeling
well...Or angry at someone or something." John's eyes filled with tears again, but not out of fear or
pain. He stared at Lestrade with genuine shock written on all his features.

"Greg, I used to love him."

Greg would forever be grateful Sherlock had not been around to hear that. He looked at the screen
and then back to John. "Yeah," he said softly, "we all suspected as much." He had no idea what
more to say there. John was coming to his own reality, Greg was not about to push him. He wanted
to say any number of things, terrified they might push John hard over the edge. Instead he kept close,
letting Sherlock's playing walk John along.
Suddenly the music stopped and Greg looked to the screen, his heart seizing up in sympathy as Sherlock leaned forward, curled in on himself, abruptly breaking down into nearly silent tears. It would never cease being strange watching that man break in honest emotion. Sherlock was mostly quiet, the moment over in under a minute before he unfolded and put bow to string again, back into the song he'd played during John's night terrors.

John watched with a pained expression on his face, which stemmed from Moriarty-induced terror at the man and sadness from watching him cry. To recall that he had once loved this man was painful. Incredibly painful. It made the things in his mind infinitely worse when he factored in that he had loved the man who tortured him. John broke down hard into tears that Greg could not console before his mind finally constructed a neat wall to put such things behind. Moriarty wouldn't like such thoughts anyway.

Sadly he looked back at the screen, and while he could only watch for a few seconds without feeling the same panic rising up in him once more, it had been enough to tell him that something was terribly wrong. Not with Sherlock, or with the hospital, or with the staff, but with himself.

The idea rocked him like a heavy punch to the head. He blinked, unable to cope with the idea that perhaps the people at the hospital weren't trying to torture him, but perhaps just a neutral party, or perhaps even allies. He still believed with every fiber of his being that Moriarty had control of it, but perhaps he had just been dumped in an unsuspecting hospital to be picked up later. "I'm confused," John muttered honestly.

Greg nodded, his heart breaking for John while hope burned in his chest. "I know, John. I know. Would you like to talk about it, or do you need a rest?" He was impossibly glad that Sherlock had gotten himself back together quickly.

"I think I need a rest. I can't do this much longer today." He gestured at the screen to indicate that he meant watching Sherlock. "But I've done well... right? I did good today though, so they might let me out soon, right?" John lay with his head back and his eyes only half open, though he couldn't see at all through the tears. His arms were forcibly down on the bed, and he did nothing to attempt escape. This was the posture of a man who had given up; an abused animal waiting to die.

Greg leaned forward and muted the screen before clicking it off, silence falling in the room. "You've done very well, John," he said softly, wanting very much to help him. "Can I get you anything? Would you like me to read to you?" Greg very much wanted to go check on Sherlock and give him a bit of company, but he did not dare when John seemed to trust him and could potentially see him visit.

John looked utterly exhausted, mentally, physically, and emotionally. Keeping his eyes on the "I'm sorry, but no. I'm too tired. You should just go."

Exhaustion is a terrible thing. It makes strong men weak, heroes into villains, and the brave men into cowards. Even the most resilient will succumb to exhaustion in the end, while pain alone often doesn't work to the same level of quiet despair.

John was utterly and completely exhausted, but sleep refused to swift him away until the early hours of the morning, when the war between weariness and panic was finally won and he dropped off.

Nightmares came, as they always did, and he snapped awake screaming. This was to be his routine now, and soon he would start to fear sleeping for reasons other than the possibility of retribution. Even while he slept, John wasn't safe from Moriarty.
I'm well aware you do not often function in this capacity, but your brother looks as though he could use some kindness. GL

Mycroft knew he wasn't a fantastically comforting person, and responded with that knowledge in mind.

Honestly, I think he would rather be alone than with me. I'll go though, if you think he looks bad. M

After checking the camera feed, which he had an option of viewing on his laptop, he rose to his feet.

Alright, I'm on my way over. M

Greg nodded, slowly standing on stiff legs. He hoped that horrible level of exhaustion would allow John proper sleep tonight, instead of the regular sedative he was given. "Alright, John, I'll see you tomorrow," he said very gently, moving out of the room and quietly shutting the door behind him. He texted Sherlock that the feed was off, and that the music had comforted John.

Sherlock read the text several times before setting his violin aside on the stairs, pressing his hands to his face, knees drawn up close to himself. He felt like a child, lost and alone. John's absence shouted deafeningly loud in the absence of heroin and Sherlock stood there, hand in hand with his horrible sobriety, lower and lower every day. He'd taken every bit of information from the implements in the box that he could. He traced their origins, looked into the sellers and the manufacturer's, studied the particles, even found a few hairs that were not John's.

All just led back to the factory where John was tortured, and to Moriarty as the criminal. One he traced back to the factory of origin where it was made. It was like chasing one’s own footprints around; he always ended up in the same place.

He would not risk leaving the flat, not with John terrified of him. He'd been made a prisoner in his own home, slowly going mad, his routine the only thing keeping him together without the drugs. He was carefully groomed. He had the flat in hyper-focused state of cleanliness, had brushed up on his Latin and French grammar, and was working through his bookshelves again, refreshing the information in his mind palace. He ate once every other day, the most he could force himself to do, and he spent a great deal of time sleeping.

Sherlock's dressing gown spilled down the few steps below him, and he let his forehead rest on his knees as grief washing over him like the sea. It was slowly becoming a familiar friend in the silence.

Mycroft came to the flat soon after Greg's text and walked up the stairs. He didn't bother knocking and found the door unlocked. The state of the flat was less perturbing than it had been the last time, and he was pleased to see that Sherlock had a few books he was reading. "He's making progress," Mycroft said to the small, broken lump that used to be the consulting detective. "He's eating ice, and can look at you for a little while on the monitor now."

Sherlock did not move from where he was seated, nor did he look up. "If you've come to gloat, or happier still, tell me of all my failings, I'd just assume you show yourself out." He made an effort at drying his eyes without his brother's notice, preparing to defend himself.

Mycroft walked to the couch when he arrived and sat down, hands folded in his lap in a rather non-threatening manner. "I've come to say that your display with the violin has helped him. I check in on him via camera from time to time. He was watching the screen." Mycroft tried to make his voice gentle, but realized he had no recent practice. "And for a moment, he didn't look terrified, he looked
Sherlock had no idea what to do with that. "Is this what you count as progress? That he can stand to glance at my image for a few seconds and not scream?" The words had bite, but his tone was flat, neutral. "You've made your feelings perfectly clear, Mycroft. I'm clean, you've no need to send me away. I have hit walls with every attempt to analyze what I've been sent. It is done. I sit here in hopes that he can function on some level again, but it is done. At least for me, anyhow. Save whatever lecture you have regarding my need to return to life, and kindly see your way out."

Mycroft listened to his brother with an even, unreadable expression the man had perfected over his lifetime. "You're not seeing the point, brother. When you found him, he was a bleeding mess of panic and terror. He was unable to speak, unable to even write without having a full psychotic breakdown. Now, he's having rational conversations with Greg. He's talking about what's going on inside his head. He's trying to work through his own fear, and he's doing well considering the amount of mental damage that he sustained. If I were you, I would be proud of him."

"I am happy he is making progress towards a life of his own, yes. I am grateful to Greg for working with him. I fail to see why you are here, brother. Am I not showing sufficient enthusiasm? Perhaps I shall brush up on my acting skills, add that to the routine. The entirely pointless, mind-numbing routine."

Mycroft sighed. "You should thank Lestrade. John would still be a raving lunatic if it weren't for him." He looked up at Sherlock and tried to mold his face to look hopeful. It didn't work. "John is trying to get over his fear of you. He's not just trying to get over fear of eating, or drinking. For God's sake, he's not even attempted to eat something, and yet he's working himself sick staring at your video feed. It hurts him to do and yet he's doing it."

"Then stop him!" Sherlock said sharply, looking up at that. "This entire endeavor was to put him at ease, not stress him terribly! He does not need more stress! I do not matter! The only thing that matters is his wellness! He is wasting his energy on something as-" he waved his hand, "he- do not refer to him as a raving lunatic, Mycroft. Were your positions reversed, I doubt you'd still be breathing." There was cutting anger in his tone, and he was back on his feet. "John Watson is an incredible man who has been dragged through the belly of hell and is attempting his legs on the other side. Do not sit here and presume that I am not aware of his suffering. I have thanked Greg, many times over, for filling a role I wish nothing more in the world than to occupy personally!"

Sherlock was pacing tight, gesticulating wildly with too thin arms. "Pull these cameras and give that man some peace! I am irrelevant, there is plenty of life for him without me in it." And oh, did that fact cut like a dull blade, but it was the truth.

Mycroft sighed and didn't allow Sherlock's biting tone to sting him, though his brother's pain was incredibly uncomfortable. "It is putting him at ease, in a sense. He's less afraid of you know. Before, you were a looming threat he believed to be lurking around every corner. Now, you're a face on a monitor he can look away from if he wants to. And often times, he doesn't."

Mycroft took out his phone and requested from his assistant that the recording of the day be sent to his phone. His people were always prompt, and it was there in under five minutes. "Would you like to see him, Sherlock?" He asked gently. "I can show you the tape. He's awake, talking. More than talking. He's conversing."

Mycroft started the tape and started to watch the events whether Sherlock planned on joining him or not.

Sherlock paced like a caged animal in front of Mycroft, pausing occasionally to look at the feed, the image incredibly painful though he made his best effort not to allow Mycroft to see his distress. The
tinny sound of his violin replayed through so many speakers mostly filled the room, and for the first time in a long while, hope poured into his chest when John said he didn't want to hate him.

His knees nearly buckled under him when John confessed that he used to love him. The words sliced across his chest like a hot knife through butter and he nearly went to the ground, though luckily there was a chair for him to collapse into. His gut twisted and sadness crashed hard into him, nearly making him physically ill. The magnitude of what he'd lost became greater still, his reality spinning hard out of control. John asked for Greg to turn it off, no longer able to stand looking at Sherlock, and a few moments later it went quiet.

Sherlock could hardly breathe.

Chapter End Notes

Rough waters are ahead, my lovely readers.
Rough times that made me cry when writing. Openly cry.
We'll post soon, and may God have mercy on your soul.
-Dem
Mycroft rose slowly and forwarded the tape to Sherlock, just in case he wanted to watch it again. "I understand that this is difficult for you. I can't imagine what you're going through right now. But this should give you hope. He's starting to remember you. If he remembers that much than its only a matter of time before he starts to realize that you didn't hurt him."

He went to the door and turned one last time. "I can imagine what’s going on in John at the moment, though. He remembers loving you, but still thinks you tortured him. The betrayal he must be feeling is more than either of us can understand. Don't make it worse by giving up on him."

Sherlock did not respond to his brother. John's agonized tone was wrapped tight around his mind, choking off all other thoughts. The words nearly interrupted his breathing.

*I used to love him.*

How he wanted to throw himself at John's feet, plead with him, allow John to drive blades into his own body until he was satisfied Sherlock had hurt enough. He was the last person on earth who would give up on John. It had taken more than he had thought himself capable of to accept that he'd lost the man forever, that the goal had shifted to simply allowing John to live. He'd been tirelessly at John's side, even in secret, until banished from doing so. Sherlock's hands had been tied.

So he played when asked to play, and he kept himself under constant surveillance. He'd gone off the drugs to keep himself where John could see him and shaved daily to keep from frightening him. The accusation from his brother, while he was so horrifically reeling from the revelation, was nothing short of cruel. He'd never given up on John, he'd let him go. The act had been the most selfless thing Sherlock had ever done in his life, and now he knew the staggering level of loss even more intimately.

Mycroft left the building and notified Lestrade of what happened. Sherlock seemed to have given up, but at least wasn't using anymore and had been eating at least weekly.

*I showed him the video. I think it is devastating to him to see John like that, but he should know that John's making progress.* M

John was determined not to scream, as he was trying to show his progress. Nightmares were normal. Normal people had nightmares. Fully functioning, sane people with jobs and families had nightmares. They did not, however, continue panicking for the next half hour even though nurses tried to calm them. That wasn't normal. John was realizing quickly that he had very little control over his fear, which was painful and embarrassing to know. "I'm fine... Fine.." He told the nurse to his left, who looked like she was going to sedate him. "I can get through this. Please."

Greg read the text, incredulous.

*I had said 'kindness,' Mycroft, if you will remember. GL*

*And I told you that kindness is not my strong suit. If we can fix John he'll be fine.* M
That is a sizable 'if,' Mycroft. GL

Its the only thing we've got. If we don't get John to the point of being able to at least be in the same room as Sherlock soon, he might give up. M

Sherlock will never give up on John. He's just accepted that he's lost him. Or is that not how you mean 'give up?' GL

I meant give up on himself. If he doesn't think he can be a benefit to John, we might have to start worrying about him. M

Mycroft's missive greatly concerned him. It had crossed his own mind more than once, but he thought with Sherlock on camera, they'd be okay. Now that Mycroft had shown him the tape -and Greg could not imagine watching something like that if it were about him- he was even more twitchy to see what Sherlock was doing.

When Greg showed up at the hospital the next day, the doctor stopped him, informing him that John had been sleeping and started having night terrors. It was no surprise to anyone, though Greg was disheartened to hear it, simply feeling terrible for John. Perhaps he could shift when he was there.

He walked into John's room, gently knocking. "John? Mind if I come in?"

"Come in," John murmured and his voice was smaller than usual. He was perturbed by this new development in his own mind. If it wasn't enough to be haunted by his memories in the day, now he was being terrorized by his mind at night. "Hey, Greg." John didn't look over. His limbs felt heavy from defeat and exhaustion, but it was the knowledge that he wasn't even safe from fear in sleep that was disturbing him.

He let the silence linger for a little while. "You look really, really tired John."
John nodded and blinked his heavy eyelids slowly. "I am tired."
He looked over to John and swept his eyes over the man. "John, you seem pretty calm. If I let your hands loose, are you going to try and hurt yourself or run? I'd really like to let your hands loose."
John shook his head. "I won't try and go anywhere," he almost whispered. Other than his eyes and mouth, he hadn't moved a muscle. "I'd like to be free though, just in case."

Greg had been moving to release him when John added the last line. His hands stilled and he tilted his head. "Just in case what, John?"
John shrugged as best he could. "I...I don't know. Nothing? Just in case someone came or something. Or even something like a fire. I'm not going to move too much. I don't think I can." His head lollled to the side and it seemed draining just to draw breath. "Forget I said it. I'm confused, remember? I'm insane." John looked tired, perturbed and dejected.

Greg's expression slid to sympathetic and he shook his head as he reached out and unfastened the restraints, including the ones at John's ankles. "You are not insane, John. You're horrifically confused because of unspeakable terrible things done to you, but you're so much better than you've been." He pulled John's personal comforter up higher for him and dimmed the overhead lights.

"I've a recording of the music played for you when you were upset. Would you like to listen to it? Just the violin bit is all." Greg wanted to reach out and touch John, but was worried there would be a fallout.

John laid still as death even when he was untied. For a brief moment, a sense of freedom stirred
within him and he wanted to rise, to walk, and to leave, but it was soon extinguished. He didn't budge, not even to curl into a more comfortable position like he usually did. "I'd like that. Thank you. I think maybe all that time of hearing it when I knew things were going to be alright might help now."

There were five pieces on the disk, spanning over an hour. Greg popped it into the little player and put it on repeat, letting it play low and soft in the dim atmosphere of the room. He leaned forward and put two gentle fingertips at the side of John's hand, wanting him to not feel alone. "Everything will be alright, John. I know it must sound absurd to hear right now, but it will be."

"No, I'm quite sure it won't be," John whispered mostly to himself. "It can't be alright. I'm broken. I've lost. I'm ruined. I don't want to live and I don't want to be afraid anymore. This is all so pointless, but you aren't going to let me die in here." It was rather dark of him, but he wasn't feeling overly optimistic at the moment.

Greg slipped his hand around John's, very loose in his grip. "I'm sorry, John. 'Alright' was likely not the right term. I don't think you're ruined, and you've decidedly not lost. You are so much improved from when you were first found." He went quiet, letting the music play for a few minutes. "I don't want you to be afraid anymore. You've been fighting so hard and doing so well, John. You won't always be afraid. You won't be."

"Yes, I will," John said slowly. "I had nightmares about the war, Greg. Still. I couldn't handle that without permanent repercussions. What makes you think I can handle being held down and sliced?"

John looked like he was about to slip down into the chasm of panic again, so he focused on the music and not his memories. He started to hum along in a jerky, tight voice with his eyes squeezed shut.

It was a fair question. Greg held quiet as John mastered himself, wildly proud of him for his efforts. He wished terribly that Sherlock could be here to see this. He waited a long while with John, his hand loose around the man's, just sitting with him. Finally he spoke softly, "You are a remarkable man, John Watson."

John laughed, but it was a humorless, sour sound. "Not remarkable. If I were remarkable I would have found a way out of here by now." He imagined himself tipping off the bridge, hanging suspended in the air briefly before plummeting into the welcoming darkness. He had a pleasant smile on his face at that.

Greg shook his head, undeterred. "Think that all you like, you'll not shift my opinion of you. Do you want a bit of ice?" He kept his voice calm and quiet, but he was using his normal tone for John, the same as before the man left.

John nodded. "Alright. Yes, I would like ice." The words still came out stuttered and forced, as asking for ice was very similar to asking for water, which had been the cue for waterboarding. "Maybe today I can let some of it melt and not scream this time." He truly wanted no part of eating ice. What was the point of rehabilitating him if he was just going to die? But it was entirely necessary if he was going to escape.

Greg squeezed John's hand gently and then stood up, walking over and fetching him a cup as he always did. "Maybe so," he said with more optimism than John had. He deeply felt for the man, but this sort of shift was more than welcome. He brought the ice back and sat down, helping John elevate the head of his bed. He waited as the music played and John started in before speaking again.

"Would it be a help, or welcome at all, if you had someone here to wake you from bad dreams?"

John shook his head. "No, I think I should just get used to them myself. I don't want to bother
It had been two months in the mental hospital and still the only thing he could manage to eat was ice. Even that still required a great deal of courage and stressed him to the point of shaking. "How much longer until I can leave?"

Greg was not to be deterred. "That someone would be me, and you're no bother. If you'd prefer to be alone, that is your choice, but don't say so for the benefit of keeping me untroubled." He skirted the 'leaving' question, betting that unless something drastic happened, it would likely be a very long time, if at all.

"I don't want to be here anymore," John remarked. Of course, he meant life in general, but the hospital was what he was more directly referring to. "It's best if I just learn to cope with them. I'll be living with them for a while, apparently." John slowly moved his arms up to his chest and curled his knees up for protection.

"Alright, John, I'm sorry," Greg said softly, much more gentle once again. He offered the cup to John, "I did not mean to push. I don't want you to feel alone. You are not alone. You have people wanting you to get better, cheering you on in the background. You are not alone." He let the music wash over his words and he leaned back, hoping John could get a bit of that ice down.

"I want to leave." John reiterated. After a while, he started to drift off into the melody, his mind being captured in its soft tune. "A few weeks ago you told me something," John began, "About...him. You said that he didn't want to hurt me and I was confused. I didn't believe you, and I still don't..." He wrestled with his own belief system and told himself that it was just a ruse to get himself out. Still, he was curious. "But I was wrong about other things... and I'm ready to listen."

Greg leaned forward, surprised by this but highly encouraged. "Absolutely, John. Absolutely. What would you like to know? I'll tell you honestly about anything to do with him." He shifted so that John could easily see his face, wanting to keep the honesty as clear as possible.

John looked uncomfortable, as the subject was unpleasant to even consider talking about. "I fully believe it was him who hurt me. He...He did...bad things. I have the memories in my mind. I'll listen, but I get stupid. I'm sorry I'm stupid. I just...You were right about the talking, and maybe this too."

And oh, how little he believed that. "But I can't keep thinking for so long. My mind goes away. Soon, I'll be hurting again." He drew the covers closer around his shoulders so only his head was visible. "Hurts in my head."

Greg nodded, "Then perhaps, John, it is better if you close your eyes and get comfortable, and just listen to the music. Sleep will do you a world of good, even if you have poor dreams. It wasn't him who hurt you, and he won't come here. He...he loves you, John, and this is killing him. I know you hate that, hate to hear that and I'm sorry, but it's the truth. It's why he looks so sad when you watch him. He would never hurt you like that. Never. He'd sooner die."

He kept his words soft, just wanting to give John something to think on, just something.

John shook his head, but didn't verbally refute Greg's claims, no matter how outlandish they sounded at the moment. "I... That can't be right, Greg. He was there! He-" John ran his fingers through his hair, which had grown a bit longer than he usually kept it. Not that he cared. "I h-have proof written on my skin that he was there. Just...Could I have some paper and a pencil?"

Greg got up, moving through the drawers and finding what John asked for, utterly thrilled that John had not started screaming. It was a remarkable breakthrough, even if it had taken him working every day for two months. He moved over a little rolling table and put the pad of paper and pencil down on it. "I do still have the evidence folder, if you ever want to look at it, John." Otherwise, he just sat still in the calm quiet, listening to the sound of Sherlock's violin, curious as to what John was going to do.
The pencil felt foreign in his hand, which had only served the purpose of shielding him from pain or being held down to be carved at. He repositioned the pencil several times before he found a way that would work with his hand, and even then it slipped often.

John drew a line down the center of the page and started to write on both sides. It was supposed to make him look sane, in order for him to be released, but the pencil made a wavering track down the middle. On the right, he marked down the reasons he had for believing Sherlock had tortured him. On the left, he planned to put the reasons Greg had told him it wasn't him, but his hands started shaking before he could get that far. He didn't believe himself capable of dictating it for someone else, so he waited a few minutes then started again.

_Moriarty said so_
Moriarty is always right
believe him
he was there.
I could hear him
I could see him sometimes
smell him
I saw him cut me
I felt him cut me
he held me down so I couldn't escape
he was dressed as one of the doctors who had hurt me

Greg leaned in and watched John writing. Oh, now this was something wonderful they could work with. He beamed at John for a moment before settling back. "You let me know when you are ready."

It took John over a half hour to write the simple list. Often he felt himself slipping and had to turn the page over completely until he caught his breath, but in the end, he had written on both sides.

_Moriarty said so_
Moriarty is always right
believe him
he was there.
I could hear him
I could see him sometimes
smell him
I saw him cut me
I felt him cut me
he held me down so I couldn't escape
he was dressed as one of the doctors who had hurt me

Greg says so
he hasn't hurt me in a while - could be waiting
looks sad - acting?
said did nothing wrong - lying
said I could shoot him - bluff?

He handed the list to Lestrade. "I assume you have more for his case."
Greg hummed and leaned to the side, pulling open the night table. "I do, John, yes."

He drew out the long waiting envelope and set it on the table for John. He'd added to it from time to time, even getting records from the phone company with Mycroft's help, an official MI-5 seal on the top, showing Sherlock's GPS movements over several months time. He was never once near the warehouses. All of John's emails, even to himself, Mrs. Hudson, and Molly were included, next to the ones sent to Sherlock. The CCTV stills, the case studies, all of it.

"He was kept very busy while you were away. He missed you, I think, and he never wanted to be home. Not typical for him. Granted, he loves the work, but he never avoided Baker Street."

John took the file and looked through it. He had to look away and collect himself each and every time he saw the word Sherlock, which made progress slow, but eventually he started to add to the left side of the list.

GPS location monitored - hacked fake maybe
emails sent and received
cases solved

"I don't like this at all," John complained. To John, Greg was trying to convince him that a man who tortured him was actually innocent. "I swear he was there..."

Greg watched John carefully, incredibly proud of him while he felt deeply for the man. "What happened to you was real. However, there were recordings of Sherlock's voice, nicked clothing to make his scent part of the experience. Do you recall the case with the kidnapped children, little Hansel and Gretel as he called them? You had been with him, and yet that little girl screamed, swearing she'd seen him before. That was Moriarty's trick. He wore you down, again and again, hurting you to the sound of his voice, his scent. Pavlovian, Moriarty described it when he called and taunted him with it."

He cleared his throat. "When you were in Bart's, Moriarty was relentless in his taunting of him. He threatened your medications, had a mole in that hurt you. You were too scared to see him, so he hid his face dressed as a doctor, screening all your meds, all the people who came in. He was trying his best to help you, John, without scaring the daylights out of you."

John added some of the things Greg was saying to the left side.

Hansel and Gretel
pavlovian
torture induced fear

He wrote them, but didn't believe them. It was still too much to swallow at once that the only thing he was sure of didn't contain a scrap of truth. "Greg, I trust you. I'm going to assume that he's deceived you as well, and not think you're lying. If he is making all of this up, and you're in on it, tell him to kill himself. If not, and you're right, tell him I'm sorry."

Greg's brows knitted and he exhaled slowly. He tapped the list. "This is huge progress, John. Huge. I'm incredibly proud of you. We will take all of this at your pace. The fact that you could even discuss this...it's fantastic. Do you want me to move any of this for you? Can I get you anything? I'm...I'm not going to tell him much of anything at the moment, he's...well, that's not for you to worry about. Amazing work, John."

"I think I need a sedative." John said rather abruptly. He was grateful that Lestrade was
acknowledging how difficult this was for him, and thought he would understand his pain. "I can't stay calm anymore today. I'm too tired." He kept his mind on anything but Sherlock, which proved difficult. He put his wrists back by the restraints. "You might as well strap me back down. I still can't handle needles."

Greg's chest tightened and he got to his feet, "Could you try a pill? If the needle is going to scare you anyhow?" he asked gently as he began to fix the restraints back in place, hating doing so. He was gentle with him, moving slowly, and he left John's legs free.

John shook his head and his eyes widened just a bit. "I'm not supposed to..." It was his default answer. "I can't. I couldn't swallow it. I'm not allowed." John's breathing had picked up and he tried to remind himself with what little energy he had left to stay calm.

Greg wasn't going to push that. John had already worked so hard. He walked into the hall and called to the nurse, explaining that John needed a sedative, and then moved back into the room. He stood at the side of John's bed and wrapped his hand around John's, speaking softly as the music played. "Doing brilliantly, John, just brilliantly," he said calmly, waiting for another minute until the nurse came in. "Hey, John, look at me, yeah? Just look at me for a moment."

John was always stressed at the sight of the nurses. Even several weeks later, he still wasn't quite over the doctor who had been pulling at his stitches from the time he got there to the time he was removed. "Yeah, thank," John said in a nervous voice and pulled slightly away from the nurse, regretting his choice to have Greg restrain him again. His attention flicked back to Greg after a moment. "Alright. Alright."

Greg touched John's shoulder. No pressure there, just a ghosting reassurance that he was with him. "There you are, get you a bit of rest, let you have a break from this. You're going wonderfully, John. I'm right here, and you're doing fine." He watched the nurse swab at John's little IV port, sliding the needle in and giving the meds, glad that John at least did not have to feel the prick of the needle any longer. He held on to John's hand, keeping his fingertips light at John's shoulder.

"Just breathe. That's all you have to do right now, just breathe and relax, let that work."

The familiar feeling of drowsiness started to pull at him again and he fought against it. "No...I'm not supposed to sleep... Not supposed..." He started to hyperventilate a bit and grabbed at Greg's hand. Eventually the medication won and he sagged down onto the bed.

Greg sat down, watching John drift off. He should leave, he knew, but he couldn't quite make himself go just yet.

He picked up the list John made and photographed it, sending it to Mycroft.

Greg settled, intent on remaining for a few hours, just keeping in John's company.

He did that himself? That's incredibly improvement. Should I show it to Sherlock? M

Mycroft pulled the feed and watched John writing. It seemed to be greatly painful for the broken man, but at least he was making improvement.

Is he willing to consider the fact that Sherlock might be innocent? M

Greg responded in the low lighting.

I believe so, yes. He brought it up on his own, looked through my entire evidence file. Said he thinks Sherlock has me fooled, and that if I'm in on this to tell Sherlock to kill himself, and if not, to tell
Sherlock he's sorry. I'm not keen to show Sherlock anything right now. If John does all of this and still believes Sherlock is guilty... better to allow Sherlock to think John hasn't made progress yet, I think. He hasn't gotten out of that chair all day. I'm worried. I'd rather not risk it. He is your brother, the call is yours. John is having night terrors. I'm finding it hard to get up and leave him. GL

He slid the papers over to the side of the little rolling table John had used, flipping them over so that John would know where they were without having to look through them.

_The progress today is remarkable. He's trying incredibly hard to get himself together, though I think the reasons why are less than ideal. GL_

Yes, I can imagine that he has ulterior motives for recovering, but perhaps in recovering he'll abandon them. Night terrors were to be expected. I'm honestly not surprised. I agree that if he still comes to the conclusion that Sherlock is guilty and Sherlock knew of the list it would crush him, but as it is he still thinks John is just blindly afraid. Perhaps it would give him hope to see that there's still a speck of the old John in there. M

Mycroft considered sending them to Sherlock, but Greg was right. If John still found Sherlock guilty at the end of this it could crush him.

_His progress is due to you. I can not express how grateful I am to you. If you ever need anything, don't hesitate to ask. M_

Greg read the text several times, hardly believing what he was seeing. Mycroft so openly thanking him was beyond unexpected.

Greg spent the next half hour emailing Molly, as had become his habit. She asked after John constantly, starting the day he was brought to Bart's. When Mrs. Hudson's reception had gone so poorly, Greg asked that she not come. Occasionally she'd text Sherlock, deeply concerned for him, but he never replied. Greg was never surprised by this. He let her know what was happening, and then sent Sherlock a brief text to encourage him to keep heart.

Once all was said and done, he still couldn't make himself leave. The following day was off for him, and despite John's insistence that he learn to handle these dreams himself, he just couldn't do it. He settled in with a book on his mobile, fully expecting to leave in a few hours.

By half one in the morning, a nurse slipped in and put a blanket over the sleeping man in the chair.

The sedative eventually wore off and John's mind woke up. He was still too tired to wake up, but the horrors persisted and clawed their way into his mind.

John opened his eyes. He tested the restraints, as always, and looked over to Greg, who must have fallen asleep. He breathed a long, slow sigh and stared at the ceiling, settling in to wait. "Hello, John." John's eyes snapped open and he looked to the doorway. He knew that voice. In a pressed suit and long coat stood a figure. He wasn't quite sure if it was Sherlock or Moriarty, but it hardly mattered either way. "You thought you escaped." The figure chuckled and took from it's pocket a blade, dull, rusty, and covered in blood. "GREG! Greg, wake up!" John twisted in his restraints and shouted at him, but the man didn't stir. "Shhh...." Moriarty-Sherlock whispered. He gently touched Greg's throat with the tip of the knife in a sickeningly gentle way. "Should I let him go, John? Or should I take him as my new pet?" John shook his head frantically and panic sawed at his nerves. "No, let him be! Get away from him! Please!" Moriarty-Sherlock's face twisted in anger. "That's twice you've spoken," he remarked and dug the blade into the front of Greg's jugular. Red blood poured down the front of Greg's throat and his eyes snapped open just long enough for him to begin to splutter before he went limp again and his head lolled to the side. John let out an agonized scream
and jerked on his restraints. Something in his frail wrist snapped and pain radiated up his arm. Once his screams died down, Moriarty-Sherlock began to speak again. “I believe I told you not to speak.” The object of his nightmares advanced on him now, smiling down with one brown eye and one blue.

John thrashed and screamed in his sleep, tugging very violently on his restraints without being aware.

"Oh, how cute. You thought this was a normal hospital?" John shook his head but didn't speak. "You thought you were here to recover? Well, I'm glad you've been doing so well. You're like a fresh canvas now." Moriarty-Sherlock dragged the knife across John's chest through the thin fabric of his white shirt.

Greg startled hard awake, watching John for a moment as he screamed, his skin ashen, sweat on his brow. "John!" Greg called out, calm and loud. He reached down and lightly shook John's shoulder, "John, it's a dream. Open your eyes, John!"

His heart rolled in his chest at John's reactions, the poor fucking man just lost to it, tormented horribly. He shook his head and tried again. "Captain Watson!" anything to shake him out of the hell his mind locked him into.

The knife carved over the JM already scared on his chest, this time making new initials, SH. John screamed in agony, but thought he could hear something in the background. Someone was calling him.

John snapped awake violently and pulled at the restraints as hard as he could. He kicked his legs and looked wildly around, though his eyes touched not on the anxious face of Greg, or the clean white walls. His heart skipped like a frightened rabbit in his chest and he screamed over and over again until his throat was raw and his chest ached.

Finally, he opened his red, tear filled eyes and began to see the room. When he saw Greg alive and without blood pouring from his throat, he slowly put the pieces together. "It-It was h-him..." John stammered, still on the verge of hyperventilating.

Greg moved without thinking, reaching up and gently sliding his palm over John's forehead, sweeping his hair back and letting his hand rest at the crown of John's head. "Look at me, John," Greg said softly, talking over John's panic. "Slow breaths, with me." He took a few exaggerated inhalations to start pacing John. "Slow down, I'm right here with you."

John stared up at Greg with wild, almost unseeing eyes. He looked down at his chest, where the cuts would have been, but saw no blood. "Dream... It's a dream..." He tried to breath on time with Lestrade but a fit of panic-induced coughing made him stop. "I don't want to sleep... He was-was cutting me! Killed you!"

Greg let John's closest hand loose and sat the bed up to help him with the cough, slowly carding his fingers through John's damp hair in an effort to calm him. "That's okay, John. I'm not going to make you sleep. Slow down, breathe. He's not here. Only me, just a dream."

John pulled his arm close to his chest and took a few deep breaths. "Sorry...I'm sorry.." He closed his eyes and made an effort to calm himself. "He killed you... And-and he cut me.."

Greg shook his head, leaning in closer, his fingers running through John's hair slowly. "You've nothing at all to be sorry for. Nothing. No one is going to cut you again, it's not going to happen. They are dreams, and they hurt, but they are not reality."
He dropped his free hand down to John's, very gently wrapping his fingers around the back of John's knuckles. He was glad he'd left the music looping. "Slow breaths, John, slow breaths."

John forced himself to take a deep breath, hold it for a moment, then exhale slowly. Once the panic started to subside the sadness came and John's face twisted in anguish. "How much longer until I can leave?"

Greg let go of John's hand long enough to drop the bed rail dividing them, before reaching over and loosing John's other hand. He dared to rest a hip against the bed, holding John's hand again, trailing his fingers through John's hair.

The sadness in John's voice and expression was devastating, even to Greg, and he shifted a bit closer. If ever there was a time he wanted to hug another bloke, it was this. "Let's take this a day at a time, alright? Today isn't the day you leave. I'm so sorry, John."

John was impossibly small in the bed, with both arms in a tight X across his chest and eyes dull. He shook lightly, but not with active fear. He was tired of struggling with his own mind. Greg's words and touch were comforting and John latched on to the sound of his voice. "Please," he whispered and locked his eyes on Greg's. "Please let me leave."

Greg stopped touching him long enough to pull the thick comforter up to John's shoulders in response to his shaking as he was desperate to do anything that would soothe the man. He slid his palm back over John's hair again and again, scooting a bit closer until he was properly sitting next to John on the bed, one leg down to the floor, the other bent along John's side.

"I wish I could, John, I really, really do. I'm not going to let you give up. You've worked too hard. I'm not giving up on you, even if you had. I'm so sorry you are hurting, mate, I can't imagine."

John stared up at Greg for a long moment, as if deciding for the final time if he could trust this man. He was tired of trusting people only to be hurt by them, but Greg had shown more devotion to him than anyone who'd ever hurt him had. So, slowly, he reached up and wrapped his arms around Greg's waist.

Suddenly he was clinging, with his frail hands latching on to the fabric on Greg's shirt. He held on, desperate for some sort of comfort from the terrors that prodded at his mind from every corner. "This is too hard," he lamented, his face buried into Greg's chest. "It's too hard and I can't do it. I-I just can't."

Greg closed his eyes and wrapped one arm softly around John's back, incredibly wary of hurting the recently healed wounds littered across it, and sank one hand in John's hair at the back of his head, holding on to him. "You don't have to do it alone. If it's too heavy, then share the burden. You don't have to do this alone. You have people who love you, John."

John shook his head and gripped Greg tighter. "He's in my mind, Greg. Moriarty. He's in my mind and he's hurting me with it." John seemed to have lost what little fight he had regained and sagged in Greg's arms. "I'm too tired to fight him off."

Greg slowly shifted to better support John, letting the man rest as much weight against him as he could. "I know you're tired, John. I know. Sleep and food will help, they will. Once we get to that, I think you'll feel a world better. For now, let me help. I want to help." He took in a slow breath, his fingers in John's hair working light little circles where he touched him, starting to slid his fingers very softly over John's back. Perhaps he could coax him to sleep like that.
"Moriarty was right," John said with sudden realization. "Sleeping will bring me pain. He doesn't even have to do it himself anymore!" John curled closer to Greg and pulled at the fistfuls of his shirt. "I'm not allowed to eat, Greg. You know that. I've got the tube. Can't that be enough?"

Greg shook his head, slowly rubbing circles on John's back with the flat of his hand, his heart squeezing at the extensive lines of raised scarring he could feel under John's shirt.

"It's not enough to get you out of here, and it's not enough to help you properly heal. He doesn't make your rules anymore. You are allowed to eat. Just like talking and taking in ice, it will not hurt you. Sleep...I see that sleep hurts, but it won't always hurt every single night." He took a slow, deep breath, pulling the blankets tighter around John, not wanting him chilled. "Please hear me, John. You're allowed to eat."

"I want to believe you," John whispered. In his mind, Greg had become the anti-Moriarty. He was kind, and advocated the opposite belief system as Moriarty had. He desperately wanted this new authority to be in control, but it was difficult to say which was correct. "I very much want to believe everything you say. I wish I could but I can't. I don't believe that he hasn't hurt me and I don't believe eating won't bring me pain." The tension in his shoulders relaxed slowly as kind touch eased his mind and his breathing returned to normal. "I want to believe you, but I can't."

Greg nodded, easing slightly back to better hold John against him. He rested his back on the highly elevated head of John's bed, though he was still nearly hanging off the side. "I know you are afraid, and I know you are trying. Do you remember how scared you were with the ice? How sure you were that I was wrong? That it would hurt? You're so tired, John, so tired. Can you make a jump? Remember that I promised I'd...I promised you I'd sooner put you down than let anyone harm you again? It stands, John, that promise stands. I will not let anyone hurt you like that. You're so tired, take a leap and let me carry you for a little while?"

He kept his tone very soft, gentle and steady, doing his best to keep John warm and sheltered. "I'm not asking you to eat right this minute, just think on it?"

John had been carrying the weight on his own. He had decided what would hurt and what wouldn't, what would anger Moriarty and what would appease him, and who he could trust. What Greg was proposing sounded like a trust fall off a building over a bed of hot coals, but John was far too tired to continue on like this, and eventually nodded.

"Alright," he whispered into Greg's shirt. "Alright, I'll listen to you." Immediately he felt a wave of relief and seemed to sink further down. He wouldn't have to make this his own fight anymore. "J-just please don't hurt me. I think I wouldn't be able to handle it if you hurt me."

Greg exhaled in relief, closing his eyes for a moment. He gave John a soft squeeze, overwhelmed with the man's trust. He knew without a doubt that John couldn't handle it if he hurt him. "I will never hurt you, John. Never." He let the silence hang, simply experiencing the incredible gift it was for John to be both receptive to physical comfort and protection, as well as his extension of trust.

"I want you to sleep, John. I'm going to stay just like this with you, and I want you to sleep. If you dream badly, I'll be right here with you and I'll help you when you wake up. No restraints, okay? Let's see if that helps. You're allowed to sleep, I promise."

John's breath hitched and he pulled the covers tightly around his shoulders. He had forgotten what it felt like to be touched in a way that didn't hurt, and found himself overwhelmed with how much he missed as simple a comfort as a hug from a friend. It showed the depth of his physical abuse that it had taken him four months to allow someone to do so.
"I'm scared of sleeping," he stated but closed his eyes. "But if you're sure it won't hurt... I'll try." He leaned his head onto Greg's chest. "Thank you for not strapping me down."

"I cannot promise you won't have bad dreams, John, but I can promise that no one will physically harm you for sleeping. I don't want you strapped down at all." He helped John get the blanket over his shoulders and gently slid his fingers down the side of John's hairline, gentle and rhythmic, letting John rest his head over his heart.

He closed his own eyes, holding on to John protectively, trying to allow the man natural sleep.

Even as weary as John was, it still took him quite some time to sleep. He whimpered softly once, when he thought about his punishment for sleeping, but other than that he was silent.

Greg proved to be a great comfort for him, and after a half hour he finally drifted off into a tense, but much needed sleep. His breathing slowed, and for a while he had no dreams to torment his crumbled mind.

Greg exhaled slowly and slipped into something of a dose as John slept against him. When a nurse came in to check, his eyes snapped open and he waved her off, waiting for John to wake on his own.

John woke slowly and with only a small trace of fear. His grip tightened on Greg just to be sure he was still there. At first he was frightened that he would be in trouble for sleeping, but he looked up at Greg and remembered that he was under his protection now. Moriarty was no longer in charge of these small things. The idea scared him, but at least the burden wasn't falling to him anymore. John had decided to let Greg be in charge, and perhaps by doing so he would stop being afraid of everything.

John had managed seven incredible hours of deep sleep. Greg had been awake on and off, not daring to move, sometimes gesturing to the staff and once watching John's psychiatrist come in somewhat incredulous.

"Hey," he said softly, warmth in his voice as John's grip tightened on him, "good morning." He went quiet again, trailing soft fingertips over John's back, just trying to keep him soothed and steady. After a few more minutes, he finally asked, "How are you feeling?"

John looked up at Lestrade and blinked. "I didn't... It didn't hurt..." A small smile of relief lit his face and he hugged Lestrade. "I'm going to believe you now, Greg. I'm going to do everything I can to believe you."

He stretched and noted that he felt much better physically. The odd aches and pains that had been a symptom of his constant stress were faded slightly and he sat up without getting too dizzy.

Greg sat up with him, a genuine smile on his face. It was brilliant to hear. Greg carefully stood up and stretched, rolling his shoulder to wake it up. "That's fantastic, John. Thank you." Feeling that Mycroft had a right to some of this new success, Greg texted him.

John slept on my chest last night without restraints. GL

He looked back up to John. "I'm going to have a bit of breakfast, and I'm going to eat in here. I'm going to have them bring you ice with a small bit of apple juice in it, and it would be wonderful if you'd try it with a spoon. Just like always with the ice, only a touch of juice there this time, yeah?"


John hesitated. "I don't know... That sounds like eating..." He looked back at Greg for reassurance.
"But if you say I won't get hurt I'll try it." This idea of trust was painful. It was like swinging off a cliff by a rope that had worn down to a thread. He was supposed to trust in it, even though he believed he could clearly see the outcome.

Greg nodded his understanding, keeping himself gentle. "I know, John, I know. It's the smallest step towards eating I can think of."

He got up and walked to the door, leaning out and waiting for someone to pass, utterly unwilling to leave John while the thread of trust was stretched so tight. He asked for coffee and a bit of egg for himself, and the ice and apple juice for John.

Several minutes later, Greg had the white paper cup filled with ice, apple juice drizzled over the top and pooled about a quarter of the way up from the bottom, sitting on the little table in front of John. He sat down beside him and quietly tucked into his own meal. "No one will hurt you, John."

The innocent paper cup looked intimidating, like a terrible monster John was going to have to fight. He could put it off, but then it would become water, which terrified him even more. Reluctantly he took the spoon and picked up a piece of ice. With frequent looks back at Greg for confirmation, he ate a few chips with the spoon. His heart pounded in his chest like a caged animal.

Greg left his eggs and got up, carrying his coffee, and sat down on the bed next to John, giving him a bit of physical support. "I've got you, John, I've got you. You're okay," he said gently, warmly leaning his shoulder against John's.

John continued to eat the ice, his mind starting to rebel slowly against the forced calm. When he got about halfway down he could start to see the juice at the bottom. "Greg, I can't... I can't do this... It hurts"

Greg set his coffee down and very gently wrapped his arms around John, softly pulling him in against his chest. "Close your eyes and take a slow breath for me, John, just take a deep, slow breath. The ice used to scare you like this too. You can do this. I'm right here with you. You're not alone."

John picked up the spoon again, though it took him several tries to pick up the ice. Once he had almost finished it the ice was swimming in the juice at the bottom.

John coughed and spluttered, tugging violently at the ropes that held his hands behind his back. "You said you wanted water, didn't you?" Moriarty said softly as he dragged him back up out of the water. "You were thirsty. You said you were thirsty. I'm giving you water."

John's eyes widened and he stared down into the paper cup. "He... He's..." He tightened his grip on it, crushing it slightly.

John gathered up his resolve and slowly raised a spoonful of apple juice to his lips. When it did not cause him great pain, he took another, then another, until the cup was empty. He tossed it against the wall.

Greg pulled John close to him, wildly proud, running his hand down John's back over and over again. After a few minutes, he spoke against the side of John's head. "I am so incredibly proud of you. You're such a fighter."

Tears of bitterness and fear rolled down his face and he allowed himself to sob openly. "Why is this so hard? This shouldn't be so hard. I-I don't want this to be so hard."

Greg just allowed John to lean into him, holding on and soothing him as best he could manage. There was no way to make this any easier. John had to get through it, and anger, while hard, was a
brilliant step forward.

"I don't want it to be this hard, either," he whispered, sliding his fingers through John's hair, "I wish I could just fix it."

It took John another hour to fully regain his calm. When he did, he smiled up at Greg with a weary, broken, but nevertheless triumphant expression. "Maybe they'll let me go soon if I keep doing that."

Greg gave John a soft smile. "Maybe. Listen, John..." he trailed off for a minute, not exactly sure how to broach the subject. He cleared his throat and just jumped in. "I've been thinking about this, and I don't know how long it will be until you are discharged-" he dared not say released, he did not want John thinking in prison terms any longer, "but I've an extra room now that my wife's left me for good, and I'd...I have no idea where you'd like to go, but my flat is open to you. You're more than welcome to stay with me, if you want."

John thought that living with Lestrade would be nice, but he didn't see himself having much of a life outside the hospital. "I don't think that'll be necessary, Greg." He said quietly. Didn't the man already know he intended to head for the Thames? "I think I can find something to do... I won't need a house."

Chapter End Notes

Still suicidal. He's been away from Moriarty for four months now. He's been out of the hospital for two.

He's recovering, even if it is incredibly slowly.

And Sherlock is declining, though not so slowly.

Thoughts?
Reluctance

Greg held John tight to him at that, flexing his grip. It was hard to hear in the cold light of day, such a rational, calm explanation that John just intended to die. He lost hold of a small pained sound and eased off his grip again, not wanting to scare him.

"I would never get over it if you did that, John. Not ever." He said the words softly, as gentle as he could, sadness weighing his words down drastically.

"You don't want me to be in pain, do you?" John responded in a quiet voice. He was deeply saddened by Greg’s emotion, but was more determined not to press on. "I would rather have died with Moriarty than be here, terrified of my own shadow. It would have been the humane thing to let me die of my injuries on the pavement than to drag me unwillingly back to life. I don't want to hurt you, Greg, but I won't be able to leave this behind." He spoke with measured words that contained not a hint of panic. He wanted Greg to know this choice wasn't one brought on by fear.

Greg slowly let John go, easing back from him. John had always asked this in terror, had always been in the harsh throws of panic. This...this was cold and unwavering. He exhaled slowly and ran a hand down his face. He'd thought...well, it didn't really matter what he'd thought.

He was incredibly glad they'd not updated Sherlock.

"No, John, of course I don't want you in pain," he said quietly, the vigor of earlier evaporated. He couldn't blame John for feeling as he did. He really couldn't. "You are so much better than you had been, and I believe that you will carry on getting better. That's only if you want to, though. I can't-" he had to pause, the threat of his voice crack suddenly very real.

He'd always liked John very much, had been incredibly fond of him as a friend, admiring his calm, stoic endurance. Then he'd become wildly protective of him in this environment, having both John and Sherlock's well-being in his hand, wrapped up in one horribly battered body. He cleared his throat, the wash of deep sadness a shock even to himself.

"I don't want you to give up. Perhaps that's incredibly selfish of me, but I cannot stand the thought..." he shook his head and gave John his space, staring at the discarded cup on the floor that John had thrown.

"Greg, I'm sorry," he said as the men drew away. It was colder without Lestrade next to him and John curled in on himself in the man’s absence. "I didn't mean to hurt you."

John was trapped. Of course, dying was his only option at this point. Recovering seemed far too tedious and stressful. He honestly didn't see the point in it. "Greg, I want you to know that I'm mainly recovering because of you." He sat up and looked down at his hands. His military posture had been replaced by a dejected, pained slouch. "I don't see the point in recovering. It's a futile effort and a waste of time. But you want me to, so I am. It's the only way to get out of here, but even that goal isn't worth the pain I'm recovering for you, but I can't live for you."

Greg shifted closer on the bed to John when he shivered, not wanting John to feel alone. "I know you are not trying to hurt me, John. I know. Don't censor yourself, I want you to talk about anything, whenever you want to. Yeah it hurts, but that's because I just- it's not about me, John, it's fine."
He carefully moved so that his arm was open, leaving his position where John could tuck in against him if he wanted to. "The point, John, is to win. You didn't deserve it, and he does not deserve to win. There will be nothing more grating to him than to know that you've conquered his best efforts. I don't want you to live for me, John. God no. I want you to live for you, and I intend to stay with you until you find the will to do that. I loathe that you are in so much pain, I do, but you are under the fog right now, and I can see over it. I can't make you do this, I can't, but God do I want you to."

John crawled into the spot between Greg's arm and his chest. It was safe there, and warm, and John could think more clearly when he felt safe. "He's already won. He didn't want me. I was never his goal. I was a tool to be used against him. It's not fair that I was caught up in it. It's not fair."

John turned so his back was against Greg's chest, which made him realize how easy it would be for Greg to hurt him. "If I recover fully, he'll just do it all again."

Greg shook his head, leaning just slightly into John, wanting him to feel safe. "No, he won't. He won't, John, because we are going to catch him. He's made a critical mistake in taking you, and there are a lot of people who's entire focus is to take him down. He won't do it again. Even if I have to put you in witness protection, start you an new life somewhere else, he won't do it again."

It was interesting that John had said that he was used to get to Sherlock. "Perhaps he's succeeded in getting to...to him, but he's not the focus here, John. You are. It's not at all fair that you were caught up in it, I completely agree."

"I never was the focus." John said quietly. "I was just John. I'm just John. It's a simple name for a simple person. Moriarty used me, he used my pain to get to him. It could have been anyone really.... But... He chose me...." John was trying to remember why he had been chosen.

"Moriarty chose me to get to him... Because he.." John shook his head. It was already clouded and terribly disorganized from the scare with the juice.

"You are the focus here, John. I don't care what anyone else thought. you are not a simple person, you are John Watson, and you matter. He chose you because you have always mattered. Moriarty chose you because he loves you, and you were the most important man to him."

He kept himself close and kept himself calm, but his heart was aching with John's words, with how little he thought of himself. If Greg ever got a hold of Moriarty, it would be a long, slow, messy affair taking him apart

John cringed just a bit at the thought of Sherlock, though at this point he could at least think the name. "If he didn't torture me, and I matter so much, and he loved me, and if I was so important to him, why did he let Moriarty torture me?" John had turned back to face Greg. Betrayal, bitter and stinging, had worked its way onto his face and carved deep craters under his eyes. "Out of the two, he is smarter, but Moriarty has more resources. And out of the two, I fear him more."

Greg pulled in a sharp breath at the look on John's face. When he answered, his voice was pained, feeling the weight of that guilt and unable to keep it out of his tone.

"Oh, John," he breathed, reaching out and touching John's shoulder before drawing his hand away, "we didn't know. God, I swear it to you we didn't know. There were emails from you in Darfur, and Doctors without Borders had a cancellation from you. There was no indication you were missing. John please believe me, no one knew you were not in Darfur. We would have taken London apart to find you, just like we are doing now to find Moriarty. That's why I printed all the emails we got. John we didn't know."
His vision blurred, guilt slicing across him like fire, burning terribly. He had to take a slow breath, looking up and blinking rapidly for a moment to clear himself.

"He's supposed to be clever!" John almost shouted and resentment burned in his voice. "He's supposed to be able to deduce everything in a moment! He should have known, damn it! Someone should have known and come for me." Tears started to burn in him and he crawled to the opposite corner of his bed where he curled into the smallest possible ball a grown man could. "Someone should have come for me!"

Greg couldn't help the single tear that shot down his face, slipping past his defenses. "You're right," he managed, his voice rough and low, "God, John I know, you are so right. We- we all messed up, John, we did. It wasn't for lack of caring. It- there was nothing to raise suspicion, there really wasn't. You're right though, and there is no way to express how sorry..." he shut himself up, pushing himself to his feet, wanting to give John his space. The way John had fled from him ripped across his chest and he had to take a few deep breaths to calm himself down. God, he needed to sleep. "John I'm so sorry."

John had his back turned to Greg and sobbed quietly. His knees were tucked up to his chest and his hands over his face. "Y-You sh-should have come for me," he stammered in desperation. "Someone should have helped me!" He wiped tears out of his eyes and looked over his shoulder. "You know, I thought for sure someone was coming. I told Moriarty so. I told him someone was coming for him, but then weeks went by and nobody came. And then I didn't want anyone to come because I was scared of what he would do to me and..." His long, rambling sentence trailed off.

Greg squared his shoulders and set his jaw, hands in his pockets, looking at the floor. He forced himself to calm down and distance. John needed to rave, deserved to rave, and Greg had no place to be emotional. This was John's crisis. He would stand there and he would take it all. "I should have come. I would have come if I'd known. I should have known. None of this is fair to you, and I know I can't possibly make up for it. I should have come." His tone was honest and tightly controlled, his insides on fire, searing with guilt.

John pulled a pillow over his head and gritted his teeth together. He wanted to be comforted, but he was still bitter with Greg, Sherlock, Mycroft, and anyone else who had the capability of finding him but didn't. Once again, he found himself slipping down into hysterics. "Y-You should h-have come to g-get me." He said and felt like he was going to be sick. "H-he should have protected me! How the hell do you expect me to think he didn't hurt me when he's taken down Moriarty before and he just didn't even try?"

Greg watched John, wavering in what to do. John was swiftly spinning out of control. Greg moved to John's side, just shy of touching him. "John," he said softly, heartbreak clear in his tone, "John, I'm here now. I wasn't...I didn't know you were missing then, but I'm here with you now." He reached out and touched John's shoulder, hating how much pain John was in. "I am sorry, John, I'm doing my best to fix it."

"Just leave me alone," John spat through clenched teeth. He wasn't angry with Greg, not really. He was just cross, broken, exhausted, confused, and in pain. But anger was a more productive emotion than depression, and he had more energy than he had for the past few weeks. "I'm sorry. Just leave me alone."

Greg drew back as if burned, taking a half-step back in retreat. He looked around desperately, not sure what to do. John was free and unrestrained, and he wanted his privacy. He blinked rapidly, trying to clear the blur from his own eyes, gathering up the pencil and anything else John could use to hurt himself with, stuffing it all in the night table drawer and locking it. He pulled out the little key and then turned back, pausing just before he pulled open the door to the hall. His chest was
incredibly tight and he was struggling with his composure. "I'm...god how I'm sorry, John."

He slipped out of the door and closed it softly, leaning back and closing his eyes, pinching a thumb and pointer to them. A nurse passed by and he managed to get out that someone needed to be watching the feed.

John remained a small lump on the edge of the bed. He cried until he had no more tears left, then stared dejectedly at the wall. He didn't want to risk sleeping, and he had sent his only bit of comfort away. He was sorry, but too tired to worry about it at the moment.

John glared up at the camera in the top corner of the room. He was certain either he or Moriarty would be watching. "I hope you're happy," he muttered, then his voice rose, "I hope you're BLOODY HAPPY!"

Greg was a mess, pacing hard in the little waiting area, a coffee in one hand, his mobile in the other. He had no idea why, though. He couldn't let Sherlock know about this, and Mycroft would likely just reply with something snide. He debated going home, but he could hardly stand the idea of John on his own. He sat down for awhile, only to stand back up and pace, running his mind over potential ways to help fix this, finding none.

He needed a drink.

John sank down into the bed and whimpered. The thought occurred to him that he was able to leave, but he remembered that he couldn't walk. He swung his legs off the end of the bed, though he had no intention of leaving the room. He just wanted to stand on his own. His bare feet slapped against the cold linoleum floor and he slowly shifted his weight onto them. At this point the leg felt badly strained, and he couldn't flex the ankle, but it could bear a bit of weight.

Mycroft watched the feed with interest as John held on to the bed and took a few hobbling steps around it. He texted both Lestrade and Sherlock.

*He's walking a bit. M*

Greg read the text. That meant Mycroft was watching, for how long, he had no idea. If John was up and moving, well. He had no idea what to think of that. It would make it much harder to keep John put if he was mobile.

*He wants to heal so that he can throw himself off the Thames. I wish I could be more optimistic about his mobility. GL*

Sherlock, meanwhile, had turned off his mobile. He'd started in on the cold medicine the night last. He'd been asleep for the last twenty hours, and had no intention of getting back up. He wasn't overdosing, just keeping himself sedated. Hopefully until he starved himself to death.

John leaned heavily on the bed and placed one foot in front of the other. His muscles were weak from months of inactivity and he soon found himself aching anew. He crawled back into bed and tried not to be upset with how weak he was. It was disgraceful for a soldier to be so immobile.

*Well either way, it's progress. By the time he's recovered he should be rid of that notion. Maybe they can move him to a room where he can walk around but not hurt himself. M*

Greg sat down and tipped his head back, exhaling slowly. It would be so incredibly nice to have a bit of backup in this.
How long have you been watching? He's hit a wall that I'm not sure we can get past, this time. GL

And truly, in this, he wasn't sure there was a work around. You should have come for me! John was right, and Greg was having a very hard time soothing that ache. It wasn't about him, but it still hurt, and to think of what John had been going through when none of them came for him...he shook his head and sighed. It was so intensely horrible.

John laid still for another twenty minutes until his muscles stopped quivering from the exertion. But he was curious to see if he could do it again, and soon was trying once more.

I've been watching on and off all day. When he's with you I don't need to monitor him as closely. I have someone watching the 24/7. Why? Which wall are you referring to? M

Greg read the text with his eyebrows in the air, shaking his head.

You are aware I'm still at the facility, yes? He's had me out. Very, deeply hurt that none of us came for him. That I didn't come for him. Was so close to really making some headway with him but there's really no way around that, is there? Offered to let him stay with me, he categorically refused on the grounds of 'not much use for a home.' GL

Mycroft read the text with dismay that didn't register on his face. He didn't like the idea of John being angry, but at least it was reasonable.

We had to expect that he would be angry. It's illogical to think he would keep us instantly in his good graces. He's gone from blaming himself to us, perhaps the next step will be to blame Moriarty. M

Christ, but Mycroft could be horribly grating.

Well no, Mycroft, I didn't expect he'd be just fine with us, shocking as that may be to you. I hope the same, but he's tossed me out and his sole focus is on how to end his life. Forgive my lack of sustained optimism in this moment. GL

You sound tired. If you want, I can send someone to watch him. M

Or I can come myself. We should talk in person about the next step for him anyway. M

Greg frowned at the text and simply dialed Mycroft, not wanting the hassle of texting. There was no way in hell he wanted Mycroft near John, he was too blunt and too indifferent. John was suffering terribly, and the last he needed was Sherlock's brother walking into his room all cold and calculating.

That aside, he had no idea what Mycroft meant as John's 'next step.' John was still tethered close to his bed by a tube in his nose, had yet to drink a proper cup of fluids or consider a bite to eat. It was a wonder he wasn't still in a medical hospital. What Mycroft could possibly have in mind, he had no idea, pacing as the phone rang.

"Lestrade, I'm on my way. Don't worry, I don't plan on seeing John directly. I'll just sit in the hallway or something." He had his driver turn and prepared to address the difficult topic of John. "So he's eating ice and speaking. I'd say that's improvement, though it's not much. About his anger; I believe it will pass. He's grown quite attached to you." He kept his voice calm and indifferent, despite his sadness about John's condition.

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Greg pinched the bridge of his nose, Mycroft grating on his nerves terribly. "What exactly is it that you mean by next step, Mycroft? He's already in a mental hospital. What is it that you have in your head? As far as his anger, yeah, I'm sure it will pass, but to what? He's not attached to me, he's just terrified and I've not hurt him. Only now, he realizes I have. So, there's that progress for the bin."
"He's going through the natural stages of grief," Mycroft said simply. "He's going to hate everyone for a bit. He's just angry." He got out of his car and strode into the building.

"I'm here now. Let's talk about this in person." He clicked the phone off and found Lestrade. He noticed the lack of sleep shown in his deep lines and circles, the stress that had pulled at his face, the rumpled clothing that said he had been lying down... "You look terrible. You need to go home and sleep."

"I told him he wasn't alone. I'm not going to just abandon him, especially not on the day he realizes how horribly we failed him." Greg waved it off. "I'm a copper, sleep is a luxury. Why are you here, Mycroft?" He chose not to comment on Mycroft's assessment of the natural stages of grief. He doubted the man had ever felt such a thing, and that aside, he was quite aware of them himself.

"There's a few armchairs in the reception hall," Mycroft said curtly and led the way. "We haven't failed him. Not really. We didn't know that something was wrong and therefore had no reason to investigate."

Mycroft was being logical, as always. But he turned around and tried to be kind. "Don't beat yourself up about it, Lestrade. It wasn't your fault, and he'll come to realize that."

Greg rolled his eyes. "You're absolute rubbish at this, you know that? I'm tired, Mycroft, and I'm worried. Logic has yet to reach John once. It doesn't matter what's logical. He needed us, we were not there, ergo, we failed. That's not just John in there, it's Sherlock as well, and it's a tightrope, yeah? I'm trying to understand why you are here, and your stalling makes me think there is something on you don't want me to know about."

He was a bit more rough than Greg typically was, but this was wearing him down thin.

Mycroft sighed and looked up at him. "I'm aware that you're stressed." Mycroft began and tried to soften his voice. "You've done so much for the man and I am incredibly grateful. But you can't keep this up forever. I think it's time to push the idea of Sherlock being a friend more than the importance of other things. Maybe if we get him less afraid of Sherlock we can have the two of you rotate so the other gets some sleep." Mycroft pinched the bridge of his nose. "He's passively killing himself, Greg."

"I'm fucking aware, Mycroft," Greg snapped back, dropping language he rarely entertained. "I'm trying. He can't even hear Sherlock's name. He doesn't want to see me, and you want me to what? Waltz in there with your brother? And what of Sherlock? He's not exactly on form, what happens to him when yet again John goes into begging hysterics at the sight of him?"

He sighed and shoved his hand in his pocket. "I get that this is not enough. If you think I'm in the dark-" he shook his head, hardly able to look at Mycroft. "what is it that you had in your mind that could be done in short order? Lock them in a room together and hope for the best?"

Mycroft looked down. "I am aware you think me an unfeeling robot, Lestrade, but you're mistaken. I am worried about my brother. Deeply worried. He's killing himself. Slowly, mind you, but he's got no desire to live." Mycroft folded his hands in his lap.

"What I propose is to keep the video rolling and occasionally say words that sound like his name. He was terrified of water, wasn't he? Yet he eats ice now and sleeps sometimes."

"John doesn't want the video. Christ, Mycroft, in the last twenty four hours I've gotten him to accept touch, create a pro's and con's list, go through all the evidence, watch Sherlock and listen to him play, sleep unrestrained, and take in a bit of juice. I- Jesus, I'm trying with him and Sherlock, but he asks me to turn it off, it gets to be too much, and what would you have me do? Allow him to panic,
strap him back down in restraints and shout Sherlock's name at him?"

His eyelashes were damp as he nearly raved. "I'm not a psychiatrist! I'm doing the best I know how, Mycroft. I wish like hell I could get him to see reason but Moriarty has really outdone himself this time. I am scared for your brother too, I don't have anything else to offer here, you've already got it all!"

Mycroft stared up at him and sighed. "Greg, I am so grateful to you. I owe you a debt I can never repay. As does Sherlock. I know you're doing the best you can. Honestly, I never expected him to get this far. You've done fantastic."

"I think after a few more weeks though, he'll watch the video without too much fear. Then perhaps talk about him more. Water was a trigger, and still seems to be, but ice and juice were manageable. Perhaps if we wean him into talking about Sherlock, he'll start to warm up to him."

"Which is precisely what I've been doing. He's at least considering now that Sherlock was not the one wielding the knife." He sat down suddenly, the wind gone out of him.

"I have nothing to offer him when he wants to know why I didn't come, why none of us came. I could walk him out of so much, but I can't walk him out of that. I'm going to take time off work again. If you've any extra shillings in your coffers, I'd appreciate it."

He looked at the clock. John had thrown him out hours ago.

"I'll have you paid in full for your work with John." He responded. "I am sorry it's been so draining. If there is anything I can do to make this easier for you, don't hesitate to make a request." Mycroft gave a look of sincerity that rarely touched his face.

Mycroft rise to his feet. "Do you think it would upset him if I visited him briefly?"

Greg's eyebrows rose at that. "I honestly have no idea. I don't know if he will remember who you are. You...if you go, try to be uh, less stiff, alright? Gentle with him, he's...god he's suffering."

Greg got to his feet, intent on following, "I'll come with you, hang at the door."

"It would be best if you went in first. He trusts you, as much as he's capable of trusting anyway." Mycroft walked to the room and stood outside the door. He heckled his phone and found from the live feed that John had gotten back in bed and was staring blankly at the ceiling.

"Yes, I'll do my best to be less abrasive."

"Then wait here for just a moment, let me see if he'll even have me back."

Greg knocked lightly on the door, slowly opening the handle and slipping inside. He looked at John and cleared his throat. "John?"

John looked up with a numb, tired expression. "Greg, I'm sorry," he said immediately. "I didn't mean to make you go. I didn't mean to be angry." He sounded much like a child apologizing to a big brother for stealing his toys.

Greg visibly relaxed, walking straight for John and leaning down, wrapping his arms around him. "It's alright, John. You've every right to be mad, I was just trying to respect your space." He leaned back slowly and swept his eyes around the room. "Listen, John, you've a visitor. If you don't want to see him, he'll not be coming in. Mycroft would like to see you. Is that alright? I can stay right here if you want."

John wrapped his arms around Greg's neck and buried his face in his shoulder. "Mycroft?"
Mycroft...Mycroft..." John tested the word and rolled it around in his mind. "You won't let him hurt me, right?" He was dead serious, and decided to put his faith in Greg.

Greg shook his head, letting John cling to him. "I won't even let him in arm's reach of you. He has been helping me, getting me permission to be in here all the time with you, getting whatever I need. He's very worried about you, just wants to say hello. He absolutely will not hurt you."

Greg eased himself back just enough to call to Mycroft through the door, keeping between John and the door, right where he could reach and hold on to Greg if he wanted.

John seemed alright with the idea, or at least he was hiding it well. Once Mycroft entered the room, however, the color drained from his face.

Greg reached over and wrapped his hand around John's, holding tight, hitching a hip up on the bed and pressing closer to John. He wanted him to feel defended, if necessary, sheltered from any threat, imagined or otherwise. Perhaps seeing for himself how John was, even in this vastly improved state from the last time Sherlock had seen him, despite the tube in his nose and the IV port in his arm, the lingering red chafing around his wrists and the exhaustion in his eyes, would help his brother understand how difficult it was to see John honestly fear Mycroft's presence.

"Hello, John," Mycroft said softly. "How are you feeling?" John looked up and have a small nod. "Fine. I'm....I'm in pain but.... I mean...." John stuttered and looked down. The clean pressed suit and cold look in his eyes reminded John of his two least favorite people. "So...Mycroft... Why are you here?"

Mycroft stood a respectful distance away. "I'm just here to say hello," Mycroft said softly. "And to ask if you need anything."

John nodded and looked down. "I don't need anything. I don't think so. I need to be let out of here, but.... You won't do that...." John was trying very hard to continue speaking normally. But after a moment, he seemed to realize that if Mycroft hadn't hurt him yet, he likely wouldn't do it at all. He nested behind Greg a bit.

"Well, no, we can't let you out until you're feeling a bit better." Mycroft pulled the chair away from the edge of the bed and sat down so he wasn't as tall and imposing. John seemed to appreciate the gesture, as he sat up and looked at Mycroft more directly.

Greg's brow raised, honestly impressed with the entire exchange. He was glad to continue to have John's trust, at least, and allowed him to sit however he wanted near him.

Greg hummed and looked to Mycroft, giving him a gentle nod in thanks for his efforts. "John, do you remember Mycroft?"

"Uhm... I think... I think I do..." He looked up at Greg for help, then back to Mycroft. "I remember you kidnapping me for something....." He didn't sound upset about it, more curious. John's mind was foggy and it took him a while. "And... You were mad once because he wasn't wearing pants."

Mycroft smiled and nodded. "Yes, yes, he was being rather childish. I'm glad you remember." John looked back to Greg and smiled. "I remembered, see?"

Greg gave him an honest smile. "He nicked an ashtray for you," Greg said with a bit of a laugh, pleased with the memory. "Unbelievable business with the sheet, truly." He smiled over to Mycroft and flexed his grip on John's hand, incredibly proud of him.

"You two never failed to impress."

"He did nick an ashtray, didn't he?" John looked up with a smile. "He did because I said I wanted
Mycroft looked down at the sheet and scanned the list. "I agree with Greg. It's really fantastic of you. I'm glad to see you're making progress."

John kept close to Greg. "He showed me files and evidence..." That thought was starting to make him nervous, so he looked to something else. "Greg, tomorrow maybe we can put the video on again."

Greg nodded to John, keeping hold of his hand. "I think that would be a really good idea. I'm sure Mycroft agrees with me." He looked over the the man, the surprise at John's behavior evident on his own face. He needed a night of sleep, and wondered if he might be able to manage it tonight. John was...more settled. God, how Greg wanted get him eating so that horrid tube could come out.

"I was just telling Mycroft how fantastic of a job you did with the juice today."

"I hated that." John responded honestly. "It's stressful. I don't know why it's stressful and it hurts." John crossed his arms over his chest in a protective X. "But I'm supposed to get better, so I'll do it." Mycroft smiled. "Fantastic. That's very logical of you." Coming from Mycroft, that was a high compliment.

John looked up to Greg next. "I'm tired. Can I get some rest now? I'm done for the day."

Greg got up swiftly, nodding to John. "Absolutely. Would it be alright if I stayed with you? You've had a very productive day." He was in better spirits himself, highly encouraged by John's reaction to all of this. He looked over to Mycroft, nodding to him again. He'd text his gratitude, and apologies, later.

John nodded and wrapped his arms around Greg's waist again. "I'm tired. But sleeping is..." He was going to say 'not allowed' as Moriarty had said, but Greg tended to refute that. "...uncomfortable."

Mycroft took this as time to leave. He slipped out the door and back to his car, feeling that the meeting had been productive. Perhaps he could tell Sherlock about it.

Greg, toed off his shoes and settled himself better onto the bed, gently budging John over before laying out as he had the night last. He pulled John's blankets up and wrapped them over him. "You're incredible. Just incredible. Get some sleep, I'm going to stay right here next to you, okay?"

He was already starting to drift himself, incredibly tired, the emotion of the day having worn him thin.

John didn't argue with him about sleeping. He hugged a pillow to his chest and curled up next to Greg, who had become his source of peace. "I don't like the stress. I just want to not be here anymore." He yawned and pulled the covers up over his shoulders. "But if I keep being stressed I can handle it better, then I don't scream, and I can leave..."

Greg gently touched John's shoulder. "Just rest, John, get some sleep."

He did as he was bid and closed his eyes. The idea of sleep still filled him with trepidation, but he repeated to himself that Greg was there and nothing would happen. "Alright.... Wake me if I start to dream."

Greg nodded to him. "I will John, I've got you." He watched John with distant interest as he began to doze off himself, exhausted but far less hopeless than he had been a few hours ago. Before letting himself slide into sleep he drew out his mobile and texted Mycroft.
Thank you. I'm sorry I was so rough earlier. If not too much trouble, could you have someone pop over to my flat and pack a bag for me? GL

I'll send someone now. I expected you to be rough. It's a normal reaction for someone who cares about John. M

Do you think I should tell Sherlock about any of this? M

I have no idea. I truly don't. I'm going to leave that to your discretion. GL

I think I should. If John's accepting other people and making lists it could encourage him. We just don't know how he'll react. M

Greg shrugged to himself and stared at John. The man looked...less terrible, at least. He silently snapped a picture of him from the angle he was laying at and sent it to Mycroft.

If you are going to tell him, perhaps attach this. It may help. I don't know. Molly is good with your brother, you may want to contact her for help with him. I truly am at a loss. GL

I'll go in person. It might upset Molly to see him like this, but I'll call her anyway. What do you suggest I say to him? M

Mycroft sent the photo ahead to his office and had it printed. He then brought it with him on the way to Baker Street.

Greg thought about it for a short time, finding that he quite agreed with Mycroft that it would upset the woman to see Sherlock so despondent.

I suppose update him on what's happened with John this week. Mycroft, he's making strides, but I really don't know if he's ever going to heal enough to physically see Sherlock. Even if he does, I struggle to even imagine him wanting to keep his company. I would just caution that you tread lightly. GL

I won't give him any false hopes. But this progress is incredible. It could make him happy. M

Mycroft arrived at the flat an hour later. It still wasn't locked, but at least it was clean. "Sherlock?" He called. "There's progress I'm here to update you about."

Sherlock cracked open a groggy eye, inhaling sharply at the unexpected voice of his brother. One day, it would be Moriarty. It simply had to be. He'd hung the welcome sign, left the flat wide open, and had tappable live camera feeds rolling at all times. It had to work, and one day it was going to work.

He rolled to his back and dragged a hand over his face, trying to shake off the heaviness of his limbs. He sat himself up and swayed as he tried to correct his posture, a palm spread over the bed sheets to stabilize himself.

"What day is it," he rumbled with heavily slurred speech, pressing a palm to his forehead.

Mycroft suppressed an irritated huff. "It's Thursday, Sherlock. I've got something to show you." He handed Sherlock the picture of John that Greg had taken while he was sleeping on him. "He's sleeping now, he drank some juice, ate some ice, let me talk to him..."

He pulled up the feed and briefly showed Sherlock the events. "He made a pros and cons list of why he should trust you. He's trying to believe Greg."
Sherlock took a look at the photo as he groused at his brother. "Must you always speak with such speed and volume?"
He set the picture to the side and dug his heels into his eyes, grinding he sleep away, though after he was still incredibly groggy. He blinked several times, rolling his head on his shoulders, and looked down at the picture again.

"Sleeping. That is an improvement, I imagine he feels physically better for it." He set his mind to the feed. "Perhaps when, or rather if, he realizes that I am not coming to carve out his eyes, he will be able to function again. At least properly feed himself." Sherlock picked up the picture again and tried to find some hint of John in the battered shell. He traced the shadow of the tube running from John's nose with the tip of his finger and then softly added, "I am glad for him that there is progress. We owe Greg a debt."

"Yes, I agree. Greg has been invaluable. He's earned John's trust, even though it took over... Oh, six weeks? But he's doing it." He went back to the part of the feed where John was eating ice with a spoon.

"Before, I didn't believe he would ever recover. I thought he would waste away in the hospital. But he's recovering now. He's taking steps and getting better. I think he will be able to see you again sometime." Mycroft put a hand on John's shoulder. "There's hope for him." To Mycroft, that meant there was hope for Sherlock.

Sherlock stared at the feed in silence. John was clearly still very afraid as he worked at the ice, a faint tremor in his hands, the way he constantly looked to Greg in worry. His fingers wrapped around the phone and he stared at John, taking in the lingering effects, the way none of the man he knew was visible in that body.

"Don't be absurd, brother," Sherlock whispered. There was no bite to the words, all his energy focused on John. It was different to see him like that, calmer but still horrifically trapped. "He is wasting away, looks like an end-stage patient. Is an end stage patient. Ice and a bit of terrified sleep..." he had to look away, handing the mobile back and closing his eyes.
"Moriarty was kinder than I. John is gone, Mycroft. Whoever that is in there with Greg, I don't know. That is not John Watson. I've doomed what scraps are left to this."

He lowered himself back down, closing his eyes, the print of John beside him on the bed. It hurt horrifically to see. "I appreciate your effort, Mycroft," he whispered, knowing this was an attempt by Mycroft to infuse false hope, "I would be exceedingly cautious in your optimism."

Mycroft kept himself stoic. "John is still in there, I think," he said quietly. "He remembered you playing violin. He recognized me by saying I had been angry with you for not wearing pants."

Mycroft realized that even if John regained his memories which had been so terribly beaten out of him, it wouldn't mean his personality was in-tact. Not that he would share this. "Just try and be a bit more positive. He stood up. He drank. He slept. Its not much but he's moving in the right direction."

Sherlock did not otherwise move. His heart squeezed in on itself and he exhaled slowly. "The best that man can hope for is a nurse with poor maths skills and too much morphine. "I've ruined him, Mycroft. I've ruined him."

He shifted slightly and pinched his eyes closed tight, feeling as though he'd been shot in the chest, finding breathing progressively more difficult. Why had he hesitated when he had the chance? It had been a horrifically foolish move, one John was constantly paying for.

"No, Sherlock, you haven't ruined him." He spoke as though it were obvious, which it was to him.
"Moriarty's ruined him. He's hurt him terribly and it's a damn shame. He only hurt him to get to you. I understand why you would feel guilty, but you had nothing to do with it. The emails were clever fakes."

Mycroft pulled the live feed and turned it to Sherlock. John was sleeping soundly, curled up on Greg's chest like a child. His arms were impossibly thin and his wrist bones were clearly visible under the hospital bracelet, but he had a peaceful expression on his face. "No sedatives. Just Greg."

Sherlock watched the feed with his brother, doing his best to remain indifferent. He failed utterly. "Had I not allowed myself to attach to him, he would be living a much deserved life. I am responsible for this. I did not once think to verify his location, as I was so willing to be distracted from his absence." His voice was rough and low, as much from disuse as the intense grief. "I am very glad he has some form of comfort." It was indescribable to see him like that, so small and brittle against the chest of another man. John, the old John, the John before he was utterly broken, would have died from mortification in such a scenario. "Look at him, Mycroft. This is what we consider progress."

John stirred slightly in his sleep and curled his fingers in Greg's shirt. He whimpered but calmed once he opened his eyes and saw the man still next to him. Mycroft switched the feed off.

The sound from John ripped right across Sherlock's mind. He doubted he'd ever be able to delete it. He'd made efforts with the way John had been in hospital with him, the tears and desperate pleading, but the memories were locked in tight, branded to his white matter, never to shift. He added this among their number and was impossibly glad when Mycroft killed the feed.

"I understand that you feel like it's your fault, but it isn't. You were distracting yourself from his absence because you care about him. Moriarty used that against you. It wasn't your fault. He hadn't been active recently and there was no reason to believe he would do something like this."

Mycroft put his phone away. John looked too small. "Yes, this is progress. It's small, and basic, but it's progress."

Sherlock could not trap away the sound of clipped pain as his chest twinged. "You were right as ever, brother. Caring is not an advantage."

"No, it isn't. Not for you. Caring never helps people like us. But you don't have a choice anymore. You already care about John." He texted Greg briefly, requesting the man's obvious skill in comforting.

He's still upset. I've told him it wasn't his fault. He isn't listening. M

"Sherlock, the feed is off. He can't see you. Perhaps you can get a case." Mycroft hoped he would throw himself in his work instead of just lying down and slowly killing himself.

"From whom, brother? Lestrade is with John. The Yard will otherwise not work with me. That aside, I've no interest in a case. What does it matter? So a jewel is found or a body located. It will all repeat and repeat to no gain, no end. It does not matter. None of it matters."

He shifted away from his brother, pressing his face down to his pillow and breathing slowly, wishing, foolishly, that he could go back and keep himself from ever allowing John in. He could not save him, and the weight of guilt was nothing short of crushing.

It's not surprising, Mycroft. He's isolated and without ability to do anything to help. I'd be going mad as well. I'm not sure how to help him. It's a tricky position to be sure. Have you nothing to offer him
in regards to Moriarty? I know he's exhausted his efforts there. GL

Mycroft still found it shocking that Sherlock refused a case. He knew how hurt he was, but it still threw his suffering into sharp light. "Sherlock, if we could find some way for you to help him, would that make you feel better? I mean some way other than staying here."

Mycroft had no idea what he was proposing, but he didn't want to leave without some form of hope being instilled. "The violin helped him immensely. He seemed to recall that you played it when he had nightmares." To Mycroft that was a pinch too sentimental for his tastes, but it was helping, so he couldn't speak against it.

We need to think of a way for him to help. He's gotten far worse. M

"Then I will play when asked. What more could I do, Mycroft? Every time I make efforts to help, I create a far worse situation." There was nothing in his tone at all. Flat and dejected. Sherlock knew when to admit defeat, even if it was just to himself.

I'll try and think of something. I wish I had answers. GL

"Maybe you could just... I don't know. Greg's got a recording of you playing. We could try playing it from the hallway and see what his reaction is. Perhaps we can work up to you playing outside his door. The music seems to calm him, and he can look at you on screen, so perhaps it wouldn't bother him if you were on the other side of a wall." Mycroft was grasping at straw, but it could work. There was a possibility the music could be John's gateway to being comfortable with Sherlock again.

Perhaps he could come play. M

"You sound desperate, brother. Has your constant lecture in all of this not been in the folly of sentiment?" Mycroft's efforts to remind him what a fool he was for allowing this were salt in the wound, and Sherlock was beyond battered down.

"I have made my errors and the bill has come due. As I have said, I will do what I can for him, salvage whatever remains of his life. You and I both know the odds of him walking out of a care facility."

Mycroft stood. "I'm willing to make arrangements for anything you think will help him. If you have any productive ideas, let me know." He cast a glance at the picture of John sleeping on Greg's chest. "I'll keep in touch." Mycroft left the flat then, discouraged and dejected but showing no outward signs of it.

Sherlock slouched back down onto the couch and buried his face in the cushion. John was gone. The hollow shell of what remained was curled up with Greg, trying to eat ice without screaming. There was nothing left for him now. Nothing except to wait until his death wouldn't cause John harm.

Chapter End Notes

Poor babies.
I don't know if they can keep this up.

Anyway, as always, the title is a poem or literature reference that gives insight to the story. This one by Robert Frost seemed fitting.
Can we try playing the violin music outside in the hallway? Perhaps we can work up to Sherlock playing there. M

Thank you. I'll let him know that he's on camera. That should keep him from actively taking his own life, but it won't make him eat, or drink, or stop taking medications to stay asleep. M

He's off his food? Would that I could be in two places. Can anything be done in regards to Moriarty? He went off the needle when he put his focus there. He feels defeated. I will try my best to rush things forward with John. Try to get some sleep, Mycroft. We can only do so much. GL

Mycroft went back to his office, not his home.

I don't need to sleep. I've got everyone I can working to find Moriarty but he seems to have vanished. No trace. Would you mind if I visited again? Maybe I can help somehow. M

Greg dragged a hand over his face. He had no idea what a panicking Mycroft looked like, but if he imagined, it would be this. He looked over at John and then back to the phone.

Mycroft. Calm down. You decidedly do need to sleep. Have some whiskey and lie down a few hours, you are no good to anyone exhausted. Sleep, and then come back in the morning, okay? I know you are scared for Sherlock, I am too. This is the best we can do for them at the moment. GL

Mycroft took the advice and had a shot of whiskey, but it did little to calm his nerves.

I'll sleep later. Let me know how John is if there's any developments. I think bringing Sherlock to the hallway would help both of them. M

Greg closed his eyes and tucked his phone back into his pocket so that he could feel it vibrate. There was so much to be done, so much riding on their every move. He tried to slow his mind and before long, he was off to sleep beside John.

John woke up several hours later in full panic once more. It took him a while to calm back down, but eventually he managed. He sat up and held his head in his hands, rocking himself back and forth, muttering to himself that it was just a dream.

The music helped him, as it always did, and John briefly wondered how something so beautiful could come from someone who had hurt him so terribly.

Greg slowly managed to pull John to him, all the while speaking softly to him, soothing him down.

"Its alright, John. Only a dream. Only a dream," he whispered, keeping an arm around John's shoulders. "Do you want to tell me about it?"

John checked his arms for blood. "N-no... I don't want to talk about it..." He put his hands over his face and exhaled slowly to compose his thoughts. "Lets just watch the cameras." That had been his default for a while now. He knew that it helped, and that if he improved he would be able to leave and end the nightmares sooner.

Greg clicked on the feed, staring at the screen. Sherlock had moved from his bed to John's chair, this
time. He had his violin in his lap, staring off at nothing, deep bags under his puffy eyes. Christ. He'd been crying.

His face was dry now, his fingers absently plucking at the strings, no rhyme or rhythm to it.

"Mycroft went to see him, John. Sherlock has his brother incredibly worried." He held his breath, wondering what sort of fallout the name would bring.

John watched the feed for a few moments before looking away. He was about to ask a question but it evaporated from his mind. John went rigid, eyes wide. He stared at Greg with disbelief and panic written on his face. "No... Please, no!" He let go and scrambled to the opposite side of the bed which was thankfully up against a wall. "Greg, no! Please! You're my friend!" John knew that word. It meant 'I'm about to beat you senseless.' John shook his head and threw up his hands for protection. "Greg, please... Please don't... I'm sorry..."

Right. Greg took a deep, slow breath, turning to face John, keeping his outward appearance calm and steady. "John," he said softly, extending a hand to him but otherwise not moving, "I am your friend, and I'm not going to do anything to you. Look at me, John, I'm not going to do anything to you."

John screamed once, through gritted teeth and with a wild expression. He jerked away from Greg's hand and pressed his back against the wall. "Y-you s-said you wouldn't h-hurt me!" His voice was raw with betrayal and heartbreak, and he clutched the pillow to his aching chest. "Y-You promised! You just s-said you were g-going to hurt m-me!" Greg shook his head. "No, I didn't, John. I didn't say I was going to hurt you. I said his name, and when I say that name, that's all it is. It's a name. I'm not going to hurt you. I will never hurt you."

He drew his hand away and stayed where he was, letting time show John there was no pain coming. "It's me, John. Police officer, Greg, just me. I won't hurt you."

John let out a long, drawn out scream that tore out of his throat and into the air. It was desperate, broken and pleading, as he had only recently decided to trust Greg, and here he was about to beat him. For ten minutes he cowered in the corner, untrusting and panicked, before his mind slowly started to calm.

He shook his head, reverting back to his old method of asking not to be in pain. "I’ll be good, I p-promise. I w-wont do anything wrong. I’m s-sorry. Please d-don’t h-hurt me."

Greg looked at the feed. Sherlock had gotten up and moved back to his room, laying on his bed now, a pillow held to his chest. He was staring at nothing, and in the light of the morning Greg could see that the already thin man looked even more sallow.

He looked back to John and then tapped the screen. "This is what that word means, John. Just this. How threatening is this?" He was pushing, but damn it all if it didn't hurt to see both the men like this. "I won't say it, but I'd really like for you to start, if you think you can manage it. Hell, I don't care if you give him another name, just...look at him, John. He's suffering as well. Not like you are, but look at him. You cannot fake this."

John shook his head. "No, no, no, that's not what the word means at all. It means you're going to hurt me. That's what it means. It has nothing to do with him." In John's mind, the word and the man had become separate somehow. There was the trigger word that told him pain was coming, and there was the terrifying man who may or may not have hurt him.

Greg blinked at him. It has nothing to do with him.
Well that was just fine, they could work with that. Absolutely. "So...it's not him you're afraid of?" He asked cautiously, the possibility too good to be true, he held his breath and lied to himself that he didn't hope for it. He knew it was foolish to hope for it.

"I'm afraid of him too. It's not the word that cut me." John spat the words indignantly, then remembered that Greg didn't think he had been the one torturing him. "It's different... The name is different from the man... The word doesn't mean that," he pointed at the screen, "it means..." He lifted his shirt and showed the scars. "This. But the man is the one who does it. Sometimes. Sometimes it's other people."

Greg scrubbed a hand over his face with a sound of desperate frustration. The clock was running out and there was so much to be done. He he wished he could simply infuse John with his own knowledge. "It wasn't him, John. It wasn't. He did not put those there. I don't care what you call him, hell call him Frank for all I care, but look at him, John. Really look. Do you remember him cutting you, or just something hazy that looked like him?"

"I remember for sure that he did! But he was there all the time, even if he wasn't doing it." John scowled and tried to remember. "He... He had to be there. Maybe..." John struggled with his own stubborn, broken mind, "...maybe he didn't do it directly, but he was there."

Greg shook his head, trying to keep himself calm. This wasn't helping, but he couldn't seem to stop. Sherlock was panicking him in the light of day.

"No he was not, John. He wasn't. Unless he managed to fool all of MI5 and the Yard, myself and Molly, Mycroft, and every officer who's ever worked with him. He was not there, John. I know your mind was horribly tampered with, but it wasn't him."

John clutched his head. "Greg said the word but didn't hurt me." He stated to himself. "Greg said the word but didn't hurt me." John looked up. "Maybe it doesn't mean the same thing coming from you," he said as though in sudden realization. "M-maybe it's different." John was frantically trying to make sense of all the information that was being thrown at him.

Greg watched him, utterly ashamed. His posture slowly drooped and he rest his face in his hand, breathing slow and deep. He let nearly five minutes slip by without a word, trying to give John a few minutes to settle. "I'm sorry, John. This isn't your fault. I'm just afraid. I'm sorry I scared you."

"John, I'm sorry. Do you want me to read to you?" He floundered, anything to try and make up for trying to rush John forward. "No. No, I'm not mad at you. You're nice to me.... I thought you were going to hurt me... That's all..." John grasped at the reins to his frantic mind.

He kept his eyes locked on the screen for as long as he could. Perhaps if Greg had said the word but not hurt him, it didn't always mean he would be hurt. "Greg.... If you said the word again, would you hurt me?"

Greg shook his head slowly. "John, I'll never hurt you. That word is my friend's name, that's all it means to me. I would never hurt you, John." He itched to find the bottom of a bottle of whiskey and scream. This was so unendingly terrible. So terrible. Sherlock was wasting himself away, John was in hell, and now even Mycroft was slipping.

John nodded and seemed to be on the verge of tears. He regretted not shooting himself when he had the chance. He wished this all to be over, and knew only one way. He needed to recover so he could escape.
John swallowed hard and spoke without certainty. "You have to put the restraints back on," he stammered, "and say it again until I'm not afraid." It felt like he was condemning himself to the worst torture, but it would help him recover, and therefore would help him die.

Greg shook his head. "I'm not tying you down, John. I'm not. I'll hold your hands, or hell, I'll wrap you up with my own arms, but I'm not tying you back down. I'm not. I won't." He was not going to pin John down like that, the same as he had been when tortured. That was just another form of torture. "I don't want to hurt you, John. I don't." John looked up at him pleadingly. "Greg, I need this to end. I need to recover. I have to recover and this is the next step." He was already tearing up at the effort it took to make the decision, but was more determined than frightened. "Please, Greg... Just keep me still and say it for a while. I need to learn... I need to learn that it doesn't mean the same thing from you. I need to look sane."

Greg dragged a hand down his face and nodded. He'd not deny John anything he could provide. He moved over and sat the head of the bed all the way up, and then, with his jaw tight and his eyes burning, he slipped John's wrists into the restraints, buckling them back up again. He left his ankles free. John allowed Greg to strap down his hands, though he couldn't look the man in the eyes. This felt all too much like being tortured. He knew pain was coming, he was being tied down....

Greg moved the small tablet screen over and nodded to John. "I won't hurt you," he said softly. He dragged the screen over to where John would easily see it, and then began speaking.

"You came home from a terrible deployment, nearly forced out of London. Your friend introduced you to Sherlock, and within a day you were living together..." He forced on with the story, never avoiding Sherlock's name, watching the man who was staring out the window in hopeless dejection the entire time.

John forced himself to breathe and remember that Greg hadn't ever hurt him. Despite his efforts, the name tore across his mind like a hot dagger, banishing any rational thoughts he held and kicking up chaos in its wake. John screamed and yanked at the restraints. "No, PLEASE!" He shouted, eyes wild. He had lost control of his mind and it felt like a futile effort to claw it back into submission.

Greg couldn't take it after ten minutes, he had to stop. John was tearing him apart. He turned the screen away and put his hand on the flat of John's chest, refusing to move it, reaching up with his other and sliding his fingers through John's hair, following him if and when he moved his head to get away. "Breathe, John, breathe for me. You're okay. No one is going to hurt you, I'm not going to hurt you. Breathe for me, John."

John sobbed loudly in a guttural, broken plea. It took him several minutes to come back down off his terror spike, but even once he did he continued to shake.

"M'sorry... S-sorry..." He tried to collect himself but felt far too exposed. John latched eyes with Greg and tried to breathe. The violin played faintly in the background and he tried to focus on it.

Greg's eyes were red-rimmed and overly bright, the sleeve over his shoulder damp from where he'd had to continuously press his face down to keep his cheeks dry. John's sobbing was nothing short of gut-wrenching and he could not imagine the depths of how heartless one would have to be to carry on hurting a man in such abject terror. He had blood in his own mouth from biting down far too hard on the inside of his cheek.

Greg cleared his throat and shook his head. "Don't be sorry," he managed, his voice overly rough, "I hate scaring you, I'm so sorry John." He itched to get the restraints off, watching John closely. "I'm sorry... I didn't... I didn't mean to scream..." John was growing increasingly self-aware, and at the same time incredibly frustrated. "I know it's just a word... I know you won't hurt me but..."
whimpered and tried to force his tears to stop. "Greg, what's wrong with me?"

Greg shook his head as he began to unfasten John's wrists. He couldn't take it, he couldn't leave John like that and listen to him nearly break. "Nothing is wrong with you, John. You've been horribly wounded. This is a symptom of the injury, yeah? Can't walk on a broken leg, can't think with a mind that's yet to heal. You are getting there, you are. He conditioned you to associate that word with pain." He crawled up on the bed with John and pulled him into his arms, hoping he would accept the comfort. John didn't cling to Greg as he had before, but he didn't pull away. He pulled his arms to his chest and covered his vital organs by curling into a ball. "I'm broken. My mind is so broken. It's just a WORD! It's a god-damn word and it shouldn't hurt!"

John pulled the covers up over his head in shame. He was starting to see the extent of his mental injuries and it scared him. "I can't trust my own mind anymore."

Greg debated letting John go as he curled up defensively. He decided to keep hold of him, sliding his fingers through John's hair. "It can be fixed, John. It can. You can trust your mind, once you get it back. It's just been injured, and we are healing it. Sometimes healing things hurts. I'll help you, you can lean on me, and I'll help you. So will Mycroft, you're not alone."

John peered out from under the covers. "If I decide to trust your mind instead of mine... Will you try to make the same choices I would have?" John was taking yet another leap of faith, though he didn't see any other option. "You'll help me until I can think, right?"

Greg nodded, "Yes, John, I've been trying to do that already. I will absolutely make my best effort at decisions you would have made." He leaned back just enough to properly look at him. "I just want to help you, that's all I want. I know you're in there, John, I know you are and we are going to get you back out, okay? Please."

"I just want them to say I'm alright so I can go," John looked at his fingers and wondered when they had become so boney. "And I'll trust you to make the choices for me. But Greg, I'm not in control." He looked crestfallen and dejected. "I'm not in control of the panic. But I want to be." John was determined now. "I won't be afraid of just a stupid word. I won't be afraid to hear Sher.... Sher..."

Greg nodded and reached down, touching John's hand. "Listen, I want you to do as the psychiatrist has asked and start taking a daily anti-anxiety medication. It won't knock you out, it will take the edge off and you can breathe a bit, let some of the panic settle down. Will you do that for me?"

John nodded feebly. "I can do that. I need to not be afraid. I can say it. It's just a word. It's just..."

"Say it!" Moriarty shouted, to which John shook his head and spat blood into the concrete floor. Moriarty wasn't pleased. "Say it, or I'll carve your eyes out. Would you like that?" John's head was jerked back and a dagger pointed towards his eye. He squeezed them shut and could feel the tip of the knife, now warm and sticky with his blood, press against his eyelid. Panic surged in him and he tried to pull his face away. "SHERLOCK!"


John stared at a blank section of the wall, eyes wide and glassy, his whole body frozen except his heaving chest. "I can't say it... No... I can't..." Greg nodded to him and pulled him in close. "Stop, John. Let them come give you something to help with this. We are going to breathe, and we are going to wait until your medication has had time to kick in, and then we will see how you feel. Alright? Let me call in your doctor."

He pressed the call button, wanting John to take a xanax and drink a bit of juice. He needed strength,
and right now he did not have it.
A nurse appeared and saw John sitting up, speaking, and apparently angry. "Do you need help?"
She asked, and instinctively moved to John's side. He was unrestrained, and it made her nervous.

"No, Greg," John exclaimed as if he had made a terrible mistake, "I didn't ask for water! I never said
water! I'm not thirsty, I swear!"

Don't think about anything, just breathe. Nothing bad is going to happen. I'm right here, breathe."

He waited for the nurse to come back, determined for this to work. John had to have water with
those meds, and damn it, he was going to drink the water today. Enough of this.

"I don't want water!" He said to Greg with tears starting to bloom in his eyes again. "I don't! I'm not
thirsty! I'm not thirsty! Please, no!" John was openly weeping in desperate, heartbroken tears and he
clung to Greg even as he thought the man planned to hurt him.

The nurse returned with the usual paper cup of ice with a spoon, a bit of juice, and a cup of water.
She set them down on the table next to Greg.

Greg held John close to him, keeping the water out of sight. He waited until she came back with the
pills, nodding to her to leave them on the table. "John, I just want you to take the pills. If you don't
want anything else, you don't have to, okay? Just take your pills. That's why I have it. You can use a
straw if you want."

In a secondary thought, he asked the woman for a lid and a straw. Perhaps if John didn't have to look
at it, that would help.

Pills didn't seem to fall into the category of food or drink, so he nodded. The water, however, he did
not consent to. "I've had ice. Isn't that enough? Can't that be enough?" John pleaded like a child,
looking up at Greg with large, sad eyes as tears shot down his face.

Greg reached over and affixed the lid to the water, as well as the straw, and held it in his hand. "Here
are the pills, John," he said softly, holding the cup. "You're a doctor, you know you need water with
that. Look, a straw, alright? You can do this, you absolutely can do this."

John crossed his arms, closed his eyes, and turned away. He wasn't trying to be stubborn. No, he
wasn't being difficult on purpose. John was just honestly terrified. To him, it was akin to asking
someone who's afraid of heights to jump out of an airplane. "Can't I just have ice?"

Greg sighed and shook his head. "You can either drink this water, or tell me exactly
what he did to
make you so terrified of it." He was a bit more firm than normal, not at all interested in letting John's
fear win.

John opened his mouth then closed it again. He was very used to following orders at this point, and
would rather take them from Greg than Moriarty, but both options were equally terrifying. "H-He
didn't give me water," John said quietly. "until I asked for it. Then h-he'd strap m-me down
and...You know what...Water...B-But you said exactly and...he...he put me on a...a slat and put
a...a...a rag over my mouth and...And..." Were he not so programmed to respond clearly no matter
what condition he was in, he would have been unable to continue. "And...and I was drowning and
sometimes would get a sip so I didn't die and-and-" John continued to sob and covered his face with
his hands. He did not want water. Not at all. His frail fingers dug into the side of his face where he
had clamped his hand over his mouth. When he finally managed to speak again through the tears, it
was broken and hitching."I-I-I stopped...I s-stopped asking and-and-and h-he m-made me ask... m-
made me w-with h-hurting and I-I d-didn’t want to...but...but I...I…” John broke down hard and turned his face away.

*Christ.*

Greg set the water back down and offered the pills. "Can you take these dry, or with ice? You need to take these, John. Please.” He was trying to keep his own hands still, the idea of John being bloody *waterboarded* was...hell, it was indescribable.

John had tucked his knees up to his chest and tried to make himself as small and as protected of a target as he could. Just in case. "I can take them dry." He held out his hand. It was shaking, but that wasn't something new.

Greg handed them over and watched John carefully. "I can give you a bit of ice to help?" His tone was soft and he reached out slowly again, sliding his fingers over John's back. The Xanax would take about fifteen minutes to hit, and it the dose was high enough to set him far more steady, nearly drunk, though he’d remember what occurred and be mostly himself.

John shook his head. His mouth was dry but he managed to swallow the pills anyway. Several minutes later he stared absently at the ceiling, much calmer than before but still uncomfortable. "I stopped asking for water," he said in a slightly slurred speech. "But he *made* me ask. I didn't like that."

Greg shook his head, fishing out a bit of ice from the cup and putting it in John's hand. "I'm sure you didn't. I'm sorry that happened to you, John," he said softly, nudging John's hand. "Put that on your tongue, let it melt. You sound painfully dry."

He pulled out his mobile and texted Mycroft.

*I don't think we can pull Sherlock in here today. John is talking though, Moriarty waterboarded him to give him water. John's in a bad way, but has accepted Xanax. I'm working hard on it, Mycroft, watch the feeds. GL* 

*I have been. You're working miracles, Greg. Whenever you think Sherlock can come, let me know. You're the expert here. The waterboarding is particularly upsetting. I believe he was nervous around water since the incident at the pool. M* 

John took the ice with only a bit of trepidation. It did help, but he was aware that he had been chewing the side of his tongue and it started to sting. "I wish I died in the war." John said almost pleasantly. "That would have been nice."

Greg pushed another bit of ice into John's hand. If this was how they got water down him, then so be it. "Something as pithy as a war would not have taken you out, John," he said warmly, moving to budge John up into more of a sitting position. "Tell me about what he did when you needed food. What happened then?"

John didn't wish to talk about it at all, but found his tongue more free in his medicated state. "Uhm... I don't want to... Its not a good thing to think about." He knotted his hands up in the starchy fabric of the hospital blankets. "Its not a good idea. I could feel bad again if we think about it. Lets think about something else."

"We are going to talk about food, or we are going to talk about Holmes," Greg pushed, putting yet more ice into John's hand. He was hell bent on making a substantial breakthrough today, and decided that even if he had John screaming and in restraints, they were pushing through. Sherlock couldn't
wait, and John had been in hell long enough. They were going to break through on *something.*

John grabbed the ice and threw it at the wall. He had already had enough. John scowled at Greg, though it didn't last more than a few seconds. "I don't want to talk about either." He retorted stubbornly. It took a while, but he seemed to remember that he was supposed to be listening to Greg so he could be released. "But... I'll tell you whatever. Ask."

Greg nodded, giving John a soft look of understanding before pressing on. "What are you afraid will happen if you eat?" he asked softly, genuinely wanting to know. The more information he had, the better he could adapt and come up with solutions. He wasn't like Sherlock in his ability with crime scenes, but Greg was a problem solver, and that had landed him his position at the Yard.

John looked at him as though it was obvious. "He'll *hurt* me. HURT. Do you not understand that? Cut. Beat. Burn. Stab. Slice. Rip. Whip. Drown," John spat the words out as if they were poison. "With pliers and whips and knives and-and-and *clamps...*" John swallowed hard and stopped speaking.

He'd read the words again and again on the medical examiner's report. He'd known the likelihood of these being used on John, but it was so hard to hear from the man's own mouth. He shook his head and went quiet for a few minutes, giving John time to gather himself and calm down just a little bit. "John. None of those things are in this room, are they?" John was shaking terribly and scanned the room.

"John," Greg said softly, sitting at the edge of the bed and looking right at him. "Look me in the eye and tell me you believe I'd do that to you. Look me right in the eye and tell me that's what you think I will do to you."

John looked away, ashamed. "I know you won't," he murmured. "I don't know why I said that. I don't know why it bothers me that you could. I know if you were going to hurt me, you would either have done it while I was vulnerable or won't try until I'm mentally healed."

Greg just let that roll off. It wasn't John's fault that he felt that way, that it was a fear of his. He just reached over and picked up the lidded cup of water. "I want you to keep looking right at my face, right in my eyes, and I want you to drink this water. Show him he's lost. Drink the water, John. Hell, I'll even move away from you if it will help."

"I don't.. I don't want water!" He shouted as loudly as he could, which still wasn't very forceful. He put a hand over his nose and mouth and scooted away. "Stop saying that... please.." His voice was muffled from speaking into his palm. "I've said no! Please don't... I can't.. not water. Please, no water today!"

"John, drink that, and I'll let you alone. I'll let you alone, John, just drink the water. You have to get past this it's been *months. Drink, John. We are doing this today. Put that straw in your mouth and *drink it.*" He was far harsher than he wanted to be, but damn it, they were going to do this.

John froze. He reached out and took the cup in trembling hands with his eyes down and shoulders rounded. "Y-Yes, sir," he stammered, tears streaming down his face. He managed to get the straw in his mouth and take a sip. As soon as the water was in his mouth, he shook violently and dropped the cup, spilling the water over the bed as he jerked out of the way instead of catching it. John looked horrified. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to... I'm sorry... please d-don't!"

Greg swore under his breath, his heart trying to break through his ribs. Too hard, he'd pushed too hard. He held up his hands to show John he wasn't going to hurt him. "My fault, that was my fault, John," he said softly, keeping his eyes down as he picked up the cup and made a show of throwing it
in the bin. "No more, I'm so sorry, no more. That...I shouldn't have done that."

John coughed hard and grew suddenly nauseous. "M'sorry... I don't want water... please don't hurt me. Don't hurt me. You said.. you said you weren't-weren't..."

Greg slowly pulled the sodden blanket off John, which sent the poor man into a shocked silence as Greg went to the closet to get a new one. He fanned it out and draped it over John. Instead of welcoming the blanket, John looked up at it as if it were going to bite him. He kicked at it weakly and let out a clipped scream as Greg retreated to the fall corner of the room. He rest his forehead in his hand, choking on tears, keeping his cheeks dry as his throat closed up on him. He'd scared the daylights out of John with that stunt.

It took another twenty minutes for John to calm, but when he finally did, he looked over to his friend. ".....Greg?" he called softly. "Why did you do that? I don't know what I did wrong." He sounded betrayed and utterly broken.

Oh, god. Oh god. He looked up at John, his own face pale as his stomach seized up alongside his heart. He'd made a phenomenal mistake. "I'm scared," he said honestly, desperation and nearly crippling grief in his voice, terrified that he'd ruined everything. His pride and dignity could go elsewhere. Right now, he needed to be honest with John. "You and he are the only friends I have in the world, and I'm losing you both, and I don't know how to help and I got scared and I pushed you too hard. It's no excuse. I am so sorry, and I'll leave if that's what you want. I'm so sorry. I was never going to hurt you. John. I just-" he shook his head and shut himself up, his eyes burning, the sound of carefully controlled tears clear in his voice.

John was utterly confused. He had decided to put his trust in Greg, and sometimes that would mean doing things he was afraid of, but he never expected sometime like this. "I don't want you to hurt me, Greg." John said in a tiny voice, hardly that of a soldier. "I don't want you to be angry. I tried. I tried to drink the water. I'm sorry... I tried... Don't be angry..." Greg put up both his hands from across the room, fully unable to look at John, his head still down. "I'm not ever going to hurt you. John. You need water, and I was trying to help. I'm not angry with you, mate, not with you."

He had no idea what to do here. Mycroft was no doubt watching the exchange and he could feel the weight of letting that man down as well. He swore under his breath and closed his eyes, trying to steady himself.

John, still heavily medicated, was trying to come to grips with what happened. "You shouted. You were angry. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you angry." He wiped tears out of his eyes. He wanted Greg to come back to him. He wanted to say he was sorry for not doing it right and beg not to be beaten. But that was how he had been with Moriarty, always apologizing, always begging. "Please come back. I'll do better next time." Even if Greg had scared him, he was still dependent.

Greg was on his feet and moving in the next second. He sat down on the edge of John's bed, close enough that John could get as much contact if and when he wanted, and shook his head. "I wasn't shouting, never raised my voice, John," he said softly, staring at the cup in the trash. "I wasn't angry with you, I am sorry if I made you think that. I wasn't. I made a mistake. I-" he dragged in a ragged breath, beat down and defeated. "I'm not good at this, John. I just want to help you."

John nodded and scooted a tiny bit closer. He was afraid of being beaten, but still came back like a lost child. "I'm sorry... sorry... Please don't be angry.. I tried. I really tried. Greg, I tried so hard..." He was ashamed and hid his face. "I don't want to be trouble. I want to get better. I'm sorry. I'll do better next time."
He hated that the damage across John's mind stopped him from hearing Greg. "John, I'm not angry. You did your best." He eased himself closer, gently reaching out and touching John's back before sliding his hand gently down along his spine, palm flat and gentle, trying to soothe him. He felt like a complete ass, as though he'd battered a trapped animal. "I know you tried, and I'm so glad you did."

John crawled to Greg and tried to get as close to him as he could. He flinched, cowered, and shook, but still needed the comfort. "M'sorry... I tried..." He calmed a bit and kept his eyes closed. It took a while for him to slow his rapidly beating heart. "I'll do better... I promise... Promise..."

When Greg finally had John in his arms, he closed his eyes and just let a few of the tears clinging to his lashes roll down his cheeks. He was doing his best, he really was, and it hurt horrifically that he'd done this to John. He'd been in panic for Sherlock, for the both of them, and things just were not going to feel as though properly progressing with John off eating and drinking. He had to do those basic things. He had to. Only Greg couldn't force it, hell he couldn't really help the poor man at all at the looks of it.

He carried on rubbing his palm in slow, gentle circles at John's back. "You're alright, mate, I've got you. I'm sorry, John, I am."

John buried his face in Greg's shoulder and let tears roll down his face. "That was scary. I don't want to do that again. I'll do it if you make me, but I need time. I need more time. I'm sorry... I wish I could heal faster, but I can't. I just... This already hurts. This speed is already painful. I want to get better, but I can't... I can't drink yet. I'm sorry."

Greg nodded with his eyes closed, his cheek to the side of John's head, his heart breaking. He was going to fail. He wasn't clever enough for this, and Sherlock was going to die in his bed and John was going to toss himself in the Thames.

Of course, that sort of thinking wouldn't help, but for the moment, Greg had no choice but to float in the despair. He tried to get himself back together, John's tears dripping over his heart like acid. He'd put them there. He was supposed to be comfort, and he'd terrified John. He did not speak again, John wasn't hearing him, anyhow. He just let John lean against him and cry, feeling each hitching sob like a blow.

Mycroft watched the scene with sadness in his heart and a pained look on his perpetually stoic face.

John had stopped crying and was quiet pardon the occasional hitched breath. "I'm sorry.... I'm going to drink... Just not today..."

Greg slowly drew back to read the text his phone vibrated with. He shook his head, staring incredulous at the words. John had been away from Moriarty for weeks and had yet to drink water. The odds of him forgetting in a few days was so low it was hard to even consider the possibility. Of course Mycroft was watching. He dragged his sleeve over his face and took a deep, slow breath, trying to calm himself back down, feeling as though he'd been flayed alive.

What an unfair thing to feel sitting next to John Watson.

"Forgive me, John," he breathed, knowing John wouldn't hear him. The music had yet to stop, and the silence allowed it to swell up around them. Greg tried to think of a case, anything to pull John's
mind away from the water he'd so cruelly demanded he drink.

John looked up at Greg, his only friend, the one who had kept him safe and showed him he didn't need to be afraid of talking. "I forgive you. I know I'm being difficult." John hung his head and curled closer to Greg. "I'll do better next time. I won't drop it. I'll drink some maybe if I can. I don't know. My mind hurts."

Greg's fingers were on the mobile.

*I'm sorry, Mycroft. I am. Hours of progress I could have made with him today. I thought maybe if I did it like the ice...it doesn't matter. I'm sorry. GL*

*Don't be sorry. He's making progress. He went from screaming when someone came in the room to cuddling. M*

*You are mistaking 'cuddling' for cowering. He is just attached to the idea of protection. Nothing more. GL*

*I wasn't suggesting anything. I know he associates you with safety just as he associates Sherlock with pain. M*

He looked up at John and slid his phone back in his pocket. "Do you want to watch some crap telly? You used to like that, when you were...used to like it."

John looked a little worried. "No... No, I don't want to. What do you mean when I was...?" John searched for the right term. "When I wasn't defective." John was a little upset by his own use of the term. "I'm defective."

Greg shook his head, dragging a hand over his face. He'd set the whole damn thing off. "I was going to say 'home,' John. When you were home." It seemed even watching the telly was off limits to John. He wracked his mind, trying to think of anything. "I could read to you again, or get you a book of your own?"

John didn't want anything at the moment. He just wanted to be numb, dead, or asleep. "I don't want to do any of that. Can I have a sedative? I don't want to be awake anymore." He had supplemented the word 'awake' for 'alive' as the idea of his death generally upset Greg.

Greg drew away from him and walked to the door, feeling like he was a thousand years old, whispering to a nurse on the other side. He walked back to sit in the chair beside John's bed, watching as the woman came in with the sedative. He said nothing as she slipped it into John's port and then quietly left the room.

Greg went ahead and crossed his arms over the bedding, leaning forward and putting his head down as a teenager would at their school desk, breathing slow and deep, utterly loathing himself.

John smiled inanely as he felt the sedative start to erase his mind. This was as close to death as he could get, and he might as well enjoy it.

*Do you need me to come? M*

Mycroft was watching the feed and noticed how utterly devastated Greg looked at the moment. It bothered him deeply.

Greg just shook his head, knowing Mycroft could see him on the feed. He needed to shower and
change. Greg stood up and slowly put John's hands back in the restraints, walking over and picking up the bag that had been brought for him. Sherlock was still lying on his bed, at least now his eyes were closed and Greg could pretend he was sleeping.

He walked out of the room and asked the nurses to care for John, giving him a bath and a feed, hydrating him and cleaning his mouth before changing the sheets and John's clothes. Greg would be in the shower while they were doing that. He grabbed a sandwich from the little break room and took his time under the hot spray, allowing himself to break down in the privacy of the shower, shoulders shaking hard with quiet tears.

He had a proper headache when he returned to John's room an hour later, swallowing down tablets to help, dressed in new, comfortable clothing and taking up his chair once again. It reclined slightly, and he closed his eyes, trying to rest some. He'd go home if he was going to just push John in reverse. What in the hell had he been thinking?

John was asleep for quite a long time. He was in a comatose state, the combination of the Xanax and the sedative making him much more drowsy than usual.

It was at this time that Moriarty thought he had sufficiently damaged the most people. Mycroft was breaking down, Sherlock was utterly destroyed, and now even Greg had fallen. But it wasn't time to take John back yet. No, that would come later. Moriarty had always wondered, ever since he was a child, how far he could push something before it broke. He broke his toys, other children's toys, his parent's things, and anything he could get his hands on. There was always a fantastic sense of accomplishment the moment before something broke. When he had pushed it to the limit and knew it just needed one last strike to fall apart. He sent a text to a nurse he had been working on. He had her child tied in a warehouse, so she was more than willing to comply. But while Greg was there, it wouldn't work.

He would wait.

Chapter End Notes

But he won't wait very long, now will he?
"Faith" is a fine invention

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Greg ended up falling asleep next to John, one hand wrapped around his, and slept for hours and hours in the chair by the bed. The extended rest helped very much, and the nurse had at one point moved him so that he was reclined in the chair, a blanket over him. All the while he never let go of John's hand.

It was close to twelve hours when he woke up, blinking into the soft light of the room.

In the next moment he was texting Mycroft.

*Can you come? I've an idea I'd rather discuss in person. GL*

The sleep had done him a world of good. He got up, used the little attached lav, had a shave, and returned to John's side.

John was still mostly asleep. They had given him more Xanax by crushing it and putting it in his feeding tube, and even when he did wake it wasn't for very long.

*I'm on my way. M*

Mycroft got in his car and was driven swiftly to the hospital. He was more than relieved to see on the feed that Greg looked a little better, and that neither of the men were crying. He appeared around twenty minutes later outside John's door.

Greg got up and left John's door cracked so that he could still see inside, glad that John was still sleeping. The original sedative that knocked him under would have long since drained away and now what was left was gentle sleep with anti-anxiety meds to help.

Greg leaned a shoulder in the doorway and spoke softly.

"I have an insane idea, and I need your help. I think it will buy us time with Sherlock, and it will do John a world of good if it works." He kept his voice far too low for anyone other than Mycroft to hear. "I think we should offer John as bait." Mycroft’s expression grew incredulous. "I know, I know, but listen to me. Moriarty has been offering Sherlock the chance to 'fix' John. Perhaps we can entice him here, or at least get a lead on where he is from whomever he sends to fetch him. We have to take him down, Mycroft. I just can't see another way here."

Mycroft hesitated. He looked back at the sleeping John then back to Greg. "I would love for that to work. I honestly would. But what if we offer him as bait... And Moriarty manages to snatch him up before we can catch him? John would be devastated."

John stirred slightly in his sleep and made a muffled sound that might have been him talking were he awake.

"You remember the attack on the hospital. If we say he can have John back for a bit, there's likely nothing we could do to stop him short of a bloody maximum security stockade." Mycroft would love to track him down, but wanted to consider all the risks. “Let’s go somewhere safer,” Mycroft said suddenly and looked around. “Not to be paranoid, but we already know he has eyes and ears everywhere. John will be alright for a moment. I have people watching the feed. Many of the nurses
who interact with him are not, in fact, nurses.” He led a hesitant Greg down the hallway and just outside the back of the building, where they picked up the conversation in hushed tones.

Greg nodded, his focus sharp and hard. "I know, god help me I know. I've considered the angles, but Mycroft this is James Moriarty. I know MI5 wants him down. I know they do. Surely we could do this. You have all of these forces at your disposal. It would take careful planning, but surely we could manage this. I mean hell, we can even affix a tracker to John as backup so we can follow his arse on GPS if we mangle it. You've resources, this is something Sherlock could sink his teeth in, and in the end if we put Moriarty down and show John, well..."

He was sure to keep their voices low, whispered softly, far too quiet to be heard by anyone around them. "I didn't want to talk over the phone. This is Moriarty. He seems to pick up damn well everything that's electronic. This is going to have to be old school, word of mouth, short wave radios, etc. but Mycroft, come now. You were going to crash a plane full of bodies and no one picked that up. You can do this."

Mycroft listened carefully to Greg's plan. "It's my opinion that if Moriarty wanted John back he would have taken him by now. If we can give Sherlock something, he'll follow the trail like a bloodhound. I'd rather see him with intent to kill Moriarty than himself." Mycroft sent a few texts, informing a few of his associates that he needed to have a meeting about Moriarty. He didn't give a damn if the psychopath saw them, as he'd had several meetings and absolutely nothing productive had happened in them. "I could go tell Sherlock. Unless you want to. It'll have to be out of the flat, as I'm sure Moriarty has every inch of it bugged. If you can keep him from watching the feed for a bit, maybe work on the name instead, I can get him out and speak with him."

"Moriarty doesn't want John," Greg continued, “He wants Sherlock dancing for him. If we have Sherlock respond, asking Moriarty for help, I don't think the man will be able to stop himself from taking the bait. Can you imagine how happy that would make the little psychopath?" He took in a slow, deep breath. "We have to do something. This isn't working, and I am not doing that to John again. I'm not. Sherlock going after Moriarty will buy me time, will buy him time, and it will allow John to do this at his pace. I fucked up, Mycroft, I have no idea how bad the damage is now."

His whispered voice dipped bitterly and his eyes finally dropped away. "Make it look like we are all hopeless. Surround this fucking building, dangle John like bait and catch that motherfucker between his eyes."

Mycroft nodded and worked through the situation. It would not be nearly as simple as that. He’d need a well thought out strategy, one that nobody would be privy to but himself. He'd have to be somewhere nearby calling the shots. "I'll have everyone in this building secured and checked. I'll have people stationed out two kilometers then rings of security getting tighter until you get to the hospital. He won't be allowed out once he's in. I'll even have a helicopter in the area." Mycroft got out his phone and sent a quick text to Sherlock.

_We have a plan. Get dressed and be able to leave the flat in an hour._

"You didn't fuck up. You couldn't have known he would snap like that. He's so fragile, it's a wonder you've handled him this long without a slip up." He greatly admired Greg for his patience, which was a skill Mycroft, in fact both the Holmes boys, severely lacked. "Don't beat yourself up about it. He forgave you, didn't he?"

Greg shrugged, "That may be true, but that won't effect whatever damage I did, however far I set him back. I damaged his trust in me, and that's all I have going."

He shook his head and looked back up to Mycroft, tapping the phone. "Be careful with the texting."
He gets wind of movement and then Sherlock asks him to do this, he'll know what's on. Smart as you lot are, we will lose if we don't have the element of surprise."

Mycroft fought the urge to roll his eyes. The element of surprise did not exist in this situation. Moriarty would know it was a trap from the second he saw it. The point was to make the bait good enough that he would walk in anyway, and make the teeth sharp enough that he was captured despite his awareness. It is a beautiful thing to surprise someone with a trap, and a beautiful thing to go into a trap willingly and still come out victor, but it is an even better thing to have someone willingly walk into your trap, prepared to fight, and have it work anyway.

"We have to kill him, Mycroft. He'll get out of an arrest. He just has to die."

Mycroft put his phone away, not bothering with a response from Sherlock. "We'll keep it all in person. Sherlock will cooperate, I hope, and we can shoot him down. I've already messed this up bad enough."

Greg looked back over to John, returning his eyes to Mycroft, sadness settled back in his features. "I'm sure he'll recover whatever ground he lost. You've been doing wonderfully. He still came back to you. I don't know if that says more about his previous treatment or his current state of mind... But he came back."

Greg seemed saddened by Greg's statement. "That's not back. He's not asked to be sedated from so little time awake before. I reduced him to-" he clamped his jaw shut, the roughness of anger back in his tone, still furious with himself. He doubted he'd ever get that day out of his head, as long as he lived. Yes, sir.

Mycroft looked at John, who was still asleep. "You didn't do it. It was Moriarty. Don't let him get to you too." Mycroft sighed and leaned his back against the wall, which was contrary to his usual perfect posture and slightly posh way of carrying himself.

Greg shivered as a chill ran down his spine and he looked back to Mycroft. "What's done is done. I'm not leaving the hospital, but I'll make it look that way if needed. Please, get John a tracker. Something we can affix to his skin, perhaps on the inside of his thigh, where it won't be found straight away. Or hell if you've something we can inject into him, all the better. I hate to do it, but we must have a way to recover him before we start any of this, okay? Please. Peace of mind for me, at least."

"I'll get a tracker," Mycroft agreed, "Something we can inject into him. But we have to be careful; if Moriarty finds out about it and gets John, it's likely he'll cut it out." It was a dark way of thinking, but it did sound like him. "Perhaps one on his skin and one inside so they don't think to look more."

"Oi, I'm not quitting, Mycroft. I'm just bloody well furious with myself." He shook his head and sighed. "Yeah, I agree with you about the trackers, that's a good plan. We are not telling John. They feed him and give him his fluids and medications while he's sedated, I'll put it on him then. Make the injection look like any of the others he gets."

He looked back in the room and then to Mycroft again. "If we kill him, we have to let John physically see, okay? None of this pictures business, he needs to go and see the body himself, or ideally, we kill that bastard right in front of John, hell, maybe let John do it. No idea if that's possible, but fuck I'd like to let him, he deserves that kill shot."

"As much as I would love to allow John the kill shot, I don't think it's wise to put a gun in his hands just yet." Mycroft did want to have Moriarty dead though. "Perhaps if Sherlock does it and John sees, it could help him realize that Sherlock is a friend." Mycroft pinched the bridge of his nose and fought at a headache that had been pounding behind his eyes for the past few days. "We'll let him see the body if Moriarty isn't killed in front of him."
Greg nodded and reached out, putting a warm, solid hand on his shoulder. "I know this is bloody horrible, Mycroft, I really do. We've got motion here, though, and if nothing else we can restore your brother a bit."

He let him go and looked back into the room. "He may be better when he wakes up, who knows? Sleep never fails to help him.

Mycroft looked back and tried to be optimistic. "He'll be better when he wakes up. Of that I'm sure. I should go talk to Sherlock now and see what life he's got left in him." Mycroft appreciated the bit of sentiment and stared at Greg's hand. "I believe this is the last chance we have at getting Sherlock back on his feet."

Greg nodded to him, "I know it's getting a bit desperate. See what you can come up with, alright? They are both still breathing, so there is still hope."

He clapped his hand gently to Mycroft's shoulder once more, giving him a bit of a squeeze before pulling his hand away and returning to John's side.

"I'll do everything in my power." Mycroft responded and left the building. It was depressing to see people shuffling around in white clothing, with furniture they couldn't hurt themselves on in the common room with a nurse by their sides. It was worse to know that John had even reduced to the least functioning of them all.

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Mycroft walked in the flat, which anyone could do now that it was left perpetually open. "Come on, Sherlock. You're going to have a walk. You need exercise or your muscles will start to atrophy."

Sherlock pushed himself up. He looked over to his brother, sadness etched deep into the lines of his face, dragging down his posture, darkening his eyes. He got to his feet, still in yesterday's clothes, and moved over to his shoes without a fight. He didn't have it in him to fight. It was easier to pacify his brother and move than it was to argue.

"What of John, will it not frighten him to see me leave?" He asked as he tied his laces, opting for trainers to go with the sweats he was wearing. His voice was rough with disuse and defeat. "John is asleep," Mycroft said simply and led the way. Once they were out of the flat and down the street he began to talk.

"We're going to draw him in. Lestrade and I have talked about this and we're going to be very thorough in our planning. John will have trackers on and in him just in case." He turned the corner and left his car behind, not trusting anything but the open air. "We need you to ask Moriarty for help. Tell him you've hit rock bottom. Beg him to come fix John. Then, we shoot him dead, take whoever he sends, or get some sort of lead."

Sherlock stopped up short.

"You're desperate," he said, hands shoved in the pocket at his belly. "You're desperate and you are going to use him as bait. This...Mycroft the costs of failure here are too heavy." There was no conviction in his voice, however, his posture already slowly correcting, interest back in his eyes. It could potentially work, could it not? "He has been quite insistent that I do as you say. He would likely take the offer. He would also likely take John. You will have to pull a great number of resources to make this work."
"And I'll pull those resources." Mycroft responded simply. "I am desperate. We both are. It's been months and we're no closer to finding him than John is to leaving that hospital." He softened his tone and faced his brother. "We'll catch him. I promise you we will. We'll have people stationed everywhere. He won't get out. They'll have orders to shoot on sight."

Sherlock stared at his brother. "And what of this just one man business then? Where was this when I groveled for your help, when John's psychiatrist was still torturing him." He drew in a sharp breath and pulled himself to his full height. The betrayal there still burned deep.

A moment later, however, he deflated. "It is irrelevant, I suppose. I am far more culpable in all of this than you. It gives me pause to know that your interests have nothing to do with John Watson himself, only his effect on me, but that will have to suffice. I take it Lestrade is aware? Mycroft if Moriarty gets John..." He shook his head, open fear sliding across his features. "You cannot allow that. You cannot. I have doubts, Mycroft."

Mycroft had pity in his eyes when he looked at his brother. This kind of torment was something no man should endure. "I have my doubts as well. If you wish, you can call it off. I'm putting the ball in your court. All you need to do is decide if you want to take action or let Greg spend a year of his life in a mental institution trying to get John to drink water."

He turned and continued walking. This was a difficult subject to speak of for his brother and he knew it. "How many men do you think I should put up? I'll let you decide."

Sherlock flinched internally, a lifetime of feigning indifference to his brother's barbs keeping his expression unchanged as the biting words slid across his mind. It was an unexpected cruelty he should have been prepared for.

He kept his brother's pace and called to mind all the schematics of the hospital, mapping exits and entry points, gathering every option he could think of. It was nearly twenty minutes later when he spoke, an entire chess board laid out and positioned in his mind.

"If they are your best? Forty. If not, double that. Plain clothed, no ear buds. All on shortwave communications with hopping channels every twenty five seconds. John should have several tracers on him. You will need at least four unmarked vehicles in the area..." He waked Mycroft through his best plans, laying out several scenarios. "The most likely, of course, being John's abduction. I am not sure how likely it will be for him to arrive personally at the facility. I will appeal to his enjoyment of the game, though I suspect the mostly likely method of success will be John's abduction. I loathe this."

Mycroft took notes in a journal -not trusting any form of electronics- and slipped it into his coat. "I'll have my best. They'll keep him safe. If not, we can track him. John's abduction from the hospital does seem likely, but he won't escape the area. I'll have everything shut down. Every roadway, every tube entrance, manhole, every sidewalk even. He'll be trapped. I'll bring in a helicopter."

There was, of course, the safety of everyone else in the hospital. Mycroft would have to find a way to bring them out and replace them with operatives. "Sherlock.... In the worst case scenario, and he's got John, I can send a drone to eliminate the problem." That would spell out John's death, but that would be humane compared to what Moriarty would do to him.

Eliminate the problem. The phrasing grated and Sherlock had to look sharply away. "Well you don't expect me to say no to that, I'm sure." He swallowed and looked back up at his home in the distance.

"I...Mycroft," he said softly, looking back to his brother, "I apologize for allowing myself to form an attachment. I had not anticipated it. He was interesting, at the start. Something to occupy my mind, a
distraction from the lure of the needle. I did not intend...he became..." he'd fallen in love despite himself, not truly realizing it until John wasn't there any longer.

"You're human, Sherlock. As much as we wish to be machines, we're human. I had a feeling you and John would grow attached, but never saw it ending like this." Mycroft shook his head at the word 'ending'. "That's not what I meant. You likely couldn't help yourself. Most people are allowed to fall in love and live happily until they break up. We just aren't most people."

Mycroft looked straight ahead, pretending to be observing a few birds pecking at bread crumbs around a rubbish bin. "I'm sorry you had to go through this." Sherlock looked down at his feet, his heart heavy. "Next to his suffering, it is nothing." He felt the now-familiar burn of tears and cleared his throat, looking up and blinking rapidly as he pulled in a slow, deep breath. "How many days do you need to prepare?"

Mycroft didn't care to see his brother cry. "We can have it set up in a week." Mycroft stated. Usually, an operation like this would take at least two months to get every little detail painstakingly planned, but he wanted this over with and Moriarty in a body bag. "Will you be able to participate? I think if you played violin to him outside the door he might accept your presence."

"I frighten the life out of him as a distant image on a screen," Sherlock said sadly, narrowly keeping his cheeks dry. He swallowed and took another few, slow breaths to master himself. "I imagine if he heard my violin in any proximity, he'd likely suffer heart failure and Lestrade would gun me down." He swept his eyes over Mycroft and looked away. "As ever, I will do whatever I can for him. That has mostly entailed sitting useless in my flat, keeping away from him where I want to sit guard at his door. I am doing my best, Mycroft."

Mycroft nodded slowly. What Sherlock said was accurate, if harsh. "Your music has been helping him immensely. I've been watching him, remember." Mycroft checked his phone. He could have a meeting to discuss the plans within the next five hours if he deemed it an emergency. "Perhaps you could work up to playing for him live."

"Stop this." The words were whispered, falling from his lips like delicate spun glass. He stared off at nothing in particular as his throat worked, clearly battling with himself. "He will never forgive me, brother, and rightly so. I've lost him irrevocably. Stop this false attempt at hope. My focus is exclusively on doing what I can to restore the option of a satisfactory life to him. I've made my inexcusable mistakes, and as a result I've lost him."

Had this been anyone else, any other scenario, he would have rolled his eyes and mocked the drama. As it was, his heart failed to keep proper rhythm and his mind screamed at him, rebelling against the irrefutable reality.

Mycroft sighed quietly. "I'll do best. I promise. I'll have him in a body bag before the month is over." Mycroft turned and left the scene, heading back to his car. "If you wish to come with me to the meeting, I might be able to arrange that." He ran his hand back over his hair. "I'm more likely going to call to ask your advice. They listen to you for some reason."

"If I am suddenly absent from the flat and then ask him for help, he will know. Call if you must. Much as I highly prefer a more active role, my hands have been flawlessly tied." He moved himself back into the flat, glad that there was at least some semblance of a plan. He sat down in his chair, fingers steepled together in front of him as he closed his eyes and dropped into tactical planning. Anything to escape the twisting agony around his heart. 
Mycroft left the meeting several hours later. It was dark outside, he was tired, and there was still loads of logistics to work out. He was back at his home office later, still writing in his journal and making plans.

John woke quietly, still heavily medicated. "Greg?" He murmured and tried to fight out the panic that always hit him when he woke. "Greg? Are you still mad at me?"

Greg startled awake from the doze he'd been having at John's bedside. He shifted forward, reaching out and touching John's hand as he spoke. "Of course not," he answered truthfully, clearing his throat as he stretched out his legs. "How are you feeling?"

"Thank you. I'm sorry. I'm sorry I couldn't do it. Next time, I'll do better." He tried to smile, to show how he would cooperate, but didn't work. It came out more of a sad grimace. "Can we watch the video? I'll show you I can be good... I'll cooperate..."

Greg forced himself not to wince. This was what he'd been afraid of. John was scared of him now as well. He nodded, handing John the tablet so that he could turn it on or off himself. "You don't have to be good, John. Do what you need to do. Watching him doesn't seem to bring you peace, and that was the point of it, but if you'd like to, go ahead."

John clicked the telly on, but didn't look just yet. "I'm going to be good," he murmured. He so desperately needed the comfort and didn't want Greg to leave. He turned his eyes up to the monitor and took a sharp inhale. He was going to watch. He forced himself to watch. Not that these was doing anything particularly threatening. "It's just a telly. I can see that he's there. He's not here. I can watch this."

Greg leaned back and watched John. He let his mind wander, going over the plans he and Mycroft were hatching. It would require leaving John defenseless and without warning. It had sounded good when he'd woken, so intent on a solution, but now, with John sounding so small and nothing of himself, he wondered if he would actually be able to do it.

He drew in a slow breath and let it back out again, wishing like hell that John was better. Sherlock was still in the chair, his fingers steepled, deeply shadowed and pale.

John had his eyes locked on the screen. Sherlock was there, looking so utterly broken. For some reason, that upset John. It hurt him. It was starting to hurt more than it did to watch the screen. John found himself mimicking Sherlock's expression. He was wrapped up in all the small lines on his face that hadn't been there before. John snapped his eyes away. It had been minutes this time.

"John?" Greg asked softly, wanting to get him talking. "What's wrong?" He leaned in to look at the screen. Sherlock had not moved. He seemed deep in troubled thought and it was clear that Mycroft had presented the plan. "Can you tell me what you're thinking?"

John brushed off Greg's question and looked back at the screen. He was deeply concentrated, staring intently at Sherlock. "He's...he's not supposed to be like that..." John murmured and his eyes brimmed with tears. It didn't take much to get him crying anymore, not with his pride as shattered as it was. "He's sad... Greg, I don't want him to be sad..." John was quickly finding that if he focused on his own empathy and not Sherlock, he could watch for longer. It was detaching the man from his body and his face. John stared, captivated, and tried not to view him as his eyes told him to.

Greg stared at him, transfixed. It was remarkable, whatever was happening. As ever he kept in mind that with John, it was frequently one step forward, ten steps back, but he would take what he could
"Yeah," he whispered, agreeing, "sadder than I've ever seen him."

John felt panic rising in him once more. But this time, instead of forcing it down, he tried to go around it. He latched on instead to the strange sadness the other man seemed to radiate, and his own emotional response to it. "Why's he sad again?" John asked in a disconnected manner.

Greg watched him as he leaned forward, not daring to touch John but wanting him to not feel alone. "He's sad because of what's been done to you. He's sad that you are afraid of him. He's sad because he wants to help, and he can't." Oh, how he hoped he was navigating this properly.

John gave the barest of nods, showing that he was listening, even if he didn't quite understand. He was at war with his own mind. One side said that this man was an enemy, would bring him pain, terror, and stress, and the other was simply curious that maybe this wasn't all quite right. John reached out and grabbed the piece of paper he had been writing his list on and flipped it over.

I fear you and am confused. Is that why you are upset?

He handed it to Greg. "Give that to him."

Greg pulled out his mobile and snapped a picture of the text, allowing John to watch him as he sent it to Sherlock.

Sherlock could be seen a moment later on the screen, reaching down and picking up his mobile, clearly expecting bad news. His features shifted dramatically, his hands instantly starting to shake, painfully visible on the screen. He looked up at the camera, and Greg sucked in a sharp breath at the anguish in his features. A moment later Sherlock's focus was on his mobile, replying to Greg's.

I am upset that you are hurting, I am upset over what's been done to you...and yes, I am saddened indescribably by your fear of me, much as I understand it.

Greg noticed the omitted initials and showed the reply to John.

The way Sherlock looked up into the camera made John look away, but not in fear. His eyebrows drew together, his lips became a thin line and he closed his eyes tight. Once he had read the reply, John nodded in a military fashion, the way he used to when trying to figure things out.

You say that as though you weren't a part of it, yet I remember you as being there. I should hate you, but I don't. I don't hate you, but I do fear you. I know your games.

John was going to hand the note to Greg, but he snatched it back and added one line.

It's confusing.

Greg repeated as he had, photographing the note, his own heart racing at this incredible development.

Sherlock looked as though he were ready to drop the phone with the force of his shaking. Greg watched as Sherlock read the missive again and again, as though he could not process the words. It took him a long time to peck out the message.

You were made to believe I was there by a very clever man, who despises you and I above all others. I would never, never cause you harm, John.

John read the letter and looked to Greg. "Is he lying?" He whispered in a very childlike voice. "He
could be lying..." He had decided to believe Greg no matter what, but this was starting to upset him.

_Moriarty. I remember. I remember all of it. Unless he told me to forget. Then I don't remember._

He was starting to ramble, and moved down on the page.

_If you didn't hurt me, why am I still afraid? I should have figured it out by now._

Greg reached out and wrapped his hand around John's. "Breathe, John. Just take a moment and breathe. He's not lying, look at him, you know he's not lying deep down."

Sherlock was not sure how to respond. He quite agreed that he wished John had puzzled it out by now, but the incredible amount of physical torment John had endured over nearly a year was something he was sure not even he would have been able to brace against.

_You were made to suffer horrifically. The mind can only endure so much without sustenance and rest. I am deeply sorry that you are still in such fear, though it is understandable._

John stared at the phone instead of the screen now. Keeping down his panic was akin to keeping water in a wicker basket. There were holes and bits of pain kept forcing through like hornets in his mind. It took him another ten minutes to respond.

_You know what happened when I slept? I'd hear his voice then get beaten. Like an alarm clock but a metal rod. Wake back up. Not supposed to sleep._

John didn't know why he wrote that, so he put an X over it and wrote again.

_Greg says you aren't lying and I'm supposed to believe him. Greg is nice to me. But I have to drink water and_

John shook his head. This was getting to be overwhelmingly taxing. The damage in his mind was becoming apparent through his increasingly sporadic and off topic answers.

_Did you play that song when I had nightmares before?_

Sherlock responded swiftly.

_I did play that song. I can play for you now, if you like._

Greg moved after he sent the scrambled messages to Sherlock, climbing up on the bed and sliding an arm around John's back, letting him tuck into the space between his arm and his chest if he wanted. "You are doing so well. Do you want another pill to help? You are doing so, so well."

John curled into Greg eagerly and pulled a pillow to his chest. It was hard to write in that position, so the words were messier than they had been.

_I'd like that. You played it before and never said anything about it. I never realized it was for me._

Sherlock's voice was soft and wrecked over the monitor, sounding just before the music began. "It was always for you, John."

Chapter End Notes
*Gross sobbing*

Anyway, my lovelies, the next chapter will be up soon, and hopefully Greg and Mycroft's plan won't lead to anything devastating.

Hopefully.

-Dem
You guys said you wanted more Sherlock.

I hope you meant gut wrenching agony.

John jerked at the voice, at the sound of his own flesh being burned and cut, but didn't scream. He gritted his teeth as if fighting off pain, and held on to Greg.

It was once the music started that he allowed himself to consider the words that had been said, not the voice *It was always for you, John.* He looked back at the monitor and seemed to relax just a bit.

Greg held tight to John as the music played and looked up when a nurse popped her head in to check on him. He silently mouthed *pills*, watching as she nodded and slipped away.

Sherlock carried on playing, keeping himself seated, the music softer and a bit shaky to Greg's ear, but he played nonetheless.

A few minutes later Greg had pills in hand for John, offering them without mention of water, watching as John took the pills without hesitation. He needed them. This situation was an odd mix of terrifying and depressing for John. "Greg, can I sleep?" He asked quietly, then grabbed the paper once more.

*I'm going to sleep. I'm sorry I'm afraid. I don't want to be. If you really didn't hurt me, I'm sure I'll figure it out some time. Thank you for playing.*

Greg sent the message to Sherlock as he nodded to John. A moment later, he was pushing the screen back and shifting so that John could lie down. He sent the text to Sherlock, listening as the music slowly faded away. He looked up at the view of Sherlock, watching as he read the text and slowly set his violin down. In the next minute, Sherlock sat down on the sofa, staring off into space, hands shaking and a glistening track trailing down one cheek.

"You did really amazing, John. Really amazing." Greg said softly, helping to get an exhausted John get under his blankets.

John could feel his mind slipping away from reason, defaulting to panic as his energy flagged. "I'm tired... I'm glad I did well... Maybe they'll let me out soon." He nestled into the covers and spared one last look towards the screen before lying his head down. "If he really didn't hurt me," John whispered, "then he must be mad at me for thinking he did."

John's words tugged at Greg's heart, and he shook his head. "He's not mad at you, he's not John. He's just sad. You sleep, just rest." He leaned over and muted the screen before texting Sherlock.

*That was progress, Sherlock. Really good progress. GL*

He kept his eyes on the screen as Sherlock read the text. Sherlock just shook his head slowly before he lay down on his side, curling up and closing his eyes. Sherlock took a few deep breaths and tried to banish away the desperate urge to cry. When had he become so damned emotional? He'd foolishly allowed himself to hope, but all evidence showed John was gone from him, the relationship
unsalvagable. The progress made today was the progress he'd been hoping for, nothing more than that. There was no incredible breakthrough, nothing to show that perhaps John could ever do anything more than tolerate that Sherlock was still breathing. It would be better when John could exist without watching Sherlock. It would enable Sherlock to forgo the temptation to try and salvage their relationship was gone. He would distance himself and then he would fade away.

Sherlock closed his eyes and turned his face from the cameras, slipping back into his mind.

Another four days passed before John was able to make any serious attempts at communication. The silence was eerie and while he was not unresponsive, he had Greg worried with his lack of conversation and nodded answers. John spoke a little, asking politely for things, taking a bit of ice, and sleeping when he was tired. But it was four full days later that he put voice to what he had been thinking about. "Greg, I'm willing to accept that my mind is not as it should be." He swallowed hard. "Things that shouldn't scare me do. Things like water, and food, and him. I shouldn't be afraid, but I am. I am willing to accept, as you said, that it was Moriarty's fault. That he made me afraid of water... And food... And sleeping and talking and Sh..." He shook his head. "Sher... Damnit."

Greg nodded to him. He'd not seen Mycroft in as many days, and Sherlock had hardly moved. He'd definitely not eaten. Greg had watched the pair of them all but wasting away, wondering how close to the end they were here. Both men seemed to be at the limit of their endurance. So, when finally John spoke, John's words were a fantastic shock: even if it had taken half a year for John to reach the conclusion. "That's...that's really great, John. Really great. You'll...you're making progress. Can you maybe try eating or drinking today? I'm not telling you to, I'm just asking."

John seemed to hesitate. It had taken him four days to reach his conclusion, and it was already being tested. "I don't want to. But... It's not a rational fear. I'll try to... Can I have it with a spoon? I'll try drinking with a spoon. I can't be drowned with a spoon. Is that alright?" To John, it still seemed like an impossibly high mountain to climb.

Greg looked at John and then took a slow breath. "What if you tried a bit of applesauce with a straw? Not water, just applesauce. We can work up to water?" He didn't want to push John back into that terrible silence again. "You don't have to try any of it today if you'd rather not. I just know you will feel so much stronger if you put a little nourishment, proper nourishment, into your body. Broth would do as well, just a bit with a straw? Or if you'd rather the spoon, that too. Whatever you want, John."

"I don't like straws." John said quietly and shook his head, but not in the way he had been before. "I'll try broth if you want me too. I don't want to, but if you say it's alright..." John shifted uncomfortably at the idea. "I'm sorry... I might panic. I don't want to... It's just eating but...." He ran his fingers through his hair. "It's still frightening."

Greg listened as John spoke almost rationally. "John' there is nothing 'just' about it for you, this is huge. Let me get you a bit of broth, and we will see how you do from there. I promise you it's alright. It will feel so much better to have that tube out of your nose when the time comes, help you feel more like yourself. Let me go ask them."

He stood up and went to the door, asking the nurse for John's pills and for them to bring him warm broth. She gave him a wide-eyed stare before swiftly moving to the little shelf to her left and nearly instantly producing the pills for John. He could take them now and let them kick in while she got the broth.

Greg thanked her before he moved back to John, setting the pills on the little table for him. He walked around the bed, sitting at John's side. John seemed comforted by Greg's physical presence most of the time, he hoped his proximity would help now, while John wrestled with the act of eating.
Greg was deeply relieved that John took the pills willingly and without hesitation. It had taken John the willful act of coming to terms with the fact that medication in pill form no longer counted as food, and were completely safe. In addition, the medicine took the edge off his panic, which was something he deeply required. Above all, unlike with Moriarty, here he did not have to earn painkillers; they were free.

The nurse returned and John watched cautiously as she placed a shallow bowl of soup with a plastic spoon in front of him on the table. "Perhaps this will make it easier," She said and went to the closet. There was a small table that swung on a hinge and could be attached to the bar on the side of his bed.

John glanced at Greg as the nurse set up the table and meal. "Do I have to?" He whispered, though he already knew the answer. He had the spoon in his hand before Greg could reply. He leaned back as Greg wrapped his arm around John's shoulders, sitting at his side. "I'm right here, nothing is going to hurt you, yeah? Just a little for me, John. It will help." He watched John carefully, his breath caught in his lungs, willing with far too much that John actually manage this today.

John's hands shook terribly, but he was careful not to spill a drop. After a while, he resigned himself to a beating. He told himself that he had gone through so many of them before that one more wouldn't hurt him too much. Besides, Greg said he wouldn't be beaten. He could trust Greg.

With those things in his mind, John managed to take the first few spoonfuls of the warm broth. When he brought the first tiny spoonful to his lips, he flinched as if it would burn him. Finding the temperature warm, not scalding, he relaxed the tension in his muscles just a bit.

Greg's throat was tight as he watched John, fighting off tears. It was such a small thing in the grand effort that John would have to make to completely heal; the first steps over Everest, but they were real and solid. He kept his hand to John's back. "You are doing wonderfully," he said gently, watching John eat, breathing again when he realized he'd been holding his breath. "Is it...how's that feel?"

John made a pained face as he continued to eat. He could still do that. He could continue eating even though he was scared. John finished half of the bowl before he couldn't take it any more. "I-I'm done." He stammered and dropped the spoon. "Can I be done? P-Please?"

Greg was nearly dizzy with the fact that John had done so amazingly well. "Yeah, John, yeah of course," he took the bowl away, sliding off the bed and putting it in the hall so that John wouldn't be stressed by it. He then pulled the little table and sat down beside John on the bed again, wrapping an arm around his shoulders. "I am so happy with you for eating. So happy. That was so good, John."

Despite Greg's words, John pulled his hands up to protect his face. Now that he had eaten, he was frightened of the punishment. "Greg," He said, voice strained, "If he comes to punish me, you'll shoot him, right?" He ground his teeth together and tried to take deep breaths. "You'll shoot him, or me, right? Shoot me. There are other people. Shoot me."

Greg pulled John into his arms, wrapping him up tight. "Yes John, I promise. I absolutely promise." This had perhaps not been the best timing, given their plans for Moriarty, so he amended. "I will make sure you are safe, John, one way or another. Breathe for me, John, just breathe. You're okay."

In an effort to listen, John managed to take a few deep breaths through the persistent worry. "I'm trying not to be afraid, b-but it hurts." It helped to have Greg there, and he curled closer. "Its... don't let him hurt me..." His logical mind was starting to deteriorate from stress.

Greg bundled John closer, speaking very calm and quiet to him. "Let's lie down, John, okay? Here," he whispered and he tugged the blankets up to John's neck. Greg began to ease them back against
the elevated head of the bed, keeping him pulled right to his chest. "I've got you, okay? I've got you."

John tried to keep himself calm, but it was growing increasingly difficult as the reality of what he'd just done settled over him. He'd eaten. He knew better than to eat and yet he'd picked up a spoon and had food. "I'm sorry... I'll be calm..." He leaned on Greg, his small, frail body taking up very little room on the bed.

Hating seeing his suffering, Greg responded on a whisper. "John," Greg said as he doused the main lights in an effort to make the room calm and dim. He pulled John in closer against him and shook his head, threading his fingers through John's hair. "If you need to fall apart, that's okay. I've got you, I'm right here with you. It's all okay."

Greg's kindness was nearly overwhelming. John made a valiant effort to keep himself from breaking down, but eventually started to shake. "This isn't fair," He sobbed, clutching Greg. "It's not fair that this is so hard for me. It's not fair! I hate this!"

Greg nodded, whispering softly as he trailed his fingers over John's scalp in an effort to soothe him, remind him with gentle touch that he was protected. He spoke in quiet agreement. "It's not fair at all, and I hate it too. Try to breathe, John, just breathe. You did the hardest part, your mind will settle. Breathe."

John manage a few deep breaths before his world fell apart, leaving him in overpowering tears. He cried unashamed on Greg for quite some time before he was able to regain composure. His mind had been so utterly shattered by Moriarty's torture that even a small amount of logic was incredibly draining. "C-Can I w-watch the video?"

Greg arched a brow, sliding his palms over John's cheeks. He was surprised until he realized John likely wanted to see that no one was coming for him. It took a bit of shifting, but Greg got the screen on and moved back to wrap John up in his arms again, looking at his old friend on the screen.

Sherlock was on the sofa today, breathing slowly, staring at nothing. His sharp jaw sported a few days growth and his eyes were bloodshot and red-rimmed. He looked horrible. Greg suddenly wondered if Sherlock was ill.

John stared at the screen with the same look of concentration as he had before. "He's not coming to hurt me." John commented, but decided to look closer, longer. "And he's sad again. Always sad."

Sherlock's sadness always seemed to confuse him, and he had to tell himself over and over again that it was because Sherlock was innocent, he was innocent, Sherlock was innocent...

John was yet to decide if he believed it or not. He spoke abruptly to Greg, keeping his eyes on the screen. "Can I write again?" It had been four days since he last wrote, and he had things that needed to be said, to be asked. The confusion was infuriating.

Greg responded swiftly, thrilled that John wanted to communicate. "Of course you can, whatever you need to do, John. Of course you can." He sat them up, dragging the little table the nurse had given down so that John could properly write. He watched as John took the pencil and paper. John's hesitation showed his hesitation. In John's mind, he was still speaking to his tormentor. His tormentor who he had compassion for. The conflicting facts were painfully confusing to him. Soon, he'd managed a few shaking words, watching as Greg snapped an image of the paper as they had before, sending it to Sherlock. On the screen, Sherlock could be seen plucking up his mobile from the back of the sofa. He read John's words slowly.

"You still look sad."
Greg watched along with John as Sherlock flicked his eyes to the camera, swiftly looking away again as though afraid he'd upset John by showing his face. He was sluggish as he responded to the text.

*I am sad.*

John watched the man intently. This was the man from his darkest night terrors, his worst fear on the forsaken earth, and yet John could not look away, could not find joy in his obvious suffering. His return was short and to the point.

*I don't like it when you're sad.*

Greg watched Sherlock with steadily growing concern. He looked worse than Greg had ever seen him. The feed made him look nearly gray in the dim light of winter afternoon. Sherlock read the text much slower than he typically would manage before replying.

*I don't like it when you're hurting.*

John didn't like the answer. It was contrary to the Sherlock he knew, the one one who always seemed to be laughing when he was water-boarded, took such merry delight in John's agony.

*I don't like it when I'm hurting either. I want to not be hurting, but they won't let me out. You look sick.*

Greg quite agreed with that as he snapped the picture, sending it to Sherlock. The man read it twice and then looked at the camera again before replying.

*You don't have to kill yourself, John. I'm going to make sure all the things that scare you are gone. You don't have to die.*

The response took Greg by surprise, marveling at Sherlock's constant ability to read between the lines.

John shook his head as if the man didn't understand.

*What scares me is my own mind. I remember you were always logical. What would you do if you could no longer trust what you saw? Imagine life as though you were constantly on that drug from Baskerville, and didn't know what was real?*

John was starting to remember more and more about their past. The memories failed to make interacting with Sherlock any easier, adding depth to the standing betrayal.

He stopped Greg before the man clicked a picture to send to Sherlock, swiftly adding another line of text.

*It's worse than that. Most of it actually happened. A lie surrounded by truth. I don't know which is which anymore. Sometimes I can remember you hurting me and sometimes I remember it was Moriarty but you were there. I don't know. I hate this.*

When the message finally got to him, Sherlock nodded and tucked his head back down, his breathing a touch faster. Greg leaned in slightly, getting a better look at him as Sherlock responded with slightly shaking hands.

*I do too.*
John was more than confused. He was fighting terror, pain, and chaos and winning by a dangerously thin margin.

*I get confused and think you hurt me. But Greg says it wasn't you. I think maybe you didn't hurt me, but you were there.*

*Why didn't you do anything? If this makes you so sad, why didn't you stop them hurting me?*

Sherlock made a soft, audible sound of pain as he read John's trembling, chaotic handwriting and shook his head, responding faster.

*I would have painted the walls with him if I was there, if I saw him hurting you. I was not there, John. I would have killed him, will kill him if I ever get the chance to do so.*

John stared at the text for quite some time. It didn't make sense that Sherlock would kill Moriarty, since to John they had been working together. But he wanted Moriarty dead, and didn't know anyone else who could do it.

*Good. Kill him.*

Greg sent the text to Sherlock and then started texting Mycroft, gravely concerned for Sherlock's well being.

*Have you checked on him? You need to. GL*

He did not have to wait long for Sherlock's elder brother to reply.

*No. I'll pull the feed. Is he alright? Is he talking? M*

Greg was glad for the feed. Mycroft would be able to see for himself, which surely would lend a bit of urgency to his brother's trip to Baker Street.

*Talking with John via text, in fact, but he looks incredibly ill. GL*

Sherlock looked up to the camera after reading John's last missive and nodded twice. He closed his eyes, breathing slow and controlled. He was acutely aware of the fact that he caused John great distress, and so kept quiet. A few minutes later he texted back.

*Should I play for you?*

John shook his head as he read the question. His mind was, for the most part, actively allowing him to think critically. He wanted to take advantage of the bit of clarity he had command of. His reply was terse.

*No. I have questions.*

*I still think you were there. You claim you weren't. I know I can not trust my mind. I know I can trust Greg. He agrees with you. It seems logical I should trust you.*

*But it's hard.*

Sherlock had been so keen on providing John with an answer to something, that the lack of a proper question got under his skin. He was exhausted and in pain, not thinking as sharply as normal. He texted back a clipped, *John, you've not asked me a question.* That sort of response to John's statement harkened back to their typical irreverent relationship. It made Sherlock flinch as soon as he realized that he'd regressed to his normal behavior with him.
John closed his eyes, disappointed with himself. He tried again, this time determined to get it right.

*Right. Sorry. I don’t know why but its hard to think when I'm writing because*

John crossed it out and tried again.

*Moriarty is going to come back for me eventually. He wants to hurt you by hurting me.*

John crossed it out again. Not a question.

*Some things are magnetic but not magnets. Why?*

It was a stupid, irrelevant question. It was all John could bear to ask.

Sherlock read the snapped image and replied by line, having to stop several times and drag a hand over his face to clear the sweat off his brow.

*It's hard for you to think with clarity because your mind has been cruelly tampered with for a long period of time. Time that was yours, that you intended to go towards helping people in need, as that's the sort of man you are. It's horrifically unfair that a maniac stole this from you.*

*Moriarty will never have possession of you again, one way or the other, he will never, ever manage this again. Ever.*

He then sighed and tried to sit up, pressing an openly shaking hand to the side of his head as it throbbed terribly. It took a moment of slow before he was able to set in on the long-winded explanation of magnetism via text, occasionally skipping or adding letters to his words as he attempted to type.

John wrote back immediately. The answer had sounded very *Sherlock*, the old Sherlock, which pulled a very small smile onto John's face.

*You're clever. I remember that. I remember you being clever.*

John noted the way the other man shook and a worried expression passed over his face.

*Is this hurting you?*

Sherlock stared at his phone for a long time. His reply was simple and honest.

*Brilliantly so, yes.*

John scowled. He wasn't sure why, but the idea of causing Sherlock pain was intolerable.

*Then stop. I don't want you to be hurt. I have no idea why, but I don't like it. I'll stop.*

Sherlock shook his head, swiftly responding with a messy, swift text.

*You are not hurting me. I want very much to communicate with you. I only meant that yes, this entire thing is hurting me, as it is you. I cannot stand your suffering, it is...by far the most terrible thing. Please do not stop, John. The flat is obnoxiously silent.*

It was as close as he could get to telling John he was desperately lonely without him.

*I am aware I've lost you. I do not expect you to ever wish to see me again. Knowing that, please allow me to do whatever you need me to, so that you are at least past your fear and can go on living*
without looking over your shoulder for me.

After reading Sherlock's message, silence hung in the room. John stared at the words as he gripped the phone, bony knuckles blanched white.

You really don't want to hurt me, do you?

He wrote in small, neat print and handed it to Greg.

Sherlock stared at the writing, so familiar and close to John's natural penmanship that it tore a choked, pained sound right up out of Sherlock's lungs. He pressed a hand over his mouth, staring at the phone, the deep ache of reality nearly crushing. John...oh, how he missed John. He collected himself enough to respond.

I'd sooner have off my own hands before they caused you pain. I do not ever want to hurt you, John.

Greg watched as Sherlock put the mobile at his side, wrapping one arm around his belly and pressing the other hand over his eyes, clearly struggling harder than what had become typical to keep himself together. Greg's stomach dropped.

John flinched at the sound from the monitor, but not out of fear. It seemed to send a shard of glass right into his heart and echoed painfully in his mind.

I believe you.

John handed the paper to Greg with shaking hands. He was terrified to believe, but he couldn't shake the feeling that Sherlock had been utterly damaged by this, just as he was.

He watched Sherlock read the text, and then read it again, and then once more. Sherlock exhaled a choked breath and nodded to himself. It was done. It was done. There was nothing more now that he could offer John than this. His brother would kill Moriarty via his agents, and Greg would carry on with John. He'd set it as right as he could. He looked up at the camera, wishing he could see John as he said a silent goodbye. He texted once more to Greg's phone.

You are the best man I've ever had the great pleasure to know, John Watson.

Sherlock stood up from the sofa, taking a few faltering steps towards the lav. He had to catch himself on the back of the chair, but he eventually slipped from the camera's view. Greg's stomach dropped out and he simply called Mycroft, his voice shaking as the man picked up the phone. "Go, Mycroft go," he breathed, the fear loud in his voice.

John looked confused and squinted at the monitor. "Where did he go?"

come back

Mycroft was already in the car when Greg's voice came over the line. He'd studied his brother for years in an attempt to predict and stop his relapses, and he could tell something terrible was about to happen. A siren was placed on the roof of his car and he flew the flags that allowed him to park anywhere. It was still going to take him time to get to the flat, however. He spoke to Greg, demanding an explanation.

"John believes him, he's- I'll forward you everything. John is still writing, I'm going to keep trying. Hurry, please hurry." Greg snapped a photo of John's writing and sent it to Sherlock, pressing a hand to his eyes as he tried to breathe, knowing he needed to keep steady for John.
John had managed to sit up as Greg spoke to Mycroft. *Something's wrong.* He tugged on Greg's shirt and looked desperately at the screen. "Greg, something is wrong. Something's really, really wrong."

Mycroft arrived exactly 16.3 minutes later. He sprinted up the stairs and into the flat. "Sherlock," he called out, his voice wavering uncharacteristically. Paramedics were on their way, just in case.

Greg wrapped a hand around John's shoulders and watched the feed, debating turning it off. If they were too late...well, either way it may give John what he needed.

John watched as Mycroft ran in. The volume was still on from when he had been listening to the violin, and he reacted horribly to Mycroft's shout.

Sherlock was on the floor in the lav, cheeks shining and breath hitching horrifically. He could not be silent in his grief, nor could he steady his hands enough to do as he needed. The inside of his elbow was bleeding in several places where he'd tried to inject the Morphine meant, all those months ago, for John. He was exhausted and dehydrated, malnourished and steady burning with low fever. He did not hear his brother over his own distress.

Mycroft knew exactly where Sherlock was. He charged into the bath, sweeping his eyes over the scene. He saw the blood, the needle, and the utterly wretched state Sherlock was in. "Put it down," Mycroft snapped and snatched the needle. "What the hell are you thinking? You're just going to abandon him like that? Just when he's starting to make sense of things? Is it really too much to ask that you help him try and understand?" Moriarty grabbed Sherlock by the collar and hauled him to his feet. Mycroft was scared. Very little scared him, but now he was terrified and held his brother up with hands that shook with sickening worry. This was not what his brother needed. His brother needed comfort. Its a shame he wasn't the comforting type.

Sherlock startled hard at his brother's intrusion and was suddenly standing, wavering on his feet, his knees threatening to go out. He stared at Mycroft as he the words sank in, and he slowly began to laugh. It was a horrible, empty sound, muffled as he let his head loll forward. "Abandon him? I've lost him. this will help set him free. Your men will do what I failed to do, and Greg will get him living, and he will have nothing left to fear."

The laughter stopped then as his breathing hitched on the remnants of harsh tears from earlier. He looked up at his brother without any of his armor, masks all dropped and shattered on the floor, exhausted and hopeless. "I love him, brother. This is all I've left to do."

Greg had a tight hold of John, shielding him from the screen. "I'm going to turn this off John, okay?"

John had started to cry, reaching for the screen as a child reaches for their mother. "He's hurting... Greg, I don't want him to be hurting!"

Mycroft pushed Sherlock to the wall so he had something to lean on. "You haven't lost him! He was just talking to you for god's sake! He was talking to you finally and you decide to just leave after that? I've read the texts on the way over. He said he doesn't want you to be in pain. He doesn't want you hurting. Call me an idiot, but I think DEAD is included! The man was tortured by the most creative criminal mastermind we know, and tells you that he doesn't like it when you're hurting. He makes a SIMPLE request. One request, Sherlock! Selfish as always!"

Sherlock hung his head, tears endlessly dripping off his cheeks. "He cannot hear my voice or mention of my name without terror, Mycroft! This is the best that I can do. This is my fault! You've said yourself, I've been told quite sufficiently by everyone involved that this has happened because I formed an attachment, that he associates with me. How horrible would I be, how indescribably selfish would I be to try and put myself back in his life?"
Sherlock was shaking hard. His mind a tangled mess, logic fled from him as the endless months crashed over him in the wake of this release. Sickness and neglect tore away his composure and defense and left him brittle in the angry hands of his brother. His voice dropped and he shook his head, "He will not try to come for John ever again when I am dead. He needs to win, I'll gladly tip my king."

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Greg sat in stunned silence, holding on to John, able only to hear, not see.

John had both arms wrapped around Greg. He was face down against Greg's chest with eyes squeezed shut and a muffled whimper dying on his lips. "Turn it off! Please! Turn it off!"

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Mycroft was totally, completely, and utterly done with Sherlock's attitude. "Yes, Sherlock. This happened because he was friends with you. It happened because you loved him. We all know that. But you're going to have to get over it right this very instant. Pick yourself up, go back in that room, and talk to him. He just said he believes you! Is that not exactly what you wanted to hear? If he believes you, that leads to him leaving the fear behind. Greg can't be his nursemaid forever, Sherlock."

At those cruel words, Greg reached over and killed the feed. His heart was hammering against his ribs and he took a few swift breaths to master himself. He wished to hell anyone else aside from Mycroft could be in the flat with Sherlock in that moment. "It's alright John," he whispered, his own voice shaking, "breathe."

Sherlock went lax in his brother's grip, his eyes to the floor. "I cannot speak to him, he fears my voice. I cannot- what would you have me do? What would you have me do?!"

Mycroft's agitation skyrocketed, deeply concerned for his brother, fear lending to the anger in his voice. "I would have you calm down and get a hold of yourself," he shouted loudly, trusting Greg had turned off the feed by now. "Sherlock, you're helping him! I've been watching. You look sad, and that confuses him. It doesn't fit the story! It doesn't fit the narrative that Moriarty forced into his head! He sees you sad, and some of the old John, the John that loved you, forces its way out."

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John couldn't breathe. Bright spots erupted in his vision and he struggled to sit up. "I have to help. I want to help." He threw his feet over the edge of the bed, not in a mad scramble as he had before, but in a determined, measured way. "John wait, wait, what are you doing?" Greg asked, scrambling off the bed, looking with worry at the tube in his nose and the state of him. "Slow down John, breathe. What do you mean help?"

John stopped long enough to look at the tubes tethering him to his bed. He knew it was a terrible idea to pull them out himself, that the act of doing so would be damaging and painful. "Call a nurse. I need to go back. I need to go help."

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Sherlock shook his head, desperately pulling at the air, shivering hard from a crashing mix of prolonged stress and illness. "I am a danger to all of you. I-" his knees buckled and he groaned as he forced them back, using the wall to keep himself up, "you and I know the only logical resolution to this ends with me in the ground. You speak of logic, only to deny it yourself. I'm death by proxy. I
cannot-" his head swam and he leaned more into his brother, legs shaking horribly.

Mycroft let go of Sherlock and took a step back, ignoring how Sherlock was very near to falling. "Go back into the living room and write all of this for John. Tell him what you're telling me. It'll get through. He seems to respond to you being in pain as a parent responds to a child crying.” Mycroft gave him a slight push in the right direction.

Sherlock moved on shaky legs to John's chair and dropped down into it. It took him an incredibly long time to peck the whole of the message into the phone, talking to his brother even as he was typing. "He cannot come back, Mycroft, you know he cannot come back. He loathes me, even if he does not wish that to be true. Irrelevant, really, I cannot ask that he come back to me, not after the danger I've put him in.

He carefully tried to type all out for John, explaining it from the start. He was nearly blacking out as he finished writing.

I'm going to remove myself and this will all stop, John. All of it. He will leave you alone, you can eat and drink knowing I'm not coming to hurt you, it will be over and you can live. I swore I'd do what I could to protect you.

"I refuse to hurt him any longer, Mycroft. I refuse. I've done all I can for him while breathing and you know it."

---

Greg read the texts with a sinking heart and looked to John. He handed the phone over, watching him carefully.

"No..." John whispered, shaking his head. "NO! Tell him no!" John shouted for a nurse as loudly as he could. "I need to LEAVE! He's going to DIE!" He grabbed Greg by the shirt and shook him. "This isn't right. I don't want him to die." His breathing grew rapid and shallow, too fast to get a proper breath. "Greg. M-Make him st-top. P-Please."

Greg set his phone aside and put both of his hands on John's shoulders. "Look at me. Look at me, John. His brother is with him. I need you to calm down. Take a deep breath and hold it for me, okay? Hold it for a few seconds and then let it out slowly."

"NO!" John screamed and pulled himself away from Greg. He was still attached to the bed by the feeding tube and he debated pulling it out. That could hurt. He screamed again for a nurse and stood shakily. "I need to go help him! That's what I'm supposed to do."

Greg let John have a bit of space. "Okay, okay...John...alright. You can't leave, you're not well enough, but what if we let him...what if we let him come here? Or would you try and speak to him? Let's figure this out John, if you want to help, you can. Work with me."

John held on to the tube in his nose with grim determination. He wanted to leave. Right this god damned minute. Perhaps he wasn't thinking all that clearly in the moment, either. He tore out the tube, which left him coughing and gagging, all through tears, but he managed it. His eyes were wide and wild and he settled the weight onto his legs. "Absolutely not. I'm going." He took a few steps and stumbled, the pain from his destroyed tendon making it difficult to move at all.

---

Sherlock set his phone down on the armrest of John's chair and then rest his face in his hands, feeling miserable, loathing that in all that time he failed to hit a vein. There was still the Browning, or any
other number of ways, but the morphine had been the ideal choice. "Please, Mycroft, leave me be. Please."

Mycroft shook his head. "No, I will not," he responded stubbornly and sat down on the sofa where he could still watch. "I'll have you bloody hospitalized before I let you off yourself and leave him."

Sherlock looked up at his brother in hopeless loss. "You cannot tell me you believe there is another way. You can't. You just refuse to see it for what it is."

Mycroft wanted to reach out and slap him, or perhaps embrace him, but he kept his composure. "Fine. One month. Wait one month. If he hasn't recovered by then, I will personally give you enough morphine or heroin to blow you off the planet."

Sherlock stared at his brother, blinking slowly, trying to get his defenses back up. "I am nothing more, nothing more than a terrible pain in your side. It will be a relief. Go home, Mycroft. The only outcome of this will be relief for all involved. Go home."

---

Greg swore colorfully under his breath. He reached out and caught John up gently. "John, are you really going to walk out of here and go face-to-face with Sherlock?"

John winced at the name and tried to work past it. Greg is going to hurt you. He said Sherlock. Now he's going to hurt you. John put his hands over his ears and tried to stumble away. "Please don't...Please...He's not alright. He's not going to be alright. I have to go."

---

Mycroft stared stubbornly right back at him. "You are not a terrible pain in my side. Don't be so dramatic. This isn't about me, this is about John, you, and Moriarty." Mycroft took out his phone and texted Lestrade.

*How much of that did John hear? M*

Greg swiftly responded, his eyes locked to John.

*Shut it off ten minutes ago, just before Sherlock's text. John is trying to come there, he's pulling his tubes, is scared for Sherlock.*

"John, please look at me," Greg said softly as he reached out and firmly grasped John at his shoulders, bodily pushing him down into a chair. "He is not alone, and I will let you help but you've got to work with me. You've got to work with me, John. Please."

John tried weakly to fight him, but had no strength in his arms. "Greg, you don't understand," he cried with tears in his eyes, "He's going to hurt himself. You've got to let me go help."

---

Mycroft read the text to Sherlock. "He's pulled his tubes and he's attempting to come himself."

Mycroft tried not to sound angry with Sherlock. He was angry with the entire situation, but not particularly Sherlock. "He's scared for you. You're scaring him. Text him again before it gets worse."

Sherlock did not have much color left in his face, but what was there drained away and he dropped his phone on the floor in his haste to try and respond. He was outright sliding into hyperventilation.

*John please don't hurt yourself. I'm alright. Please John*
Greg read the text to John and then showed him. "Calm down, John, calm down. Do you want Mycroft to bring him here? We can do that. Or the screen, we can turn that back on."

John got up and stumbled to the screen. He turned it on and started, with one hand pressed against the glass. "Tell him I don't want him to hurt himself. Tell him!" John decided to snatch the phone himself. His hands were shaking too terribly for him to type anything, so he found the contacts. After pressing the wrong one on accident twice, he pressed Sherlock's and the line started to ring.

Greg watched in stunned silence as Sherlock rest a trembling hand against his eyes, leaning so hard against on his elbow he looked ready to fall. Sherlock's fingers deftly answered without looking, his voice muffled as the screen was muted, only coming over the phone itself.

"I'm s-sorry Greg, I only meant t-to give him peace," his voice was brittle and broken, a rough shadow of it's true potential.

John jerked the phone away from his ear as if it had bit him and held it at an arm distance, face turned away. After a moment he curled up into a small ball on the chair, phone clutched close, but not to his ear. "....uhm.... hello..." He said softly. "Its...Its John..."

Sherlock froze, dropping his hand away from his eyes, leaning forward in his chair around the mobile as though it might be torn away from him.

"John," he breathed, his voice breaking over the name. Words so long demanding to be said fought for attention on his tongue, seizing him up and making him stutter, dumbstruck. "Oh, John."

_Breathe. Breathe. He isn't going to hurt you. Its just the voice. You don't need to be afraid of the voice. Its just a sound coming over a phone. He's miles away. Breathe. Breathe._

John whimpered a bit and held the phone tight. "I...I was w-worried about y-y-you. I thought...hurts but...I-I thought you were going t-t-to h-hurt yourself...." He tried to clear his mind but it was seizing up on him. "Y-you aren't going to hurt yourself r-right?"

Sherlock closed his eyes at the sound of John's distress, wanting to stop talking, to stop scaring him. Tears shot down his cheeks and he shook his head.

"Not...not if you want me to stay here. I thought-" he shook his head and took a slow breath, his chest aching. It was nearly more than he could stand.

John was starting at the screen now, a crestfallen look making his already weary features seem to age. "I don't.... I don't want you to leave. I thought I did... but then you were upset and I don't want you to be upset but that doesn't make sense because I thought you had h-h-hurt me but now I'm not sure of anything but I can watch the screen now without screaming and I want you to be alright."

Sherlock's hand had returned to his eyes, his whole body shaking as he listened to John, tears sliding continuously down his sharp cheeks. He was as silent as he could manage in his grief.

"I'm sorry," he breathed, shaking his head, not knowing what to say. It was incredibly difficult just knowing the sound of his voice was such a horrible experience for John.

John got up out of the chair slowly and crawled back into his bed. He pulled the sheets up over his head, the phone braced away from him to keep it from attacking. "I know. I know you are. But I'm broken. My mind is broken. I can't.... I can't think... Sometimes things hurt me that shouldn't. I think you're one of those things. I think I shouldn't be afraid of you."
Sherlock leaned back in his chair, Mycroft and their audience forgotten, his vision blocked by his hand and his focus wrapped around John's voice. "If I knew any way to better relieve your fear, I would do it. I will do it. I only want you well and sound, that is all, John. I will do anything. I understand that likely means never seeing you again." He took in a shuddering breath but otherwise remained as calm as possible.

John bit down on his pillow to keep from screaming. The voice tore through his mind, attempting to rip apart his small semblance of control. "I believe you," he said, but it was forced and sounded nothing like his normal voice. "Or at least I really, really want to. I can't control it. I can't help it when I start to panic. I-I know its in my head. but its still terrifying. Actually, that makes it worse."

Sherlock nodded, hoping the camera was on, loathing this. He was scaring the daylights out of John. He kept himself quiet, his chest hitching violently at times, forcibly restraining himself. He had no idea what to do. "I'm so sorry," he whispered, trying to keep his voice as quiet as he could, "Would it not help you far more if you knew I wasn't a threat as fact? If I was not here, you would not be afraid. I am powerless to do anything else for you, my hands have been tied." The grief was intense in his voice and the offer genuine. He'd put a round in his head in the next second if John asked it.

"No," John said without hesitation. "I think... I think I'm starting to see things the way Greg sees them. I know that I-I shouldn't be afraid b-b-because I don't want to be afraid of you. I-I...It hurts and...I don't want t-to be afraid of you because Greg said not to and w-w-we...we were friends!" He said it with such heartbreak that it felt like razors in his heart. Sherlock had been his friend, his dearest, closest friend, and he'd tortured him. But that hadn't happened.

Regardless of reality, the betrayal was there. "I-I don't want to be afraid of you. I want to help you. I-I remember all the things y-y-you did t-to me...But n-not you, but...It still feels..." John whimpered and pulled at his hair. "It hurts me t-to think about it." John put the phone down and dug his fingers into his scalp. This was incredibly taxing.

Sherlock looked to his brother briefly, lost. He swallowed and went quiet, just leaning against the phone, his heart breaking. He looked to the screen from time to time, wanting to help.

Greg leaned over to John and put a hand on his back. "You don't have to do this, John. He will be okay."

John didn't acknowledge Greg. He made himself as small as possible, with his knees up to protect the softer parts of his stomach and his arms guarding his face. It was a familiar and practiced position.

"I think that I can not be afraid anymore." John whispered into the phone. "I'm working on it so they'll let me out. I'm not very afraid of ice anymore, and I had some broth... And I'm talking and I can even walk a bit..." John listed his achievements as one would who had won the Olympics.

Sherlock closed his eyes as John spoke, giving him a gentle smile he hoped would show on the monitor. "That's very good, John, all of it. I'm very glad to hear it."

Greg sat back and watched the pair, his eyes sliding to Mycroft. He sent the man a text as Sherlock and John spoke.

Easy, Mycroft. You look ready to strangle him. Go easy. GL

I'm not going to strangle him. This is just how I look. M

Does he need a doctor? GL

I think he might. He's starving himself. He's likely sick too. I can't tell what is doing the damage. M
John was taking deep breaths to combat the breakdown he had been circling for the past ten minutes. "I'm sorry... I wanted to not be afraid..."

John could remember a time a very long while ago when he had refused something Moriarty wanted. He hadn't blamed Sherlock for his torture. Moriarty was mildly angered by this and within the end of the week John would blame Sherlock for anything Moriarty bid him to. "Will y-y-you kill him? You'll k-k-kill him, ri-right"

Sherlock closed his eyes, his heart sinking. "He won't live out the month, John. You've no reason to be sorry. I- goodbye, John." He said the words with a softly resigned acceptance, swallowing against the urge to beg him to stay, beg him to come back. He would let John end the call.

John swallowed hard and whimpered. He didn't want to start screaming, since it seemed to upset Sherlock. "I-I'll talk again l-later when I c-can think," He stammered through clenched jaw. Without listening to a response he handed the phone back to Greg, who took the phone back, watching Sherlock on the screen. He caught a faint sound of grief and then the line went dead. Sherlock pushed himself out of John's chair, clearly in tears and physically guarding himself as though in biological pain. He moved into his room and crawled into his unmade bed, dragging the blankets up over himself.

---

"That was incredible, John," Greg said, forcing himself to put his focus back to John, who looked on the verge of falling apart.

*I have to handle John. Call me if you need me. GL*

John had pulled his tubes, meaning he would be forced to either eat, or undergo another placement. Greg shook his head, that would be decidedly difficult on him. Even to the most mentally sound patient, NG tube placement was deeply frightening.

John trembled and gave no acknowledgment that he had heard. He bit back screams, though not in the frenzied way he had before. He was in control, if only for the moment. "C-Can I-I be s-sedat-ted?" he managed to choke out, each syllable punctuated by a sharp intake of breath.

Greg looked over John and went to the door, calling in a nurse. John was swiftly given a sedative, which he struggled against, and the doctor had returned, setting up to replace the tube.

---

Mycroft followed Sherlock and stood in the doorway, leaning against the frame. "You did good with him," he said gently. "I think that's helped him a lot."

"I terrified him," Sherlock responded from under the blankets, nearly childlike in his tone. He wondered to himself how it was possible to feel sadness at such a deep level, for such a prolonged period.

"Yes, it did terrify him. But he knows its not real now. Before, when he was still worried that you were coming to hurt him, it would have been a comfort to him if you were dead. But now, he is worried about you. That's the old John peering through." Mycroft didn't come any closer, but didn't trust Sherlock not to do something rash.

Sherlock did not answer his brother at all. John had sounded both wonderfully familiar and horrifically unknown. It did nothing but deepen the ache on several levels. He knew it was progress, but he could not see past the terror in John's voice, could not look past the fog John found himself in.
The man sounded nothing of himself and it scared Sherlock to no end, choking him on hopelessness.
Dulce et Decorum Est

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Greg watched as another tube was inserted into John's nose, incredibly grateful John was unconscious via sedation. New drip lines were inserted, the old one bandaged, bruising surrounding the area that the line had been torn from.

Another thought went through Greg’s head, which had him texting with Mycroft in the next moment.

If you have those trackers, now would be the time. He's completely under. How is Sherlock? GL

I have them prepared. I can send someone if you want. I trust them, but you should be present for it anyway. M

I am not leaving this hospital for the foreseeable future. Have them sent. GL

They'll be there by the end of the day. I'll send a surgeon and a few of my personal operatives. M

Business conducted with Greg and John, Mycroft put his focus back to his brother.

"Sherlock, are you going to hurt yourself if I leave?" Mycroft asked as gently as he could.

Sherlock shifted, feeling utterly miserable. "Go home, Mycroft," he managed through the mixed haze of overwhelming guilt and loss, defeat and hopelessness, "just go home." Of course, his brother was not one to listen. Sherlock rolled his eyes as the bed dipped.

Mycroft sat down stubbornly. "I'm not leaving you until I'm sure you're stable mentally."

Sherlock shivered and dragged a pillow over his head, stubbornly ignoring his brother. Mycroft was interrupting his efforts to put his conversation with John into focus. His mind palace rejected entry. With increasing frequency he found the door to his mind locked fast against him, refusing him access. The loss of his typical thought patterns left him with no clear way to observe anything. It had been difficult to focus on John's actual words and not the quivering fear in John's voice. John didn't want to be afraid. While Sherlock longed to take comfort in the knowledge, it did nothing for how John actually felt. He licked his dry lips and tried to ignore both the thundering pain in his head and his intrusive older brother.

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Greg sat at John's side as the doctors worked. The tube was back in place, he was given a nightly feeding as always, bathed, changed and attended. John's progress had been remarkable today; he could hardly believe it. On the other side of pride at John’s progress lay deep concerned for Sherlock. He'd never seen the man anywhere close to his current behavior. Not even years ago, when Mycroft had insisted that a very strung out Sherlock stop using full-stop, had Sherlock been so out of control.

Greg settled in, impossibly grateful for the chair, dragging a blanket up over himself. He felt much more relaxed knowing they would be able to find John if anything negative happened. The upper trackers were flesh toned and difficult to see, and the injected one was completely invisible. Felt safer that way. Now there wasn't much to do other than wait. He settled in, allowing himself to rest while
John was down.

An hour passed before a quiet whimper broke the relative silence. "Greg?" He called, exhausted and confused, seeking out the only safe person he knew as he always did when he was frightened. "Greg? Is he... Is he alright?"

John shifted as he woke, seeking out Greg. As he moved his hands, he found himself free of his restraints and smiled. They had usually strapped him back down once they had to sedate him. He was grateful they were extending trust to him. "Is Sherl.." He squeezed his eyes shut. John was determined to master the ability to call his name soon.

Greg stood up and stretched, blurry with sleep as he walked over to John's side. "I've haven't heard anything, so I'm assuming he's fine. Mycroft would have let me know. You did a very brave thing earlier." He reached out and wrapped his hand around John's. "How are you feeling? You've had a really impressive day."

John looked down at their joined hands. "I feel terrible." He admitted in a tiny voice. Then again, he had been feeling just awful for as long as he remembered. "I'm feeling bad. I'm feeling scared, and confused... I can't trust my own mind and it's awful." John touched the tube that was back in his nose and felt bad about pulling it out. He hadn't wanted to be trouble. "I'm sorry... I'm being stupid..."

An intense flash of irritation at Sherlock tore through Greg's chest. It wasn't Sherlock's fault, and he sympathized greatly with him, but to see John so low again was hard. "Can I sit up there with you?" He asked softly, hearing the sadness in John's voice.

John scooted over a bit as an invitation. "I'd like to walk today," he said quietly. "But I can't talk to him. I'm too tired. We can switch, body, mind, body, mind..." John was starting to see that they wouldn't let him go until he was properly healed. "That way I don't panic again. I don't like panicking."

Greg nodded as he put a hip on the bed, exceedingly careful as he reclined back and gently pulled John to his chest. "You are not at all being stupid, John. You're not. You've done a wonderful job. You don't have to talk to him or watch him anymore if you'd rather not, let's just get you on your feet, alright?" He pulled John's blankets up around the man and tried to shield him somewhat.

John curled up on Greg's chest in a childish manner. He very much wanted to stay in bed with Greg, but walking was imperative to leaving. "I want to walk. Will you help me walk?" He slowly let go of Greg, sitting up and shifting until he could put his feet over the edge. "I can walk today." He told himself and slowly shifted his weight forward.

Greg moved with him, surprised at the haste John was so suddenly using. "Okay, John, okay. Just for a few minutes, you've really pushed yourself today." He got up and was glad that John was no longer tethered to the bed. They'd inserted the tube again, but instead of keeping it constantly connected, they'd sealed it off just outside of his nose with a little blue cap, which would be opened when attached to the actual feed. He'd just be given timed meals instead of the slow-dripping constant feeds they'd been doing over the last few months. Greg held his hands out for John, wanting to give him some sort of support. "If you feel like you are going to fall, lean on me, okay?"

John found that while the ankle could bear weight, any activity involving the calf muscle on his injured leg was difficult and painful. It was also quite painful to lay his foot flat, wanting to point his toes down to keep the strain off the tendon. It was technically healed, but the tissue stretched and burned when engaged. "Yes but... I've got this..." He put one foot in front of the other, holding tight to Greg's arm. "They'll let me out soon for sure."

Greg flinched at that, keeping his hands right where John could easily grab them "John," he asked
softly, following him along, "when you are released...will you be needing a place to stay?" He couldn't get the words are you going to drown yourself past his lips; asking John where he was going to live was as close as he could get.

"No, that's alright." John said almost cheerfully and kept his eyes on the floor in front of him. "I'll be fine." He took a few steps, and seemed to gain confidence as he went on. He was able to let go of Greg and walk to the door. The doorknob seemed to call to him, and the hallway behind beckoned him to freedom. He still was scared of being a captive, even though it was for his own good. John found himself holding the sterile brass knob and slowly let go. He hung his head, arms limp by his side.

Greg swallowed hard. Perhaps if he could say it out loud, plain and easy for John to understand, it would at least get him to consider abandoning the idea of suicide. "So, what you're saying then is that I should go ahead and start planning two funerals. Right then." He kept close enough to get John back to the bed or catch him if he fell, but otherwise the enthusiasm drained out of him. "Back to bed, John."

John was unaffected by the statement, finding it as a point of relief. "No, just one," John turned and said quietly. "Why do you say two? I'm one." He didn't find the idea of his own death very frightening, but he didn't want anyone else to be hurt in the process. "I don't want to go back to bed," he added, still facing the door.

Greg shook his head as he thought of Sherlock getting up and heading for the lav. "Like hell just one," he replied softly, his voice steady and matter-of-fact. "He won't survive the hour you do it. I don't even know if he's going to survive tonight, John, but I do know for a fact that if you throw yourself in the Thames or whatever it is you have in your head, Sherlock will be dead within the hour. He will not survive it. So the pair of you. Fucking hell, you must think me a monster to be helping you recover just enough to die."

He moved back to the side of the bed and slowly sat down, feet on the floor, leaning forward and resting his head exhausted on his hand. What were they even doing?

John stumbled. "He can't." He said indignantly. "He can't. He's supposed to be alright." John grabbed the side of the bed as his knees seemed to grow weak. The idea of Sherlock dying by his own hand hurt him terribly, though he wasn't sure why. "You're not a monster. You're not. You're helping me. Who cares what I do after? He shouldn't. He should know that it's for the best."

Greg shook his head, frustrated and trying to keep a handle on his own overtaxed emotions. "Listen, mate, I don't know what you've been made to believe, but none of us would be alright if you killed yourself, least of all him. He nearly did that tonight, just to keep you from being afraid. He's shut down entirely. I damn well care what happens to you. Did you imagine I'd walk away from being here with you round the clock and simply never look back? Christ, John."

To John there were two types of people. There were those who wanted him to have pain -formerly everyone- and those who didn't want him to have pain. "But... You don't want me to be hurting, right?" He had climbed back into the bed and looked at Greg curiously. "You don't want me to have pain... He doesn't want me to have pain. Doesn't that mean you want me dead?"

"John, I'd have killed you myself already if that's how I thought we'd get you out of pain. Every day gets better for you, why on earth would I be helping you heal just so you could die? I promised I'd take you out before I let him torture you again, that is the only instance I would rather see you dead." He took a slow breath to calm himself down, not mad at John, rather frustrated with the situation.

He sent a text to Mycroft.
"Oh, can't you see?" John flopped back on the pillow with a miserable expression. "He already is torturing me. He's clever. He made it so my mind tortures itself." John flinched for no apparent reason and hugged his pillow close to his chest. "He is torturing me. There's no other way out of it." He had a sudden realization. "They won't let me out until I don't want to kill myself, will they?"

He's ignoring me. I can't imagine what he's going through. M

Greg texted back, unwilling to answer John just yet.

We have to move on this. God, can we just do it now? Right now? None of us can take this much longer, we have to move. Bring Sherlock here, get him to get Moriarty here, let's have it fucking done. GL

He looked over to John again. "You stopped him, you know? You stopped him when he offered to kill you. You didn't want to die, and he didn't want you to die. There is a difference between wanting the silence that comes with death, and actually planning to die, John. You have hope or you would have taken yourself out the few times you had the chance. It might frighten you, but you have hope."

John scowled and covered his face with the pillow. "There IS no hope. There just isn't. I thought maybe it would stop hurting but..." John's breath hitched. Before, speaking about dying had been an almost pleasant subject of conversation. Now he was bitter and scared. "I'm broken, Greg. I've lost. There's nothing I can do. All this effort is so pointless. I'm not going to have a life. I'm not going back to Moriarty, and I don't want to stay here forever."

I can call everyone in, but it would take until tonight to set it up. Night favors the hunted. First thing in the morning? I'll have Sherlock arrange it. M

Greg read the text, exhausted and wrung out.

You're right. I should not rush. I'm sorry. Whatever you and Sherlock decide, that's what we'll do. GL

Greg looked at John and shook his head. "You don't believe that. I know you don't. It's fine to be disappointed and angry, John, but you can't ask Sherlock to stay around while you plan to leave."

John made a desperate, pained sound that closely resembled an animal caught in a trap. "I don't want to stay alive, but I don't want him to die."

Greg couldn't believe it. His head shot up and he looked over at John. "Sherlock is going to die if you do. He's in the same boat as you, John. He thinks he's lost you for life, and remarkably, fucking remarkably, that's it for him. He won't keep on without you." He'd noticed with a bit of rising hope that John had not broken down into screaming and begging at Sherlock's name.

John didn't want to hear what Greg was saying. "No, no, NO! There's another way. I know there is. There's a way for me to die and him to live and be happy. I've just got to find it."

Greg shook his head at John. "I don't think Sherlock has been anywhere close to love in his life, John. He loves you. I think the only other person who matters that deeply to him is his brother, though he'd never admit it. He's never been like this before. He won't survive it, John. That's not your problem if you don't want it to be, but it sure as hell is mine. I- you two are my best friends. I hate seeing you suffer, and god does it hurt to hear you planning on dying."

John closed his eyes. "You and Sher...lock... You claim to care about me. One of you should have
shot me by now, but I'm going to keep in mind that you tend to try and keep your best friends around. Sh...erlock... Loves me. He wants me to be alright. I won't be alright as long as I'm alive. Maybe..." John was already having difficulty speaking. "Maybe if Moriarty was dead it would be different. But he has apprentices. He... He used me to train them."

John had decided that he would make the choice whether or not to die once he was free. Obviously it was hurting Greg, and John didn't want Greg hurt. "I'll think about it, alright?" He whispered.

Greg dragged his hand over the back of his neck and kept his eyes to the floor, nodding gently. "Yeah John. Alright." He got down off the bed and moved over to his chair, sitting down slowly, tipping his head back and closing his eyes. It was so much, so incredibly much do deal with at the moment, and Sherlock had looked horrible on the feed. Greg licked his lip and tried to settle his mind.

John fell asleep eventually, which he had been able to do on his own if he were tired enough. His broken, disheveled mind settled into some semblance of security when he remembered how he hadn't been beaten for sleeping in months.

---

Mycroft walked over to Sherlock and tapped him on the shoulder. "We're doing it tonight. We need you to lure Moriarty to John."

Sherlock startled violently when Mycroft touched him, the spike of adrenaline too much for his overwhelmed body to handle, making him roll to his side and sick-up into the bin. There was nothing but acid in his stomach and it was mostly just the action of his muscles painfully contracting. A few minutes later he was pushing himself on shaking arms, blinking at his brother with bloodshot eyes. "Are you even prepared for that? Or is G-Greg demanding a Hail Mary?"

Mycroft stayed calm outwardly despite his pain. "Its not a Hail Mary. We've been preparing for this. Our timeframe has simply advanced. We're ready. We can go over the plan if you want and I'll let you personally choose where each man is stationed based on his skill set."

Sherlock looked up at his brother, tremors skating across his back and down his arms. He was quiet for a long time before his expression fell and his shoulders drooped. He tapped the side of his head and groaned. "Can't get in anymore," he whispered, knowing his brother would understand. He blinked slowly, his eyes hot and gritty under the lids. "Can't sort it, can't see it."

Despite the attestation from Sherlock being rather disturbing, his difficulty getting access to his mind was not unprecedented. Sherlock had lost the ability before in times of extreme stress or illness. "You'll find it again. You'll find all the rooms intact once you fix the foundation." Mycroft was, of course, speaking of John. "Do you need anything? Can I help? Perhaps if you had some water, or a bit of food, you would be able to think a bit better. We need you on this. You understand Moriarty better than anyone. What will he do?"

Sherlock blinked at his brother, swaying where he sat, and held up a finger before picking up his mobile. He did not text this time, his fingers too unsteady. Instead he just pressed the call button, ringing the line Moriarty always and endlessly texted him from, feeling as though he himself were going to black out at any moment.

Moriarty had expected the call. In fact, when he wrote up the exact plan of what would happen and how people would react, he had pinned it within a day. "Hellooooo, Sherlock," he drawled,
stretched the syllables in an almost melodic way. "This is quite a surprise! I thought you had decided you wanted to let John heal on his own."

Moriarty’s voice was so overwhelming over the line that it caused Sherlock to break composure, physically leaning into his brother. He tipping his fevered forehead to Mycroft's hip much like he had when he was a small boy all those years ago. "Oh, I'm rather sure it isn't a surprise at all," he slurred, defeated in his tone, no acting required.

Moriarty had the phone call recorded so he could listen to the utter defeat in Sherlock's voice later. "What's wrong? You aren't mad or anything, are you? No, of course not. You're likely depressed and suicidal... but still alive. That's good. Are you going to tell me why you called, or is it just to hear the sound of my voice?"

Sherlock drew a deep, shuddering breath. "Coy doesn't suit you," he breathed, keeping against his brother, "I need help with him. He isn't going to make it. I accept your offer." The words made his gut clench and he suddenly reached up, grabbing Mycroft's trousers to steady himself. "Don't want him taken out of hospital. Don't want him hurt."

Mycroft put a hand on Sherlock's head and ran his fingers over the terribly broken man. "You accept?" Moriarty pretended to be shocked. He wanted to make this as painful as possible for Sherlock. "Oh, but John will think you a traitor! Well, at first he will. After that, he'll be perfectly normal. I'll need a week and your full cooperation. If he isn't being taken out of the hospital, I'll need everyone else to leave."

Sherlock took in a deep breath, shaking his head against Mycroft's hip. "Won't make it... he won't make it a week. He- I made an error, so many errors and he won't last. I'll clear the hospital. He- you are not to hurt him, that... that was our agreement."

"Oh, I wouldn't dream of hurting him." Moriarty purred. "I've got what I wanted. I had fun. You're no fun when you're moping about. No, I'll cause trouble elsewhere like usual. I expect the hospital to be completely clear. Anyone who is not you or John will be shot on sight."

Sherlock nodded despite Moriarty's inability to see him. "The day after tomorrow, by half ten in the morning, it will be clear."

He hung up the line and set his phone down, keeping against his brother. "There. Now he has my ego to chew on and the false idea of victory to bask in. No one can be in the building. I will go in armed, I will kill him. If I fail your men will rush in and that will be the end of it. It will be done."

He shivered once more, his voice deadpan and even. "Brother... I believe I'm ill."

Mycroft listened intently and with an emotion akin to boiling horror. "You are ill. Let's get you to a hospital." Mycroft hauled Sherlock to his feet and helped him to the door. "You're of no use to John if you're shivering on the floor the whole time. You need to drink, eat, and prepare yourself. It's not going to be as simple as this."

Sherlock leaned against his brother as they moved, the ground dipping at his feet, ever fluctuating. His breath was overly hot on his lips and he was swimming in nausea. He did not resist. John needed him to put a bullet in someone, and therefore he needed his body functioning. He allowed his brother to navigate him. "It's more'n simple, My, it is little more than a twitch of the finger."

Mycroft took Sherlock out to his personal car where the driver was waiting. "Hospital." He said curtly. He was going to add in one that was further away and less predictable than Barts, but
Moriarty could easily track them anyway. "Yes, but it could come to a chase. You could graze him. You could miss entirely. Your depth perceptions is frankly horrific at the moment."

Sherlock waved his hand as though Mycroft had lost his mind. "I won't miss," he said simply and with conviction he'd lacked in all other places. "I will not miss. He will not come near John and I will not miss. I... I..." his voice faded as stars erupted across his vision. He leaned harshly to the side, grabbing hold of his brother as his vision tunneled and he groaned, going slack as his brain kicked off, dropping him hard and abrupt into unconsciousness.

Mycroft held him upright until they got to the hospital. He was wheeled away on a stretcher, leaving Mycroft to explain what happened. "He hasn't eaten much for months... Recently overcome a drug addiction... Hasn't left the house but once... He was determined to die." The nurse's eyes widened but she only nodded.

Mycroft sat in the waiting room, hands over his eyes. He was exhausted from lack of sleep, stress, and the emotional toll of having a brother collapse in his arms.

Greg watched John sleep for the better part of an hour before he finally texted Mycroft.

This one is sleeping. Suicidal and sleeping. What have you and Sherlock decided? GL

Sherlock has collapsed and is in hospital. M

Mycroft couldn't bring himself to type anything else. He wasn't trying to be curt, but he was too prideful to admit he wasn't handling this well.

Greg read the text several times before looking away. His eyes slid over to John and then back to his phone.

Jesus. Is he- what are they saying? Are you alright? I'm sorry I cannot be there. GL

Mycroft called instead of texting back. As soon as he heard the ling go through, he spoke rapidly and breathlessly. "He's dehydrated, likely ill, starving to death, and recently over withdrawals."

Greg blinked at the sound of Mycroft's voice, leaning forward in his chair, his focus honed in on the man. "Mycroft, take a breath. He's going to be okay, he will. He just needs a bit of building back up. He's going to be okay. Christ, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. I'm not going to ask if you're alright. He's going to be alright. He's stayed off the needle, that's a good sign. Slow down."

"He's been clean for what, three weeks? That's usually about when he'd start again if he weren't in the hospital. When I found him, he was trying to kill himself with morphine. He would have done it were his hands steady." Mycroft spoke rapidly. He still had an outward appearance of calm, but his voice was treacherous of his mind.

Greg pressed his hand against his face, breathing deep and speaking calmly for Mycroft’s sake. "He's frightened and hopeless, Mycroft, I don't think either of these men actually want to die, they are just pushed well beyond their breaking points and trapped. And no offense to family, but your brother is an idiot when it comes to matters of the heart. He's... hell Mycroft, I'm sorry, I wish I had been there with you, wish I was with you now. These men are going to make it if we have to drag them the entire way. Sherlock is going to be alright, he will. Slow down, try to breathe. I know this is scary and terrible, I really do. Slow down."

"I don't have time to slow down and breathe." Mycroft snapped and hoped Greg wouldn't take offense. "I don't have any time for that at all. I don't have time for this!" He gestured to the hospital even though Greg couldn't see. "I've got to find a way to have that mental hospital secure even even
Greg set his lips as he leaned back, thinking on each problem as it came. The semantics of the hospital he could address. "Call in a bomb threat. Well, make it look that way. Bring in lots of workers with sniffer dogs and in the chaos, leave a few behind. Breathe, Mycroft." He kept his voice calm and steady, deeply wishing there were a way to better help him. "This hospital has twenty-seven patients right now. It's not Bart's. We can clear it in half an hour. Even the Yard without your help could manage it. I will stay in John's room, hide if I need to, and clean shot anyone who walks in the door. We can do this, Mycroft."

Mycroft listened to what Greg proposed and wrote some of it down. "Bomb threat. Perfect. But Moriarty has promised to shoot anyone I leave behind. I'm sure he'll have his own workers on the case."

Mycroft was deeply worried about this operation. "If Sherlock stays, even if he does shoot Moriarty there's others. He's got legions of scum working for him."

Greg nodded, "Yeah, I know, but they work for pay and not loyalty, surely. At least I'm sure that's the case for a vast number of them. Cut off the head, the body dies. Maybe we put these two underground a month after this is done, let the operatives scatter off. Surely you can set up some sort of care for them away from here? I can help with that, but there will have to be paperwork at the Yard."

Mycroft ran his fingers back through his hair, giving it a disheveled look he had never allowed to be seen with in public. "I can make them disappear after. I'm just worried that one of them might actually be like him. Who knows? He could have trained some poor kid to be as twisted as he was. Who the hell else would work for him?" Mycroft steadied his breathing and started to pace around the hospital. "I wish I could be there when it happens."

Greg nodded his understanding, feeling deeply sorry for the man. This had greatly affected Mycroft, clearly. "Mycroft," he whispered, getting to his own feet and moving away from John. "Let's just get them past this, okay? Let's get Moriarty down and then we will take the next chapter. These two will be okay if we can get them back together, they will be. If we get Moriarty out of the way, John might be able to manage it. One foot in front of the other, yeah?"

He looked back over at John and exhaled slowly. "We just flood the surrounding buildings. Snipers all over the place on the perimeters. He's not going to leave, and we don't have to have operatives inside. I'm not going to leave. I'll hide and stay out of sight, but I'm going to keep in this room. Hell I'll put myself up the ceiling tiles. I'm not leaving them. It's going to work. It is."

Mycroft was torn between being grateful to Lestrade for staying and worried about Moriarty's promise. "We can find a place to put you where he won't find you. In the walls or ceiling if we have to. But I fear Moriarty is the type to light fire to the building to smoke you out." He sat back down, stood up, paced, got a different chair, and repeated the process. "I'll have the area on lockdown. He's probably going to put his own men in too."

Greg nodded to himself. He knew what sort of odds he was looking at. "I know, Mycroft. I know. If it goes south, be careful with these guys, alright? Get Molly to help you, she knows how to handle these guys. Mrs. Hudson too. I'm not leaving them on their own."

"Don't speak as if you are sure of your own death, Greg." Mycroft requested quietly. "Please. That's just not something I would like to consider at the moment. We have so much to plan. I'm going to send snipers to the buildings in the area now and have them wait. I would honestly rather have you somewhere safe. If this goes south, and John ends up panicking, you're the only one who can get
Greg shifted his tone, "I've no intention of dying here, Mycroft. Not one bit. I just want you aware that I'm aware of the risks. I need to stay here for the reasons you just listed. I'm going to ask that John stay on a heavy dose of anxiety medications and morphine. If...god help me if, at least he will not be on his own. I wouldn't put it past that psychopath to hurt him in his bed. I hate this, but I think it's our only viable plan."

He gentled his tone. "I am not going to leave you to handle this mess if I can help it, Mycroft. I don't know how you are functioning. I'm still so sorry this is happening, and I'm here, okay? Anything you need. Put the snipers in, and we will get this done."

Mycroft paced again. "He'll be heavily medicated. Maybe we can make him numb so he doesn't feel it if he's hurt." Mycroft utterly hated this entire situation.

"Shoot him, Greg." Mycroft said with great resentment and bitterness. "I want him to suffer. I would love to let Sherlock work on him until he was afraid to breathe. Nothing would satisfy me more so see him in the same state John is in." At the comment about him functioning, Mycroft laughed. "Oh, I'm not. I'm only on my feet because I need to be. The human mind can do anything for a short period of time. Once this is over I'm sure I'll crash."

Greg nodded, "Trust me, I feel the same fucking way all the way around. If I get a shot I'll take it, and if I can leave him alive and give Sherlock a chance to take him slow, I will. I will. Please let me know how Sherlock is doing as you find out, okay?"

He moved to sit back down beside John. "I do think if John watches Sherlock take Moriarty out, terrifying as that will be for him, I think it may be the push he needs to get his mind around this. If Sherlock can keep his feet long enough to come in this room, I will provide the firepower even if he can't manage it. John needs to see this, and his mind needs to be functioning well enough to remember it."

Mycroft sat down once more without the intention of standing up. "Ideally, John will see Sherlock kill Moriarty. He'll realize what's going on, and maybe they can be happy together again." There was absolutely no spark of hope in his voice.

"Snipers in the area. Two kilometers out in a circle is to be secure. I'll put of road blocks and check everyone who goes in or out. Moriarty will not hurt John again. When Sherlock wakes up, I'll ask him just what Moriarty plans to do." He asked a nurse, who said that Sherlock hadn't woken up yet, but likely would be soon.

Greg nodded. "I know it sounds absurd, but if you can get any rest, please do. Just try. I'm physically here, I'll go down before either of them do, and I have no intention of going down, Mycroft. Just..take a few minutes and let yourself center as much as you can. I can't do this without you, don't you drop on me."

"Unlike Sherlock, I don't develop pointless love interests." He grumbled and watched the nurses go past. Each time he thought maybe they were coming to tell him Sherlock was awake, and each time they walked by and he seemed to sink lower into his chair. "I'll do my best to get some rest after Sherlock wakes up."

Greg sighed and shook his head. "Keep in touch, Mycroft," he said sadly, finally hanging up the phone. He set his attention to John and went quiet.

He found it impossible to go back to sleep. Instead, Greg emailed Molly, updating her once again.
He drafted a few emails just in case things did not go the way they planned, leaving a few words of goodbye for the people he loved in his drafts folder, and stretched himself out in the recliner, letting time slip by without much notice.

When the nurse finally came to Mycroft and told him that Sherlock had woken, he had fallen into an uncomfortable sleep with his head leaned back against the chair. He followed immediately and went to the room to see Sherlock looking incredibly frail in his bed. "How are you feeling?"

Sherlock looked up from where he’d been fiddling with his oxygen. "Foolish. Culpable. Toxic. Guilty. Shall I go on?" He asked in a rasping, rough voice, a drip line in his hand and oxygen flowing under his nose. He stared up at the ceiling, ashen and thin, licking at his chapped lips.

Sluggishly he turned his eyes on his brother, frowning deeply at the way the man looked. "One would think you cared, Mycroft. Do be careful."

"Yes, well, you're needed in the capture of the nation’s most wanted criminal. I don't want you to die on me." Of course, Mycroft did care about his brother, but there was no need to parade it around. Each time Mycroft had been threatened, which happened often as he was in the government, Sherlock was never involved in it. Moriarty hadn't even so much as glanced at Mycroft. Not caring seemed to keep each other safe. "Do you need anything?"

Sherlock's eyes slid back to the ceiling and he swallowed twice. "I cannot stay here. There is much that needs doing. Surely they've injected me to the gills with antibiotics. I require transport and a full briefing of plans."

He was slurring his words still, a thin sheen of sweat on his brow. "There will be no capture." He was going to gut the man, let him die screaming for mercy.

"I will do everything in my power to make sure there are no holes in the plan. You can go over it once you're better. You're severely dehydrated and starved and sick and...." He breathed a long, slow sigh. "You need to take care of yourself. That means eating, drinking, and taking whatever immune system boosters they give you."

"And you, brother? You look as though the slightest breeze will knock you down, and we've extended the invitation of a dance to the most dangerous man on the globe. Have you your feet?"

He slid his hand over his face, scowling at the oxygen, tearing it away from his face and tossing the thin tubing aside. "We have hours, not days. There is no time for this."

Mycroft made no move to stop him. If Sherlock could walk out of the hospital, he would accept him as fit enough to work. "I'll get a little sleep once it's all planned." Mycroft said curtly. "If you want me to get them to release you early, you must agree to take care of yourself."

Sherlock looked to his brother. "I was given to understand the plans were already in place. Have new details come to light? I want to go to the hospital now and wait out the night. He cannot be left on his own while Moriarty plans to fetch him back."

Worry crept back into Sherlock's tone as he tried to sit up, frustrated with the line in his hand. "Yes, we're going to try and hide Greg in the hospital." He said calmly. "You can come with me now, but you must agree to take care of yourself!" Mycroft offered his hand in case Sherlock needed help walking. He watched as Sherlock plucked the drip line out of his hand, pressing a thumb to the bleeding area as he got unsteady to his feet. He straightened the sweatshirt the hospital had inexplicably allowed him to remain in and began to follow his brother.
"I do not at all care for Lestrade to remain in the building. It is an incredible risk to him. Moriarty has sworn to shoot anyone outside of myself and John on sight."

"Exactly why we need you to find him a good hiding place." Mycroft responded and walked down the hallway. "He has agreed to take that risk for John. I did not pressure him into it. He cares a great deal about John. Honestly I'm surprised neither of them have developed any type of Florence Nightingale syndrome. I doubt you'll be able to coax him away.

Sherlock had not considered that the men may form an attachment on that level. It came as no surprise that Greg had volunteered. He was an idiot. Sherlock shook off the sinking jealousy and followed his brother. There was no time for such foolish thoughts at the moment. It would serve in John's best interests to emotionally attach to someone else, as he was surely lost to Sherlock.

"He will likely do best in the ceiling. He will have a line of sight and I doubt Moriarty will be inclined to look. This is wildly entertaining for him, and John will no doubt be horror struck to see him again."

Mycroft led him outside and to a waiting car. Immediately he handed Sherlock a bottle of water. "Drink. You know that the mind needs water in order to think clearly. You need to be completely alert for this." The car took them to the mental hospital, which was neatly manicured and looked almost pleasant with small patches of flowers growing beside the walls and around the sidewalk.

Sherlock had the water down and was scowling at the hospital as they arrived. He loathed the place, hoping the damned flowers were destroyed in the coming conflict. "This is intolerable," he breathed, looking back to Mycroft. "He- this is intolerable."

"I think the landscape is nice." Mycroft lied. It was hateful how cheerful the place seemed when one knew what utter suffering took place on the inside. Mycroft led the way to the outside of John's door. "He's in there," he whispered and hoped Sherlock would do the same.

John had woken up and was still rather upset. He was suicidal, but didn't want to leave Sherlock to die on his own. "Greg?" He whispered, just to be sure if the man was there. "I don't know what to do."

Greg leaned forward and wrapped his hand around John's. "I know John...I know. Right now, you just need to rest, ok? Just...try to rest."

John took Greg's hand and scooted to the edge of the bed closest to his armchair. "I don't want to rest. I want this to be over. I want him to be alright and I want Moriarty dead." He could already imagine Moriarty lying gutted on the ground.

Sherlock slid his shaking hands in the pocket of his sweatshirt and closed his eyes, forcibly restraining himself from going in the room. He nodded to his brother and then moved again, eyes darting everywhere as he took in the details. "Show me an identical room."

Greg nodded to John. "He wants the same things, John, I promise you he wants the same things."

John made himself as small as possible. He tried mouthing the name to himself, then whispered it, trying to get over the utter panic it caused. "Sherlock doesn't want me to be hurt." he said in a very quiet, very unsure voice.

Greg was as calm as he could be, nodding to John, keeping hold of his hand. "He doesn't want you hurt."

John appeared sick. He was pale and thin, with red rings under his eyes and sunken cheeks. "Then
nothing in my mind makes sense. I'm insane."

Greg gently rest the palm of his hand against the side of John's face. "You are not insane, in fact, you are more sane now than you've been since being taken from Moriarty. Now you can start to put the pieces where they fit. You are not insane, you are waking up out of a terrible fog."

"Yes, but now I know I'm insane," John protested. "Now I KNOW that there's something wrong with me! This is worse! I'd rather think there was a monster after me then know my mind is just torturing itself."

Greg clicked his tongue. "I don't believe that for a second. Now that you know this, you know the control is back in your hands. You have the ability to start changing this."

John shook his head. "But now I can't even trust my own mind!" He had fairly shouted this time. "Before at least I could trust my thoughts! Now I can't tell what to be afraid of."

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Mycroft had been studying the building plans and moved him two doors down on the same side. "This one has the same features, with an air vent running lengthwise down the hall in the same place in both rooms. The gaps between the walls aren't big enough, but I'm not sure if the ceiling is weight bearing."

Sherlock was all over the empty room. Presently he was standing on the bed, a tile shoved to the side, mobile in hand to use as a torch. "Not load bearing, no, but a simple insertion of a board across the beams that support the ventilation shaft can make it so."

He was right back at it, ashen and nearly gray, though full of energy he did not possess as his mind started rolling, working into possible plans now that he had the tactile ability to set them in place.

"That's what I was thinking. Some sort of platform over the beams for him to stay on. How long do you think this will take? We can't stash him in there for days on end." Mycroft wanted to make these arrangements in person. Any line could be tapped, any text read.

Sherlock shook his head and came to stand in front of Mycroft. "Days? No. He will be punctual as always. This is his plan. I've no doubt he had it timed to the hour. He will be here tomorrow morning at ten am, and I will have him down before the hour closes out."

Mycroft very much wanted to believe Sherlock, but he wouldn't put it past Moriarty to be several days late just to let stress eat at them. "I do hope your claims are accurate." He said simply.

Sherlock looked at his brother with snide disinterest. "Of course they are accurate. Don't be stupid."

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Mycroft glanced in the direction of John's room. He had heard the shout. It was better than screaming, though, so he left it alone. "As long as you're sure."

Sherlock's attention was sharply on John's door, his expression unguarded as he forgot himself, distracted with John's distress. He took a few steps forward before remembering himself, stopping, looking down at the ground. He stood there, breathing harshly for a full minute, trying to master himself. "Perhaps...perhaps I am mistaken," he admitted, John's cry and his own inability to go to him flooding self doubt across his mind.

Mycroft didn't like the way John's shout seemed to scatter Sherlock's mind, so he sent a text to Greg.
Sherlock and I are just a few meters away. If there's any way to comfort John and keep him quiet, I would greatly appreciate it. M

Mycroft sighed and tried to refocus Sherlock's mind. "Don't second guess yourself now. Re-examine the evidence with a logical mind and see if you come to the same conclusion. Would he rather hurt you by making you wait, or hurt you by making you watch him scare John?"

Greg read the text with a bit of surprise. Sherlock was here. He looked up at John and reached out, sliding his fingers through John's hair. "You do know, John, you do. You know I won't hurt you, nor will the staff here. I hope you know Sherlock won't hurt you. You know you are protected and have been. You know more than you think you do. Breathe, John. Just breathe."

Sherlock kept his eyes to the floor, hands flexing and relaxing at his sides as he tried to think. "I- I do not know," he breathed, his voice pained and expression pinched. It was a terrible reality for him. "He...John is already afraid and Moriarty must know that...but...he knows I am unlikely to leave John alone while waiting...so keeping himself delayed...though John has been calmer..." he looked up to Mycroft. "I don't know. If I scare John with my physical presence, he is likely to make me wait. If John can tolerate me, he is likely to be on time."

John responded well to Greg, as he usually did, and started to force himself into an uneasy calm. "I know perhaps two things for sure. Everything else is terrifying. That's not normal. I should be alright by now." John couldn't remember the day he had been taken captive, and the first few weeks of torment, the ones where Moriarty had to tear down his old personality to make room for a more submissive new one, were hazy and painful to remember.

"He likely knows exactly what John's reaction will be. He'll know, and use that to make his decision. At this point I don't know John's mind as well as Moriarty, and I agree that he will likely come if John can tolerate you." That seemed to leave them at a disadvantage, as they couldn't possibly know how John would react without Sherlock entering the room.

Sherlock gave him a tight nod and moved without further hesitation. He'd only delayed to confirm his own mind, not quite trusting it.

He braced for the fallout, suspecting he knew how this would go, and gently opened the door to John's room.

Chapter End Notes

Alright, folks. Here is where we dig into a bit of action. Deep breathing. What do you all think thus far?
Greg was on his feet in the next moment, one hand firm on John's arm to keep him from falling off the bed. His eyes were wide and he looked at Sherlock as though he'd gone mad. Sherlock's posture was dropped and he looked far from imposing, but that was hardly the point.

What little color was left in John's hollow face drained instantly. He jerked, mouth open and eyes wide, reaching blindly for Greg, his comfort and protection. "Greg... Greg..." His voice was a warning, as if the man couldn't see this new threat who was surely here to beat him. John tried to use logic, reason, and rational thought to tell himself that this was just like the screen. Greg would keep him safe. Remarkably, he didn't scream, though his death grip on Greg did not loosen and his chest heaved with panicked breath. "What is he doing here?" John whispered, clutching Greg's arm like a life rope.

Greg slid an arm across John's chest, trying to help him feel shielded. He gave Sherlock an apologetic look, but Sherlock was not at all focused on him. His eyes were locked to John's and he put his hands slowly up, obviously overcome with seeing John.

"I'm sorry, John, I'm sorry. I had to see if you could stand to be near me," he whispered bluntly, struck dumb, his plans draining out of him like quicksilver in the face of John's fear.

John jerked away again at the painful sound of the voice and looked up to Greg. He let out a small, pitiful whine, begging for some sort of explanation from the one he trusted. "Y-You wanted to... to see...." John was shaking already and pulled a pillow over his face for protection. "A-are you g-going to hurt me?" He asked and peeked up from underneath his shield.

Greg adjusted his hold, trying to make John feel more protected. He had no fucking clue what had gotten into Sherlock. He was angry with this move, and was trying to soothe John as best he could. He spoke swiftly to Sherlock. "You are frightening him!" It was harsh, but John was driving hard his protective instinct.

Sherlock blanched, his knees nearly going out on him. "No, John no I'm- I'm not going to hurt you. No. I-" he shut up when Greg made a sharp noise of irritation and was then unable to move at all.

John's heart rate soared and he refused to release his hold on Greg. Sherlock had said he wasn't going to hurt him, but John couldn't stop the reaction he was having. "Y-you scare m-me! P-Please don't h-hurt me!" He tugged on Greg's sleeve. "Is he g-going to hurt me?" Greg instantly answered, tightening his grip on John. "No, he's not going to hurt you."

Sherlock looked ready to collapse, like something wild caught fast in snare. He closed his eyes for a moment and tried to make himself move in reverse, hardly remembering what had forced him into John's room to start with. His legs faltered and he nearly went down, reaching out and grabbing the wall to support himself. "I'm sorry, I- I'm sorry," he breathed, his voice wrecked.

A surge of worry shot through John when he saw Sherlock falter. He was, and always had been, a very protective sort of man. He was loathe to break loyalties, had always been willing to sacrifice himself in the field for a fellow soldier, and in general was very empathetic. "Please d-don't be upset," he whispered to Sherlock. "I'll stay c-calm, I promise."
Greg's brow knit as he looked down at John. Sherlock closed his eyes again, his hands shaking hard. He swallowed several times before trying to speak. "John, can I stay," he breathed, his heart racing in his chest.

It took John several minutes to think about the request. No. He did not want Sherlock to stay. He did not want this terrible man in the room with him. But he needed to look sane, and sane meant not being afraid of Sherlock. "Yes," he muttered, "you can stay. Just.... don't hurt me. P-Please. A-and d-don't be mad if I-I'm scared. I d-don't want to be."

Sherlock moved on shaky legs to the far end of the room, where he slowly sank down into a chair where John could easily see him. He kept his hands—the hands John believed had been used to hurt him— in his lap. "I am not mad, John. Thank you," he whispered, staring at what was left of the man he'd accidentally come to love.

Greg could hardly believe what was happening. Hope bloomed like wildfire in his chest. He sat down on the bed beside John, staring at Sherlock, taking in all the details that the camera feed ate away. He looked like death warmed over, but his focus on John seemed to keep something steady in the man.

John didn't take his eyes off Sherlock. It upset him to see how haggard and tired he looked, but it scared him more to know he was in the room and not be able to see his actions. So, just as one would stare at an ugly spider to keep track of it, John kept his wide, terrified eyes on Sherlock. "I'm trying not to be afraid," he said to open the lines of communication. "And so f-far you haven't hurt me."

Sherlock nodded, trying not to inflict his voice on John. His focus was settled now on how John was clinging to Greg, protecting himself. John's valiant work to allow Sherlock near him was far more than he ever expected. Given John’s massive effort to endure him, it was clear to Sherlock that Moriarty was highly likely to arrive in that day, given John’s reaction. There would be no delay until the morning.

"I'll go," he said gently, his voice raw. "Thank you for letting me sit here a moment. I'll go." He carefully got up, moving slow and predictable towards the door.

"Wait," John said and loosened his hold on Greg just a bit. "I...I w-want y-you to stay." He had very little conviction in his voice and decided that perhaps he had made a horrible mistake. "I just... I'm trying not to be afraid. I'm trying really hard, b-b-but..." He knew that he very much needed to remain sane if he was ever going to be released from this hellhole, and he knew that the sight of Sherlock nearly in tears was ripping his insides to shreds.

Sherlock stopped moving, honestly surprised that John had asked him to stay. He looked over at him and then to Greg, who looked just as stunned as Sherlock felt. He moved back over to the chair and sat down, texting his brother.

_in the morning, then. SH_

_Alright. I'll have everything in place. M_

He looked up at Greg, who shrugged and stayed put, quiet and exhausted, wishing he could ask Sherlock what the hell was going on.

John stayed put, both arms reaching off the side of the bed to hold onto Greg. He hadn't been hurt yet, which made him believe that either he wasn't in danger or Greg was protecting him. "Greg?" He whispered, low enough for just him to hear. "He isn’t h-hurting m-me but I-I-I’m still scared. M-My head. It’s in m-my head."
Greg crouched, keeping in John's reach, staring at him. "He won't hurt you. You were just made to believe he would, that he did." He was whispering with quiet urgency.

Sherlock sat utterly motionless, watching them, aching to reach out for John and assure him. He kept himself still, hardly breathing, torn between showing himself out and staying.

"Alright," John whispered back, and looked up at Sherlock again. "I believe you. But that doesn't change that it hurts." He composed himself and sat up, with one hand still in Greg's. "I am alright now," he told Sherlock, forcing every syllable. "I can talk for a bit."

Sherlock looked ready to cry. Greg held tight to John's hand and looked between the men. Sherlock stared, silent, watching John as though he'd never seen him before.

"We...you don't have to talk John. I simply wanted..." he faded out, swallowing hard. "I'll answer questions if you'd like." Greg watched as the tremor in Sherlock's hands spread up to his shoulders, engulfing him.

John sat up a bit. Sherlock did not look alright, and it was starting to worry him. "You're shaking," John said quietly. That was not the Sherlock he remembered, this behavior absolutely not that of a killer. "You're still sad that I'm scared." John seemed to realize he was the cause of Sherlock's pain and looked down. "I'm sad that I'm scared too."

"I miss you," Sherlock breathed, the words ripped out of his chest before he could catch them back. He clamped his jaw closed and looked down at the floor, heart fluttering as he breathed shallow and swift, palms sweating.

Greg felt trapped in the middle of a slow moving atomic detonation, all the air drained from the room, making him feel very much the intruder. Such a confession from Sherlock bloody Holmes made color touch on his own cheeks. It was by far the most intimate thing he'd ever heard from the man. He held tight to John's hand, trying to keep him feeling secure.

"I'm right here," John whispered, looking almost crestfallen. He realized with sudden clarity how far gone he must be, of people were missing him even though he was right there. "I...I'm...I'm still me."

He choked and buried his face in his pillow and tears blotted the cover. "I promise I'm still me. I-I'm in here... I'm just scared."

Sherlock could not help himself as he stood up, moving slowly to John's side. A small sound of distress escaped him when John leaned away, clearly frightened. He crouched down so that he would be eye level, though at an arm's distance. "I know John... I know. I just miss you. I failed you so catastrophically I can never... never atone. I... I know I can't ever... I simply miss you."

He was unable to get through the words without slow, heavy tears spilling over his cheeks. It was so much more than he thought he'd ever get, this opportunity to offer John an apology. "I've no way to describe how sorry I am that I ever... that this was done to you for knowing me... Could I take your pain I would, in a heartbeat John, I would take it. I'm so sorry. I'm so indescribably and forever sorry."

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"And I've decided... I've d-decided that I-I don't want to blame you anymore."

John listened, his face contorted between horror and deep sadness. He leaned away from Sherlock, pulled Greg's arms with him, and held the man's hands to his chest. "I don't w-want to fear you, Sherlock." He let the words fall heavy on the silence, punctuated by the occasional hitch of breath. John reached his hand out as if to touch his old friend, but dropped it, remembering how much touch from Sherlock had hurt him in the past. "And I've decided... I've d-decided that I-I don't want to blame you anymore."
Fear, white-hot and blinding, ripped through him and he let out a sharp cry of pain. Moriarty would torture him for this. He would torture him so badly. He had to believe Moriarty. That was all he had. That was his only protection. Still, here was Sherlock, looking so broken... "I-I don't bb-bla-blame you. It...it's Moriarty. It's all him. I'm sorry..." He took a moment to compose himself as self-hatred blossomed in his chest, making him turn his face away in shame. "I'm sorry I wasn't strong enough."

Sherlock and Greg both drew in sharp breaths. Sherlock managing to find his voice first. "No, John, god no. You survived. You survived John. You...god you still, you're recovering, you're...this is so above and beyond what anyone would have expected. No, you should never be sorry. Never. I-words fail me, John. No."

John started to break down again, but not out of fear. "H-he used m-me to hurt to you," John cried, the guilt evident in his voice. "I-I w-w-wasn't s-strong enough! I-I submitted. I-I believed him! I'm stupid and w-worthless!" John covered his face to hide his shame and started to sob.

Greg had a sudden flash of worry, wondering if they should call the entire Moriarty plan off.

*Are you watching this? GL*

I'm outside the door. I can see the feed on my phone. Is this too much? M

Well I'm decidedly not breaking them up even if it is. GL

Good. Sherlock needed this. M

Sherlock reached out and gently touched John's shoulder. "John," he whispered, "John you are not at fault here. Please, you've nothing to be sorry for."

John flinched and let out a pained, panicked whimper. His breathing sounded as if he had been in a fight; ragged, pained, and frequently catching in his throat. John clamped a hand over where he had been touched by Sherlock as if burned and leaned even further away. He kept his scream in and managed to keep some semblance of composure. "I-I'm h-hurting you by b-being scared."

Sherlock pulled his hand away, swallowing hard and trying to keep the sharp lick of grief out of his voice. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. You're not hurting me, John."

"I'm s-sorry, Sherlock," John said mournfully and held on to Greg, his protection. "I should have b-been stronger." John remembered all the times he had been strong, all the times he had tried to defy Moriarty, and all the pain it had brought him. "I-I want you to know that I d-did try. I tried n-not to believe him."

Sherlock backed up, giving John his space. He closed his eyes, nodding. "I know, John, I know you did. Please, I'm not going to hurt you," he whispered, his back hitting the wall.

Greg held tight to John, warning Sherlock off, responding to John's fear over Sherlock's distress. "Back off, Sherlock," he whispered, not daring to let go and respond to Mycroft.

Sherlock's eyes went wide at Greg's warning and he eased himself up and moved, stammering apologies with a tight, wavering voice as he slipped out of the room. As soon as the door was closed behind him, he let out a pained groan and tipped his head back to the wall, gritting his teeth. That had been a mistake.

John gasped and shuddered in relief at the stress being over. He was upset with himself for not handling it better, but the fear was still lingering. Sherlock’s voice sounded like whips and screaming. "I-I'm alright...I'm okay..." He told himself over and over, clutching his source of
Greg held John tight and ran his hand over John's back. He whispered softly, assuring John that he was alright. "You've done fine, you have, it's alright."

John was exhausted and laid his head on Greg's shoulder. He nestled around until he found a place where his temple could rest on Greg's collarbone. "I'm g-going to be let out soon." He mused almost wistfully.

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"How did it go?" Mycroft asked gently, even though he had been watching. He wanted to judge Sherlock's state of mind.

Sherlock pressed a hand over his chest, trying the breathe through it. "We cannot let...cannot let..." He bared his teeth as he swallowed hard, trying to breathe, "this won't w-work he'll...call it off, My...can't do this."

"Sherlock, deep breaths." Mycroft stood in front of Sherlock and put one hand on each of his shoulders. "You have to do this. We agreed on it."

Sherlock closed his mouth, along with his eyes. His throat worked and he tried to keep himself calm. "He'll be l-lost. Won't come back from it. I- he's so... I can't do it too him! Oh god he's so..." He pinched his lips tight and tried to slow his breathing down.

"Yes, Sherlock, he's damaged. He's scared. If you seriously want to call it all off, I give you permission to make that call. But Moriarty might not be as flexible. He's used to getting what he wants." Mycroft took deep breaths to try and encourage Sherlock to do the same.

Sherlock dragged a hand down his face, swearing colorfully in French. His fingers tangled in his hair and he pulled tight as he tried to get a grip on himself.

"No. You're right. We'll bring him here and end it. I'll end it." He nodded, his raw nerves buzzing. He'd end it before John even saw the man.

Mycroft nodded. It was incredibly unlike Sherlock to show such raw emotion, and it was deeply unsettling to see. "Everything is in place. I'll call a bomb threat immediately and have everyone out within an hour."

He called the threat in and decided to let the Yard handle it. "Stay calm. Drink some water, eat something. Breathe. You need to keep a level head."

Sherlock was checking the ammunition of the Sig he'd been handed, nerves humming. "Go, brother," he said softly, no bite to it, as much of a thank you and goodbye as he could manage. He put his back to John's door and clearly settled in for however long it was going to take.

---

Forty-seven minutes later, the men were in place, snipers ready, and helicopter on a pad nearby. He called the bomb threat in and had the place cleared.

A few boards were put in place for Greg to be supported on in the ceiling and the streets around the area were ready to be closed off at any moment.

*I'm looking forward to seeing my pet again. JM*
Sherlock sat down outside John's door, the weapon rested against his forehead. He slowly drew out his mobile and responded.

*I have doubts that you can correct this. It is likely beyond you. SH*

He was trying to bait him. John had a massive dose of morphine on in addition to anti-anxieties. Greg had positioned up into the ceiling when John had slipped into slumber.

Moriarty smiled at his phone and motioned for a few of his favorite snipers to go ahead and start taking out whatever government operatives they found. He viewed the city as a massive chess board now, and he knew exactly where Mycroft’s pieces were.

He would tip the king.

*Of course I can, but you already knew that. I am coming. Don't try anything stupid. I've got people trained in torture. Some of which I trained with John. I'm sure he would love to see them again. Or did I blindfold him.....? JM*

*I'm not allowing anyone outside yourself in his room. Otherwise, you will find no resistance. SH*

He ground his teeth at the idea of what had been done to John, adding that to the fuel. He was going to destroy Moriarty and he didn't much care if he died in the process.

*I'll leave my other pets outside. I'll have several of them though, so don't do anything stupid. I've got a protégé now! He's not as bright as we are, but he's got control of my web if anything happens. John's met him. Ask him. I'm sure he'd love to chat about it. JM*

Sherlock did not respond, instead he pressed his back to the door, and thumbed the safety off. He had no intention of letting anyone past.

---

Moriarty had a gun, though he doubted he’d be using it. He also had a whip, a rusty knife, a rag, and a water bottle. He felt like a child packing up his toys for a playdate, and he wondered if he could convince Sherlock to let him cut John just one more time.

When Moriarty finally arrived, he did so in a sleek black car that drove right over the flowers on the sidewalk and up to the door. The psychopath’s door was opened for him and he stepped out over the crushed, formerly cheery flower beds with a predatory look in his sharp, dark eyes. Anticipation surged in him and he had the shadow of a grin on his face. He strode in to the abandoned mental hospital, tailed by five of his favorite pets who peeled off and checked rooms as they went.

When he finally reached John’s room, swung around the corner with his hands in his pockets and his men close behind. "Hello, Sherlock," he purred and his eyes greedily drank in every line on his distraught face.

Sherlock leveled the pistol at Moriarty's forehead, his finger twitching on the trigger. He had to force himself not to shoot."These men wait outside. You are going to empty your pockets. No one touches John."

Moriarty's men leveled their weapons at Sherlock. One had even stepped forward in front of Moriarty. The consulting criminal brushed off the threat and his men's defensive position and walked to the door with a casual ease that almost touched boredom. "Wait outside. If anything happens to me, you know what to do." They nodded and stood down.
Moriarty held his arms out in a T. "I don't particularly feel like emptying out my pockets... But you're free to search me."

Sherlock was swiftly calculating. He and Greg could handle this, take the five, with careful planning. He stepped forward and began to search the man, itching to dig into his ribs and tear out his heart.

"You don't touch him," he warned before cutting his eyes to the men. The next breath had him acting without hesitation. Sherlock put a round in two of Moriarty’s guards with rapid speed, headshots both. In the next second he was spinning Moriarty and pressing the gun to his temple with enough force to tip his head harsh to the side, Moriarty's body shielding him from the men.

"Tell your men to go before I start putting rounds in you."

Greg was scrambling out of his hiding place, putting himself between the door and John, completely abandoning the idea of laying in wait.

Moriarty gave a sigh as if he were incredibly bored. "Oh, come on! Those two were useful!" He whined childishly and squirmed a bit in Sherlock's grip just to be dramatic.

After a moment he grew bored of it and waved his hand dismissively. "Go on, go walk around and pretend to be crazy people or something. I've got this handled. If I don't ring in...oh... fifteen minutes, call in the others."

They nodded and backed down the hallway, weapons still trained to Sherlock.

"Happy?" Moriarty asked in a dull, flatlined voice.

Greg was relaying what he was hearing to Mycroft via text. There was a sudden shot directly outside the door. In the next moment Sherlock was dragging a bleeding Moriarty into the room, a round through the man's knee. He dropped him to the floor at Greg's feet. "For you, John. What do you want done?"

Greg was furiously typing.

_Moriarty hit in knee. The guards will call in fifteen minutes. Help. GL_

Moriarty swore colorfully at the pain that seemed to radiate through his entire body from his knee. He had expected Sherlock to be violent, but hadn't expected a shot to be fired. Not a touch of worry reached him though, as he still had a few cards left to play.

John had woken up only recently and was still groggy. He was on heavy painkillers and anti-anxieties, but the shots still made him jump. The sight of Moriarty, even though he was bleeding on the ground, still made him almost come out of his skin. "Greg...?" He called nervously, light eyes locked on the criminal's. "Greg?" John let out a startled scream and pushed himself to the opposite side of the bed against the wall. "GREG! GREG! No, no, PLEASE!" He'd known! He knew Moriarty was coming back!

Moriarty grinned up at John. "Hello, pet. I see you're talking. What did I say about that again?" Like a trained dog, John fell silent instantly with a look of utter horror on his face.

Sherlock reared back and cracked the butt of the pistol across Moriarty's face, horribly splitting his lips. "Be silent," he hissed. "Should I shoot him, John? I'll kill him right this second."

Greg wrapped his hand over John's, pistol trained on the door in case Moriarty's men barged through.
John had his mouth shut tight and his eyes wide. Moriarty seemed pleased by this, but the blood on his suit still upset him. "Sherlock, you're going to pay to get this cleaned," he snapped and slowly rose to his feet. It was far more difficult a task than he would liked to have admit, but pride drove him to the vertical position.

"Go ahead. Shoot me. I know you want to. Shoot me, and let my snipers shoot Greg. Let them shoot out your legs and drag John kicking and screaming back into some hole to be tortured until his mind snaps completely." Moriarty had an easy grin on his face despite the blood that dripped off his chin from his split lips. "I know you want to. You hate to lose. Would it make you feel better if I died? Would that patch up your bruised pride at not being able to protect poor little John?"


Sherlock's boot came down on Moriarty's bleeding knee, taking his legs out and fisting a hand in Jim's hair, counting on his brother to help. He'd kill John before anyone dragged him out. He wrenched Moriarty's head back by the brutal grip in his hair, chin to the ceiling and throat bared in an elegant arch. "Do not address him again."

"Johnny boy!" Moriarty sang in clear defiance, "Look how rough Sherlock's being! I told you he had it in him. I told you he would be fantastic at torture. Want to be his little bitch again? He liked hurting you. You remember that, don't you, John? Remember how...handsy he could be?"

"No, NO!" John shouted suddenly and clung to Greg. "He....he wouldn't... He...Sorry! I-" John's mind was already starting to revert back into its protective shell built of lies. Believe Moriarty, and you are safe. Go against him, and you have pain.

Greg called out Sherlock's name just as the man pressed the barrel to Moriarty's temple and pulled the trigger.

Time seemed to suspend as a red mist hissed against the far wall. Moriarty slowly slipped from Sherlock's grip, falling forever until a sickening thump resonated through the room as the body hit the floor.

Fuck, oh fuck.

His hands were shaking as he called Mycroft. "Help, help Sherlock just killed him! Help!"

It had been six minutes. There were nine left before Moriarty's men came back and found him dead. Currently they lurked in the corridor with several others who had flooded in after playing with the government snipers had gotten boring.

John’s scream shredded out of his throat as he stared in abject horror. "H-he's going t-to have....to have s-s-someone...c-come h-hurt m-me..." He coughed as waves of nausea rolled over him. He was going back. He couldn’t do it. He couldn’t.

Mycroft was glad to hear Moriarty was dead, but that would make things complicated. "Ground and air support are surrounding the area, however, we are out of contact with a full third of our people."

Sherlock moved, having John up into his arms and pulling him off the bed along with John's blankets. Greg followed along, upending John's bed, tipping it to its side, barricading the three of the in the far corner.

John did not like being held by Sherlock. It was too much too suddenly and he tried desperately to escape. "No, NO! Don't touch me! Greg! GREG HELP!"
Sherlock pressed John into Greg's arms, focused only on protecting them, going over to crouch arthe side to the door.

When he was back in the safety of Greg's arms he quieted a bit, though it had still been a shock. "Greg, there's people coming for me! Shoot me!"

"No one will take you," Greg promised, his heart racing.

Sherlock was moving forward to the door, slipping out into the hall. He crouched, trying to get a count. He was going to take them down until they were all dead or he was. Grim determination set in and he re-adjusted his grip on the Sig.

Greg shook his head. "I won't lose you, John. I need you to trust me. Sherlock is going to kill them too."

John shook his head. "There's too many! There's another... one like him..." John broke down again and made himself as small as possible. This was too much. Every muscle in his body locked up as he shook violently in Greg’s arms.

There were only three in the hallway at the time, each holding semi-automatic rifles just around the corner. More waited further down, and more still at the exits. Moriarty hadn't texted. They had a plan of action for this contingency: collect John and take him to Moran.

Greg scrambled away, diving for Moriarty's cell and simply mass texting hold.

He moved back to John and grabbed him up. "Trust, ok?"

"You said they wouldn't come!" John shouted. "Y-you said- you said-" He let out another scream and his eyes rolled back.

Sherlock was abruptly confronted with a hail of gunfire, the men clearly aiming to maim and not kill. His hand was steady on the heavy grip, successfully returning fire. He dropped two of them as bullets punched through his shoulder and flank. Pain flared sharp and brilliant, making his hand waver as he cracked off a third shot, only managing to land a round in the nearest shooter’s hand.

Greg had John behind him, his mobile to his ear. "Mycroft get people here now, get John extracted. Now!"

Moriarty’s men began to communicate with one another, well practiced in the event that Moriarty went down. Posted guards at the exits remained standing fast, though the floating men all converged on the main hallway, Sherlock as their active target.

Sherlock grit his teeth, leaning heavy back against the wall as he struggled to breathe, leveling his weapon at the next wave of men. Two came from the east, while three flooded in from the west. In a confusing exchange of fire, Sherlock managed to catch a third round in his left leg, and then the right.

He fell backwards into John's room, just inside of the doorway, angling his weapon up and shooting the emergency water lines. Water began to pour down from the fire lines, causing visual obstruction to the entrance of John’s room.

Moriarty’s men fell back, perturbed by the lack of visibility. They set up a small block on either side of the hallway behind the corner, where they could still hear people coming and visually identify closer targets.
John looked down at Sherlock in horror. "What happened?" He demanded. John had previously kept his eyes locked on Moriarty's corpse, but now he stared at the blood on Sherlock.

Greg kept to the door, providing a block as he pulled Sherlock inside, a long dragline of water and blood trailing after him. "Mycroft knows," he assured Sherlock as he took up guard.

Sherlock was in agony, his chest hot and soaked red from where a bullet punched through his shoulder. His right leg had one in his upper thigh and a graze to his left calf. He shook his head at John, "Keep down!" He slurred as he tried to get back to his feet. Miraculously he managing to prop up, focusing on reloading with quaking hands, a growing puddle of red under him as he bled freely.

Greg fired into the hall blind, listening at the screams and the sound of at least one body dropping. He dipped back down, waiting, ready to shoot again.

John reached out to Sherlock. He wanted desperately to help, and everything in his nature told him that Sherlock was not evil, that he needed pressure on his wounds, and he needed to lie down and stop fighting. "Sherlock…? P-Please, you’re h-hurting.”

Perhaps it was his ingrained military training that compelled him, or maybe he was starting to remember how attached he had been to Sherlock, but either way, John was determined to help. John pulled the sheets off his upturned bed with shaking, weak hands and tore the cheap fabric into a few smaller strips.

Down the hall, the men had retreated a little. They still had Sherlock and Greg outnumbered, but it was difficult to get to them without killing them. They were aware that there was a battle waging outside. It was quiet, aside from the occasional muffled shot, but behind the scenes criminals were facing off with Mycroft's men.

John wrapped one of the strips around each of the bullet holes in his leg, though he did so at the end of arms reach as if still frightened to come near him.

Sherlock allowed John his efforts as he spoke to Greg. "You've got to take John, get him out. Run the main vent line, the two of you can make it. I'll put down cover. Get in and head south to the rear supply rooms, can get out that way. I'll lay down fire as long as I can.” His words were strong as he shoved the clip back into the weapon, nodding up to the ceiling. Greg could punch into the vent and crawl them to safety until Mycroft's men could get in. Sherlock would buy them time. It was all he could do now. He would lay down his life in order to buy John a few more minutes of time to escape and build a good life.

Greg moved back, looking up and then grabbing the bed. With swift motions he righted it and crawled to the top, where he was tall enough to run his hands along the large ducts. “John, with me,” he called out as the panel gave way.

John hesitated and Sherlock grabbed his wrist in a trembling grip. "Go. Go!"

"You'll be killed!” John was able to hold Sherlock’s eyes for longer than he had since the capture. “They'll k-kill you. H-Hurt you. Y-You c-can’t escape! D-Don’t!”

Machine gun fire erupted from the hall for a couple of seconds, drowning out John’s pleas before subsiding.

"You have one minute to come out unarmed or we'll come in. As of right now, we don't want you dead. If you get in the way, however, we won't hesitate to kill you.” The man sounded heavily accented and rather cross.
Sherlock shoved John hard. "GO!" He could stall, he could buy them time.

Greg hesitated, reaching again for John in the next moment. They were not going to walk John out. It wasn't going to happen. He wasn't going to take Sherlock's chance to defend John away.

John flinched and fell to Greg when he was shoved. This was not a time to panic, he told himself, but the situation was more than stressful to him. "Greg, I don't want to go," he whispered, but followed the man's direction anyway. He sent one last mournful look to Sherlock before turning away, perhaps for the last time.

"Thirty seconds." The man from the hall called again. They had broken their group in half, one on each side of the hallway. The entrances and exits were, of course, still guarded.

"Greg," Sherlock called out. The two of them shared a knowing look. Greg would not allow them to take John.

He would do what was needed if it came to that.

Sherlock managed to drag himself to his feet, the pistol in his sleeve. He hobbled out off the room with his hands up, blood pouring out of him and staining John’s makeshift bandages red. He raised his eyes to the men with an expression of defeat, but also that of quiet resignation and peace.

"Here. I am here."

Chapter End Notes

What will happen? Will Greg survive? Will John escape or be thrown back into the clutches of Hell? Will Sherlock die of his wounds?

Comments make us write faster. Not even gonna lie about that.

-Dem
Greg reached behind John, moving to the side so that he could help him move. He was deeply concerned over John’s mobility, his legs and body still so pained. At least he was loaded to the gills with morphine. “Let’s go, John, quiet as you can,” he whispered, a hand on John’s back to help ease him forward in the dark, rectangular air vent. John whispered weak protests, overwhelmed with near-blinding fear and worry, though he began to move with Greg as quickly as he could possibly make his limbs go, aided with a hefty shock of adrenalin that had been flowing since Moriarty was dragged into his room. Greg would catch him up when his weak arms would buckle under him, taking his weight for a few seconds and whispering encouragement as he tried to keep them moving forward.

A heavy voice rang out from below, echoing up faintly but audible from where they’d left Sherlock behind. Greg’s stomach dropped while he began to move them forward with more urgency.

“Bring us John Watson. If you fail to comply, we will shoot Detective Inspector Lestrade and finish off what’s left of you,” the man sneered, sweeping his eyes over Sherlock as he leaned, hemorrhaging against the wall.

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Greg reacted swiftly as he heard the command, catching sight of where the vents veered a hard right, which was the direction of the outermost wall. Thin, pale yellow streams of light flowed in through rivets where the screws were not perfectly snug, guiding them. He tapped John and began to pull him off to the side, just in case one of the guards wised up and stuck their head up into the vents, looking for them. When they were tucked out of sight, he pulled John against him, breathing fast and chaotic, sending off a frantic text to Mycroft.

“We are hidden in the air vents, Sherlock is sacrificing himself. Hurry Mycroft, hurry. GL

The area is on lockdown. We have suffered a fifty percent loss, though we now appear to have command of the perimeter. I am sending a team in, but it will only buy you enough time to slip out back, if you can manage to circumvent the guards. M

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A beautiful sense of warm, numb peace settled over Sherlock like a warmed blanket. While he was physically soaked through, bleeding heavily, and growing weaker by the minute, his heart had slowed from it’s frantic beat, and each breath felt whole and complete in his lungs. His mind was floating free of his agonized body, allowing him to clearly count the visible men in the hallway, running through a rapid string of possible reactions, each giving him an estimate of further time bought for his John.

His held his hands up, the grip of his Sig between thumb and pointer, barrel to the ceiling, arms trembling from slowly setting shock. He swept his eyes over the man giving orders, giving him a lazy smile, feeling nearly drunk.
“Oh, don’t be so dull,” he drawled over the hiss of the sprinklers, curls sticking to his pale forehead, water dripping heavy off his lashes, “surely you don’t want your first act as successor to be the execution of standing orders given by your dead predecessor. I’m Sherlock Holmes, surely you are aware of the plenty useful connections I have for you to exploit. What do you want with a former torture victim when you could have me? Not very good at this villianing, are we?”

He watched as the frankly massive man laughed in amusement, answering in a booming voice that was highly likely to echo up where Greg and John could hear. They’d had close to five minutes at this point. Sherlock willed his consciousness to hold, each second he distracted this man raised John and Greg’s chances of survival. The broad, blond man spoke calmly to him, just as at ease as Moriarty had been.

“My first act? I was told you were better than that, Sherlock. He handed over control months ago when he snatched up your little doctor, though I was happy to lend my expertise when I had the time. He’s a screamer, that John. Set of lungs on him like you wouldn’t believe.”

As he spoke, Sherlock watched two of the guards flanking the commanding man advance on him, weapons trained to Sherlock’s head as the heavy voice carried on speaking.

“We’ll bring him with us. We’ve given Johnny boy and his DI a sporting head start.”

Sherlock gave no struggle as the men who had advanced took him down, rough hands grabbing his biceps, hard knees thumping to the back of his, buckling him down to the floor. He was pushed down to the tile floor with a knee pushing down to the center of his back, a hand fisted in his hair. His cheek hit the ground hard, splashing against the mix of water and blood. His arms were wrenched behind his back, and soon plastic zip-chords were biting into his wrists. Indescribable pain peaked with each beat of his heart, but it was of little import to him. He’d bought seven minutes for Greg and John.

The heavy thud of boots told him that several men were pouring into John’s room. One called out, confirming that James Moriarty was dead and gone, mostly splattered across the wall, though Greg likely had a bit of him on his boots. The thought made Sherlock grin.

“Clear,” several voices called out minutes later, after the sound of opening and closing cabinets, closet doors, and the scratch of the overturned bed being searched. Greg had remembered to close the duct behind him. Sherlock exhale in relief that they would not be immediately pursued. Twelve minutes now, he’d bought twelve minutes. He was hauled to his knees, crying out sharply as pain ripped across his body.

The man in charge barked out a command. “Check the ceilings, possibly the air vents. Get someone on the heat, we will roast them ou-”

A sudden, nearly deafening crash of toppling brick and groaning metal drown out his words. About time, brother, Sherlock thought to himself as the dust was swiftly cleared by the constant spray from the sprinklers. An uparmored assault vehicle had come right through the side of the building, blocking off the east end of the hallway. Moriarty’s guard instantly began popping off rounds, engaging the tactical team.

Mycroft’s team had been instructed to draw fire to themselves, only. They went in nearly blind, and would be unlikely to see Sherlock. Rough hands grabbed him up, dragging him toward the man in charge as Sherlock screamed in rage, twisting and fighting against them until his knees buckled.

---
Greg had given John four minutes to rest, listening closely to all the activity under them. This was not at all how the plan was supposed to go.

His stomach dropped as he heard the air system kick on, flooding the vents with a rush of hot air. He swore, looking around the little side duct they were in. “John, we have to get out of the vents and into the crawl space. Look for a crack, any weakness, quickly John.” His hands shook as he felt along the seams of the metal around them, desperate for a way out. If they could simply perch in the crawl spaces of the ceiling, they might have a chance.

John pressed his hands to the top of the duct and searched for any kind of gap. He was a shaking mess of nerves and pain, though he was able to push past that in an effort to escape. Eventually he found a place where the metal was replaced by a mesh vent, which would be easy to remove. "Here, Greg."

Greg helped John push through the mesh as sweat began to roll down his back, dampening his hair at his temples. How John was still up, he had no idea. The poor man still had the damned feeding tube in his nose and the drip port in his hand, too thin and too taxed for this. They moved out of the vent into the welcome cold of the crawl spaces. "Keep on the boards, don’t put any weight on the insulation," he warned with a whisper, setting the mesh back as it had been.

Greg decided it was time to put the damned trackers to use, sending a frantic text to Mycroft before addressing their next move.

*Mycroft, track John to find us GL*

From the sound of it, there was far too much gunfire outside for him to even consider pulling John out in a bid to run. He'd have to carry the man, and it clearly wasn't safe to try yet, they'd be woefully easy targets out in the open. Greg began to crawl forward, moving John closer to the exterior wall.

John followed behind, getting a bit slower as he went on. "Greg," he whispered urgently, "Where are we going? You heard them. It's closed off."

*Tracking. M*

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Sherlock caught a second wind as he was dragged towards the entrance of the hospital. His mind was no longer blissfully disconnected, leaving him feeling every single jarring movement as he was manhandled. He panicked as his body began to shut down, struggling and twisting until he was able to sink his teeth into the arm of one of the men moving him. His left side nearly crashed to the floor as the man screamed and let him go, earning him a strike across the back of the head before they gathered him back up again. They dragged him out the door, a weapon pressed to his neck as they formed a barrier around him.

He caught sight of the leather interior of a Land Rover just before his vision tunneled. Nearly twenty minutes had passed, it was all he could do. He’d paid with blood and now had to trust that his brother and Greg would do the rest. He felt himself pushed forward, hitting the floorboards with a vicious crack before darkness rushed up over him, leaving him limp and oblivious as the car peeled away.

As Mycroft’s men began to pursue, the guards that had snatched Sherlock away pulled him up off the ground and propped him up, supporting his unconscious weight, behind the bulletproof glass. In clear view, a weapon was held to Sherlock’s throat in a clear warning that they were willing to shoot
Mycroft’s men locked on to John’s location. A second team was sent a bit more covertly to the back while a third flanked the men who attacked those behind the vehicle.

Greg put a hand on John and kept them still. "We are buying time," he answered quietly, tapping his phone for John to see, "Mycroft is sending help, we are just stalling until it arrives. Don’t give up, he has entire teams out there for us. Lean on me and rest a moment, try to be quiet."

John nodded as he leaned his head on Greg's shoulder, nearly shaking apart with fear. "If you left me here and ran, or hid, they wouldn't come after you. Not once they had me." Silent tears were streaming down his face from the sheer effort it took to keep himself calm. “Shoot me and run.”

Greg shook his head, holding on to John tightly. "I am not leaving you, I swear John I'm not leaving you. I won't let them have you, one way or another I'm keeping you safe."

It was then that the second team arrived. Mycroft had a helicopter making rounds over the area, but was severely restricted in his ability to further aid them. The hospital roof would not support a helicopter, and there was still severe cover fire from Moriarty’s men. He ran a hand over his face and texted Greg.

If you can get outside and make a run for it, I've a helicopter ready to touch down. M

Greg read through the text and then cast his eyes around. "We have to get to the roof, help me find a way.” John seemed to respond when given something constructive to do, so he was trying to find anything he could to task John with.

In the crawl spaces, we are trying for an exit up. They have Sherlock. GL

Mycroft responded swiftly.

We have eyes on the vehicle. They cannot leave the area at present, but we cannot fire at them without risking his life. If you can get to the roof I can get low, but you'll still have to climb the ladder. You'll be shot at. M

John clutched Greg and pointed to his gun. "If-f they come for me, you're going to sh-shoot me, then yourself. Do not let them take you, Greg. Do not. I'd rather k-kill you myself than see them take you."

Sherlock took two, maybe three rounds. John cannot climb. We will hold. GL

I'm not sure how long holding will work. The situation is deteriorating quickly. We're outmanned. M

I can focus my remaining operatives on retrieving Sherlock or retrieving the two of you. I simply do not have enough for both. Moriarty arrived with a veritable small army. We did not anticipate an attack of this magnitude. M

Where is Sherlock shot? M

Greg stopped texting for a moment to respond to John’s plea. He wrapped John’s small, shaking body up close and held to him fiercely. "I already made that promise. I've got you, we will hold tight,
let Mycroft work his magic."

John shook his head, tucking close to Greg and speaking in a quiet, quaking voice. "But if you've got to make a choice, you should s-save yourself. I'm already broken." John clung to Greg’s shirt, shaking as tears poured down his cheeks. The very real possibility of being taken and subjected again to their torture was paralyzing, leaving him hardly able to breathe.

“That is not going to happen,” Greg answered stubbornly. He grabbed John's hand and began to move them, heading alongside the heated vents to keep John from getting too cold. He let his mind race through strategic options before responding to Mycroft.

*Sherlock, get Sherlock. He's caught one in the shoulder and two in the leg, one looked grazed, don't know. Bleeding heavily when he was taken. GL*

He carried on moving and paused every few minutes to let the overstressed, exhausted John rest, moving them over electrical outlets and wiring even though his hands bled and splintered from their efforts. "We are getting out of here, John. You and I. It's going to be a mess but we are going to get out.” He tucked John into a far corner where the building ended and the ground was visible through the eaves. It was quick work to enlarge the gap enough for them to slip through.

"We are going to get out. Here, you take this," he took his pistol out of his holster and handed it to John by the barrel. He pointed back to where they'd come from. "I'm going to go there and I'm going to set a fire. We are going to drop out the side while they are distracted and I will carry you while you lay down cover fire.”

John took the weapon with wide eyes, grateful for the trust. Immediately he was tempted to put it to his temple and fire. He stared at it for a moment. How lovely that would be. It would be the best way out of this. But if he died, Greg might die as well. Sherlock would die as well. He tightened his grip and vowed that he would not be taken alive, and neither would Greg. So he followed Greg’s plan despite shaking with exhaustion, sore muscles, and blinding fear.

Mycroft's helicopter was forced upwards by a focused effort of ground fire. Through a blown out window of the hospital, Moriarty's men took to popping off shots in an effort to keep it from landing. It was to their fortune that they'd not prepared a surface-to-air defense.

Mycroft's pilot navigated around the heavy fire while ground teams drew their focus away, leaving a window of opportunity for the chopper to land.

*Hurry. M*

Greg started ripping the wires apart at the far end of the building. He sparked them together and kindled a good flame in the fiberglass insulation before kicking it down through the soft portions of the ceiling. He raced back to John, hands shaking but with purpose and drive.

"Okay, John, I'm going to drop down first and then you are going to drop down to me. I will not leave without you, do not ask me to. I won't make it without your help anyhow. We are going to make for the helicopter. There are fifteen rounds in that clip. Make them count."

Greg stood up, leaned over the railing and dragged the boards away from the lip of the roof. He let his legs hang off the edge for just one moment, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath before dropping down to the ground. As soon as he was out of sight, John’s heart nearly stopped in fear that he’d been left.

Rounds slammed into the brick around Greg and he reached up for John, calling for him to jump and
assuring that he would catch him. John fired blindly in the direction of the shot, all former
marksmanship gone to hell as his mangled hand struggled to hold the gun, and his mangled mind
struggled to keep him from using it on himself. The heat from the flames started to press against him,
driving him forward and to the edge of the building, but still he hesitated.

Greg called up to him again and he stared over the edge, certain he would break his ankles upon
landing. He closed his eyes and leaned forward. Greg caught him before he crashed into the ground.
"Hold on," Greg shouted as he immediately began to run.

The assailants in the building were forced out by the spreading flames, which gave what was left of
Mycroft's men a chance to snipe them from surrounding buildings. As they ran to the armored car
they were picked off, one by one, each jerked and dropped. More and more flooded out, more
worried about saving their own lives from the rapidly burning buildings than the objective.

The pilot had the helicopter nearby, and the fire had pulled away the attention to escaping. Greg
grabbed John. "I have you," he shouted over the chaotic sounds of machine gun fire and helicopter
blades. High on adrenaline and set with grim determination, he ran through the crossfire towards the
helicopter. His legs shredded over the grounds. Even when a round ripped across his calf he did not
falter. He promised John safety and that's what was damn well going to happen.

He gave a great shout as they cleared the area, the heat of the roaring blaze at his back driving him
hard forward. Soon he was shoving John into the helicopter, his breathing destroyed as he dropped
down hard beside the man. "John," he panted, grabbing at John's chest and splaying a hand over
him, "you...you okay?"

John held on for dear life "G-Greg, w-we left him! We left Sherlock!" His was a quivering mess of
fear, pain, and worry. "They'll hurt him! They're going to hurt him!"

Greg pulled John to him, leaning back against the wall of the helicopter, sliding his fingers through
John's hair and giving himself a moment to breathe. They'd kept John safe. That's what had mattered.
He was horrifically worried for Sherlock, stomach twisted in knots, but they'd done what Sherlock
asked. "We didn't leave him, John. He made a choice."

"No, NO! Turn around! We have to go back to him!" John pushed Greg away and tried to stand. He
crawled instead to the pilot, pleading with him. "Please, we left someone! They're going to hurt him!
THEY'LL HURT HIM! Do you see m-me? LOOK AT ME! H-He'll b-be like me! D-Don't d-do
that to him!" John was borderline hysterical.

Greg had a hell of a time calming John back down, and ultimately had to manually restrain him in the
back. He waited until they landed to seek out Mycroft and find out what was on with Sherlock.

John struggled in Greg’s arms despite the futility of it. He thought about what had happened to
himself, and how it might be happening to Sherlock now.

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The armored Land Rover sped off, a gun held to Sherlock's throat. Mycroft's pilot sped off in the
opposite direction while squad cars gave immediate chase. As the vehicle came within range, one
man holding Sherlock up began to drag a blade across Sherlock’s throat, grinning and winking at
Mycroft’s team. They were forced to fall back as blood flowed like a bib from Sherlock’s neck.
Above it all, like a puppet master, Mycroft pulled strings to keep as many people as possible breathing. He pecked out commands as fast as the situation morphed, receiving intel and responding swiftly. *Second team retreat with John and Greg. Third team advance. Everything mobile: Pursue the Rover.*

Not until the clear threat to Sherlock’s death was made did Mycroft feel his hands slipping on the controls. Had he the helicopter, he would simply have followed them as they slipped the perimeter, mixing with several other identical vehicles. All of which then split off in different directions like a cup game that he could not watch from above. Had he been behind the wheel of a car himself, he’d have followed to the detriment of his own life. Had he a drone- But no, he had none of those things at the moment, and thus was forced to watch Sherlock slip away as he did as he’d promised his brother and took care of John as the primary objective.

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Sherlock was roused back to himself at the sharp, liquid pain around his neck. He sucked in a sharp breath as his eyes shot open, his heart racing, eyes scanning for John. *They only have me. It is just me.* He relaxed and closed his eyes again, knowing what was likely to come. The heavy weight of his shirt pleased him, so soaked in his own blood. He’d likely bleed out within the day, there would be little time for torture. He shivered with the cold of shock, wrapped in terrible pain that he forced his mind away from, focusing instead on his breathing.

He faded in and out of consciousness over the course of his unknown journey. At one point he woke as they hauled him out of the Land Rover, loading him into a small prop plane. He had no awareness of how much time passed through the flight, nor any memory of being unloaded. He was oblivious to the physician attending him, giving him a bag of blood as Sherlock was bound to a chair, left to himself to wake in a small, dismal room with damp stone walls and a rough concrete floor.

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Sherlock was calm as he woke, though he was in a great deal of pain and incredibly thirsty. The calm, pared oddly with a sense of impending doom, let him know that he’d bled enough to be low on volume and in a dangerous state of shock. He needed fluids and medical attention soon. The harsh floor under him and the acrid gag in his mouth let him know how unlikely that was going to be. He tested the bonds, finding that movement of his arm bloomed horrific pain across his chest. It was cold, with rotten smelling air and a floor splattered with blood. *John.*

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Moran was angry. Of course, he’d expected this. Moriarty had never been particularly predictable, especially when it came to making his pets dance. But something about Sherlock Holmes made Moriarty particularly reckless, as if he was anxious to be caught and killed. Sherlock Holmes. Moran ground his teeth together and his hands curled into fists. He had a job to do. A very important job. It had been the boss’s last command, and while Moran had every intention of carrying it out for loyalty and spite’s sake alone, he was certain there were operatives in place to make sure he got the job done. God, how he hated Sherlock. He’d watched the world’s most successful criminal’s web fall to pieces just so the boss could play dead for a while to fuck with some pathetic detective. He’d had to rebuild it piece by piece with him when he came back, only to watch the boss spend nearly every waking hour with the stupid detective’s stupider pet soldier.

And now, boss was dead. He hadn’t even tried to defend himself. Moriarty hadn’t even let him protect him. He sent him away to get some fucking alone time with the stupid bloody detective.

He was going to break every single bone in that man’s god damn body.
Anger boiled up in him and he took another swig of strong brandy. Once again he checked his phone to see if Sherlock was awake, and this time was delighted to find his newest stress ball awake.

Stubbing his cigarette out, he took his time and made his way into the cell with a small television and large speakers. "Hello, Mr. Holmes. Never introduced myself properly, bit hectic. Sebastian Moran." He stopped with the TV in front of Sherlock, leaning on it as he turned to fully face him. "Feeling well?"

Sherlock blinked his eyes open and tried to focus. He glanced at the TV and then slid his eyes to Moran. Sniper, ex-military, borderline psychopath. Quietly Sherlock assembled the details as he sat there listening to him, hearing muffled as though listening from under water. He made no move to speak from behind the gag, instead making an effort to boot up his mind, to take in the facts.

Moran switched the TV on with a crackle of static and a faint clicking sound. He had on the cart below it several old-fashion VHS tapes, all meticulously labeled and organized. "You've lost, Sherlock." He said roughly and pulled up a chair to sit down in front of him. "You've really lost."

Moran reached out and brushed a bit of dirt of Sherlock’s knee. "You're the one who pulled the trigger," he said in an almost detached way. "I should be thanking you. Killing James Moriarty guaranteed my place. I'm now the leader of the most successful criminal web on the continent." He looked at a few of the tapes. There were dozens of them, each with a date and keyword on the spine and a brief description on the front. "Should we try..." he trailed off as though making a critical decision, narrowing his eyes at the rows of footage, “first time asking for water? Or first time being forced to ask for water?"

Ah, Sherlock's mind supplied, his heart twisting as he searched for the calm acceptance of before. Tapes. John's torture. This was penance. He'd not known John was missing, but now, at least he would die knowing the full extent of the price John had paid for his cowardly avoidance of John’s absence. Had he only looked, truly observed John’s purported missives, the photos and videos, he would have seen, would have known John needed help. Instead he shoved his head in the metaphorical sand and buried himself with work. This was justice. He deserved this. He stared at the sniper without flinching, his expression pained and as schooled as he could manage.

"It's all here, Sherlock." Moran said as he proudly patted the TV. "Every last second. Even the rare times he's asleep. Those are the times you're to sleep, mind. Don't waste them. I was charged..." He stood up and walked in a slow circle around Sherlock, an action which, in addition to asserting his height dominance, claimed himself as the predator and Sherlock as the prey, "...that before I torture you to death..." He put a hand on Sherlock's injured shoulder. "I would sit you down and have you watch every second."

Sherlock hissed as deep, burning pain flared across his back, radiating down from his shoulder, the flames licking up the side of his neck and shooting down to his elbow. It was going to be months then, of this, if he survived the gunshots. He readily accepted his fate, aware that there was nothing he could do to save himself, along with the inescapable reality that he deserve to suffer for John’s pain. He could restore balance with his own pain and death, and Greg would take care of John,. In the end it would be right.

Moran judged his reaction. He seemed to accept it far too easily, as if it were penance for his guilt. That wouldn't have been what Moriarty wanted. Moran pushed the first video in. The screen flickered and rolled, blipping until the tracking corrected itself. Color pared with the shapes on screen, and soon a clear image of John, strung up with his arms above his head, muscled back to the camera, came into focus.

For a moment, Sherlock wondered if the tapes were without sound. A vicious, shockingly loud crack
banished the question from his mind as his stomach pitted, making him lean forward as he ground his teeth down on the gag. On the screen, Moran had laid a brutal stripe across John’s back. The tape had to be from early in his capture, as John the 

soldier

held himself up on his own two feet, shouting bitter curses as the horrific sound rang out over and over.

Twenty minutes into the tape, Sherlock’s face was glistening with tears he had no awareness of producing, and John’s furious cursing faded to weak cries. He slowly sagged in his cuffs, putting his weight on his shoulders. Sherlock’s mind reeled in sympathy. John’s damaged shoulder pained him in the cold and troubled him when stiff, though he never complained. The position he was currently in had to be agony, even without his flayed back.

By the conclusion of the video, forty some odd minutes in, John was reduced to nothing, body jerking with the force of the whip, otherwise nearly lifeless.

Sherlock sat, panting and grinding against the gag in the silence, reeling from what he’d seen. The first video was so horrific, it was nearly impossible to accept that they’d hardly begun, that there was still an incredible amount left to see.

"That particular beating was for eating. Moriarty hadn't laid a finger on him until that point. He just locked him up, told him not to eat, then after three days tossed him an apple." Moran rewinded to an earlier day where John seemed free of injuries.

"Come now, John, don't be stubborn. Repeat to me the rules and I'll let you have a bit of water or some sleep." Moriarty's voice was soft and pleading.

“Fuck off.” John snapped and stood with hands curled into fists. There was a fire in his steel blue eyes, a familiar rage that fueled him. “To hell with your rules! I’m not some damn dog you can order about!”

Moriarty sighed and snapped his fingers. Over a pair of loudspeakers, Sherlock's voice boomed and the first beating began, Moran's fists the only weapons used against him.

Sherlock cursed himself colorfully. He’d known that John’s experience had been horrific, there was no doubt of that given his physical state. Sherlock had managed to form an idea of what had been done to John by the shape and ages of his scars. However, the fact came into sharp relief that the difference between knowing and witnessing were worlds apart.

Moriarty tried to coax John with soft promises and vague irritation, demonstrating a demeanor completely at odds with the sheer violence. It was a common tactic among torturers attempting to endear their captives to them. His stomach turned and he was nearly sick, gagging hard despite the cloth in his mouth as pain seared across his body.

Moran took the tape out and got a later one.

John was on the ground, his breathing ragged and pained. He had one arm wrapped protectively around his rib cage and bared his bloody teeth at Moriarty. "You're a bloody fucking liar!" John shouted, though it was clear from his voice his nose was broken and he was out of breath. "This is YOUR FAULT! YOU! All you! It's not Sher....him."

Moriarty smiled, and John looked down in a grimace of shame. By now, he had learned what that word would bring. He didn't fear it yet, but knew better than to say it. No point in bringing himself extra trouble.

"John, you and I both know this is all his doing, not mine," Moriarty said in disappointed, apologetic
tone and his assistants forced John down onto a cold table already crusted with his blood. The army doctor kept his characteristic, military stoic calm, but fear was evident in his eyes as the restraints tightened on his wrists.

With a look of apologetic sorrow to cover up the immense pleasure he derived from hurting Sherlock’s John, Moriarty began a series of cuts down his arm, deep, jagged, and uneven.

By the end of it, John was screaming and writhing in agony, anger and hatred and just a hint of despair in his still very strong voice. Four cuts were made on the inside of his forearm, which Moriarty immediately had stitched up while John was still suffering from the pain and shock. He wanted him clear headed and without any dizziness from blood loss. Besides, stitches could be played with and tugged on, which was how Moriarty chose to entertain himself.

Sherlock kept his eyes locked to John, ignoring Moriarty and the others. His heart pounded against his ribs with such force it nearly overrode his hearing as he watched Moriarty torture John mercilessly, leaving the man soaked in his own sweat, struggling to breathe through the pain of it. That was John, his John, who should be wrapped in absurd jumpers and fiddling with a chip and pin machine. His hands flexed tight at his back, nails cutting into his palms, toes curled tight despite the fire that lanced up his leg from the bullet hole.

By the end of the video, John was repeating back the rules Moriarty had set down. Moran stood beside Sherlock, smiling as the footage restored his mood. "Do you want to see more, Sherlock? I've got eight months of it. I just want to give you a little taste of what you'll be seeing. Sometimes it’s hard to note the changes in a man’s behavior when it’s so gradual. I want you to see an overview before we get into the gritty details."

"I'm not allowed to drink..." John began, but was cut off by a hard punch to the nose.

"Stupid John! Say it right!" Moriarty demanded.

"Drinking brings me pain...eating brings me pain... Escaping brings me pain..." He trailed off, leaving Moriarty looking a bit irritated.

"Do you remember the last one, pet?"

"Yes." John grumbled and looked away.

Moriarty took a pair of pliers and pushed them into a knife wound. "First, it's 'yes sir,' and second, tell me what it is."

John screamed loudly once more with his head thrown back and his eyes squeezed shut. "Yes, sir! I'm s-sorry, sir! He brings me pain! He brings me pain! STOP, PLEASE!"

Sherlock was violently shaking his head, gagging as he looked away. His breathing had gone wild and audible, and his entire body trembled in response to what he was seeing. The physical pain he was in had nothing on the agony of watching John suffer.

Moran ejected the tape. "You look ill, Sherlock," He said roughly. "I'll get you a doctor. You've got almost another year with me. I thought I would just show you some highlights before we moved you to a different facility. One with beds, baths, food... You'll be comfortable while you watch. We'll have a projection screen perfectly sized so it's realistic. Like you're there. We've made special headphones to increase the experience." He clicked on one more, just a few seconds of John on his back, feet elevated and body strapped to a plank. A rag covered his mouth and Moriarty poured water over it, looking for all the world that he was bored out of his mind.
Sherlock did violently heave then, making his mouth disgusting, his nose burning as he tried to swallow the acid back down. This was it then. This was the master plan. They meant to make him believe he tortured John.

With a great twist of fear, he knew he likely would.

Chapter End Notes

Hold on to your hats, folks. It's only just beginning.
After what they'd done to the John, he had little doubt in Moran’s ability to break his mind down to
madness and restructure it as he wanted, even if the falsity was something as contrary to his core as
hurting his John. He shook his head, not wanting the doctor, and prayed for infection to take his life.
He stared at the screen, or rather at the stars that crackled along the edges of his blurring vision.

"Ah, so you've figured it out." Moran seemed very pleased. He put the tapes away and pushed the
TV to the other side of the small room. "We've got other types of videos once you're ready. We'll
show you these first... Then with a little pain and persuasion, you'll start to believe you were the one
who did it. You can't help it. You'll be easier to break than John because you've got no reason to
hold out. He loved you. He didn't want to believe you could hurt him." Moran looked disgusted.
"But you? No... You already feel the guilt. You already blame yourself, don't you?"
Sherlock glared up at the sniper. He slid his eyes over the man and sneered as though he were the
most filthy thing to ever happen along Sherlock's path. It was beyond horrific. He should have come
out guns blazing and taken a proper round. He crewed at the gag and otherwise said nothing, already
trying to get his mind back in order.

Moran smiled a sickly, oily smile and knelt down in front of Sherlock. "Are you ready for the guilt?
Are you ready to believe you tortured your precious John? Because by the time we're done, there
will be no confusion. We gave John confusion to frustrate him and give you a chance. You'll be
convinced you were the one who did it." Sebastian stood and chuckled to himself. "Then, we'll let
you go. Or, bring him here. Perhaps we could put the two of you in a room and let you sort it out."

Sherlock's foot flew out and he caught the sniper hard in the nose, shoving himself back hard and
twisting to get to his feet. His hands were lost to him, but he was still going to give him hell. He
stumbled toward the telly and crashed into the cart supporting it. He watched as it slid hard toward
the man and the cord ripped from the wall. Sherlock scrambled back and wrenched his wrists,
screaming through the gag as he shifted his shoulder and made a mad dash for the door.

Moran was only briefly deterred by the blow to the face, which caused blood to drip down to his
chin. With an irritated growl he lunged after the man he hated so terribly and kicked Sherlock hard in
the back. He was sent flying face first into the closed door with a bone-jarring slam. "Repeat after
me," Moran said in a breathless voice that forced it's way out of clenched teeth. "I hurt John Watson.
I tortured him. I cut him. I beat him. I burned him." Sebastian tossed Sherlock onto the ground and
flipped him onto his back, where he could look the stupid man in the eyes. This was the man
Moriarty had been so obsessed with. This pathetic man. Moran kicked him in the side in irritation.
He was better than this man. He was so clearly better. He was far more interesting than a lovesick
detective. Sebastian ground his teeth and pressed his foot on the bullet hole in Sherlock’s shoulder.

Sherlock screamed around the gag once he'd caught his breath back, his fingers digging into his
lower back, his spine arched and boots scrabbling against the ground. The pressure at the gunshot
wound was intolerable, fanning pain out like ink dropped into water, spreading across his chest and
locking up his lungs. He glared at the man around free flowing tears and pushed his shoulder up into
the heavy boot even as his scream became more desperate, rage driving him hard to challenge
Moran. He was trembling violently, forehead drenched in sudden sweat, curls sticking to the skin.

*It wasn't me. I did not hurt him. It wasn't me.* He slid deeper into his mind, hoarding those thoughts
away. He bared his teeth at the sniper around the gag, looking for any small moment that would give
Moran grinned in pure delight at the aggressiveness. "Oh, fantastic. You're already at war with your mind. And you're angry! That's wonderful. This is going to be fun." He hauled Sherlock back to the chair and strapped him down, hands pinned behind him somewhat awkwardly. He took the gag off quickly and stood behind him. "Do not speak unless I direct you to."

"There are plenty of ways to get your fix, Moran," he hissed. "All the way up to Colonel and here you stand a lapdog to a dead man. Do you fetch as well?" He sneered, his voice raw and his face unafraid. He stared at Moran, trying to calculate weak points. This could be done. At least for a while, if his brother was still looking for him, and he was in shock from blood loss already.

Moran dug his fingers into the bullet hole and twisted. When he spoke, he had to shout to be heard over Sherlock’s screams. "It seems like that bullet is still in there. It must be hurting you." He stood and wiped the blood off his hand before leaving the room, leaving Sherlock listing heavy to the side in the chair. Sherlock pinched his eyes closed as he gasped and sputtered, trying to catch his breath from the incredible pain. He had too little time to think before the heavy iron door swung open again, Moran returning with a small box.

Sebastian grinned wolfishly at Sherlock as he reached in with red stained fingers and took out a pair of pliers, blunt and not at all suited for the job, but clean and new. He wrapped one hand around Sherlock’s throat as he shoved them roughly into the bullet wound. "Should I take it out, or leave it in? Was it a pistol, or a rifle? Their pistols have expanding rounds. I bet it hurts."

Blood was pooling in Sherlock’s mouth as he bit down hard on the insides of his cheeks, eyes pinched shut. He struggled to slip back into his mind and escape. He was trembling horribly, the grate of metal on metal sending shockwaves down his spine and along his chest, seizing up the air in his lungs, making him panic and push against the panic in an exhausting cycle.

Stars rocketed across his vision and his hearing tunneled down to cotton, submerged and senseless. He thought of John and how terrified he'd been, screaming for death, how cruel it had been to rob him of that peace. He refused to answer, letting himself hold his breath and willing his blood pressure to fail enough to allow him to faint.

"Breathe, you idiot," Moran snapped and struck him hard in the diaphragm. "You're not going to escape like that. Does it make you feel better that John had it worse? That I won't even be coming close to what he did to John? Well, that's the plan at least. I very well may change my mind." He let go of Sherlock in disgust and stood up, abruptly leaving the room. Sherlock leaned forward as much as he could, blood running down his chin as he trembled violently from shock.

Moran left briefly and dragged a table in. It was crusted in old blood and had several leather straps for wrists, elbows, ankles, knees, waist, under the arms, neck, and head. Moran took out a knife and scraped some of John’s black, crusty blood off the metal surface and flicked it on Sherlock. "John hated this table. It's probably why he hates the restraints at the psychiatric hospital."

The entire place reeked of the inside of the box delivered to Baker Street. Sherlock let his eyes roam over the hated table. He'd figured that's the sort of situation John had experienced, hence their eagerness to get John loose of the restraints as soon as possible. How John survived with any bit of his mind intact, Sherlock had no idea. He was still struggling to catch his spasming diaphragm, taking in the details of the table.

"M-Must be tiresome," he panted, bitterly furious with the fact that John had gotten it worse, that John had done nothing but offer his loyalty to Sherlock and this was his reward, "o-only finding your enjoyment in th-this. Moriarty knew how to f-find himself the pathetic ones."
Moran laughed gleefully. "If you insult Jim, I'll cut out your tongue." The threat was issued in a lively, happy voice which in no way subtracted from its intent. "I'm not going to train you not to eat, or not to drink, or not to speak. I'm not going to train you to panic at the mention of a word, or at a face, or at a smell or sound. You won't cower away from everyone or think a drinking straw means waterboarding... But you will believe what I say eventually."

"I suspect you've a rather liberal understanding of...of the word," he breathed, nearly managing the entire sentence without panting for air. He shook his head, teeth grit together, trying to shake through the blistering, sickly-deep pain at his shoulder. "What does it matter if I believe I...I t-tortured him," he hissed through his teeth as he struggled to breathe, his vision tunneled sharply. "You've won. Mission success. Want me to put a bullet in my head? Done. He's lost to me. You've nothing more to win." He was spitting the words, furious in his defeat, the truth acrid and stale on his tongue.

Sebastian had hold of the bullet and he pushed it in further. "Ah, that's the thing." He gave a sudden, sideways yank and the bullet came out. "Moriarty always had to win. He always had a goal. 'Why are you torturing John?' 'To get to Sherlock.'" He rolled his eyes and dropped the bullet in the box. "But not me. I don't give a damn who wins. It's not about winning." Next came out a long needle which he pushed straight into the bullet hole. Sebastian had a wicked, pleased look in his eyes. "No, I don't do this to win. I do this for fun."

Even as Sherlock's body bucked and he screamed, stars exploding across his vision, he set it all in his mind. Moran was a true sadist and the best Sherlock could hope for was death. His brother had sent the helicopter the other way. He was surely abandoned, likely suspected dead. He hoped Greg survived for John's sake. The thought brought warmth to his chest. No matter what Moran did to him, Sherlock had succeeded in protecting John.

He began to list sideways in the chair, his blood pressure falling as he freely bled down his chest, pooling on the floor, nearly pulling him unconscious again.

"Stay awake, Sherlock. Do stay awake." He added to his request with a sharp slap across the face and a punch to the eye. "I'll have a doctor in here soon. I would like you to repeat something for me. Nothing serious, no, just some numbers. 1,1,2,3,5. Simple. Fibonacci. Just say those numbers and I'll stop."

He bore into Sherlock again then, pressing his large thumb into the bullet hole and driving him forward against the chair.

Sherlock struggled to stop screaming as his bladder threatened him, pain exploding from his shoulder and making him panic. He panted sharply, grunting on the end of each exhalation as he grit his teeth and resisted. He could hear his blood dripping to the floor and it made him woozy. "E-Eight, th-thirteen," he bit out, bearing pink teeth as he leaned into Moran's thumb.

"You're to follow instructions exactly. I didn't say to continue the sequence, I said to repeat what I said." He withdrew his hand and went back to the box. There was a heavy wrench which he promptly struck across Sherlock's shins, to his knees, and on the gunshot wound on his leg.

Sherlock bit down hard on the insides of his lips, incisors tearing into the tissues of his cheeks as pain exploded across his body, making his back jump, causing him to try and twist away despite himself. He screamed his agonized frustration at Moran, spitting blood to the floor and holding his tongue.

Moran rained down blows with the wrench, aiming for places with bones protruding or tendons stretched tight. "You could end this," he whispered quietly. "It's just some numbers. What harm could that do?"
Oh hell, how he could see it happening. Even as the lights faded and he bled on himself, blood pressure tanking out, he saw how inescapable this would be. He had a plan, but Christ was it goin going to be terrible. He slowly sagged down in the chair as his hearing snapped off and his vision tunneled out to nothing, leaving him an unconscious mess.

Moran called a doctor in as he hauled Sherlock out of the chair and onto the table, crunching John’s rusted blood under him. The physician was one of Moriarty's favorites to work with as he asked no questions and didn’t mind working on tortured patients. Over the next hour Sherlock was patched up. He would live, most likely, but might not be awake for a while.

Moran kept him strapped to the table, but he added a few long, thin pins through his arms to keep them further in place. There was business to attend, and the mess of the mental hospital to clean up. He left Sherlock in isolation, whistling on his way out.

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Greg was sitting next to John, who had finally just been sedated. They could not calm him any other way. He waited for Mycroft to come in and watched the man closely. "Tell me there is something that can be done. That's all I want to hear. Tell me."

Mycroft walked in looking haggard and disheveled. He sat down and dug the heels of his hands into his eyes to calm himself. "We lost track of him."

Greg was on his feet, pacing hard, his stomach in knots. "That's not acceptable. No. I turned away your help so that you could collect him. How could you lose him? How did that happen? How did that go so horrifically? This is your fucking job Mycroft and he is your brother!"

Mycroft wilted under Greg's accusations as if they were stones. "I know, Greg, I know. We were outmanned. I never thought he would have that many resources. They had a gun to his throat! I only had one helicopter! Sherlock would have throttled me if they got John instead of him. The van got away. The men I had posted kilometers out to track were dead." Mycroft ran his fingers back through his hair. In some ways, the mission had been a success. They had saved John and killed the most dangerous criminal. "I lost so many men."

Greg dropped into the chair at John's side and leaned forward, pillowing his head on crossed arms at John's hip. He was making a valiant effort not to break down. It had been so incredibly, unendingly much already.

"He's already so sick," he breathed, calling to mind how awful Sherlock had looked before any of this started, back when Sherlock was asking his brother to call it off. "So that's it then? We just...wait until he can't hold up to the torture, see if we at least get a body back?"

Mycroft didn't speak for a while. He had several plans to get him back, but at the moment he had operatives going through the city with a fine tooth comb.

"We'll start looking. We'll pull security feeds and see where the car went." He sounded hopeless and exhausted. It had been days since he ate or slept in a bed. Mycroft was acutely aware of his own failings, which he felt like a great weight around his neck.

Greg sat up slowly and looked over to Mycroft. His own sadness was raw and unguarded, unlike Mycroft’s stoic suffering. "We've lost them both," he whispered, loathing that he forced John through all of this only to so catastrophically lose in the end. "We lost them."

He looked over at John, who had made such progress, who had fought so hard. How was he going to tell the man that Sherlock was gone when he'd just begun to accept that Sherlock had not hurt
"Go get some sleep, Mycroft. I'll sit here. You need to sleep if we are going to have any hope of at least collecting a body."

Mycroft let out a shuddering breath that would have come out a sob for anyone but the stoic government worker. "I-I'll start working on it immediately. I'll have everyone on it. I can't sleep now. Now now. Not yet."

Greg looked over at Mycroft and dragged a hand over his face, leaning back and then reaching out to wrap his hand around Mycroft's wrist. "I'm sorry, that wasn't fair." He took a deep, slow breath and did not let go. "Sherlock already knows the game, we've seen what happened to John. He may be able to survive for a while. You must sleep, Mycroft, you are going to make mistakes. Put people on tracking the camera feeds and eat a meal, have a shower, and for god's sake sleep a little. Let the physicians give you a pill. You've got to rest. I'm sorry I threw that at you. I'm so fucking angry that this keeps happening that I took it out on you. Please get some rest."

"No, you were right." Mycroft lamented and supported his head on his hands. "It's my fault. I should have let him back out. I should have found some other way." He gave a small nod to Greg's request. "Alright. Alright, I'll sleep. Thank you, Greg. Thank you for everything."

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Sherlock was still as he came awake, pain screaming through his body, his breathing stiff and tightly controlled.

"Morning, Sherlock," Moran sang cheerily. "I give you permission to speak and tell me if you plan on cooperating." Sherlock huffed what could have been a laugh, and otherwise kept himself silent. The backs of his eyelids were full of grit and fever, and the breath on his lips was far too hot to be considered normal. He licked his lip slowly and centered himself, focusing on the sharp pain from the needles in his arms and prepared for what was to come.

Moran started to twist the pins keeping his arms locked in place. "So rude Sherlock. So rude." He took out a small metal rod that looked entirely non-threatening until you felt it's bite. "The same rules go for today as they did yesterday. Follow my instructions and I won't hurt you as much."

Sherlock pulled in deep, controlled breaths even as involuntary tears rolled down the sides of his face, dripping into his hair. His teeth clenched up tight and he made every effort not to scream. *I did not hurt John. I did not hurt John.* He repeated in his mind like a mantra. He had mental discipline that far outstripped most people's. He could endure this. He would endure this. John had made it out to the other side, Sherlock could surely manage what was, compared to John's suffering, mild torture.

"Come on now, Sherlock," Moran said and brought in a pair of strange metal clamps. He fashioned them over Sherlock's ribcage and tightened until they were just wide enough to allow him to breathe. "Just repeat those numbers I gave you and I'll leave you alone for a full thirty minutes." He tightened them drastically, making his ribs lock in place and keeping them from expanding with his lungs.

Sherlock gave Sebastian a nearly crazed, massive grin, pink-tinged teeth and cracked lips. "Who topped?" He wheezed with a weak breath that was hardly strong enough to push the snide words out of his chest. "Him, I'd guess. You look the sort to receive." His words were wrecked, but the cage around his chest was just shy of tight enough. Perhaps he could incite the correct amount of rage.

Sebastian's face clouded with anger and he slammed his fist down onto the wound on Sherlock's leg. "Don't you ever speak of him in a disrespectful way," he said with livid hatred unrestrained in his voice. "This is all your fault. He became obsessed with you. He wanted to burn you. You are the
reason he is dead, and now I've got you. You should be more careful."

Sebastian tightened the clamps a few more times until he doubted Sherlock would be able to breathe much at all. "Tap the numbers if you want me to stop."

Sherlock painfully managed to curl his fingers and present the middle ones to Sebastian as much as he could. Even as he was hardly able to draw breath, even as tears streamed down over his temples and fear rattled his chest, Sherlock was still defiant. Sebastian cranked the clamps tighter until he could see the flexible areas on Sherlock's rib cage start to bend slightly. He took out a knife and started cutting in ragged, unpredictable lines over Sherlock's chest. "That wasn't very respectful, Sherlock," he purred just as Moriarty had once done. Sebastian took the long pins again and withdrew them from his forearm. Instead, he pushed one under his kneecap and jerked it to the side. Moran's torture was nothing like Moriarty's. He wasn't calculated. He wasn't making every mark for a purpose. There wasn't a deep understanding of psychology underneath it all. But he was angry, and he knew how to cause pain.

Sherlock screamed, the sound of it torn up from his toes, making him nearly black out in his inability to draw enough air. He was slicked in sweat, shaking hard with the shock of how horrific the pain was. His eyes pinched shut and he retreated into his mind, scrambling for the door to his palace, wanting nothing more than to barricade himself behind mental walls he was suddenly too exhausted to scale.

Sebastian was able to insert a tiny pair of needle nose pliers under Sherlock's knee cap. He slowly forced them open, separating the knee cap from the knee millimeter by millimeter. "Just tap. Isn't that simple? I could let you alone for a while. Would you like that?"

That had him at his limit. His fingers shook horrifically as he made the attempt at the numbers, gagging from the pain, sweat rolling off him as though he'd been drenched. He had no air left to scream, or he'd be working his throat raw.

He managed the code after several faltering tries, though his head was full of cotton and white noise.

Sebastian let up immediately. He withdrew the pins and pliers and opened the clamps again. Sherlock had to learn that obeying was always the way to escape pain. "Good job, Sherlock. That was very wise." He put a small flask and put it to Sherlock's lips. "This should take the edge off."

Sherlock rolled his head to the side, away from the cloying brancy, and was sick, bile sputtering from his lips, choking him as he pulled in a deep breath with the new ability to expand his lungs. He pulled against the restraints, wanting to draw his limbs in against his chest. His head pounded as agony screamed up along his limbs, pooling low in his abdomen, threatening to drown him. Dear god, how had John survived it?

"So far you've survived a half hour of torture. Total it's been about four hours. You've got months ahead of you. The only way to protect yourself is to listen to me." He took a few steps back and watched from a chair opposite. "You were obedient, so I'll give you some time to recover."

Sherlock shut him out. He'd endured thirty six minutes today. It was pathetic, and he damn well knew it. He closed his eyes, burning with fever, shivering violently on the table. It would kill him, surely. John was by far physically stronger, and clearly more mentally sound than Sherlock had ever given him credit for. He put his mind to slowing down his shattered breathing.

"Good, that's good. Retreat. He said you'd do that. He said you'd withdraw and try and get lost inside your head." Sebastian took a different tape out of the cart and pushed it into the port. A pair of speakers behind it were cranked to maximum volume so Sherlock was sure to hear.
"No, no, please!" John begged and there was a sharp hissing sound that punctuated a raw, agonized scream.

"John, dear, you know the only way out of this is to believe me. You know that." Moriarty pressed a metal rod which glowed a muddy orange at the tip onto John's exposed chest. Another scream tore from the much thinner John, this time with less anger and far more desperation than there had been before.

"Just remember, Sherlock," Moran said, "Dying and going unconscious count as escaping, and escaping brings you pain."

Losing his grip on the wall in his mind, Sherlock cringed against the horrific audio, shaking his head as he tried to find his center again. He could not think on what had happened to John, he simply could not. The volume was ear shattering and the details all too clear in the sounds. He could pair what he was hearing with the scars that left John with hardly any undamaged skin.

His stomach clenched up again and he had to carefully breathe, each inhalation licking fire across his chest as he agitated the lacerations, panting with the effort of not sicking up.

Sebastian ran the tape for another thirty minutes before pausing it in the middle of John's pathetic whimpering. "This is an introductory, Sherlock. Just a little taste. After this, you'll go to a room. A nice room. One with a bed, a bath, nice lighting and walls. And, of course, the screen. You will watch each and every second of those tapes in real time. You will sleep when John slept. We will not, however, be training you the same. You won't fear water, or food, or drinking, or random words... It'll be easier on you in that respect."

He took out another needle and held it over a lighter for a bit until it grew hot. "Do you need both eyes to see, Sherlock?"

Sherlock's heart tripped over itself, fear washing over the pain as time slowed down to nothing, running too fast and too slow in equal measure. His eyes snapped open and he watched what Moran was doing and he was suddenly tugging violently against the restraints. He'd gladly dislocate bones to get himself free. His logical mind knew that was impossible and his pride was screaming at him to maintain control.

His eyes. His eyes. What was he if he could not observe? He fell hard into panic, nodding emphatically, not daring to risk speech. God, not his eyes.

Moran braced one arm on the side of the table next to Sherlock's head for stability and held the needle as one would a pencil or paintbrush. "How about this? I'll blind one eye. I'll push this needle through it and leave it there for a week." He held the faintly glowing point just centimeters from his face and forced Sherlock's eye open with his other hand. "Or... You could just say that what happened to John was your fault. Not that you did it... Just that it's your fault."

"It was my fault," he breathed, the words effortless and true. It was his fault. He knew that beyond any other truth. Had he never put himself in John's life, had he put more focus to keeping John safe, if he'd simply paid attention then none of this would have happened to John. "It's my fault."

He stared at the glowing tip of the needle, his heart slamming hard enough against his ribs that he was sure they'd break from the force, bleeding heavily as his blood pressure went through the roof.

"Good, Sherlock, very good." Sebastian said with a smile. Even though it was a simple statement, he wanted Sherlock to get used to saying it and taking orders before he made things a bit more complicated.
Moran didn't blind him with the needle, but he didn't move it away. "Would you like me to put this away, Sherlock? Ask nicely, and I'll leave your eyes alone for the day."

Sherlock turned his eyes on Moran, glaring and defiant. He'd complied at first out of penance. He would not beg. He would not. Moran was going to do as he wanted, regardless of what Sherlock asked. There was no point in this. He would be dead within the week, anyhow. He turned his focus back to the needle just over his eye, fear locking his chest in a vice, forcibly holding his tongue. He would not beg. Whatever happened, he would not beg.

Moran breathed a sad sigh, as if he didn't want to hurt Sherlock. "Oh, that's a shame." He said and held Sherlock's eye open with his fingers. The needle rested just in front of his pupil then veered to the side. He just barely scraped the cornea along the side, not enough to blind him or cause serious injury, but enough to induce panic.

Sherlock's hearing had dropped into a single, shrill tone, drowning out everything save for it and the sound of his panicked breathing. He bit down on his tongue to hold back the pleaseJohn was curled up in a small ball, whimpering pathetically. Gunfire echoed through the building and he looked up, curious. Sebastian burst in wearing full uniform, gun held before him, looking wildly around. "Dr. Watson?" He asked and dropped to his knees before him. "I'm Colonel Moran. I'm here to help you."

Sebastian fast-forwarded through several minutes of arguing to the point where Sebastian actually left the building with him.

*John was crying desperately, his face pressed against Moran's chest and his bleeding arms around his neck. Moran carried John out of the building while other uniforms swarmed in as John shook with relief.*

"He believed me. He was so relieved." Moran skipped ahead again to a different room where John was screaming again, this time being beaten in a separate location by Moran.

"We did this several times with different people. It's a wonder he ever learned to trust Greg."

Sherlock was in tears as protective rage and deep flowing grief for John slid through his veins and wrapped tight around his heart. He could hardly breathe in his agony for John and his own culpability in his suffering. It was a wonder that John had any trust in Greg. He picked a spot on the far wall to stare at, unable to close his eyes, and set his mind to centering again. He had to focus. He simply had to.

"Moriarty died doing something he loved. He was happy. He wasn't bored. He already knew he had won." Sebastian slammed his fist into Sherlock's stomach a few times. It was cathartic and he didn't want to do anything that could actually kill his subject. "But John?" He put in a different tape.

"Y-yes, sir." John stammered, crying loudly without a hint of defiance in his voice.

"Good boy, John. Good boy. But let's change that a bit, shall we? 'Sir' is far too common." Moriarty walked around John, or around the whimpering mess that used to be an army doctor. "From now on you will call me master."

*John agreed without hesitation. "Yes, m-master."*

Sebastian clicked it off. "He didn't die himself. He never will. John didn't die, he was scattered. His mind was crumbled."

Sherlock was gasping, wrestling with himself against the pain, hardly able to stand the sound of
John's shattered voice. Rage boiled in his gut and he wanted nothing more than to get up and take Moran apart with his own two hands. He could imagine sinking his fingers into the sinews and tearing out his organs, the hot stink of blood pooling around them, Moran's screams drowning out John's.

"He got bored of you," Sherlock rasped, panting and tugging at the restraints again, fury clear in his tone. Moran wished he had the level headed calm of Moriarty. He wished he was as cold and clever. But he wasn't. He still had to fight against the rage.

"He never got bored of me. He did get obsessed with you, though. I'll admit that was irritating." Moran hadn't been jealous, though. Not at first. Not when Moriarty's energies towards Sherlock were geared at causing as much psychological damage as possible. It had even been fun at first.

Sebastian grabbed a pair of pliers and pinched a hole through the soft skin on Sherlock's forearm.

Sherlock shouted in pain and then clamped his mouth shut, trying to breathe through it. He stared at Moran, his lips curling up in a disgusted sneer. "You are too s-stupid for him to focus on for long," he bit out, his eloquence abandoned but his rage perfectly sound. "Didn't have t-time for you. Just a bloody st-stupid bit of muscle to do the heavy lifting."

He started to laugh, the sound of it broken and agonized, but it was still laughter. "He's dead. He's d-dead and he left you without a word, and no matter what you do to me, he's ne-never coming back. You are alone."

"If you're trying to bait me into killing you, it's not going to work," Moran snarled and hatred dripped from his tongue. “Perhaps I won't just make you believe you tortured John. Perhaps after these eight months are up, I'll keep you. I'll make you believe you fucking raped and killed him too. Would you like that? I can do it. Just like I convinced John you had tortured him. Except if he thinks you tortured him, thinks it was you and not me that put him on his back and took him like a whore....and you think you tortured him.... There's nobody to dispute it." Moran wanted to hurt Sherlock. Badly. He didn't give a damn if it was physical or emotional. “He’s got the memory. All laid out naked on your Belstaff coat. Tied up so beautifully. Your scent around him. Your voice over the speaker. The pain of you making him your little bitch.” Mycroft had a sick, leering smile on his face. “Take a break. We'll start on that later.”

He took the clamps again and left the room.

Sherlock closed his eyes and scrambled for his mind palace even as a choked sound of grief escaped him. There had been no report given to him on sexual assault, nothing in the records he'd been given and poured over obsessively. Surely this was just to get him into panic...that must be the case... Sherlock could simply not accept that Moran had raped his John, but the more he thought about it, the more terrifyingly possible it found. John’s condition was unspeakably horrific enough without adding the deeply personal and mentally scarring act of rape to the mix. Moran would never convince him he'd raped John, anyhow. Perhaps that would be what he held onto in the end, if he couldn't manage to kill himself before hand.

He smiled to himself. Whatever had happened, whatever was going to happen, Moran had shown his hand and he knew he'd affected him.

The sadist didn't return for another twenty minutes, but when he did, he held the clamps with a pair of tongs and thick leather forge gloves. They glowed a bright orange and he set them on the ground for a moment. Moran removed Sherlock's shirt and fashioned the clamps over him so they didn't quite touch his skin yet.
"I wouldn't suggest taking any deep breaths," he said and tightened them just a bit. A sharp gasp would cause his chest and ribs to expand with his lungs, driving his skin into the hot metal.

Sherlock looked at the situation and took in the estimated temperature of the metal, the severity of burns that could be reached at its maximum potential. Burns were tricky, they could easily kill despite medical attention. The game played a bit differently when he had no thought for survival.

It would be horrifically painful and slow, however. Nearly a forty percent chance of failure. Poor odds when looking at that severity of pain. His body was trembling hard, fear getting to him on several levels as he put his options forward. He decided to remain still and watch Moran, though he was not at all interested in this game.

Sebastian tightened them once more. "Come on, Sherlock. This isn't so bad. Not yet. How about you cooperate? Hmm?" The metal was just an inch away from Sherlock's skin now and it cast an eerie glow on Sherlock’s pale skin that already shone with sweat.

Moran took the knife he had used before and went back to Sherlock's knew cap. He pressed the tip just under it and slowly drove it up into the gap, past the tendon and into the gaping wound. "Tell me you cut John. I saw you do it. I was there, even though you couldn't see me."

"Fuck off," he spat, a rare, crass explicative on his lips. He grit his teeth and held his breath, doing his best not to scream. The clamps were close enough that he now realized a full contact burn would likely be enough to push his body over the limit of what he could handle, what with the bloodloss, weeks on end of improper self care, and the fever. Only his fear stopped him, his chest quivering in an attempt to keep himself protected.

Sebastian jammed the knife up into Sherlock's knee cap and twisted savagely. The first two weeks were always the hardest. They always had that shred of hope. How irritating. "Tell me you cut him and this can be over for a bit!" He twisted it again, pulling the knee cap separate from his tendons with a glorious grating sound and a rush of blood. "If you say anything but what I've directed, or are silent, I'll start peeling skin."

Sherlock's skin seared as he failed to hold back, screaming his lungs out, his throat raw and voice grating. He'd never walk properly on that leg again, not after that. He could not stop screaming, the pain from the burns mixing with the agony at his leg, the scent of blood and charred flesh filling the room, gagging on the pain of it. "Fuck you!" he shrieked, his body shaking violently, gasping at the air as his mind threatened to shut down on him.

Moran continued to that tune for nearly another hour, but this time without giving Sherlock a chance to agree with him. He ripped a strip of skin off down the side of his leg with a pair of pliers, and shoved blunt pins into his shin bones. When he was satisfied, Moran wiped the blood off his hands onto his jeans and slapped Sherlock across the face. "Care to tell me what you did to John?"

Sherlock was fading in and out, delirious with pain, alternating between vacant staring and shrill, panicked screaming. It was unending, the burns unbearably agonizing. He licked his lip and sluggishly turned his eyes on Moran.

"I b-befriended h-h-him," he croaked, starting to quietly cry, loathing how long it was taking his damn heart to stop.

Moran brought out a small metal rod and cracked it over Sherlock's injured knee. "You what? I don't think I heard you."
He struck again and again, enjoying the sickening sound of metal hitting flesh. This man killed Moriarty, and the next year would be fantastic. Sebastian ended by breaking a few of the small bones in Sherlock's hand with slow, steady pressure.

It was not until the third metacarpal snapped that Sherlock's consciousness bled away. Darkness reached up and overwhelmed him, dragging him down under, his breathing far too shallow and his cardiac rhythm dangerously lagging, skipping over beats and racing far too fast. His last scream was fading into the walls, hands gone limp at his sides, his nerve endings twitching, leaving him fading on the table.

Moran was deeply satisfied. He had a doctor come in and work on him for a bit, bandaging the leg as best he could to keep Sherlock from bleeding to death, as well as tending to the deep state of shock he’d put the man in.

He waited for him to wake then, contemplating if he should break another bone or start with the water next.

Sherlock screamed as he came back awake, furious that his heart had not quit on him yet. He was instantly wrapped in agony, unable to pinpoint a source. He started to violently tremble as soon as he became aware, and though is eyes darted over the room, his fever ridden mind was sluggish and unable to make sense of much at all.

Pain. That had been established. Exhaustion, however, a more crucial step, wasn't yet achieved. From now on, Sebastian decided to temper his violent delight in order to keep Sherlock awake. "You passed out." Sebastian stated gravely. "You aren't allowed to pass out." He slid a small crate under the two back legs of the table, angling Sherlock's body on a downward slope. "Have you ever inhaled water before?"

Sherlock had thought himself vulnerable before, tied to the table, unable to evade. Now, however, with his head tipped lower, blood rushing to his thundering skull, he knew he was even worse off and could hardly stand it. "You are a coward," he seethed, turning his head away from Moran, "a small little man, nothing more than a boy plucking w-w-wings f-from a fly." He could not get his voice to comply. How had John lived? It was unthinkable now, only a day into this, that John had any of his mind at all. He should have overdosed him when he'd had the chance. He was cruel not to have, a fool for hesitating.

"You believe yourself a fly?" He laughed a bit in a shrill, humorless way. "No, no, Sherlock. You're more important than that. You know, I see why he died now. He died so I would hate you. He knew it. He knew what would happen if I hated you. He knew that I would break you." Moran beat him about the face with his fists a few more times before his anger calmed down enough to continue. "Now answer my question. Have you ever inhaled water?"

Sherlock closed his eyes, panting as he tried to get his wits about him. The skin of his face was tight with swelling and his lip bled freely.

"Once," he rasped, as he saw no harm in answering that. He'd been young. Mycroft had saved him. It was back when Mycroft and him had been best friends, the closest siblings could be, all pirates and games and laughter. It was back when Mycroft stood over him as the big brother and protected him from schoolyard bullies, bees and nightmares. The thought tore a soft whimper from his chest, an ache for his brother to save him, a sensation he'd not felt in years.

Sebastian tilted Sherlock’s head back and strapped his forehead in place. "I'm going to give you a way out. You have ten seconds on. Then I'll give you a chance to tell me what you did to John
Watson. Then another fifteen. Twenty. Twenty five.” He slapped the wet rag over Sherlock's nose and mouth. At best, a man could last around eight seconds without panicking. That was a well trained, well rested man who understood that he would be let out when he needed to be. Sherlock was already so broken. Sebastian started to slowly pour water on from the bucket. *One. Two. Three.*

He was back in that damned lake as surely as if he'd been thrown headlong into the dark waters. The water sliding down the back of his nose, filling his airway and inducing panic, swept with it all rational thought. He balled his fists up tight which jarred the shattered bones in his hand and sent liquid pain radiating up his arm. His heart slammed hard against his ribs and his mind shut down on him. Logically it was water with a rag, that was all, but the overall effect was horrific and completely terrifying.

Moran continued to pour as Sherlock struggled. The man’s struggling and jerking was delicious and Moran felt a surge of sadistic glee that made his eyes wild. *Four. Five. Six.* "You should just SAY IT Sherlock!" He shouted to be heard. *Seven. Eight. Nine.* "This could be over." *Ten.*

Sebastian removed the rag and put the bucket down. "Breathe, Sherlock. Breathe and tell me what you did to Dr. Watson."

Sherlock's entire body was on fire as the icy grip of panic gained control of his mind. His chest was searing as he greedily pulled at the air, and his gasps were punctuated by sobs. He sputtered and coughed, nose burning and throat raw, straining hard against the restraints.

"I-" his throat closed off and he grit his teeth as the pain washed over him, "n-never would h-hurt him. P-piss off," he hissed even as he cried, desperately wanting to beg the man to stop.

Moran slammed his fist into Sherlock's diaphragm several times before slapping the rag back on and starting the process over again. *One. Two. Three. Four.* "I'm impressed with you, Sherlock. You're so stubborn. But you'll break. Jim died to make sure."

Moran was bitter towards Sherlock, and now he understood why Jim had died. This undeniable, burning anger was impossible to replicate. He was going to destroy this man in every way he knew how. *Five. Six. Seven. Eight.*

Sherlock was full on choking, unable to stop his body from attempting to breathe with his diaphragm so suddenly injured. Water flooded into his lungs and he arched against the restraints, struggling hard enough to make the leather bite into his skin, knowing his was drowning on a dry table.


Moran struck Sherlock repeatedly in the stomach and face, then took the rag off. "I'm getting irritated with you. Are you ready to comply?"

Sherlock could not breathe, his airways blocked entirely, water deep in his lungs. If he did not drown here and now, the pneumonia would get him. His abdomen bucked wildly as his baser mind attempted to pull air through the water, sputtering as he started to gag, the natural reaction to drowning. He could not turn his head to the side, nor could he sit up, the elevation of his feet doing nothing to clear water that had been forcefully pulled into his lungs while he was being beaten.

He was openly crying, his nose running as tears poured from his eyes, panic and pain overriding his senses. His vision began to tunnel once again and he was on the verge of blacking out from lack of air alone.
Sebastian saw the look on Sherlock's face, the one victims got before they slipped from consciousness. He unstrapped the restraint on his head and kicked the box out from under the table legs, leveling his body. 

"Breathe, you useless moron, and tell me what you did to Dr. Watson."

Sherlock wrenched his head to the side, coughing and gagging as his stomach heaved. I'm a desperate attempt at getting any air. He vomited a belly full of water off the side of the table, finally dragging in a shallow breath with water gurgling in his lungs.

"S-s-" he tried, his throat closing down before he started coughing violently, choking on the remaining water. He worked his voice again, raw and strained. "Saved h-him."

"Again, then.″ Moran said with a sadistic gleam in his eyes. He was perfectly alright with Sherlock bringing himself more pain. This man had taken Moriarty's attention, and eventually his life.

He decided to break his nose first, and used the small metal bar to do so. Blood started pouring from his face and Sebastian tilted his table back so it would run down his throat. "Again? Would you like another round?"

The stunning blow to his face had successfully knocked him mentally into his safer areas. He was withdrawn, shuttering the door behind him, no longer affixed to his body. His palace was his haven and he booked it up the stairs in his panic, retreating deep into the warmth of his most familiar place. The agony was still there, as was the panic and the rage, but it simply did not matter any longer. As long as he did not play into Moran's game, John would not be in danger. That aside, he'd never fall to this, never give John yet another reason to doubt. If he questioned Sherlock's culpability in this, it would likely do irreparable damage to John's incredible ability to trust at all.

His vision glazed over and he went limp, only the chaotic twitching and horrible shivering of his body dragging any physical response out of him.

Sebastian started with the water again. He poured it over Sherlock until the man looked like he was about to go unconscious, then straightened the table and turned his head to the side.

"I'm upset with you, Sherlock. You always seemed so logical. You could have no pain this entire time by just playing along." He clicked his tongue and walked around the table again. "I'll give you a little break. You have twenty minutes. Don't even try to sleep."

Numbness settled over him like an insulation above the pain and Sherlock blinked at the side wall. He lay there quietly, staring without seeing, sure he was close to death.

He had to be.

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Chapter End Notes

Hello, lovely readers. If you've made it this far: thank you.

We loved all the comments we got last chapter, and it definitely inspired us to keep going.
The next two chapters will be a bit slow, but after that it will speed up. Things are about
to get a lot worse.

So much worse.

SO! A question for you all!
Which relationships do you think are most important in this work?
(I don't mean to ask what you ship, but you can put that in too!)
Greg was pacing Mycroft's security branch as the man himself slept. John was down hard, knocked under once again by powerful sedatives. Greg could not sit idle any longer, needing to see what sort of help he could lend, what could be done to begin finding Sherlock. They'd been able to track Sherlock's mobile until the signal went dead on what was obviously a mid-flight trip. They at least had the time and coordinates of the plane. With that they could narrow down who was flying where, perhaps get a lead from the local landingstrip and airport cameras.

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"I'm going to break your arm now," Sebastian claimed in a rather matter-of-fact voice when he came in from a short reprive. He unclasped Sherlock's left arm and held it off over the edge of the table with the elbow touching the last bit of cold metal like a fulcrum on a children's seesaw. "I'm going to add weight to it slowly until it breaks. Do not move it."

In the background he put on a tape of John going through the exact same thing, though Sherlock's voice was playing and he was blindfolded.

Sherlock braced against the door in his mind. There was a screaming voice of panic fluttering at the back of his skull, begging him to say what Moran wanted, *just say it*. But that was pointless and he was trapped. John had done all that they asked, and he was utterly destroyed. Compliance had not saved John in the end and it would not save Sherlock. He was not going to be saved, he was going to die and John was going to live and that was the final end to it. The blinding terror at the back of his mind was irrelevant. His body was just transport. This was just pain, only pain.

He closed his eyes and began to focus on slow-building arithmetic, forcing down the panic and the fear. John was on the speakers and he felt a sudden, deep aching comradery with him, as though they were in this hell together, as though he could walk John through it. Tears slid slowly out from under his lashes, his breath hot and shattering despite the warm, artificial calm blooming under his ribs. He was not going to fail John in this.

Sebastian was utterly and completely pleased; this part was always the most fun. The time when the man's will was still strong but he had lost all pride and hope to live. It was always the most enjoyable to work on someone who had a stronger motive to resist than the will to live. Someone who had nothing, no attachments, no cause, was far too easy to break. But watching Sherlock cry on his table, strapped down, vulnerable, and emotionally open, he was glad the man had something to hold on to. It made him interesting.

"Arm out." He commanded and tied a rope around Sherlock’s bloodied wrist. Over the next few minutes, as Sherlock’s breathing became more and more wild and his body went from a gentle shiver to violent trembling, he added weight tiny measures at a time until the arm was fully straight and painfully strained.
Sherlock was losing it, sick with anticipation of the agony he was about to endure. He imagined the anatomy of his straining arm and wondered absently if he would poison himself on his own marrow when it shattered and began to circulate free in his blood. It was entirely possible that he’d die of a pulmonary embolism once the humorous cracked and splintered apart. That was a real possibility, at least, given the way the bone was going to split. Much like a semi-dried out branch on a sapling, the splitting of the center of the bone would occur before the outer snap. His stomach rolled and his breathing picked up as though he'd been running, sweat pouring down his face. Never in his life had he been more than afraid.

“S-Stop,” he whimpered, teeth chattering terribly, “w-wait, stop!”

Sebastian added more weight, watching as Sherlock’s biceps began to jump and quiver spasmodically until the arm was hyperextended, the tendons strained and bulging while the bone remained intact. He ignored Sherlock, adding several more kilos with glee.

A resounding crack tore a raw, frantic scream from Sherlock that shredded his throat and reverberated through the room. Sherlock’s toes curled, knees attempting to bend up as he struggled to pull his arm in, sick and blinded with pain as he moved the muscles of his arm. His elbow had given, the trochanter notch pitching up from the back, protruding between the head head of the radius and ulna, basically inverting his elbow.

"Is there anything you would like to admit about John?"

Sherlock was panting for breath as sweat poured down the sides of his face. He was whimpering on each exhalation, washed nearly translucent pale with the skin around his lips ashen gray. He looked at Moran, terror and rage waring in the stormy depths, steadily avoiding looking at his arm. He parted his destroyed lips and spoke with a sharp tongue, his voice raw and broken. "H-he's stronger than you."

"I've fought him before, actually." Sebastian said, "Early on. True, he was a little beaten up, but Moriarty had let him rest. I could have beaten him when he was healthy though. You just know with some fighters. He was stubborn, and ability to change is key. He didn't last two rounds." Moriarty had been a bit bored and wanted a proper fight. Sebastian had rolled his eyes at John’s bravado but went along with it as always.

Sherlock made a sound that was intended to be a laugh, but he was utterly unable to manage it. "R-right over your head. Sh-shocking." His shoulder was shaking hard in an effort to relieve the horrific pain in his arm and shift the weight.

Sebastian sat down at the edge of the table and strapped Sherlock’s broken arm back into the restraints, dragging the weights along so that they were still dangling from the edge. "Sherlock, I want to hurt you. I hate you terribly. It would be very satisfying for me to gut you right now. But I won't. You would love that. You would just love to die. So I'll just play the tape instead." He chose his favorite tape, one of John following Moriarty's commands like a kicked puppy after his last beating, which left him weak and docile.

As was part of his self-inflicted penance, Sherlock listened to John, applying his own physical pain to what John must have been battling, listening with woefully empathetic ears.

Caring is not an advantage. Oh, how right his brother had been. He shifted, trying to take some of the weight off his arm as John's broken voice came over the speakers, gutting him in a way far more painful than Moran would ever manage.

“P-Please, I-I'm s-sorry!” John was begging. He still hadn't been trained not to speak yet, as that
had to come after he was trained to fear Sherlock. That effort had taken a lot of speaking, repeating, blaming and other things he needed his voice for, and thus the silence had come later.

"You're sorry?" Moriarty demanded in a furious tone.

"Y-Yes! I only m-meant that maybe he didn't mean for this to happen. M-"

There was a dull thud followed by a pitiful scream from John.

"Stop! Please! I'm sorry! H-His fault! H-His fault!"

Moriarty didn't seem satisfied. "Tell me who's fault it is."

John shook his head. "N-no! I c-can't s-say it! Y-Y-You'll.." He appeared to be having a panic attack, to which Moriarty rolled his eyes and kicked him hard in the stomach. "SAY IT!"

"It was Sh-Sherlock!"

The instant the word was said, Moriarty drew a knife.

"Do you think he could ever love you after that, Sherlock?" Sebastian asked. "Do you honestly think that I lost? Jim is dead, yes, but John is ruined."

Sherlock cracked an agonized laugh. "Are y-you deaf, o-or just daft? Already s-said you won. Al-ready said as mu-much. He's l-lost to me." He was having honest trouble breathing, cheeks slick with tears as his mind oh so helpfully provided a mental image of what was happening to John on the tape. It seemed his own heart failure was the most he could look forward to, and he was willing that to come on soon.

"You've still hope. You've hope that he will live on." Sebastian toyed with a knife and considered taking off Sherlock's fingers. He began to drag the blade gently across the base of the knuckles to demonstrate his thoughts. "That's the rub. He won't get better. He won't get past that terrifying mental block that is Sherlock Holmes without you there. That's how it was designed. All of his fears hinge on you hurting him. You're the center. If you proved yourself to him..." He made an evaporating gesture with his hands and the knife. "...gone. He would still be afraid, but he could function. But without anything to work the knot out, the only thing he can hope for it to fix each trauma, each lie, individually. That will be rather painful and stressful for him."

Sherlock had heard this last from Moriarty as well. He closed his eyes and shut it out. He wasn't going to hurt John, wasn't going to let that reality come to life for him. No. It was not the only way. Greg had worked miracles and John trusted him. His John now turned to Greg for protection from Sherlock. He thought back to the days of tapping on a clipboard for John, and then to the man he'd seen last, and the shift was remarkable. That had been real. That had been massive progress.

"I w-wonder if Mor...Mor-i-" he was fading, the stress on his body nearly reaching critical mass, "-arty ever th-thought of me while be-bedding you? H-He was obsessed with m-me. I'm w-willing to bet he thought of m-me when fucking y-you. Y-You were his...his second choice."

Moran went pale. He was a strategic man at heart. He could keep his calm in almost any situation, but this Sherlock had irritated him since he first caught Moriarty's attention. "Shut up." He snapped once then took a moment to calm himself. He had the tape running in the background, but decided he should make Sherlock watch as well. He picked up one end of the table and stood it up, causing Sherlock's weight to hang in the restraints. "How does your arm feel?" Sebastian asked as he picked another tape.

Sherlock screamed, his body roughly jarred, the bones in his elbow grating loudly as they shifted. He
drew breath and screamed again, only to quiet down to soft laughter, tears streaming down his face. Moran's reaction had been a bit too sharp in response to his earlier question. He grinned manically at Moran, licking blood off his teeth before spitting to the floor. "Dear m-me...he didn't c-call out my name, did h-he?" It was all mock sympathy and concern in his tone.

Sebastian hit him once in the stomach. "How strong you're being... Its impressive. Honestly, it is. You're still screaming and crying, but the occasional half-assed quip does make up for it, doesn't it?" Sebastian got an earlier tape and skipped ahead to John lying on the ground, bound, gagged and blindfolded. He was whimpering pitifully, occasionally muttering Sherlock's name, quietly begging him to come help. "You never came for him."

Sherlock refused to allow his focus to the tapes. He panted around the blow, trying to recover from it as he stared at Moran. He was on to something here, he could just pick him apart. He grit his teeth and struggled to get the agony under control long enough to speak.

"Y-you're the strong o-one, all this st-stiff upper lip when the only m-man you could come close to an...honest....honest emotion for just....a ate a r-round. So brave of you Seb-astian." His voice was glass on gravel, wrecked and overly deep and wispy. "M-makes you angry how m-much it hurts."

"If we're going to talk about emotional constipation, Sherlock, I believe your name must be top of the list. Moriarty was a proper psychopath. Sociopath. Whatever you want to call it. He couldn't feel. I was useful. That was alright with me. But you? You pretend that you can’t feel, but you feel just as deeply as anyone else. And that?" He pointed to the screen as John broke down into tears, "That hurts you."

Sherlock's eyes flicked to the screen and then back to Moran. "And in t-turn, soothes y-your pain, yes. I'm aw-aware. Heroin helps as well, j-just as a tip." His voice was fading as he sagged into the restraints, all of his injuries screaming at him terribly, legs quivering as though freezing to death.

Moran was bordering on what he could control, what he could rationalize and the damage he could do. He grabbed the strap used for waterboarding and locked Sherlock’s head in place. “You watch that damn screen and you tell me what you see. You tell me just what I did to your precious little John.”

*On screen, John was lying on his back with his hands bound uncomfortably behind him. He was already screaming, pleading and begging as Sherlock’s voice boomed over the loudspeakers. Moran was there too, and at a nod from Moriarty a wicked gleam shone in his eyes. He laid a familiar dark coat down and tossed John onto it, where the tormented man instantly reacted to both the smell and the texture of the fabric, indicating it had been used before. “NO! NO! P-Please! I’LL DO ANYTHING! Please! SHERLOCK, PLEASE!” John thrashed and tears rolled down his face as Moran tore away what was left of his clothing and slowly forced his knees apart.*

“I took him on his back like a whore,” Moran spat and checked to make sure Sherlock was watching.

Sherlock shut down. His vision tunneled and he saw only the horrific, terrifying action taking place on the screen as it burned into his eyes. John’s screams tore right through him and left Sherlock pale, trembling, and whispering silent pleas for it to just *stop*. John. His John. Moran had raped his John.

Moran held Sherlock’s hair and made sure he watched every second. Blind hatred for Sherlock surged in him and he slammed his fist into his face one more time. This man had shot Jim. Worse, he’d become the object of Jim’s unhealthy obsession for years. He’d almost got him back after the fall, when the web had been dismantled and Moran was one of the few still hanging around, doing Jim’s dirty work, but then Sherlock had come back, and everything spiraled down once more. Abruptly he was unbuckling Sherlock’s bruised limbs with fumbling haste. He dragged Sherlock off
the edge of the table so he was on his stomach, face pointed towards the television through which John screamed.

Sherlock was mostly oblivious to what Moran was doing, his mental faculties shut down to nothing, focus only on the hell John was in.

Moran held Sherlock’s hips still with one hand and fumbled with his zipper with the other. With a mixture between a snarl and a smirk, Moran grabbed Sherlock by the hair and turned his face to the television. “See that? See how he screamed? I hope you scream like that too. Don’t take your fucking eyes off it.” He was furious at this man for killing Jim, but there was a silver lining. “You know boss. Always so result driven. Never let me had any fun.” He roughly tore at Sherlock’s belt, which he couldn’t properly see with Sherlock bent over the table. “Just once. Just that once. But now he’s dead, thanks to you, and he can’t do shit about this.”

Sherlock's vision snapped off as his sluggish brain caught up to Moran's intention only seconds before blinding, all-consuming and inescapable pain ripped through his body and he was violently rocked forward against the table. His stomach cut into the unforgiving metal, but that hardly registered.

Surely he was being torn in half, the pain bisecting and overwhelming. His brain shut down, collapsing in on itself. He'd never experienced the act of sharing his body with anyone, to any degree, and this...oh god this was worse than the arm, worse than any physical pain he'd ever endured.

He could not pull in enough air to scream, eyes wide and horrified as he choked on his own throat. Time ceased to exist, only this pain, this inescapable, visceral, humiliating agony.

John was left alone on the ground. He’d scrambled off the coat as quickly as he could when his tormentor left him, and now he curled up in a tight ball and wept. It was not the simple crying of someone sad or upset or in pain. No, this was guttural, heartbreaking sobs of fear, anguish and betrayal. He was clearly in pain from the way he crossed his legs and moved only his upper body, and several of his cuts had been opened in the process. Blood pooled around him on the concrete floor and he sobbed in devastation, hating himself, disgusted with his own body, and wishing without hope that death would claim him.

Moran left the room once he was finished and slammed the door behind him, leaving Sherlock with his functioning limbs strapped back down on the table, staring at the ceiling in blind shock, ohn shrieking in the background.

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The next three days passed much the same. Moran would come in with his sloppy, devastating torture, force Sherlock to watch the tapes, and bend him over the table if he was in the mood. Sherlock had become his own little punching bag, a way to let off all the frustration and anger that the severely fucked up man had pent up inside. Moran walked in around noon, half drunk and angry. He needed to break this stubborn streak of Sherlock’s before he could start to train him. Sebastian bid himself to be patient.

Sherlock came awake in tears, the immediate feeling of something horrifically wrong, fever and stress getting to his body enough to touch his mind. "John," he breathed as though waking up from a very bad dream, "something's wrong." He frowned then as he came fully aware, realizing what he'd just done. The pain in his arm was remarkable, mixing with the broken fingers, the agonizing burns,
and the destruction of his knee cap. His gunshot wounds were all but forgotten, that pain soft in the light of this new reality.

He sucked in a sharp breath, blinking up at the ceiling, the hand below his broken arm already purpling.

"Oh, isn't that sweet." Sebastian laughed a bit and pretended to gag. "All this time I thought you were the one who protected him, but it's clear now. He might be the submissive one on the outside, he's more sentimental, yes, but you're the truly dependent one. He was living just fine before he met you. In fact, meeting you was the worst thing that ever happened to him."

Sebastian had been working in the web while Sherlock was unconscious and now returned to his subject. "I'm actually glad he met you. I had so much fun working on him. But you saw that, didn't you? He was rather attractive when we started. Nice hair. Good spirit. Got a bit too thin towards the end. I'd loved to have had him when he was fresh. He was quite the fighter."

Sherlock could not stop the silent fall of tears. It was absurd that the truth vocalized would have such an effect on him, but it did. He'd nearly shriveled and died without John, and once it had become clear that he'd lost him, he was ready to shut down. Nothing mattered outside of the man. How "Y-yes I....quite ag-agree with you, Sebastian."

"Yes, I quite enjoyed the time Moriarty let me have cutting him. Mostly he kept all the fun parts to himself, but I still got to beat him occasionally. It's a shame I didn't get to have him more." He shrugged, "But he got all skinny and pathetic. It's no fun if they don't have any fight in them."

Moran gave him another sadistic grin. "You're useless right now. Rest. Recover. Think about agreeing with me or what will happen if you don't."

Sherlock's chest had seized up at Moran's words, the very idea of that happening to John so indescribably terrible it was nearly enough to snap his sanity. John Watson was a strong, proud man and to take that from him would be beyond words. How pathetic was that? How ordinary? He closed his eyes as pain radiated across his body from far too many places. It had yet to be a day. The only good in that was that he would die soon without a doubt. He could already feel the off change in his heart, the way the organ didn't quite beat right, the whispers of a murmur there already. He'd not been properly fed up or cared for, his body already so incredibly strained before this.

His stomach flexed hard and his fingers were starting to go numb. "Will n-never agree with y-you...n-not leaving here, n-n-not going to agree."

"You know, he was so obedient to Jim, Watson would have dropped to his knees and pleasured anyone he asked." Moran thought perhaps he had hit a weak spot and by no means was going to waste it.

"John would have let me do it too. He was so weak at the end. So confused. We were going to sort of endear him to someone, likely me, by torturing him only when that person wasn't with him. It would take a while, but he would get rather attached. In the end we decided to attach him to you, if you wanted. That would have made training you to think you tortured him all the more amusing when the two of you got back together. Him hopelessly endared, and you believing you raped him. If you'd like, I can work on him again. Make him an obedient little bitch. Would you like to watch that?"

Sherlock settled those words, verbatim, right to the core of his mind to be referenced if ever in doubt. He utilized his didactic memory and kept the smell, feel, pitch, tone, and cadence all in one neat little package and locked it away deep. It was a touchstone. He shook his head at Sebastian and pushed.
"Y-you did all the kn-knee work. Likely did n-not ask out of f-f-fear that your madman wo-would like....like him....better th-than you."

He spat right at Sebastian then, old clotted blood mixed with bile, sneering despite the violent trembling of his body.

It was a very foolish thing indeed to allow his hubris to play any part in his life, let alone allow it to dictate his speech. "You know, John still fears me. If you gave me a week I would have him on his back willingly. All of your progress with him could be broken down. Crumbled. Turned to dust. Would you like to watch that?" Sebastian grabbed Sherlock by the throat and leaned very close over him. "I could go get him. I could go get your precious John. I have no desire to make a scene. Find him, get in, get out. No week long plan with the government involved. I could drag him back here. I could have him right in front of you while he screamed for mercy. Then I could train him. I could whip him until he does whatever I said. I could warp his mind until he comes willingly to my bed."

Sherlock began to laugh again, the force of his chest moving ripping tears from his eyes as he shifted the damage, tugging at thin scabs and unsettling clots. He smiled as he closed his eyes, licking his lips. "If y-you could...w-would already be done. St-stuck with m-me and I won't play." He had no fear whatsoever that Mycroft would fail him in this. Surely not when he'd sacrificed himself, not when he knew how deeply he loved John. Mycroft was sentimental in that way. He'd huff and pout and carry on about his suffering while viciously guarding John. His brother, in this, would not fail him.

"I had no interest in John until I found out how much he means to you. Now I can't get the idea out of my head." Moran walked in a circle around the table before deciding to put in a different tape, one with no video. He turned the lights off and left the room.

It was silent for a bit until a tearing scream shattered the stillness and reverberated through the room. John's voice came at random times, with sometimes a minute in between, sometimes three, sometimes ten, and sometimes with only a few seconds. Sebastian had other affairs to attend to and was gone for over an hour.

Sherlock lay flinching violently at each horrific sound torn from John, at each ghastly shriek ripped out of his chest. Twice he was sick to his stomach, narrowly hanging his head off the table to sickness.

His broken arm was free, and with a sharp scream he managed to sling it over his chest though the action nearly caused him to black out. It took several pulsing, throbbing minutes before he dare test the fingers. Thumb was functioning, as was the middle. It hurt horrifically, and to even try moving his elbow resulted in blinding pain. Instead he moved his shoulder until his shattered hand was over the clasp of his other wrist. With grim determination and unwavering resolve, he set in on the painstaking task of slipping the buckle. He was openly and loudly sobbing by the time he got it free.

He shook out his good hand, shaking terribly and scrambling to free himself at his hips before managing his ankles. He was a wreck as he dropped his legs, the one with the wrecked knee cap making him sway sharply and nearly black out. He took a few slow breaths to calm himself and then set his eyes to the room. He shook his head and reached down to his own shoe, removed it carefully with his good hand, then worked fast to tear the lace free. It was his only chance at escaping, and he'd have to go now.

He managed a Windsor around his neck with his limited mobility and tightened the rope until his breathing was cut off and the lace was cutting sharply into his neck. His fingers shook as he tied the knot off again and he began to feel the slow slide of his consciousness leaving him.
He slid off the table and dragged himself to the corner of the room. There, his eyes full of tears and his throat wrapped tight, he forced himself to think of John with his cane, jumper, and easy smile as the darkness flooded into his vision and swept him away.

Chapter End Notes

Another chapter, as promised!!
We love our readers. Can I just say that? You guys are awesome.
If you don't mind me doing a little bit of a rant for a moment, let me clear something up.

On this sight there is a lot of smut. That's fine. But there are also a lot of fics that glorify rape and make it something sexual and hot.
Which it is not.
This is what it is. Painful and frightening.
Just wanted to clear that up.

As always, comments are appreciated.
As always, there are warnings on this fic describing just what you will encounter.
As always, everything is headed for tears and heartache, but that's just what we like, isn't it?

ON A HAPPIER note, John is getting a bit better, isn't he? Just a little? Maybe...?
Deep underground, past layers and layers of security, Mycroft had made a safe place for John. Nothing short of an airstrike was going to take them out now.

Greg moved back to John's room and settled back down at John's side with a hand wrapped around John's fingers as he lay sedated. He'd left a note for Mycroft to please join him when he had time. Greg had left the control room when they'd tracked it down to three potential flights, and all had teams combing the data, scrolling through security feeds and passenger lists, cargo flights and private jets.

Mycroft swiped his key card, entered a code, and walked past the guards in order to enter the room. "We've narrowed it down to one flight, and can pinpoint the city it landed in. But after that the trail goes dead. We have no other information. Believe me though, we're searching. There are other variables; they very easily could have hopped another plane or...It hardly matters. I'm pulling everything I have. I will find him." Mycroft sat down heavily next to John and stared at him absently. He looked, on the outside, as well kept and manicured as ever. Apart from the frown lines that had worsened and dark circles under his eyes, he appeared about the same. "How are you holding up?"

"Helps to be in a secure building," Greg said honestly, exhausted and brittle. He was leaned in against John's side, head pillowed next to John's hip. He stared at Mycroft, his eyes darting back and forth. "We have to find him. What if..." what if they don't kill him, "what if they do this to him? How could we hope- his mind is so-" he shook his head and flexed his grip on John's hand. 

"Nothing...there's no...no vehicle to track, no mobile communications to intercept, no nothing?" The strain of tears pressed against his eyes and Greg had to stop speaking.

Mycroft already forced himself to consider that option and reached a very difficult, painful decision. "If they've tortured him and he's as far gone as John, I plan on helping him overdose." Mycroft pursed his lips but remained stoic. "This would ruin him. He wouldn't be able to snap out of it, or at least, it would take a while and John would need to help."

Mycroft reviewed all the information he had. "All the private airports in the area have security cameras. A few of them were disabled at the time, at several different locations. They're deliberately covering their trail. We'll find them, but there's so many leads and a distinct lack of information on any of them."

Greg paled and looked sharply away, his fingers flexing on John's. They'd have to do the same for the pair of them. John would never recover from Sherlock's death, either. "They both have fought so incredibly hard, Mycroft. It...this cannot be how it ends. We have to find him. We have to find him." For the first time in quite a long while, panic started to rattle Greg's chest. He swallowed hard and clung to John with the arm bandaged tight from the round that grazed him. He was exhausted from the mission and the days leading up to it. he was worn paper thin. "We have to find him. Mycroft, it can't end this way, it can't."
Mycroft nodded and looked down. "I suppose we'll have to make it look like an accident, or like he did it himself." There were formalities he would get into serious trouble for if he bypassed without authorization, and euthanasia was one of them. "I'm looking, Greg. I promise. There are scores of researchers tracking every move at those airports and software scanning all security feeds from public areas for anyone with a similar facial structure to the men who took him. My own code, it is flawless. If Sherlock, Moran, or any of the men we got a clear look at on the hospital security feeds passes any CCTV, we will know it immediately."

Greg made a trapped, pained sound and slid his hand over his mouth. Propping his elbow on John's bed and staring at the man, Greg ran his thumb over John's knuckles again and again. A moment later he picked up John's hand and tipped his forehead to John's naturally curled knuckles. With eyes tightly closed he fought down the waves of pain from his rolling heart. "How the fucking hell did your men lose him. How?" He asked it against John's fingers, guilt shredding through him as all the hope seemed to bleed out of the room.

"I have not given up," Mycroft growled in return, giving Greg a look that could kill. "I've no idea how they lost him, other than the fact that they cut into Sherlock's throat while driving away and stopped when my men gave them distance! It's standard procedure when a hostage is threatened: fall back then follow from a distance. My team had no reason to think they were after a hostage with Moriarty dead."

Greg flinched at the mention of them cutting into Sherlock's throat even as he leaned forward. "Good. Don't you quit. We don't quit on them after all of this. We don't." He was speaking in broad terms, intentionally driving a double point to their considering mercy killings or suicide. "Now tell me what I can do. Give me a way to help. Something. Anything."

Mycroft gave away his nerves as he shifted uncomfortably. "They've made no demands." Mycroft pointed out. "And they didn't kill Sherlock when they could have, leading me to believe they want him for other reasons. We need to entertain the possibility that he is being tortured or at least held for some unsavory purpose. If he comes back a mess, it would help to have John functioning a bit."

Greg nodded. "Mycroft, what do you think are the odds of Sherlock being taken to the same location John was held? Christ, I hate to suggest it, but what if he can help us identify where that was or what sort of building we are looking for? Anything? Might be able to get him talking, but he needs...I need support on this. We have to keep him here, okay? Please, just for a while, let us breathe, sit safe for once."

With a nod, Mycroft swiftly replied. "You can use this facility for as long as it takes," Mycroft stared at John, the object of Sherlock's affections that had been so violently ripped away. "Yes, perhaps if we know what type of building it was we could narrow it down a bit more. Or learn if they kept him moving or in one place. Would you like me to be here for it, or do you want me to leave?"

Greg looked over at John and thought about it for a few minutes. "You should stay. He knows you were involved with this and it would help, I think, if you could back me up."

He ran his hand over the back of his neck. "He's been down for hours. We should wake him. See if one of the docs will give him a jab, reverse the sedative."

Mycroft agreed to stay and called in John's primary doctor to reverse the sedative. When John woke up it took him a few moments to recall to mind what had happened and why the room looked different.
"What...where's..." He sat up a bit and was greatly relieved to see Greg. "What happened?" He whispered and held the man's hand weakly.

Greg tightened his grip on John's palm. "We are in Mycroft's main building, much safer, no threats here. Moriarty is dead, John. He killed him." He let that settle for a moment, wondering if John remembered Sherlock's move in front of him.

John's eyes darted around like an animal expecting attack. "If he's dead, they'll be coming for me," he said in a voice almost resigned to his fate.

Greg shook his head. "They don't have a chance of getting you here, do they Mycroft? This is as secure as it gets, we all have to badge in."

He took a deep, slow breath, looking over to Mycroft for a moment. "We...John, we can't find him. We are looking, but...it would help if you could tell us anything, and I mean anything at all, about where you were held while Moriarty had you."

"They'll-" at mention of Sherlock being missing, John froze. "They....they took him?" Anguish was etched into the deepening lines on his face. "Oh...God, no.... I hope for his sake he's dead."

Greg cleared his throat and chose to ignore that, pressing forward with the issue. "John...can you tell us anything about where they held you? Sherlock was alive when we lost sight of them. We are trying to help him."

John swallowed hard as if trying to manually force down his own panic. This was not a subject he wished to discuss. But John was a loyal sort of man and he always managed to somehow rise to the occasion when someone needed his help. "They...it was different a lot. For the first bit it was small, wooden floors and drywall. Then it was big, like a warehouse of factory or something." He knotted his hands together. It was easier to simply disconnect from what had happened than to delve back into it. "Always cold. Bad lighting. Sometimes with blindfolds. I was there for a long time but it was still cold all the time."

Greg nodded, trying to be encouraging. "That helps, John, that helps. Was there anything that stood out? Markings or emblems anywhere? Perhaps on the piping or on the locks? Any insignia on the walls or furnishings, or outside sounds you could hear? Hate to make you think on it, John, I really do but we've got to find him. Were you flown there?"

John pressed the heels of his hands to his forehead and squeezed his eyes shut. His mind had decided that the first three weeks of his capture were too difficult to deal with, and therefore, as a protective mechanism, had refused to allow him to view them. "I...he...I think I was drugged. I don't remember the beginning..." He was rather upset with himself and tried to force his mind back, but tears sprang to his eyes and he fell silent for quite some time.

"I think it was an assembly plant," John finally said, "With the conveyor belts and machines and dust."

Greg looked over to Mycroft in question, wondering if that would be enough to get on with. He kept his hands where John could take them if he wanted. "That's good, John, really good. Thank you. Anything you can think of at all will help." He drew in a deep breath and watched, openly worried about him.

John nodded and stared ahead blankly. He was rather empty now, often staying in what appeared to be pensive silence for hours. But John wasn't contemplating anything of importance in his quietness. His mind too feeble, too shattered to occupy itself. "I'll try to think more later," he whispered in a hollow voice, still staring into nothingness.
Greg sighed and nodded to Mycroft, leaning over and speaking to him softly. "Let's get a telly in here, let him watch old movies or something? This is intolerable, we've got to find something that settles him."

Mycroft nodded and headed for the door. "TV, movies, books, entertainment. Got it."

Greg looked back to John and carefully picked up his hand. "John, can we try a bit of food or water today?"

His stomach twisted in sympathy as John shook his head, his expression locked in place. "No.....I'd rather not...." He spoke in an almost dreamy, disconnected way that shed light on how little gravity he recognized in his situation. "You're never going to let me out anyway. There's no point in stressing myself."

The words were horrible to hear, loading Greg down with guilt. He had no idea how to convey to John his pure desire to help. Greg looked at John for a long time then, keeping hold of his hand and staring at him.

"I will let you out, John. God help me I will. Please, just let me get Sherlock back...let me get him back and then you can tell us what you want, okay? Please. John I'm sorry, I know this...god it's been horrible. I'm so sorry, but I will let you out. I don't want you kept against your will. It's not safe right now, but it will be. It will."

"No, it won't," John remarked with little inflection and kept his eyes on the opposite wall. "Sherlock will be broken like me. I'll die in here or in the Thames. You won't let me out until it's safe but I'll never get out because it will never be safe." He gave Greg an apologetic, melancholy look. "You've done everything you could, Greg. It's time to let me go."

Greg closed his eyes and let go of John's hand. "Maybe you're right. Good help me maybe so. You obviously don't care what happens to him, or yourself. Moriarty is dead, and Sherlock on the slab to keep you safe. But you've given up."

He dragged a hand down his face, swallowing against the tightness of defeat in his throat.

"You are not going to die in pain. I refuse. The Thames will hurt. It’s dark, and you’ll have to fall, and the water is freezing. Can you just...just wait until we find him? He- I can't tell him...I can't tell him that after all that, you're still gone. Please?"

Greg watched as John closed his eyes. "It's hopeless now." John spoke just above a whisper. "If they've got Sherlock, it won't matter what happens to me. If they've tortured Sherlock, you should shoot him on the spot. He'd be grateful."

John looked away bitterly and a few tears rolled down his expressionless face. "You want me to wait until you find him. You want me to wait until I've seen the damage they've done to him. You want me to stick around to see him terrified and broken." His face remained stoic, even as a choked sob escaped him.

Greg's gut twisted in sick worry at John's words. "I want you to wait because he loves you," Greg countered, "and it will kill him if you're gone. You don't owe it to any of us, but it's not hopeless. It's not. You can't see your progress, but I can. You're still in there, John, and I don't want to give up."

He watched as John cried, tears of grief and for once, not panic. "You've come so far. So far. He's...don't punish him for trying to save you."

"I'm not punishing ANYONE!" John shouted, suddenly, desperately angry. "All that's ever
happened is people punishing ME!" John held his arms to his chest and let out another pitiful whimper.

"I don't want to wait around just to see him ruined!" John lamented. "I don't care about my own progress!"

"You are, punishing him" Greg returned, not at all ready to back down from this. "And that's not all that's ever happened, John. You are loved by a great many people and the only time you've been punished is when madmen had you captive! Since then, you've had all the help it is possible to give. You deserve that kindness, I'm not holding it against you, but I'll not sit here and allow you to believe your entire life is nothing but what's been done to you! Now that he's potentially damaged, you don't want him anymore? How is that not punishing him?" Greg knew that there was far more to it John's feelings than the way he'd phrased it, but he was making every effort to shock John out of it. "He loves you, John."

The words were not well received. "I don't want your kindness!" John shouted in return, belligerent and stubborn. "I don't deserve kindness! I deserve to die!"

John bared his teeth at Greg and balled his hands into fists. "Don't you dare say I don't want him. Don't you DARE! I'm not just tossing him out now that he's broken! I'm being realistic!" John was digging his fingernails into his healed palms again, but the nurses at the mental hospital had kept them trimmed short, and it had little effect. "He loved me. He won't after whatever they're doing to him. He'll probably hate me." John was starting to understand Sherlock's anguish at his condition. The thought of Sherlock being taught to hate or fear him was...horrible.

Greg kept his seat by force of will, not wanting to scare John but angry all the same. "You do not deserve to die! How can you say that? What crime have you committed? Does that then mean that Sherlock deserves to die, now that he's potentially been tortured?"

John's expression broke and he buried his face in his hands, breaking down into a fit of terrible sobs. "No, Greg, I deserve to die." He looked up to see if Greg understood, then clarified. "As in I've earned it. Like you deserve an award for dealing with me this long. After all this, I deserve peace."

He shook violently and felt another panic attack coming. "And what does it matter? He'll hate me anyway!"

Greg shook his head. "No he will not hate you. They will not have him long enough and that aside, do you hate him? No. You damn well don't. You are tossing him out. What do you imagine will happen to him when he wakes up and I've only to say, 'Sorry, John decided you were much too terrible to stomach, he's gone with the needle instead.'"

The words were an extremely harsh version of reality, but an angry John was a determined and stubborn one and hell did they need that just now.

"I'm not tossing him out! Damnit, Greg! I'm tossing myself out! I'm broken! I know it! I've seen the way you all look at me. The way Sherlock looked at me. You miss me but I'm still here. You miss the way I was. I'm gone. John died. You might as well kill off the shell." John had turned over and pressed his face down on his pillow.

John's words landed as effectively as if John had thrown a blow at Greg's face. He sat there, head spinning, trying to find his bearings.

I've earned it.

Kill off the shell.
He dragged his hand down his face and leaned forward, gripping John's shoulder just to let him know he wasn't alone. Overcome with grief, he had to give himself a full two minutes before he could command his voice. "You are not a shell, John Watson." His voice was thick and heavy, weighed down by terrible fear of watching John waste away. "You are changed, but you are not lost and gone. He misses you because while you've been able to watch him, to hear him, he's only managed to know where you are and know he will never get to see you again. He- god John if you could have heard him. He just- his hands have been so tied. He tried everything he could think of and then, when it was clear that his trying was killing you, he stopped. He stopped, John. You know him. When does Sherlock ever stop?"

He took a slow, deep breath and squeezed John's shoulder again. "I look at you as I do because I hurt for you, John, not because I miss who you were. I only miss that for you, if that makes any sense at all. You are not a shell, even if that's how you feel."

John hugged the pillow and kept his back to the world and all it's injustice. "I am a shell. I'm not John anymore. I'm not getting better." He sat up and looked at Greg with a tear stained, puffy face. "I'm just as scared as I was. Water, talking, other people... I'm just learning to deal with it better. It's not getting easier." John wanted to reach out and curl up in Greg's arms, but he didn't want to shout at him then ask to be held in the span of a few minutes.

"Sherlock doesn't stop. You're right about that. But I'm entitled to think of myself just for a bit. Just a little! I've stayed this long because it's what he wanted and what you wanted, but it's not what I want!"

Greg listened to John with a sinking heart, keeping gentle hold of John's bicep. He stared at him, his breathing catching. It was all getting to him after so long, such a long time of pushing and struggling. John was claiming his progress was just an illusion, and perhaps it was. He felt a tear dart down his cheek and swiftly dragged a hand down his face to clear it away, clearing his throat.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, watching John openly and honestly. "You're right. You are. You've every right to think of yourself and I'd not meant to ask you to stop, but I have, haven't I? I...you both mean..." he cleared his throat again and looked away, breathing deeply for a few seconds, trying to get himself under control. When he looked back, his vision was still blurred but he met John's eye honestly. His voice was hushed, deeply pained. "I'll...I'll help you, if that's what you want, I'll help you. I've been wrong. I've seen hope and forced you towards it. I think there is hope, and I-" He dragged his hand over his damp cheeks as he felt the tears slip down. "He'll understand...eventually. Maybe. It doesn't matter. You've- I can't be part of the people you have in your mind who hurt you. I can't stomach it. I won't keep your choices from you. Tell me what you want."

John was greatly relieved to hear that Greg would help him. It provided an option to escape he had been denied before. Even when Sherlock had claimed to do it, John had his doubts.

He'll understand...eventually.

John flinched and remembered with shocking clarity how he had fought when he thought Sherlock was going to kill himself. "Damn it," he muttered to himself as slammed his fist down on the bed. "Greg, you had better not change your mind about this," John took a few deep breaths to calm himself down. "I'll stay. I'll stay until you find him. I'll go talk to him. I want to be walking on my own, not panicking, in my own cloths and I want to be able to drink a little to show him I'm alright. Then, if he's been tortured and wants to die, you've got to promise to still let me go."

Greg was nearly sick with relief. "I promise," he breathed, letting his forehead tip to the mattress at John's side for a moment, his heart slowing from panic. He was going to do it, right then if that's what John had asked. He'd have done it, helped Mycroft find Sherlock, and then likely done the
same for him before turning himself in for murder. He dragged in a slow, deep breath, actively fighting tears, exhausted and stressed more than he'd ever been in his life.

Slowly he sat back up, grinding his palms into his eyes to get himself together. "Okay...okay...thank you, John. I promise. I do."

John leaned his head back, utterly devastated. He had no desire to see Sherlock tortured and beaten. He was terrified of the idea that right this very moment, Sherlock might be strapped down on the table or chained to the wall. "When he comes I want to be ready. I want to be ready for him. I'm going to walk in and help him if I can."

John was going to stay alive for Sherlock. He focused his mind on that goal and used it as a lens to focus his energies like a magnifying glass in the sun. "If he doesn't want to die, and doesn't want me to die, I'll stay with him until I can't take it anymore."

Greg leaned up suddenly, wrapping his arms around John and hugging him to his chest. "Thank you," he breathed, honestly grateful, a weight lifted off his shoulders, "thank you, John." He held him tight, just trying to breathe. "God, thank you. Anything you need, anything, I'll get it. Thank you."

He gentled his hold and rest his hip beside John on the mattress, dragging his hands over his face, "I'm sorry...been a lot." He laughed then, shaking his head, "right bastard saying that to you though."

"No, Greg. You shouldn't thank me. I've done nothing but lie here and cry and scream." John breathed a sigh of pure relief and curled up into Greg. "Honestly. You've done nothing but help me, Greg. You've done nothing but help me and keep me comfortable. I shouldn't ask you to kill me. I shouldn't put that on you. It's terrible and mean and awful and I'm a right bastard for doing it." John shook just a bit, caught between being a good person and wishing to die.

Greg happily responded to John curling up in his arms by moving fully on the bed and pulling him in close, running his fingers through John's hair. "Stop that," he said fondly, his voice gentle and much calmer, "I mean yeah, the not asking me to kill you thing would be nice, but I get it even if I hate it." He tipped his forehead to the crown of John's head and breathed deep. "You're stronger than you know, John. Don't argue with me, I know you don't think so. I just find you to be an incredible man."

He felt John take in a deep breath as he lay against his chest. "I'm not strong, or incredible. I'm broken and pathetic. What happened doesn't matter. It's just the way I am." He nestled close to Greg. "But thank you for the compliment. I am so glad you're here. I think I would have died just from the stress alone if you weren't here."

Greg held him tight, pulling the blankets up around John as he kept him in his arms. He hoped Mycroft had something to work with, sick to his stomach each and every time he thought of Sherlock.

"Well, to be honest, it's massively stressful to be away from you. It helps that I can be here, that you let me be here."

John settled in to sleep. "Being here helps you?" John didn't sound very convinced. "Didn't...didn't you have a wife when I left?" John struggled to remember, but he did recall seeing Greg with a ring. He took his hand and barely made out a pale ring where it had blocked the sun for a while, but it had faded.

Greg’s chest ached, startled to find that John had forgotten. Not that it was something that would be
high on the list to remember, but the loss of his family had taken Greg down to his knees, and were it not for John, Greg likely wouldn't have survived it. His throat worked for a moment as he tried to push aside the sharp stab of loss.

"Packed her things and left me long before all of this happened. Took the children, they...you remember? You talked me down many times before you headed for Africa." He watched as John's scarred fingers explored his own hand, a swell of something warm, tight, and protective rising in his chest. He pulled John in again for another embrace, brushing his lips over the crown of John's head. He didn't know exactly why, it wasn't particularly in the normal range of behavior for blokes. Then again, none of this was normal. He breathed deep and gentled his hold.

"And yeah, helps a lot being here. Makes me feel less useless, keeps me from worrying over what you're doing and how you are. Don't like anyone who doesn't know you around you, if that makes any sense." He ran the pad of his thumb over what was left of John's knuckles as he spoke.

John was more than grateful for the affection. He drank it in, seeking touch that wasn't painful as if it would counter and cancel all the beatings he had been through. "You're not useless, Greg. You're not useless at all. I don't know what I would do if you left." John nestled into Greg, the man he had come to associate with peace, safety, and goodness.

"I won't leave. I won't." Greg flexed his grip on John and stretched them out a bit. "How about you sleep for a bit, and when you wake up, we can try some ice and perhaps a movie?"

John nodded in the calm, absent way he had been acting recently and nestled down to sleep. "Alright, Greg. I can eat the ice now. I can stay calm. A movie would be nice. I haven't watched a movie in ages."

Greg felt John go slowly lax in his arms, his breathing evening out, relaxing down into sleep. Very soon after John's fingers relaxed, Mycroft entered silently.

"How is he?" He carried in a bag with some of John's personal items; books, movies, and music. The one Sherlock had played when John had panicked was left out.

"He's...motivated, if you can believe it. Any leads?" Greg was hopeful as John rested against his chest, sleeping on his own.

Mycroft looked down at John with great pride. "Motivated? By what? I sincerely hope it's not still suicide." Mycroft set down a pile of movies and opened the door once more to wheel in a thin TV that had been delivered for John.

Greg watched Mycroft for a moment, waiting for him to walk back in. "I put that option on the table, and he's chosen to get himself better for Sherlock's sake. He wants to help him recover if that's applicable."

Mycroft couldn't fathom how John was still cohesive, let alone wanting to help. "He's loyal. We know that. He's gone from thinking Sherlock tortured him to staying alive to help him." Mycroft sat down and watched John sleeping peacefully. "And what if Sherlock can't be helped?"

"Don't," Greg said sharply, shaking his head, "don't even go there. We are going to find him before that. What was done to John, mind and body, took almost a year. Sherlock will not be gone that long. Don't."

He started at the wall across from Mycroft. "Did his information give you anything?"
Mycroft held up his hands briefly and dropped the subject. "It tells me very...very little. Moriarty preferred large rooms, usually abandoned... But even if we were to have a criminal profiler analyze that, it's an entirely new man at the controls now."

"I cannot stand this," Greg whispered, tucking John deeper into the blankets against him. "I can't stand it."
He looked at Mycroft, wondering how Sherlock's brother was managing at all. "Do you hold any hope?"

Mycroft wanted nothing more than to protect Sherlock from the torment he was surely going through. That had been his one charge, the only constant thing since he was young: Take care of Sherlock.

"I have to hope. I need to hope. If there's no hope, they won't try." Mycroft closed his eyes and put his hands over his face. "Sherlock... He's stubborn. He'll hold out. But his mind was already so broken and frail when we started."

Greg made a face, shaking his head. "He lost his will, Mycroft. His mind was fine, perhaps making it worse for him, but he could still think. He was depressed."

"And will he have the will to resist? John... he's recovering, but he's nothing like he was before. I don't want that to happen to Sherlock."

Mycroft sighed heavily and leaned back in his chair. "People like Sherlock and I just should not get attached. It's messy for everyone involved."

Greg looked to the ceiling, having heard this cop from Sherlock before. "Well, that's just rubbish, isn't it? Still human, the pair of you. Not above the rest of us. I don't want this for Sherlock either. I do think he has a better chance. Knows what he's up against in advance, knows the tactics. You are a brilliant man, I cannot imagine them having him as long as John."

Mycroft turned away. The amount of pressure on him was insurmountable and suffocating. He had to find his brother before he was turned into a quivering ball of fear. "I'm not brilliant. Not brilliant enough to find him."

Greg gave Mycroft a moment, gently trailing his fingers through John's hair, wildly protective of him. His tone was gentle when he finally spoke again. "Mycroft... call in your favors. Cash them all in. Get help. You have been... hell, all I've been doing is sitting with John. You've done the heavy lifting. I know you're tired. Is there anything I can do, or any favors I can call in? If you think anything the Yard can do will help, I'll cash in every debt I'm owed and beg favor where I don't already have it. If you know anyone at all that can help, call it in. I'm worried about you."

Mycroft took out his phone and stared at it. "I'll call in favors. I've favors I can cash all over the world. The problem is that now that Moriarty is dead, this is less of a priority. There's no point in spending tax payer's dollars to find some random man."

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Far away from his brother and the safety of him, Sherlock was coming awake, his throat raw and incredibly painful, confused with fever. "John?" He croaked, not yet opening his eyes or trying to move.

Moran glared down at Sherlock. "That was stupid, Sherlock dear." He had the man strapped back down, both arms this time, on the cold, hard table. "You'll pay for that."
Sherlock's chest fluttered as he began to breathe in the quick, shallow method of panic. "Please," he whispered, soaked so completely in fevered agony he could hardly form words. Each movement of his chest pulled terribly at the burns and upset the lacerations. His leg was a brilliant mess of pain, the backs of his eyelids filled with grit and his head pounding so hard he was sure he was going to be ill. The idea of adding to the horrible mess was intolerable, nearly unthinkable. He dragged in another deep breath, feeling as though he were taking in shards of glass where there should be air, the slow spreading infection in his lungs rattling. "Please."

Moran loved to hear Sherlock beg. He wished to hurt him, but didn't want the man to go unconscious. "I'm going to hurt you again, Sherlock. I'm going to rip you apart, and not let you die." He put his hand on Sherlock's injured knee, feeling the swollen heat of infection under his palm. "Unless you decide to tell me what you did to John Watson."

Sherlock was gasping for air, fear getting the best of him. "St-stop, stop," he panted, pained, clipped gasps audible and honest. He grit his teeth, trying to get the cotton out of his head so he could think. He could win this. He was smarter than an ex-military sniper. He could do this. He exhaled slowly and spoke a truth. "I h-hurt h-im," he stammered through the nauseating pain. He had hurt John, had dug a blade into his arm the one time. It was a truth, he could manage that.

He watched as Moran nodded.

Fantastic, the hulking man thought to himself. It was a small, innocent truth, but it would be a gateway to everything Moran wanted. "You hurt him?" Sebastian repeated and took his hand off Sherlock's injured knee. "Oh, I suppose you did, didn't you. You cut him. I've the knife still, if you ever want to see it again. If you want to remember." Moran took this time to get a tape, one with only a few moments of footage on it.

A camera zoomed in on Sherlock. He was crouched over John, knife in hand. John screamed and tried to back away, but the knife was dragged across his arm anyway, creating a swift bleeding gash.

Moran turned Sherlock's head to the side and strapped it down facing the screen, the thick, heavy leather over half his ear, wrapped around his sodden forehead, the pressure of it bruising the opposite side of his face against the harsh metal slab.

Sherlock panted hard, trying to breathe without moving his chest, closing his eyes against the footage on the screen. He'd been so ignorant then, so blind to the depth of the situation. He'd figured John for horribly traumatized, he'd refused the idea of how lost the man was, how much suffering he himself would inflict on John with his own hope. He swallowed again and again, struggling to keep his stomach still, scared to death of vomiting.

"You honestly should have just stabbed him then and there. Slit his throat. But no, you're selfish. You wanted to keep the only man who could ever love you. So you hurt him, didn't you?" Moran spoke the question loudly, indicating that Sherlock was to answer. He held a small metal rod in one hand he was prepared to use if Sherlock decided not to cooperate.

Sherlock whimpered, bloody fucking whimpered in response, the words carved into his heart, too close, too true and cruel. He pinched his eyes shut and held his tongue, trying to get his body to settle down, to master the pain washing over him like the tides. "I...I n-need to sleep. I'm ill, I c-can't-" he pulled in a sharp breath as pain flared along his burns, beading sweat on his brow and making him shake horribly.

Sebastian sighed and left the room. He came back with a bucket of ice water and held it over Sherlock's head. "This will hurt, and possibly send you into shock. Honestly, I don't want to have to
deal with that, and it would be better if you just cooperated." He reached in and took out an ice cube. "Are you thirsty? Well, I'll let you drink. And I won't waterboard you either. Not unless you're being a cock. How about this; you tell me that you hurt John Watson...oh...ten times, and I'll leave you alone for a bit."

Sherlock grit his teeth. He could not possibly play this game like this and win. He tried to shake his head, halted by the strap, and croaked out at the man, "Is e-easier to die," his breath too hot on his lips, voice too splintered. He closed his eyes and braced. The body was transport, only transport. He would not sink into the lie Moran was trying to press him towards.

Moran tossed the freezing water over Sherlock, avoiding his head but hitting instead the multiple lacerations on his chest. After a moment he leaned down and propped his elbows on Sherlock's broken arm. "I agree. It would be much easier to die. Thats why I won't let you. I'll let you get close, then drag you back. You could save yourself from that, you know. Ten little sentences."

Sherlock couldn't breathe, his body shocked still as pain burst across his mind like a flash grenade. He managed a deep breath and screamed, stars exploding across his vision. He was going to go mad before they even had a chance to get this started. How long had it been? A day...it had been a day when he got the string around his neck. He had no idea how long he'd been down. John was an incredible man for surviving this and maintaining the ability to speak or function on any level. He broke into tears, screaming and thrashing hard against Moran and the restraints.

"I'm sorry, Sherlock. I know that hurt. But you didn't cooperate, did you?" Moran waited for Sherlock's body to re-adjust to the temperature before continuing. He didn't make any new injuries, simply pressed his thumb into a few of the old cuts and punched him in the arm a couple times. "How about you stop being so difficult and let yourself rest? You don't have to mean it. Think about that. It's only words. I could say that I plan on letting you go tonight but it doesn't make a bit of difference. Just words. No meaning. Go on, ten times, or I get more water."

Sherlock was trying to pull against the restraints, sobbing quietly, his mind screaming at him to comply. "I-I'll go m-m-mad be-fore you have a ch-chance to t-turn me," he said through heavy tears, his heart racing and the combination of fear and agony making him tremble so violently the chains at his wrists and ankles rattled against the table.

Moran chuckled in response. "No, you'll not go mad. The mind is very resilient against that. It'll believe almost anything to keep itself intact." Sebastian went back to his chest of tools and took out a small knife. It was curved at the back with a small bladed hook. "Should I start with the cutting again, or will you speak for me?"

Sherlock grit his teeth and braced. He was so close to blacking out anyhow that it hardly mattered. He'd been close with that first attempt, so, so close. His body could not possibly tolerate this level of consistent abuse for long, not while sick and malnourished. "W-was it your mo-mother or f-father?"

"Neither. Foster care." Sebastian grinned down at the man on the table. "And honestly, I was the abusive one. They kept passing me from home to home, giving me new people to test. I loved it." He noted that Sherlock wasn't being terribly responsive. "God, you're weak. I hate getting sick ones."

"Was j-just curious wh-what side of the f-family the psychosis c-came from," he panted, putting his mind to Moran and not his own pain. "Im-pressive that y-you managed r-rank so effectively. A n-nod to your discipline I'm s-sure." He wheezed, gritting his teeth and trying to think through the fog. "N-not a complete psychop-path though, not e-entirely." He watched through blurred, fading vision as Moran answered him.

"No, psychopaths can't feel. They can't quite enjoy what they do like I can."
Moran could see that Sherlock was going to black out if he didn’t stop. Without another word he turned and left the room for about an hour, giving the man to sit with his pain. He ordered one of his workers to go bring Sherlock some water and food, and to be sure he didn’t use it to kill himself in any way. Generally, he would withhold food to add misery, but he needed Sherlock to live.

Sherlock refused the food and whimpered as he refused the water. He wasn’t going to allow himself to survive. Moran could rally all he wanted but he’d already done an incredible amount of damage. Sherlock would need at least a month in hospital as it was. He closed his eyes, trembling violently on the table, and tried to crawl back into the depths of his mind.

The man charged with feeding Sherlock had a short temper. "We will put a tube down your nose if you want," he said and strapped Sherlock's head back. There was a small prop to keep his mouth open for ripping teeth out, and the man forced his jaw open. "You'll at least drink, or you'll choke. If you want to choke, I can arrange for you to be waterboarded again."

Sherlock struggled hard against him, resisting as best he was able, shouting as loud as he could at the man. He glared daggers at him, pressing his tongue as far back as possible in anticipation of the flood.

The man poured water into his mouth and let some bread break apart in the cup. "Just eat. You're one of the ones being trained. You can just say what he wants but not believe it. Its easier that way. Everyone is so stupid. If you behave, you can get away with pretending to be convinced. If you get to the point where you are now, you'll just snap."

Sherlock choked and sputtered, trying his best to push the water away despite being painfully thirsty. He could not help the few swallows he managed, small as they were, too weak to resist them. There was no way he was going to make Moran believe he'd caved. That would make them go after John once again, of he pretended to believe he was responsible for John’s torture. He pulled up as many images of John as he could from the days before they took him, from the last day when John had extended him a touch of trust, tears rolling free and heavy down his face as he curled his toes and prepared.

The man poured the soggy bread and water into Sherlock's forced open mouth and left, leaving him to either inhale it or swallow. Whichever he chose, it didn't matter much to him. Sherlock couldn't exactly drown on a mouthful of water.

Moran returned later and sat down on a chair, reading a newspaper. "Still being stubborn, I see?"

Sherlock had managed to cough most of the mixture out of his mouth with a well timed forceful exhalation and his tongue. The rest he'd been forced to swallow, wanting to inhale it to rush the process of pneumonia, but failing to overcome his body's natural defenses. He was easily able to ignore Moran for now, having made it back into his mental fortress. He crawled as far back as he could manage, all the doors shut, a string of arithmetic playing in marquee across a mental screen in front of him.

Moran rolled his eyes and begrudgingly got out of his chair. With a loathing look he turned the tapes back on, this time to one of John's beatings. "On the screen, John was struck over and over again with a wooden rod. He screamed as blood poured freely from his smashed nose and split lips. John was chained at the ankle to the corner, shielding himself the best he could, his lead too short for him to fight back. His palms ground against the gritty concrete as he was struck mercilessly, skin splitting and bruising as the rod landed in unpredictable angles across his body. Over the next twenty minutes he’d managed to spit out a tooth, his strength slowly failing him until he finally lost consciousness. Even then he was not spared,
his limp body jerking with each vicious blow.

Oh, now that had seriously tested Sherlock’s defensive mental fortress. He was exhausted at the end of the video, the effort of keeping his focus away from surfacing at the sound of John's horrible screaming taxed him nearly to his limit. He counted his breathing when he got close to losing his hold, three seconds inhalation and five seconds out, and then check the mental doors. His body was shivering violently and he had to keep his thoughts away from the want of a warm blanket.

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Sherlock’s body was very close to collapse. Moran was warned that Sherlock was unlikely to survive the next week if not given a reprieve from violence. Sherlock was given an injection of antibiotics and a bag of fluids through a drip line, as well as electrolytes to keep his heart from stopping.

Reluctantly, Moran backed off with physical torture, though he withheld pain medication. He spent the next four days showing Sherlock videos of John.

The first was perhaps the most psychologically damaging.

John was on his back on the cold, metal table that was thick with his blood. He shivered violently with shallow, panting breath as Moriarty spoke gently to him. “I didn’t want to have to hurt you today, John. I really didn’t. But you just can’t listen, can you?”

John made a strangled gasp in response that stuck in his throat and turned swiftly into a sob. “Answer me, John.” The psychopath’s tone had a warning in it that made the poor, tortured man flinch horribly.

“S’rry,” he managed with a gurgling noise and a hard cough. Tears poured down his face and he stared absently at the ceiling. Moriarty stooped low over him with a melancholy look on his face. “I’m sorry I let Moran beat you for so long, but you deserved it, my pet. How will you learn if I don’t teach you?” John turned his head to the side, away from Moriarty.

“My pet, if I let you just do anything you wanted, you would never learn. You do want to learn, don’t you? You want to learn so I don’t hurt you anymore?”

John gave a small, but earnest nod. “Y-Y-Ye-es, s’r,” he choked and winced as the cracked rib at his side grated.

“Good boy, John. Good boy.”

John looked strangely pleased with the compliment.

“I’m feeling generous today, so I’m going to give you another chance to earn something nice.” Moriarty turned around and brought out a set of tools. “But you were so bad before, and I can’t ignore that. So I’ll give you a way to earn it. Here, let me help you.” He unclasped John’s arm and set it over his chest where he liked it.

John whimpered in relief and curled his fingers around his protruding collar bone to keep his hand in place. “Now, John, I need you to listen very carefully. If you can do as I asked and punish yourself, I’ll give you a treat. If not, I’ll let him in. You don’t want that, do you? You don’t want me to let him in after you, right?”

John shook his head pleadingly. Sherlock would hurt him. If Moriarty let Sherlock in, there would be hell to pay.
“I’ll give you a nice warm blanket and a shot of morphine if you can do as I ask.” Moriarty’s face twisted into a smile when John let out a soft cry of relief and hope. “It’s a small thing, really. I just need you to take this knife,” he held out a dull, small knife, “and show me that you are willing to be obedient by taking off just a tiny sliver of your shin bone.”

John began to cry in earnest, but when his other arm was unstrapped, he began to struggle to sit up instead. The lacerations on his chest, arms and back were an assortment of healed, stitched, open, old, and fresh. The bruises on his face, shoulders, abs, chest, and back all showed the torment he’d been through. When he finally was sitting up, panting and weeping for the stress it had taken, he took the knife and set it to his skin. He was shaking as he broke the first barrier and blood began to seep up around the wound, but when he tried to go further his hands slipped and the knife clattered onto the metal table to which his legs were still strapped flat. “P-P-l-lease,” he whimpered, but picked it up again anyway.

Several tries later, he had three deep gashes in his leg, two of which went to the bone, but had not managed Moriarty’s hellish request. He fell back screaming as best he could with his damaged ribs, and Moriarty began to strap him back down as he begged.

“I’m sorry,” the psychopath said over the desperate pleas for mercy, “You were just too weak. I guess you don’t really want to obey me. I’ll just have to bring Sherlock in.”

At the name, John began to dive head first into pure and utter panic, which Moriarty ignored and blindfolded him. Sherlock’s voice began to play over the speakers and Moriarty put on a pair of leather gloves before beginning his routine of violently beating John.

Others were less emotional and more physical.

John was standing on the cold, dusty floor with one wrist shackled. It was tied on a rope that extended to the ceiling with a bit of slack, and it was evident from the way John held it to his chest that the arm was dislocated at the shoulder. The haggard man looked exhausted, with his shoulders rolled forward and his legs shaking from exertion. How long he had been standing was not clear. He had on a blindfold that further added to his vulnerability, which was damp with sweat and tears.

After a while, the familiar, deep voice began to play, and John began to scream. He curled up as much as he could while still standing as he heard someone walk over. Moran took out a short, slender switch and began to beat John about the legs with it. Each strike made a sickening crack as it connected with flesh, and like thunder after lightning, it was followed by a scream from the already agonied John.

He held out for seven minutes before his knees buckled and he dropped. The rope that ran to the ceiling wasn’t quite long enough, and John was caught sharply by his wrist which forced his dislocated arm to bear the sudden force of his weight as he scrambled to get his legs back under him. He screamed in agony and slipped several times in a mad panic to get his legs supporting his weight, not the tendons in his arm. Once John managed to regain his footing, Moran left him again and the voice stopped, leaving John to suffer through hours of stress and pain on his own.

Some were sickening.

John was trying to cover himself to soften the blow from the unseen crowbar as his battered body jerked on the ground when he was suddenly left alone. He’d been left in the dark for days without food, water or warmth, and his blindfold was beginning to slip. He prayed it would stay on. The last time he’d wiggled out of his blindfold he was punished. The doors opened and Moriarty came in, all smiles and silk. “Oh, John, you look terrible! Did you disobey Sebby again?”
With a heartbreaking sob, John nodded. “That’s a shame. I have so many things to teach you today. First, would you like some water?” John’s eyes widened and he shook his head. Apparently, this was after he’d been trained not to speak, when his fear of Sherlock was already deep seated and they were working on simply tearing apart his mind.

“But you need to drink to live, John. Remember the rules? Trying to escape brings you pain.” The rules contradicted themselves, but John was too delirious to see. Moriarty bent down beside John and spoke in a soft command.

“John, I want you to go get on the table and strap your legs down. If you’re good, and you behave, I will make sure HE doesn’t come in when your legs are spread.” John nodded vigorously and got up on his hands and knees. It seemed preferable to him to lie down on the table and strap himself down rather than have Sherlock come in. John wept as he crawled, for pain, for fear, for heartbeat, and for betrayal, but he climbed onto the table anyway and with shaking hands clasped himself down, ever the obedient servant of Moriarty.

When he was strapped down, Moriarty began with the same torture that John had been enduring for six months now. He started with boiling water, presented in a seemingly normal cup then splashed onto his legs. All the while he explained that this was for his own good, and if he wasn’t terribly stupid, he would be safe from Sherlock.

And some were simply heart breaking.

John hadn’t had clothes since Moran, pretending to be Sherlock, had raped him. He’d been cast aside, naked, freezing, and in pain, until he had the chance to work for a blanket. He wanted that blanket more than anything. It was truly beautiful; soft, warm, and protective of both pain and and staring eyes. John wept when he saw it, and willingly broke his own finger to get it. He curled up in the corner, weeping, with his precious blanket wrapped around himself as he tried to ignore the throbbing pain from his entire body. He tried to ignore the pounding headache of dehydration, the cramps of starvation, and the exhaustion of sleep deprivation. He was dying, but held back from the edge of the cliff, unable to tip. So, he wept, his broken hands curled in the fabric that protected him.

He had his precious blanket for nearly three hours before Moriarty came in and demanded that if he wanted to keep it, he was going to have to drink some water. John had, of course, as were the rules, refused, and his precious blanket was ripped away.

Fever and acute stress left Sherlock babbling nonsensically at the screen, losing his own reality, constantly attempting to speak to John in the times the man was on screen simply weeping. His cracked lips moved in a mostly silent effort to whisper comfort, promises of an end, of Greg and medicine and all the blankets John could ever want.

He did not pay attention to the injections he was given, nor the frequency of Moran’s visits. All there was in his awareness was suffering and John.

A world away, Mycroft was pulling down the metaphorical sky in a frantic attempt to save his baby brother.

Chapter End Notes

Just to assure some of you who have been commenting, the bulk of this story does not involve torture. We promise, there is heavy focus on the aftermath. Hang in there, it's
not shocking for the sake of being shocking. Thank you all so much for your comments, your feedback is always very much appreciated.
Moran kept a sharp on on the barely lucid Sherlock, ensuring he was still tormenting him. Each time a specific type of video seemed to be losing its effect, he changed to something different. If Sherlock appeared to be handling John’s hopeless screams well, he'd switch to John sobbing like a child while curled up and shivering on the floor, many times in a puddle of his own blood and sick. Once that sort of footage seemed to be weakening, he'd change to John dangling from chains, his body beaten and bruised and left to be whipped by Moriarty's other men. In all four days, he did not say a word to Sherlock. Finally, when he’d lost his ability to contain his loathing rage toward Sherlock, Moran walked in with intent to play once again. He looked at the screen, watching John sicking up as he sobbed for help he would not receive.

"You did that to him, Sherlock. If you admit to that, I'll turn it off for a bit."

Sherlock's tears had dried more than an hour ago. He was staring unfocused at the screen, his lips constantly moving silently, completely unresponsive to Moran, not so much as flinching at his voice, He was losing his grip on the concept of time, something he knew would prove dangerous soon enough. Hopefully he would succumb before it became relevant. Even then he could feel the fever in his brain, felt the dura bubbling. Of course that couldn’t be true, but he was sitting in a fire as it was and that was surely the way it felt.

Moran walked over and slapped him hard, snapping his head to the side. As Sherlock lay there, blinking and dumbstruck, Moran reached into his pocket and unfolded the small blade he had on him. He grabbed Sherlock’s freezing, damp fingers and shoved the tip under Sherlock's fingernail, watching with glee as blood welled up around the silver blade. "WAKE UP, SHERLOCK!" He shouted. The man's personality seemed to be crumbling, which was a good thing. "WAKE UP. I'll blow up a hospital. Would you like that?"

Pain and terror at the threat tore through him and he shouted out, "I did it! T-to him it was me!" He realized a moment after he screamed the requested confession that John was likely not in any hospital Moran could reach, but it was already done, he'd already caved.

Just like that.

Pain in a finger and the threat to John and he was speaking before his mind registered any other thought. Truly disturbing, indeed.

Moran made note as to what had worked, then left the room and came back with a needle. "You did well," he said and found the vein in Sherlock’s elbow; Morphine. His intent was to have Sherlock associate compliance with pain relief, at least for a little while. Eventually he’d have to pay. Moran pushed the morphine slowly and watched as Sherlock wept with relief, the instant heat of the narcotic wrapping around the back of his head, flooding copper in his mouth and licking off the hard edges of the pain. It was not enough to handle his pain and were he in hospital he'd be screaming for more, but as it was any measure of comfort at all was nearly overwhelming in the face of his agony. In some ways it was worse, he nearly thanked the bastard. He stared up at the ceiling as he lay there trembling hard against the table, openly sobbing, cut right down to his mental quick.

Pathetic. Sherlock Holmes was pathetic. This was what Jim had been so obsessed with? Granted, he had been quite resilient to the pain given the circumstances, and Moran would have been impressed,
but this was the man who had taken hours of Jim's attention. Sebastian was angry. Fury wrapped around his bones and burned wild and raw at the core of his belly.

He didn't come back for another hour, at which point he gave Sherlock just a bit more morphine. "This is because you were honest with me."

Sherlock had managed a broken, terrible sort of quasi sleep in that hour, but he startled hard and wrenching as far away as he could before feeling the swift flow of Morphine once again. He parted his lips in an effort to breathe, wondering what this was going to later cost and then deciding that didn't fucking matter, Moran was going to do whatever the hell he fucking wanted.

"He n-never struck as a ma-masochist," he breathed, shrugging slightly as he thought about it. "B-bit of sa-dist himself, w-wouldn't th-ink that would work f-for you." When he could distance himself, the nature of Moran and Moriarty's relationship was an odd point of interest.

"You're a curious little bastard, aren't you?" Moran asked and sat down on the chair. "Jim was a lot of things you'll never know about. I'll tell you he was more of a sadist, but he had several masochistic tendencies. As long as I didn't use knives. I have other pets for that."

Moran waited another twenty minutes and gave Sherlock another small injection of morphine. "Though I'm sure you like knives yourself, judging from the way you cut John."

"S-so...so very cl-clever," Sherlock breathed, quirking a half smile despite his pain, sinking down into the Morphine as much as he was allowed. "W-was quite the m-move on his part to take my J- John," he slurried, his tongue loose from the Morphine and the fever, his reality bent to something he could not quite control. "s a l-lot like I am, w-were I to enjoy h...hurting people...one...one in the s-same."

"It wasn't clever to take John. It was clever to turn him against you. Anyone could have kidnapped your friend and played out the damsel in distress scenario, but that's just been done so many times. This is unique." Sebastian was mildly amused at Sherlock's state and wondered if perhaps Sherlock would be more talkative like this. "I think you'd enjoy hurting people if you got the chance. It's all about control. Being dominant. With a mind like yours I'm sure you'd be a natural."

Sherlock cracked a broken smile, agitating the deep lacerations on his lips, little beads of red welling up and mixing with sweat and water. "N-not likely," he returned, his words slow and heavy. He licked his lip, toying with a crack in the skin. "M-Much as I'm loath t-to say, I can un-derstand what an-another body is f-feeling. No pleasure i-in it for me, I'm a-afraid."

Each of his slow, careful inhalations was rattling now. It made him smile once more as he imagined the bacteria crawling over his alveoli, the swelling choking off his ability to exchange air, each inhalation pushing infection into his bloodstream. His temperature had to be upwards of 39 at this point. He was going to succumb to pneumonia, surely. How long had it been?

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Moran continued in this way for another four days. He gave Sherlock high doses of morphine to keep him in a relaxed state and continued to force feed him water and soggy bread. On the end of the fourth day, he held the needle to Sherlock's vein, but made a show of changing his mind.

"How're you feeling, Sherlock?"

Sherlock's eyes failed to focus on anything at all. He blinked, making out the shape of Moran, giving
him a goofy smile. He was dying, and for the last...however long it had been, he'd been go about it
with a bit of water on his lips and morphine in his veins and it was so much more than he'd ever
expected to get.

"Je me sens ... prêt à dormir," he slurred, no mind at all for the language slip, too far gone to notice
he wasn’t in English anymore.

Moran shook his head and went back to his cart. Instead of the morphine he took up a short, glinting
metal bar that was sharpened at the end like a spike. He walked back to Sherlock and without
hesitation, drove it straight through Sherlock's hand like Christ himself.
"You're dying. I understand that. I'll be sending you to a hospital...no, I'll bring a doctor in. But first,
while you're so weak, I have a few questions."

Moran clicked a tape on to John's agonized screams and waited for a response.

Sherlock lacked the energy to scream, gasping at the unexpected flair of remarkable pain, his fingers
curling around the intrusion, choking on his own tongue at the back of his throat as John screamed
around him. Why was John screaming? John was...was with Greg...John was with Greg... wasn't
he? He'd been...but he was screaming now, John was screaming now. Sherlock's heart fluttered and
raced.
"John," he breathed out, his body shaking hard, dragging in another desperate breath to get enough
air to scream the man's name again, "John!"

Moran's lips pulled up in a wolfish grin as he picked up Sherlock’s fevered confusion. He went
about blindfolding Sherlock before inserting a tape from the early days, filling the room with the
sounds of John’s profane screaming.
"This is your fault, Sherlock. I found him. I found him and now he's here. This is because you didn't
cooperate."
Sherlock panted for air, something at the back of his mind telling him it was wrong, it couldn't be
true, Moran couldn’t have taken John from Mycroft and Greg, but he could hear John and he could
not think. "O-Okay," he gasped, his own pain all but forgotten, "wh-what do you w-want? St-stop
hurting him! Oh, god s-stop hurting him."

"I want you to ADMIT that you hurt him!" Sebastian exclaimed as the speakers gave another long,
agonized wail. "I'm going to keep hurting him until you admit what you've done!"
Sherlock grit his teeth, panting harshly, tears sliding down his cheeks in a mix of physical pain and
abject fear. "I d-don't remember...I- I d-don't remember! He-" Sherlock shook his head, trying to
clear away the crippling fog he was soaked in, "pl-please I'll...I h-hurt him, I hurt h-him j-just stop!"

Sebastian grinned, though Sherlock couldn't see. He clicked the tape off and walked beside him.
"Alright... I've stopped. It was you who hurt him, wasn't it? The only way to save him now is to
admit what you've done. If you admit it and remember then he will have less pain. You can make up
for what you did."

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"Alright... I've stopped. It was you who hurt him, wasn't it? The only way to save him now is to
admit what you've done. If you admit it and remember then he will have less pain. You can make up
for what you did." Moran used words that, when Sherlock remembered them, would imply that it
had happened and Moran had simply made him remember it. If he used words such as believe, when
he recalled these sessions it would be easier to work out the confusion. Moran had picked up some
things from Moriarty, though on a whole he was much better at extracting information than
programming it in.

"I wouldn't," he breathed, hardly able to draw any air into his festering lungs, the bronchioles
swollen with stress and panic. He coughed hard, gasping with the pain of it. "I w-wouldn't have hurt
him, I- I d-don't..." he trailed off, starting to black out, his consciousness wavering on him.

"Oh, JOHN!" Sebastian exclaimed in a sing-song, cheerful voice and walked loudly to the other side
of the room. He selected a different tape and pressed play.
John was blindfolded and on his knees. Sebastian ran a knife down his back and scraped it over his protruding ribs. "Who hurt you?" He demanded.

"Sherlock!" John screamed desperately and tried to wiggle away.

"Who is hurting you?" He demanded again.

"Sherlock! It's Sh-Sherlock! H-he's hurting m-me! Please, Sherlock, stop!"

Sherlock jerked hard, snapping back as much aware as he was capable of doing. "S-Stop! St-stop, stop!" He dragged in an agonized breath, trembling terribly on the table. "Me, o-okay, w-was m-me stop hurting h-him. Stop," he gasped, openly crying now, his face turned in the direction he thought John must be. "O-oh god I'm s-sorry, John I'm s-sorry."

His words were wheezy, each inhalation crackling like plastic wrap. How could he have done that to John? He was sure he hadn't, was sure he hadn't, but he'd say anything at all to stop whatever was being done to John to make him scream like that. "P-please."

"Stop it! Sherlock, please!" John let out an agonized wail and fought to get away from Moran. "Make him stop! PLEASE!"

Sebastian clicked the audio off and pulled a chair up beside Sherlock. The man was clearly dying. He needed hospital treatment. Equipment could be stolen and doctors hired, but this state of delirium was incredibly helpful. "You hurt him, Sherlock. The more you admit to it the less pain John will be in."

Sherlock whimpered against the raw, blistering pain clouding his mind beyond nearly everything else. "K...o-okay...please I...I-" he coughed again, wracking spasms of his chest cavity that left him with a pink foam at the corners of his lips and rattling gasps as he tried to breathe. "I h...hurt h-him...I hu-rt J-John please s-stop touching h-him. Pl-please," he groaned, breaking back down into slow sobs.

Sebastian clicked the tape off, but kept it readily available to torment Sherlock again. "Good... Good job, Sherlock." He did not give him more morphine, however, as he wanted the next day to be painful until he sent him to a doctor. "See? Admitting what you've done will help."

Sherlock weakly tugged at his restraints, wanting to be off his back, laying there feeling himself drowning in his own fluids. It was so much worse than he'd imagined, the slow act of dying by infection. He passed out for a few seconds, his blood pressure struggling to deal with the massive damage to Sherlock's body, in addition to the raging infections. When he came back he was whispering, having forgotten Moran was still in the room, carrying on in broken, stuttered French, pleading for his brother to help him, calling out weakly for Mycroft, no longer shaking. He didn't have the excess energy.

Sebastian decided then that Sherlock needed a hospital. He didn't want to risk bringing the man somewhere, as he could be caught, so instead arranged to bring as much equipment and medication as he could to the warehouse. Moran's favorite doctor had been notified and Sebastian sent some men out to procure the equipment he would need. When he thought the man was awake, he turned the tape back on. "You're fault, Sherlock. Always your fault."

Sherlock slid in and out of his delirium, begging for Moran to stop. "I've s-said....said wh-what you
w-ant, please, please s-s-stop." He gasped and struggled, the effort of speaking taxing him heavily. He turned his head to the side and dissolved into wracking cough, only to spit pinked foam to the side, blacking out and then surfacing. "M-my fault, I I said it's m-my fault why is h-he still screaming?" He shook his head, brows knit, passing out once more. When he came back up he struggled for air, wanting nothing more that to die, it would stop whatever it was that he was doing to John. He couldn't even move and yet John was still in agony. "P-please," he begged.

"He's screaming because you aren't truly sorry," Sebastian said and put a hand on Sherlock's pained chest. "You were just pretending to be sorry." He couldn't say that Sherlock was only pretending to believe, as he would remember that for later. "You pretended to be sorry, and he's still in pain."

Sherlock was choking on tears, shaking his head, 'I am, oh g-god I am," he grit his teeth, panting in quick, short breaths to try and keep from moving his chest wall or upsetting the infection in his lungs. "P-please, m-me ins-instead. Me instead." He blacked out once more, his breathing all but stopped, little clipped stutters of insufficient inhalations before he surfaced again nearly three minutes later, dragging in a breath as though coming up from under the water, which broke him down into violent coughing once again. Thick, red blood shone on his lips, coated his teeth pink, trailed from the corner of his mouth. "P...p...." he couldn't form the word, the hand without a spike through it flexing hard as he struggled to speak, "p-ls...m-m....me inst'd."

Moran sent a text telling his pets to being the doctor quickly. This delirium, while productive, might get dangerous.

"Tell him you're sorry, Sherlock! Tell him you're sorry for hurting him!" Moran twisted the spike to give him another reason to comply.

Sherlock grit his teeth, tensing hard as his hand was damaged. How many times did he have to apologize? He'd been screaming his apologies to John since he started screaming. "S...s-s...." he swallowed hard, trying to get enough air to breathe, "s-s...s...orry, m' s-sorry," he managed on a whisper.

Sebastian pulled the spike out and tossed it away. He turned the tape off and left Sherlock alone.

It was another four hours before the doctor had all the equipment he needed. Moran wasn't very interested, and used the time to arrange a few other things within his criminal web. People still needed to disappear, get away with murder, and pull off scams, and Sebastian now stood to gain from it. He left the doctor with his subject.

Sherlock watched the doctor walk in and tried to get his mind to work. He stuttered at him, warning him off the most effective medications, crying allergies to all of them in an effort to tie the man's hands. "P-please," he croaked on a whisper, "d-don't help me. Please...pl-" he was out again before he could finish speaking.

This particular doctor was more than used to torture victims claiming to be allergic, begging to die, and appealing to his humanity. He continued on with his work, knowing full well he only got paid if the man survived.

Sebastian searched furtively for John, but with no result. The man seemed to have dropped off the face of the earth. He was, admittedly, not as good at this as Moriarty, but he had people he could send to look.

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As far as movies went, Greg figured they'd be alright with something as soft as It's a Wonderful Life. He left John dozing on the bed and popped in the disk, setting everything up. He'd had Coltrane on
the speakers for most of the day and leafed through the paper where John could read along with him if he wanted.

Today, Greg, at the suggestion of the doctors treating John, had a spread for him of juice, water, and applesauce. He'd give it a try and see how John reacted. From the bed he texted Mycroft.

*Any progress? GL*

John woke up slowly, almost pleasantly, with Greg near him. He saw the food and water and was more than a bit perturbed, but he reminded himself that he was to be getting better for Sherlock. "That's for me, isn't it?" Inquired John as he swallowed thickly. He wanted not to be afraid, but it was stressful and taxing to keep himself calm.

Mycroft had been frantic. He found himself cashing all his favors and begging for those he didn't have. He hadn't slept in days. He hadn't eaten.

*Some. Got them on one camera. No tags but we've got the vehicle color, year, model... It's not much, but it's something. We'll find it on a different camera further down and get the plates. M*

Greg looked over at the things he'd set out for John. "They are, but you don't have to have any of them. Tell me to take them away, and away they go." He wasn't going to pressure any longer. He was going to offer, and one day John was sure to take him up on something. He texted to Mycroft as he spoke to John.

*How are you holding up?*

*I'm alive. Making progress. And yourself? M*

*I have the easy end here. When was the last you had something to eat or a bit of rest? GL*

*A while. Doesn't matter. M*

*That's garbage and you know it. Eat a sandwich and have the staff put soup in a container you can drink. Eat and work if you will not sleep. GL*

*I'll eat later. Making progress. M*

*I'm about to work on eating with him again. GL*

*Take your time. I'll update. M*

John looked a little frightened, but nodded anyways. "If you think it will help, I'll have water. I'll try applesauce, but I can't be sure what my reaction will be. I might panic." He was more than a little ashamed at his own weakness. "I'm sorry if I do. I'll try not to...but it's hard..."

Greg sat down on the bed beside John and pulled the little tray over, leaving it at John's knees so that it was not imposing. "Whatever you want to try, however much you want to try. No pressure here, John. And if you panic, well, we'll get through it like we always do." He gave him a soft smile and leaned his shoulder against John's for a moment.

John took the juice and stared at it for a while, debating whether to go slow and walk himself through if or to go quickly and get it over with. He opted for the former, as the feeling of water filling his mouth might trigger painful memories. John took a small sip of the juice then put it back down,
shaking, fighting off terror. The taste was abrasive after not eating for so terribly long, and he was already stressed. "This shouldn't be so hard."
"No, it shouldn't," Greg agreed, wrapping his arm around John's back, "But it's not at all your fault that it is. This was done to you, it's not your failing or your fault," he assured, nodding at his progress. "Look though, you're frightened and you are still moving forward. One step at a time. I'm going to put on a movie while you are at this, maybe we can distract your mind a little?"
Greg leaned forward and clicked on the video, the volume low enough that it could be heard, but would not wake a sleeper. John focused on the movie for a bit, occasionally taking small sips of juice. He couldn't try the water. It still frightened him. "I don't like what was done to me," he said and tried to eat a bit of the applesauce. He managed one spoonful before collapsing into tears.

Greg pulled John into his lap, just right off the bed and into his lap, wrapping his arms around him and resting John's head over his heart. He pressed a palm to John's exposed ear, wanting him to listen to his own calm heartbeat and the soothing effect of feeling his voice as he spoke in a tone dropped low and gentle. "It's alright, you're alright. That was a really good go of it, John, really good."

John wept silently. He shook, trying to press himself into Greg, to absorb some of his strength and calm. "M'sorry...sorry..." John heard the steady, rhythmic beating of Greg's heart and could feel his own pounding against the walls of his chest as if it were a panicked animal trying to escape. "Hurts, Greg. It hurts." He snuggled in closer as Greg hummed and eased the blankets over his shoulders. "Breathe John," Greg said. "It won't always hurt, it's alright. Just breathe. Don't have to eat anything else today if you'd rather not." He began to work his fingertips in slow circles behind John's ear. "It's alright."

John began to slow his breathing and reclaim his control. He still, however, required the added comfort of Greg to stay calm. "D'you think I'll ever be able to eat without being afraid?"

"Without a doubt, John, yeah," he answered without hesitation, honestly believing that completely. "Might take more time than you'd like, but yeah, absolutely." He let off John's ear now that the worst of it was passed, and let that hand slowly run down the side of John's arm. "How are you doing?" John looked up to Greg and shook his head. "Not good. Not good at all. I'm broken. But I'm getting better. I'm learning to be calm." Before this past year, John would never have broken down his pride enough to cuddle with another man for comfort. He wouldn't have allowed himself to cry in front of someone else, let alone cry on Greg's chest. All semblance of pride was smashed to bits, and he would far rather be comfortable and be thought weak than scared and thought brace. "I'm learning." Greg nodded, "Yeah, John, you are. You're doing fine, just fine. Mend a bit every day, some days you mend quite a lot." He shifted slightly to give John as much room as he wanted, leaving the option for John to stay as he was or to settle back on the bed. "I don't want you to feel like I'm forcing you to say lines, yeah? You don't have to say it to me, I just think...think it might help for you to tell yourself what happens when you eat, now that you're here with me, with Mycroft."

"Saying lines is what keeps me safe," John said with a bewildered expression. "That's what's always kept me safe. But if you say there's no lines..." He shook his head. "I'm trying to make sense of that, Greg, but it's cloudy. I get that you won't beat me if I don't say them, but I don't get how I should want to make my own lines. Why does it matter what I tell myself?"

Greg gave him a gentle squeeze. "Walk yourself through that question. Why do lines matter?" He tipped the side of his face to the top of John's head, rocking him very slightly, just enough to set him physically at ease to aid in his ability to think. "You've a brilliant medical mind, I've seen you use it so many times. Just walk yourself through why lines matter, I know you will get there."
"Lines...lines just matter. They always matter. They..." John squeezed his eyes shut and tried to concentrate on removing the fog over his mind. "If I don't say the lines, he hurts me. But he's not here...but I should still say the lines. They keep me safe. Its better to be safe, right?" He looked to Greg for a confirmation he didn't expect.

Greg decided to give John some gentle direction. He was stuck in a safe feedback loop. Maybe if he could see that there was so much more behind the walls, it would help. "Why did he make you say the lines, John?"

"He made me say them so he didn't have to hurt me. He didn't want to hurt me, but when I was disobedient or didn't say my lines he would have to." The odd, disconnected voice he used made it clear that those were lines he had repeated many times before. Such thoughts had been forced into his mind with knives, forged by hot metal and soaked in with blistering water.

Greg nodded and decided to try something different. Perhaps a visual would help. He shifted John off his lap, whispering, "Just a second, you can crawl back up if you want," before going over to his own bag and grabbing out a pen and a pad of paper. He got back into the bed with John, sitting with his own legs crossed, back to the elevated head of the bed and giving John a moment to get comfortable again as he liked.

"Alright, John, everything you're saying is what you've been taught to say," he said gently, his tone light, as though teaching a child division. "So here is what we have." He began to draw out what John had explained. When he was done, he had a perfect circle on the paper, arrows between each thing John had claimed. "Do you see this, John? This is the whole of the story, yeah? So John...if he was the boss, and he didn't want to hurt you...why did he have to? If he's the boss, even if you didn't say your lines, that would mean he could choose not to hurt you, right? Since he was in charge?"

This new idea was startling to John. "He's....there were rules...he followed the rules. But he made the rules, didn't he?" John seemed surprised. "He could make a rule that he didn't have to listen to the rules." To John, who had believed that he had brought the punishment down on himself through some act of disobedience, this was a terrifying notion. Everything needed rules. If the world operated on rules, systems of fairness, John could accept it when bad things happened. This idea that something terrible had happened for no reason was daunting. "He...I didn't...I don't understand." Greg shook his head. "It wasn't your fault. Do you remember Moriarty from before he had you, John? He's just an evil man. Just evil. Likes it. Gets off on it. Even if those were the rules, you'd never do that to someone, would you?" He wrapped his arm around John and pulled him close. "So why was it important you say the lines?"

Chapter End Notes

HELLO MY LOVELIES!
Sherlock's torture is in the worst part at the moment, and John isn't doing so well in his own mind. But hopefully, Big Brother Mycroft can help. If the stress doesn't get to him. I have another thing to ask.
Are there any songs that you guys think fit this story well? Or any art?
We'd love to hear them, if you have any ^_^.

As always, we're comment whores.
John could feel his mind tearing itself apart in an attempt to try and understand. It was much easier to rationalize the torture when he felt like he had earned it through his obstinance. It was utterly impossible for him to even begin to accept that he had not deserved it. To do so would relinquish control, even if it was fabricated. He would rather feel guilty than feel he'd lost control so terribly for so long. "No. No. Just...no. He didn’t...He always did things by the rules because I deserved them. No. Just no."

Greg slowed down for a moment, holding John close to him, letting a few minutes pass without speaking. He didn't want to overload him, but this was a massive breakthrough. "I don't mean to push, John, but why do you think he made you say the lines? I know the answer to this, if you'd like me to tell you."

John was having a difficult time thinking that it wasn't about his own punishment. It was like trying to believe that he'd stuck his hand on a stove, but the burn was from something totally unrelated. "I don't know, Greg." He had started to shake. The crushing realization that life just wasn't fair, that good people could be tortured, tore into his very moral, lawful mind. He could not accept it. John grit his teeth and turned over so he was lying face down on the bed.

Greg nodded to himself. He'd pushed perhaps a bit too hard. He gathered up the blankets and pulled them over John's shoulders, tucking them around him as John tended to like done when he was scared. He kept his hip right next to John's side so that John could move over to him at any time, sliding his fingers gently through John's hair. He wanted to speak, to comfort and distract him, but it was critical that this truth sunk in. "I know it's hard, John, but I think you will see this as a relief eventually."

John crossed his arms under his chest. "I had to have done something wrong!" John shouted into his pillow. "He punished me! I did something wrong!" He sat up abruptly and brushed the tears off his face. He was stoic for a moment, lower lip quivering from effort, before he broke down again and curled up in Greg's lap.

Greg wrapped his arms around John and shook his head. "No John, you did nothing wrong. Nothing at all. It's horrible what happened. Wasn't your fault though. You did nothing wrong." He wasn't going to let this pass. John's anger was a good sign, the tears were a good sign. Greg was sure that had he gone through what John had, he'd personally never stop screaming and crying. That John could manage anything more at all was simply astounding.

John whimpered and grabbed lose fistfuls of Greg's shirt. "This isn't FAIR!" He shouted, suddenly angry. "I didn't deserve to be punished! Moriarty was a dick! A bastard! A proper bastard!" John was almost screaming now, as if shouting at Moriarty would hurt him even as he lie in a grave.

Greg nodded again, letting John loose so that he could move as freely as he wanted to. "Yes, he was all those things, frankly fuck the bastard, he's in hell. Nothing fair about what happened to you. You did nothing to deserve it."

"Oh, god..." John whispered suddenly, eyes wide. "They've got Sherlock. He's stubborn. They'll punish him. They'll beat him!"

"We have every possible person on it, we are getting close, John. We are. Fast as we can. Just been a week. He's...we're going to find him. Best we can do is be ready to help if he needs it, yeah?"

"A week? Oh, god... A week..." John swallowed his grief. "A week is...a week is hell, Greg. A full
"He knew what he was up against. He...we are going to find him, John. He's...He could prepare a bit for it, knows their methods from what he's seen in your aftermath. He will be alright. He will."
"Do you know how many hours are in a week? How many minutes of being held underwater or cut?" John had grown eerily calm. "How many seconds of a knife tearing through you? It's a lot of seconds, Greg. I don't want him to have to go through that."
Greg cringed at that. "I don't either, neither does Mycroft. We are doing everything we can, John. Everything."
"He's going to be so broken. Maybe not as far gone as I am, but still..." John had a pained expression on his face and curled closer to Greg. "I want to help."
"Good. That's really...that's really good, John. He...that's really good." He kept John tight to his chest, paying for Mycroft to find something fast.

"I want to do something to help. I don't know what, but I have to do something. Anything. I know he's missing. I need to do everything I can." John sat himself up and scooted to the edge. He could stand to a small degree and was determined to master it today.

Greg smiled briefly, glad to see John like this. "If you can remember anything more that can help us find him...that would be good. Could you talk to Mycroft? Let him ask you a few questions?"

John took a cautious step, keeping a firm hold on the edge of his bed. He took a couple steps around it before answering. "I don't know what else I can think of. I was blindfolded, drugged, or didn't care much."

"That's alright, John. That's alright." Greg's heart squeezed slightly at that, swallowing and watching John move. If he knew where Sherlock was, knew Sherlock was safe, he'd been swelling with pride for John. As it was, while happy for the man, it was tempered with fear for Sherlock. A week was a very long time, and in all honesty, it was likely Sherlock was already dead. He'd been shot already when they took him.

He watched John move, honestly impressed with him. "You're doing really well, is it painful? It's only been a few weeks since your surgery." John had endured physical therapy brilliantly, crying and afraid, but willfully working with the woman as they helped him day by day with his range of motion.

John let go of the bed and limped a few steps away. "It's kind of tight. I can't bend the ankle very far. But it doesn't hurt to put weight on it." His voice was, as it often had been, empty and subdued.

Greg nodded before speaking again. "John, we are at a tightly secured complex. It would be safe to go out to the courtyard upstairs. It's lovely and you could walk a bit up there, get some sun on your face? It's a nice day out."

"Freedom. You won't let me go though. You shouldn't. I'll go straight to a bridge. That wouldn't help Sherlock."

Greg shook his head, "John, it's in the middle of all the buildings here. It's enclosed on all four sides, and you would have to get through layers and layers of security. Not saying that to make you feel trapped, I'm saying that to help you feel safe. It's just nice out, got a bit of sun for once, trees and birds and that sort of thing. Might...might just feel nice, you know? Might help. I can get you a wheelchair and let you walk around when we get there."

He kept his voice gentle and calm, "Change of scenery will likely do you good, honestly."
John nodded and made his way back to the bed. "If you think it will help, I'll do just about anything. I don't see how birds and trees can help me, but I'll keep an open mind."

Greg smiled broadly, "Brilliant!" He said warmly, pulling the door open and sticking his head out. He hardly had to wait as a chair was brought around as well as a heavy coat for John and a blanket Greg recognized from the back of John's chair at Baker Street. He brought them in after whispering to the attendant, asking the courtyard to be cleared out, if at all possible.

"Alright, John," he said warmly, tapping the wheelchair in his hands. He waited while John got himself settled, walking over to the row of pills John had to take every day, some several times, and grabbed him an anti-anxiety tablet. "Just...might be a bit overwhelming to move freely. Just take this, not that big of a dose."

He crouched in front of John, getting the blanket over his legs and making sure the coat was tucked around John's thin body. "Are you ready?"

John nodded and wove his fingers into the blanket. He found a familiar hole that he had worn down from rubbing when he got nervous and smiled just a bit.

Past layers of security that made Baskerville look like a pawn shop, John looked out into the small courtyard. There was a nice patch of grass and some young trees lining the sides. A larger tree had attracted his attention and he got up slowly. It was so eerie to be outside, with the sky above him and open air doing as it pleased. John paused just outside the door and stared. It was bright, much brighter than he remembered. The walls surrounded the courtyard and kept it safe, but it was still as much freedom as John had seen in over a year. There were so many things he'd forgotten about. The blue of the sky, the undulating green shades in the trees and grass, the smell of open air without a hint of dust or blood mixed in.

John looked and saw what appeared to be a massive oak, though his eyes weren't what they once were and he couldn't quite tell. "Can we go there?"

"You're free to move about however you like." Greg walked over to the larger tree, leaning a shoulder against it, hands in his pockets as he breathed deeply, calmed slightly himself from the change of atmosphere.

John shakily stood and took a few shuffling steps towards the tree. He turned back and took the tablets. "Good idea. I don't want to hurt myself." John, as a doctor, felt it acutely when he knew he was a danger to himself. "If you want me to go back any time I will."

It took him a while, but he walked to the tree and reached out a hesitant hand. The feeling of bark under his skin was alien. He ran his fingers over all the little cracks created by the tree growing and expanding.

Greg watched John closely from where he'd sat down on the grass, his back to the tree. "Can sit with me if you'd like, fine if you'd rather not."

He stretched and inhaled deeply, looking up at the sky, pleased that they'd made this much progress. John had his arms held close to his chest in a protective manner, but his face was calm. He looked at the tree, the grass, the dirt, with eyes that had only seen concrete for as long as he could remember. He sat next to Greg and stared at a blade of grass. "It's nice outside."

"Yeah," Greg agreed, tentatively sliding his arm around John's shoulders. John was calm, remarkably calm, and Greg was so relieved it put pressure on his throat. He was wearing thin in more ways than one. His own body mass had dropped enough that his trousers no longer fit properly, and he'd silvered more. He forced his mind away from the situation, just enjoying that specific moment for what it was. "Nice bit of sun for us today."
John found himself squinting up at the sun, wondering why it still existed. It seemed a foolish thought, but he hadn't seen it in so long, he had been through so much darkness, it didn't seem like something so bright could still exist. Or, if it did, it chose not to shine on him. "I'd forgotten about the sun."

_Jesus_ that was horrific. Greg eased John more against his side, nothing really to say to that. John...it was going to take a lot of time to get him back together, but he was there, the core of who John was was clearly there. He breathed deep and let the silence hang for a few minutes. "I suspect you've forgotten a lot of things, but that's okay. It's okay."

John touched the grass, the bark of the tree, and held a small stone in his palm. "I forgot about everything except what he told me to remember. He had to erase things." John pulled his knees up to his chest, making him look smaller than usual.

"They aren't erased, John, they are buried is all. Just buried. It's all still there. It's there, and you will get it back," he said softly, watching John explore, glad they'd shifted outside. It hadn't particularly been a massive shift in John's temperament, but it was a long stretch of calm where John was being autonomous.

"I haven't seen the sky in...in..." John looked away. It was too much change far too quickly. "It just kept on while I was gone. Everything kept going. Earth spun, seasons changed, sun kept on shining." It was almost frightening to think that such horrors could be going on and nature had chosen to do nothing.

Greg pulled John closer to his chest, his other hand pressing against the side of John's head gently for just a moment. "It's...it's difficult when your world stops and the rest of it keeps going. Feels like that in any tragedy. Part of it though... part of it is comforting. It all still is out there, when you're ready, it's all still there."

"It's there, but it's not for me. Not really. It'll be ages before Mycroft lets me out. By that time I'll have nothing. No job, no flat, no family..." He leaned at Greg. "I'm sorry... I'm being depressing."

Greg rubbed his hand gently up and down John's arm, careful of the newly healed scars. "John, you're free to leave, remember? I don't like it, and god I don't want you to, but you can leave. It's incredibly dangerous for you to do so, but you're not a captive here. This is meant to help you feel safe, and of course, actually keep you safe." He kept his tone soft and easy. "Please keep talking to me, it's okay if it's depressing. You've me, at the least. I know it's not much, but you have me. I already offered my flat, and you are still welcome there. Mycroft will surely ensure you never financially need for anything if you choose not to go back to work. I'm sure it doesn't feel like it right now, but all this is for you just as much as me. We are not going to let you fall without a net, John. I promise."

John laughed a bit at the words 'fall without a net' as that exact fate had been what he thought about when things felt hopeless. "I'm not going to be a burden. As long as I can help Sherlock, I'll stick around."

That was his new purpose. He would help Sherlock deal with his own torture, and he would stay with Greg so he didn't hurt him. "I know I can't leave. I'll get hurt. I'll hurt myself. I need to be alright for Sherlock and for you."

"I'm glad you're staying, but I'm going to keep reminding you that you are in charge of yourself and what happens to you. Okay? I know you know, I just...makes me feel better to remind you, if that's alright. You look a little tired, want to go in? You know, you've not had a proper shower in a while, you can have one if you want."

John stiffened at the idea of a shower. "No. No. No, I don't want a shower. Please don't. Please, I just..." He focused on the grass and the sun as panic swelled in his chest. But Greg wouldn't make him go underwater. He wouldn't hold him down or make him inhale it. "I'll panic."
Greg hissed at his own incompetence. "Right, yeah, John I'm sorry, I didn't think it through. You
don't have to. I just was- ach, I am sorry, John," he said honestly, incredibly tired quite suddenly.
Walking on the eggshells was exhausting. Worth it, but exhausting. "Don't have to do that. It's
alright."
John clenched his jaw and pulled up a fistful of grass. "No, no... I know you're not threatening me. I
know that. I'm sorry... I should get used to a cup of water before I try to handle it raining down on
me."

Greg rubbed John's arm again. "John, you know this is normal for people who have been in things
close to your situation, yeah? There is no shame or failure in this, okay? It's just...it's terrible, I fully
admit it's terrible, but you're doing great."

He nodded to the chair. "Want to stay out here, or go have a lie down and watch a movie?"
"I want to stay out here for a bit. I've been on tables and beds far too much recently. This is nice."
John didn't think he would ever get over the fear of that cold, metallic, bloodstained table he had
spent so much time on.

John waited for a few moments then spoke quietly. "I'm starting to remember the first month of my
capture."
Greg stood up and swiftly walked over, grabbing the throw from the wheelchair. He walked right
back to John, fanning it around him and pulling John back against his side, wanting to keep him
warm.
"You can tell me," Greg said gently, shifting closer to him.
"It's sort of.." John waved his hands about in front of his face. "Foggy. I get flashes sometimes when
they're triggered. Most of its stuck. Like my mind doesn't want me to see it." He pulled the blanket
closer around his shoulders and watched a tiny beetle climbing up the side of a dandelion. "I
remember the table, flashes of being chained to a wall. There's bits of Moriarty and some of his
people too."

Greg nodded. It was much like assault victims he'd historically worked with. "John," he asked softly,
"I know some very, very good people who specialize in abuse and trauma. Would you be willing to
talk to one of them? I'm glad you are talking to me, and I'll always listen to you, I am just not trained
in this." He kept physically close to John, wanting him feeling protected.

John had no desire to interact with people other than Greg, but he was willing to do what he could to
recover. "I don't know what I would say. Abuse and trauma... I'd say it goes a bit beyond that. My
brain was tampered with. It's like he reached right inside it."

Greg rather agreed there. "Yeah, it goes far beyond that to be sure, John, was just trying to...anyhow,
it's not your job to puzzle out how it would go. This is far from common, I'll give you that, but it's
not the only case out there, and you can...you can survive this and come out on top. You can."

He pulled John slightly closer to him. "I'll ask Paul to come speak to you this week. He's a good
friend of mine, Oxford fellow, head of the psychology department. I think he could help you, I really
do."

"I'm scared to talk to them." John admitted. "I'm worried they'll end up like the last one. I know they
won't. But...the last one ripped out my stitches for the whole time I was there and kept telling people
I had just panicked. I don't want that to happen again. I won't be able to handle it again." John knew
his own boundaries and was quite sure he would have a breakdown if he was hurt again. "You'll
stay, right?"

Greg leaned back against John. "'Course I will. Here till you don't want me to be. I understand you're
scared, I can't imagine not being afraid in your situation. I'm not going to let anyone touch you."
"I don't think I'll ever want you to leave. Why are you doing this? Why are you helping me? You've left your life behind just to sit here and tell me not to be afraid of applesauce. I don't want to be wasting your time." John looked down at his useless hands and tried not to feel as worthless as he foolishly felt.

Greg cleared his throat and fixed his eyes on a small tree several yards away. He squinted slightly in the sunlight as he spoke. "Well, you're my friend, John. You're my friend, and much like me, you're slim on people to call when you need help. I firmly believe you'd do the same for me, were our situations flipped."
"That's true. I would have done the same if it was you instead." John wrinkled his nose and scowled. "But it's better this way. I wouldn't wish this on you."

He turned to face John then, bumping his forehead gently against John's. "You're not scared of the applesauce," he said warmly, if not a bit sad, "just what it used to represent. I still think you're incredible."

John smiled at Greg when their foreheads touched, an action which gave his dejected features a small bit of warmth.
It was...unexpectedly wonderful to see John smile. Greg gave him another in return before leaning slightly back. "You're amazing John, I know you hate hearing me say it, but you are. Got to keep telling you, you're just going to have to put up with me."

John hadn't believed the compliments before but the repetition was starting to wear down his defences. "You're nice to me," He said simply and laid his head down on Greg's lap. "I know it's not true, but to me it's as if everyone is going to hurt me. I can't help it. I just think everyone wants to hurt me. But not you."

Greg tugged the blanket up so that it was around John as much as possible. He was on the cold ground, but it didn't seem to bother him much. He rest one hand on John's shoulder, the other sliding gently though John's hair, feeling the little imperfections left by scar tissue.
"It will ease, your fear of others. Over time, it will. I'm glad you are not afraid of me, really, incredibly glad." His tone bled the raw honesty of that. It had been horrific to see John afraid of him all those months ago. He was not at all surprised that it had nearly killed Sherlock over time.

John was, for once, grateful to Moriarty. "He could have made me afraid of you. He could have used your voice and your picture and your shirt. I don't... I don't think he forgot. Maybe he wanted me to be able to get better so he could come back for me. But now he's dead and I've got you." Greg's fingers stilled for a moment as he listened to John, his gut twisting. He took a slow, deep breath, suddenly paralyzed with fear for Sherlock. Not that it didn't happen frequently anyhow, but John's phrasing and tone set something off and he had to exhale slowly to keep his composure.

"He's dead and you've got me, yeah," he agreed. "He didn't make me afraid of you. I don't know why, but I'm glad. Probably he didn't want me to have no hope. He wanted to be able to break me again. Maybe next time he would have trained me to hate you." John had frightened himself with his own thought, and clung to Greg once more."That would be awful."

"Well, Sherlock ensured that would never happen to you again," Greg said softly, holding John closer, his own voice wavering slightly. "And I'm...I think it will be a very long time before I'm willing to let you out of my sight." If he ever got Sherlock back, he had no idea how he was ever going to be willing to leave them at all.

He leaned down then, wrapping around John as much as he could, giving him a firm embrace.
John, so broken and small, was trying to regain some semblance of control. He wrapped his arms around Greg's neck and breathed a dejected sigh into his shoulder.
"I don't want to be let out of your sight. Not ever. I'll stay with you as long as you'll tolerate me."

Greg kept John to him, sliding his arms around John's back, holding him as tight as he dared without hurting him. "Good, that's...that's good. I've got you, yeah? I've got you."
"Yeah, you've got me." John echoed to himself. He ran his fingers in light circles through Lestrade's hair and watched his chest rise and fall.

Mycroft looked out one of the small windows at the pair, locked in each other's arms as they had so often been recently. He didn't want to spoil the moment, but he wished to speak with Greg, so he walked out.

Greg looked up after a moment, easing out of John's grip. He took a look at Mycroft's face and shifted. "Give me a moment, John," he said softly, loath to move away from him in that moment, but needing desperately to hear what was going on. He settled John against the tree and got up, his knees popping, and jogged over to Mycroft.

"What is it?"
Mycroft looked tired, worn down, but there was a flicker of life in his eyes.

"We've got a lead."

Chapter End Notes

Hellooooooo!

Thanks for the songs on the last chapter! If you ever have any more, that would be lovely.

Thank you thank you thank you for reading this far, and trust us, things are just heating up.
Fear is the Mind-Killer

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Mycroft’s taut face was slightly eager. “The same car that was seen leaving the airport at the time the plain arrived was found in an alley. I doubt they left it anywhere near where they were, and they did a pretty good job of wiping it clean, but we still found prints. We’ve got ID of two men who were in the car at the time of taking Sherlock away, and we are currently searching for them. We’ll track them. It’s not much, but it’s the first small clue we’ve been given. Honestly, if this were Moriarty I would be concerned that they would be false in some way, or he wouldn’t have left a trace. Since he’s dead, I’m less surprised.” He looked even more haggard than before, but he needed to keep going, to push himself in order to find his little brother.

Greg nodded at that. "Okay, okay that's good. You, however, look like hell, Mycroft. God know's I understand, but you are going to fall out on me. You've got your team with some fat to chew. Go eat, change, and for god's sake sleep. Take a pill if you have to. You're going to crash. Please. I've got to stay with John. I need you to do this, okay?"
Mycroft shook his head. "I'm in charge of this search. If something comes up and I'm not around.... We could lose a crucial lead. If I weren’t working with a bunch of goldfish this might be easier." He had a tremor in his hands that occasionally made him look more frail than he had been before. "I'll...I could have someone else take care of it for a few hours."

Greg gentled his tone, watching Mycroft carefully. He reached out and took both of his hands. "I can't image what this is like for you, I just can't, but if you fall out, he doesn't have a chance. Please Mycroft, please sleep. Eat. Change your clothes and start fresh in twelve hours. Please."
He leaned in and gave him a swift embrace, not giving him a chance to use the assurance of his own authority.

Mycroft stiffened when he was hugged. It was clear he was unused to the sentiment, and when it was over he slouched and slowly nodded. "Alright. Alright, I'll get some sleep. Just a few hours. We're perusing that lead and I want to be awake if anything happens."

Mycroft stiffened a bit at the hug, as he was rather unused to affection. "Ah, yes, well, I'll go home right away then."
Greg clapped him softly in the shoulder and moved back to John, gathering him up and setting him in his lap again. He fixed the blankets over the man as he spoke.
"They've got a lead, John. They're working a lead."

John didn't look too hopeful, but spoke cheerily, if he did sound a bit absent. "That's good. I hope they find him."
"I know, it's a start. Gives us something to do. Mycroft is going apart. I'm worried." He pressed his nose to the side of John's head and breathed deep.
"Look at how many people he hurt just by breaking me." John said in a voice devoid of any emotion. "You, Sherlock, Mycroft, Mrs. Hudson...the families of the people he killed trying to get to me.."
John leaned closer into Greg as if to shield himself from the guilt. "And it's my fault."

Greg shook his head, pulling John in closer. "No, John, like hell is it your fault. It's no more your fault than it is Sherlock's right now. Don't let yourself think that way." He slid his hand down John's back softly. "We hurt when someone we love hurts, no getting around it."
"That's not very good. I wish you didn't hurt because of me." John had grown tired, and slowly got to his feet. "I think we should go back now. I'm going to fall asleep out here. Don't want to be trouble." He shuffled over to the wheelchair and sat down with mild dejection on his face. His eyes were on the top leaves of the tree, which looked very free swaying in the wind.

Greg moved over and made sure the blanket was on John's legs. "Let's get you some sleep," he said softly, trailing fingers lightly on the side of John's face before turning them and working their way slow and steady back to John's highly secure room. 

John hummed in contentment at the light touches and turned a small smile up to Greg. "Yeah, sleep is good. I should sleep." The small amount of movement had exhausted his weak body already.

Greg smiled as he got John in bed. They mastered spreading, sleeping, and ice in just under five months since getting him back. That, in Greg's mind, was damn good progress.

He tucked him in and lowered the lights. "How's the pain?"

"It's sore," John said, but in a way that gave hint to the trifles he viewed it as. "But that's not really a problem. I think I'll have a high pain tolerance now."

Greg found that rather doubtful. Victims of torture typically spent their lives hyper sensitive to pain. It was good that at least for now, John was okay. He handed John a few tablets for pain, no reason for him to be uncomfortable, and a cup of ice chips with a spoon. He had an idea then.

"Have that ice before you sleep, need the hydration. John...what do you think of the idea I had? We could season the ice. Drink powder on top to flavor it? Just get you used to flavor, it might help walk you into actual food later?"

John hesitated. New things, no matter how small and seemingly insignificant they were, tended to frighten him. Things that were even the least bit out of his very narrow comfort zone could be utterly terrifying. "Uhm... Maybe. I'm not sure. It sounds rational. It sounds reasonable. I should be fine."

Greg nodded to him. "Alright, sounds great. We'll try it some time." He sat down next to John, waiting for him to get at the ice, hoping Mycroft was sleeping.

John was able to get almost half of the ice down before he decided he needed a break. While he was much better at controlling his fear now it was still draining and he didn't want to risk an episode. "Greg?" John asked after a few moments of silence. "If Sherlock isn't alright...if he's like me...what are we going to do?"

The 'we' was encouraging. Greg shook his head though. "I don't know, I honestly don't. Take it as it comes. He may be quite bad when we get him, but that doesn't mean it will stay that way. We are not going to panic and react out of fear, whatever happens." He hated talking about it. It reminded Greg that Sherlock was likely suffering at that very moment. He shivered and tried to shake off the thought.

"I'd go back." John said quietly, as though if anyone heard him he would be held accountable to his declaration. "I'd go back if it meant either of you didn't have to. You're still solid. Still whole. It wouldn't take much to kill me anymore. Especially if I disobeyed. I don't want to go back, but it would have been better me than you. Or Sherlock."

Greg reached out and grabbed John's hand, shaking his head. "That's...that's a selfless thing to say, and I believe you. Sherlock would never have made it if they got you again. Never. Just...try to rest, John. I'll be right here."
Sebastian was growing tired of letting Sherlock rest and recover from his illness. He wanted to cut into him again, but he had been warned by the doctor that too much physical stress could be dangerous at this time. Sebastian had rolled his eyes and decided not to torture him today, instead to just use the tapes and fear to get what he wanted.

Sherlock listened to John's suffering in delirious tears from behind an oxygen mask, still stifling to properly breathe, in a haze of constant agony. He would open his eyes from time to time, dragging the man out, unable to focus his vision at all.

Sebastian waited until the man opened his eyes briefly to kneel down beside the table, which had blankets now upon the doctor's request. "How're you doing? John is nearly dead. Would you like to stop hurting him?"

Sherlock blinked at Moran and then dissolved into desperate tears again. "P..." the mask over his face fogged as he tried to speak, "p-lease...st....stop," he nearly blacked out from the effort of speaking, shaking hard from head to toe and nearly choking himself on tears. He tried to reach for Moran, forgetting the restraints for a moment before stopping. His mouth worked in a desperate bid to speak, but he was unable to create sound. The blankets were doing little to help him, the weight of them only causing pain.

Sebastian turned the volume up a bit. "I'm not quite convinced that you're sorry for torturing him." He put a hand on Sherlock's broken arm and squeezed just a bit. It was discolored and swollen taught, the skin ripped open in places where the swelling was weeping. "You tortured him. That's why he is in pain. Tell him you're sorry for what you did and I'll stop."

His logic was obviously failing him as Sherlock struggled to make sense of Moran's words. He screamed into the mask before dissolving into a violent fit of coughing, speckling the inside of the clear plastic pink. "S-sorry, 'm s...sorry," he panted, shaking his head as he pulled desperately for air. He grit his teeth and tried to pull away from Moran. "m s-so s-" he swallowed and sputtered again, eyes rolling back in his head as he dropped out. He came back to himself not ten seconds later, obviously unaware he'd blacked out, "s-sorry J-n."

Sebastian watched with mild amusement. It was enough. The man was beyond having a broken pride. With a shattered hubris such as this Moran could work without having to worry about petty trifles such as willpower or endurance. He clicked off the tape and John's screams silenced. "There. Admitting what you did will keep John safe, and it will keep you safe. Knowing that you tortured him and knowing it was wrong is the only way."

Sherlock cried out in relief when John stopped screaming. He panted as his eyes closed, gasping from time to time before speaking, "John...J-" he trailed off, nearly blacking out again before coming back to himself, "'m so sorry. D-don't.....don't know w-why I h-hurt you." He was slowly rolling his head from side to side, sweat pouring off of him, trembling hard enough to make his teeth chatter. He struggled with his breathing as he turned his face to Moran, blinking his eyes open. "Pl-ease stopstutinghim," he managed in a rush before breaking down into violent coughing once again, agony tearing through him as his chest violently moved.

Sebastian was utterly delighted at this new development. Sherlock's mind was so obviously riddled with pain that Moran could see the confusion in his eyes. "John will be terribly upset with you for hurting him, Sherlock. You shouldn't have hurt him."
Sebastian decided it was time to move Sherlock to a better room. He had the man moved onto a rolling cart and brought to a place with one large, white wall and the rest black. Sherlock was moved into the bed towards the front and left until he woke up.

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John did as he was bid and soon had dropped off to sleep. Is was just under an hour when he started to whimper pitifully in his sleep. He thrashed, letting out a long, frightened scream and jerking awake.

Greg had been trying to wake the dreaming man by softly calling his name, afraid to touch John. It wasn't until he screamed that Greg gave it up and reached out, his hands gentle on John's arms. "Dream, just a dream, John. You're alright," he repeated softly, over and over.

John's eyes flew open and he looked at Greg in horror, as if he didn't recognize him at all. John pulled away and looked like he might flee, but his mind seemed to come into focus and he stared at Greg. "Greg? Oh, God, Greg...It's...just...just...a...dream..."

Greg carefully reached down and wrapped his arms around John, pulling him slowly up into a firm embrace. "Just a dream," he repeated, running his hand down John's back softly, holding him close, "I'm right here, you're okay."

John coughed and crossed his arms over his chest. "God...Greg...I shouldn't have been sleeping. H-He was right, it h-hurts."

Greg shook his head and held John close. "First bad one you've had in a while, John. It's alright. You've been feeling much better since you started sleeping. I'm sorry these still happen to you."

John's breathing was still a bit erratic from crying. "I-I don't want t-to sleep again."

Greg eased John back and slid his palms over John's cheeks. "I know, I know you don't. You don't have to right now, it's okay."

John turned his face towards Greg's hand and closed his eyes. He was positive he would never let anyone touch him again except for Greg, as he didn't trust anyone else. "I'm going to fall asleep sometime. I'm going to have to see those things again."

Greg climbed up onto the bed with John and pulled him into his arms in the way that John always seemed to want when he was scared. "We will figure it out, John. There must be something we can do."

John curled up on Greg's chest and held on to a fistful of his shirt. "You always figure it out." He murmured and wiped tears off his cheeks.

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Sherlock woke up in a new location, something soft at his back, dark walls and one area of white. He still could not focus on details, but he had a blurred overview. His breathing picked up, panicked and sporadic, agitating his inflamed lungs. "John," he whispered, trying to sit himself up, straining his ears to hear anything. He swallowed against the rising bile in his throat and tried again, desperate, "John!"

It was at this time that Sebastian decided to enter. He forced Sherlock to sit up just a little by stuffing a pillow behind him and propping his head up. "We're going to help you remember now," he said and left the room once more. A projector casted a perfectly clear, actual size image of the warehouse
room where John had been tortured onto the blank wall.

John looked up from where he was sitting tied to a chair. The camera angle showed that it had been filmed about chest level with someone, and Moran wondered if Moriarty had spoken while shooting these videos or if he had left it silent. "Get away from me!" John shouted and tried to rip his arms free. "No, no, please no!"

A short whip came into view and cracked down across John's face.

Sherlock's shoulder screamed when he was moved, the unattended bullet hole wildly inflamed and oozing, his chest tight where the burns were trying to heal, laid across the lacerations. He was hyperventilating as he watched the screen, physically jumping as the whip struck John across the face. He hadn't done that. He hadn't. There was no way he'd done that. His hands didn't remember the feel of a whip, the scent of the leather, the weight of the tail. He couldn't have done it. He stared at the life-sized image, and for a moment he called out in confusion, thinking John directly in the room with him. Sherlock shook his head after a moment, soaked in a haze of sick pain and confusion. His eyes cut to Moran and then back to the screen, shaking hard, putting as much of his energy to thinking as he could.

This wasn't me. I didn't do this to him. There is no betrayal in his expression. That's not me, that's not me, that's not me.

He licked his lips, recalling Moran's words. He was meant to believe this was him. It was easy to cry, John's fear and anger was enough all on its own, and he began to babble from under the mask, panting and telling Moran how sorry he was, how he didn't know why he'd done it between violent bouts of coughing.

Moran was pleased with his desperate babbling, but didn't plan on changing the channel just yet. He had two senses covered, but recalled that Moriarty had taken one of Sherlock's shirts to use the smell. He had used his voice, his picture, and beaten John. "I don't know why you did it either, Sherlock."

It was another three hours before Moriarty started training John to fear Sherlock's voice. At which point he played the voice from a pair of speakers on the ceiling. "John," Sherlock's voice said, and the man indicated looked wildly around, through a blindfold kept him from seeing. "Sh-Sherlock? Sherlock, help me!" Immediately a pen knife was buried into John's thigh and he screamed in confusion and agony.

Sherlock watched with flailing breaths, sweat sliding down the sides of his face, dripping off his brows as he watched John suffer. His voice came out over the speakers over John, and he instantly recalled what the tape was from. How they'd acquired it, he'd never know. That's not me, I'm not hurting him. That's not me.

"Pl-please s-s-stop," he whispered, "'m sorry, pl-ease."

Sebastian shook his head. "Nope. Sorry, mate, you've got to remember what you did before we stop."

The beatings continued for several hours. John would be hurt to Sherlock's voice, then given a break. The voice would play again and pain would come. It was clear after a few repetitions that John had figured out the pattern. He started begging as soon as the voice came on, though he, like Sherlock, was still very much aware it was not actually his flat mate doing the torturing.

Sherlock faded in and out over that time. He could not keep his face dry, and the act of crying was making everything hurt horrifically, his breathing heavily labored. He would babble to John in
French periodically, whispering his pleas for forgiveness, that he'd not come, that he'd not known, that he'd hidden from his own grief and that had caused John such unthinkable suffering. He'd black out mid-sentence frequently, only to come back up to John begging. John begging, all on its own, would have been enough to bring Sherlock to his knees.

"P-please, Moran, s-s-stop," he breathed, his stomach threatening him as he listened.

Moran did not stop the tape. He paused it occasionally when Sherlock was unconscious for more than a minute, but kept it rolling for another four hours. He periodically shocked Sherlock back into alertness with slaps or cups of water thrown on his lacerated chest.

On the tape, John had quieted. This little movie had been made by Moriarty as a sort of introduction, and it contained almost a month worth of video clips strung together into a narrative.

"John," Sherlock's voice said again, "where are you?" It was from a phone conversation Moriarty had taped quite a long time ago. He'd skimmed phone calls and had his pets piece together sentences, incredibly ordinary ones, that he could play over the speakers.

John broke down into tears. For him it had been three weeks since the last clip was shown, and he was almost completely convinced it was Sherlock torturing him. "Sherlock, please, NO!" He shouted and braced himself for impact. A wooden rod was used this time to hit him on the shoulders, stomach, back, and legs, all while he pleaded with Sherlock to stop and convulsed in pain.

Sherlock licked his lips and finally looked over to Moran. "Wh-What do y-you w...want f-from me?" He was soaked in a haze of main and regret, exhausted beyond measure, thirsty, wanting nothing more than for his heart to stop. "P-Please wh-what do you want?"

"For you to remember," Moran returned. "For you to remember what you've done to John. To look at that screen and remember each time you cut him."

John let out an agonized wail as he was woken once more to the sound of Sherlock's voice and beaten again. This tape left out the parts where Moriarty had been in view, violently demanding John to tell him just exactly who had been hurting him. That part of John's training was not beneficial to Sherlock's.

Sherlock closed his eyes with a tight, careful nod and slipped back into the broken fragments of his mind. Tears slid past his lids and he tried to tune John out. There was nothing more he could do, nothing more wanted of him. He shivered hard and tuned out what he could.

Sebastian sighed and went and got a cup of ice water. He slowly poured it down onto Sherlock's chest. "Pay attention. I like this part."

On the screen John was being whipped terribly. He wasn't screaming anymore, instead he was limp against his chains, whimpering, pleading Sherlock for mercy. The fight was gone from him. He did not scream, or even move. The camera angle changed so John's face was in view, revealing a tired, broken man who no longer clenched his jaw in an attempt to hide his pain. His eyes were half closed, and he made no sign that he felt each stripe laid across his back.

Sherlock's chest fluttered and his stomach seized up on him, flexing harshly in a bid to sick up, only there was nothing there to expel, leaving Sherlock heaving on his back, choking on his own throat. He sputtered behind the mask and turned his face away from the wall, unable to bear what was playing on the screen. John's voice was nothing short of pathetic and it shredded him deeper than the horrific water on his chest managed to. He knew without a doubt that he'd not done that. It wasn't possible. No drug on earth, no amount of bribing, no level of rage would make him do that to John.
Hell, to anyone. At the very least, he was safe from succumbing to the idea that he'd done this.

Sebastian left the room then. He left one of his favorites to stay with Sherlock, giving him free range to do as he saw fit so long as Sherlock watched the tapes. He had other work to attend to as the new ruler of Moriarty's criminal web, and it wasn't a job to be taken lightly.

It was another four days until he came back. He had, of course, been watching on video occasionally. Everything that went on was filmed from many different angles, as he never knew when he might need the sound of Sherlock spluttering and begging for mercy in the future.

Sherlock had abandoned English entirely two days ago. When he did speak, it was a broken mix of French and Latin, harking back to his foundational youth. He had no idea where he was, or what was happening. All he knew was the endless sound of a man screaming and crying for mercy, his own unending pain, and his struggle to breathe.

Moriarty looked down at Sherlock. He looked broken, yes, a lovely sight to behold. But he wasn't convinced quite yet. It had been around two weeks, and he had expected to at least make him consider the possibility he had been the one on the tapes. Moran walked in and splashed water over Sherlock's face. "Pay attention. This part is important."

John was alone now, crying, telling himself that even if Sherlock had hurt him, he had to have had a reason. Moriarty had found a man who closely resembled Sherlock. He had the same dark hair and pale skin, same slender build and angular face. It wouldn't have fooled John normally, or even now, but Moriarty was going to fix that.

Moriarty came back in, telling John that he'd done something terribly wrong, and now Sherlock was coming. He jerked John's hair back and commanded him to look up. Tear gas sprayed directly into John's face caused the poor man to reel back and scrub furiously at his eyes. The sound of Sherlock's voice boomed over the loudspeakers and Moriarty struck John about the head several times.

John looked up blearily at the figure in the dark coat approaching him. "No...God, no..." He scrambled back, his blurred vision hardly able to make out the outline but his imagination and pain-ridden mind filling in the details. "No, PLEASE!"

Sherlock gasped at the water on his face, a reflexive response since birth, and blinked up at the man without recognition. He swallowed and parted his lips, babbling to the man in French before looking away, closing his eyes and bracing for pain. That's all the world had become for him now, riddled with fever, the unending consistent pain inescapable and horrific. He licked his lips and could not so much as muster the strength to flex his muscles in anticipation of what was to be done to him next.

Sebastian rolled his eyes at the French and pulled up a chair to watch the screen. It was enjoyable to him, like watching one's favorite episode of a program. "See that? We had someone who looks like you come in. We convinced John it was you and..."

John was still screaming when Moran came into view. He had a pistol in one hand and knelt next to John. He put it in John's hand, keeping a tight hold on it himself to prevent suicide, and trained the weapon on the imitation Sherlock. John immediately pulled the trigger and the man fell dead.

Sherlock jumped hard at the startling sound of the gunshot, unable to focus on the screen. It was all hazy shapes and meaningless noise. He babbled off the likely type of pistol, "Ruger," he managed, a universal word, prattling off the weight of the body that hit the floor before slipping silent, shaking apart, breathing too fast and too shallow. He dragged his good foot along the mattress, shaking his
head, blinking up at the corner of the room as he rolled in the purgatory he'd found himself in.

Sebastian decided that these tapes weren't getting him anywhere while Sherlock couldn't see straight. Perhaps they could get an imitation John in here, but now wasn't the time.

"Would you like some morphine?" Sebastian inquired almost kindly. "It's been a while since you've had any painkillers. You look uncomfortable. If you tell me what you did to John Watson, I'll give you something to help."

He was being spoken to. Sherlock's heart rolled hard in his chest and he turned away, his intact hand balling into a tight fist in preparation of pain. Every time he'd heard actual words in the last few days, blistering agony had followed. He was audibly whimpering on each shallow exhalation, his brows knitting in an attempt to understand what had been said. He tried to roll to his side, which shifted his terribly broken arm, screaming out suddenly until he abruptly blacked out.

Moran rolled his eyes. He left the room then and charged the same man with Sherlock's keeping, only this time informed him to have Sherlock recover. He wasn't to beat him. He was to make sure the man got some fluids, and he was to keep the tapes off for a while so Sherlock could rest.

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John had been put on a sleeping aid that he took every evening, that offered him a less authentic sleep, but one that silenced all dreaming. Greg had slipped out of John's room half an hour ago, seeking out Mycroft. It had been too damned long, and he wanted to know what progress had been made. It was getting progressively harder to keep John calm about Sherlock's absence.

"Mycroft. For the love of god, tell me something good. Please. There has to be something by now."

Mycroft held his phone to his ear with his shoulder to allow him to type with his hands. "Yes. Progress. The facial recognition software picked up a few hits. We've uncovered the aliases of several people who aided in the kidnapping of Sherlock. We also have the ID of the one who seemed to be in charge of the operation. Colonel Sebastian Moran. I'll send a picture for you to verify." Mycroft spoke in one long, constant stream of information.

Greg took a bit longer than he'd like to admit to register that Mycroft meant for him to show the image to John. Well, that wasn't going to go over well, was it? He took in a deep, slow breath, nodding his understanding. They had to be honing in, they just had to be. "I'll see what I can do," he assured, watching the activity in the room. "Can I do anything to help you? Get you food? Anything?" He ignored the phone on Mycroft's shoulder and shoved his hands in his pockets.

"Hold on one moment, I'll call you back." Mycroft hung up his mobile, but didn't look up from the screen of his laptop. "No, I'm fine. Ask John to verify the picture. If he is in charge of the operation currently he was likely around when Moriarty was working with John." There were light pings as Mycroft sent and received emails. "We have their faces plastered in every local police department and every major government office in the area we believe Sherlock is being held. Within the next few days we should have it narrowed to a thirty kilometer area. That is, if they don't move. If they catch wind we're close they might run and take my brother with them."

Greg nodded. That was good, exceedingly good. They were close. Greg looked at Mycroft and then reached out, patting his shoulder. "Alright, Mycroft, I'll go wake him and see if he can verify this. Keep at it, we'll find him." He felt like a proper fucking idiot saying as much, doing nothing more than sitting with John, as though he had any contribution to the rescue effort. He nodded and walked away, grabbing a runner and pointing to Mycroft. "Oi, bring that man some form of sports drink and some eggs and cheese at the least, yeah? Soup and a proper sandwich if you can find it."
He walked back down to the room John was sleeping in, passing through layers and layers of security, before finally walking in to the familiar dark space. He walked over to his chair and sat down, thumbing open the picture and closing his eyes. Fuck all but he didn't want to wake John for this. There was nothing for it, though. He reached out, wrapping his hand around John's forearm. "John...can you wake up for me?"

John shifted and pulled open his heavy eyelids. "Oh, hey Greg," he muttered and stretched a bit. He wrapped his arms around his pillow and yawned groggily. "What is it? Did you get Sherlock back yet?"

The casual question took him by surprise, and he had to swallow a few times before he found his voice. Oh, that it were that easy. "No...no not yet, John," Greg whispered, looking at him. His gut twisted and he carried on. "John...they are much closer. I...Christ, John, I'm so sorry to ask this of you. I have a picture here of a man we think was involved. Can I show it to you, see if you recognize him?"

"Oh." John twisted the soft fabric of his shirt between his fingers and thought the idea over. "I...I'll do it if you say I should. And if it will help Sherlock." John tried to recall the people he had seen during his months in captivity. "Dirty blonde, short hair? Rough face, scar, tall, strong, tattoo on the shoulder." John had his eyes closed in hopes of accurately describing the one who had done so much of the torture with Moriarty. Perhaps then he wouldn't have to look.

Greg looked at the photo and the description. It all lined up. "Can you tell me what the tattoo is of, John?" He asked softly, reaching out and wrapping his hand around John's wrist gently. "I'm sorry to even ask you, I am."

"I can't...I don't remember..." John looked like he might be on the verge of tears again and reached out his frail hand. "Just show it to me." His voice was small and he held out his hand in a way one might to feed an animal they were frightened might bite them.

Greg put the mobile in John's hand, the image pulled up, still holding tight to the other. "I'm right here, yeah? Right here." He closed his eyes and held his breath, waiting for John to confirm or deny, not quite sure what he wanted more in that moment.

John let out a small cry and his hand flew up to cover his mouth. He couldn't manage to speak, so he simply nodded. John remembered the man. He remembered the sick pleasure Moran got from torturing him and the way he smiled when he made John scream. John's heart rate soared and he felt himself losing control of his fear. "Greg...help...please..."

Greg pulled the phone away and crawled up next to John, pulling him into his lap fully, wrapping his arms around John and rocking him lightly. "I've got you, breathe for me, John, just like we practiced. Do you remember? In for three, out for five, let's try." He started the breathing with John, setting a pacer, keeping his arms tight around him.

John held his breath for a moment then let it out in a gasp before returning to his panicked, shallow gulps. "Sorry...he..he hurt me..." John buried his fingers in his hair and squeezed his eyes shut. "He hurt me...he hurt me and he enjoyed it..." Images flashed in his mind's eye that covered his reality with shades of red and flashes of white. John whimpered and let out a small scream as if he had been startled or prodded.

Greg reached over the side of the bed with John in his arms, and grabbed a bottle of pills. The beautiful thing of John's anti-anxieties was that, if not swallowed, they would dissolve under the tongue. "John, you are in protective custody with me. No one is going to touch you. Put these under your tongue," he held out three tablets where John typically took one to maintain him through the day. "You have already survived everything he's ever done to you. It's over. You survived it. These
memories you've already lived through and survived." He carried on rocking John, trying his best to calm him. "I'm so sorry, you are okay, John, you are."

John stared ahead, eyes open wide and expression frozen into a visage of horror. John could swear he saw someone coming for him. Perhaps it was Moran, or Moriarty, or possibly Sherlock. He wasn't sure. In his panicked mind, however, there was someone coming to hurt him. John took the pills willingly, wanting the terrible flashes to end. An attempt to speak only resulted in a pitiful whimper as he actively battled fear.

Greg's gut twisted and he pulled in a deep breath of his own, pushing John back enough so that John could look at him. "John, right here, look right here at my face," he breathed, tapping his own nose, "Look at me. You're safe, you are safe. No one is going to hurt you. Who am I, John? Tell me my name." He kept his hands on John's shoulders, watching him closely, his heart racing nearly out of his chest.

John twisted and pointed at the empty space near the door. "He's...he..." John blinked and the figure was gone, leaving him feeling worse than when he thought it was real. The dark was unnerving. "You...you're Greg..." He said and tried to focus on his friend's face. Back to the door his eyes cast furtive glances, worried of what he might see.

Greg very much wished he'd put the lights on. John was clearly seeing things that were not there. "Yeah, yeah, John, I'm Greg. I'm Greg, and you're safe. You are safe. If anyone tries to come near you to hurt you, I will kill them, John. I'll just kill them. You are with me. Who are you with, John? Tell me who's with you?" He was out of his depth, using his skills taught and practiced for suicidal people and those pointing guns with shaking hands.

"You...you're Greg... I know that... I..." John had been so strong for so long. He had kept calm over the past few days for the most part and been able to eat his ice chips without crying. The suppressed stress seemed to be easing over him now. "Greg...hurts..." His chest heaved wildly and he crossed his arms over it to keep himself safe. "It hurts, Greg. Help. Help me. It hurts."

John was falling into it regardless. Greg kicked himself and held John tighter to his chest, feeling the man begin to shake. "Okay...okay John, I'm trying to help," he assured, wracking his brain, feeling like an idiot. Perhaps...anger had always pulled John out of panic. Maybe he could get him angry. "John, what he did to you...what he did to you was horrific, wasn't it? You didn't deserve that, did you? He's just a sick, sick man, isn't he?"

John nodded and tears poured down his face. For a man who drank very little water, he seemed to have no shortage of tears. "H-he liked it!" John cried in outrage and shook violently. Flashes of the warehouse blotted his vision and he looked wildly around. The dusty cement floors were speckled with various shades of red blood. John thought he spotted a knife on the ground and pointed at it. "What the HELL is that doing here?"

"Tell me what you see, John? What are you looking at?" He asked steadily, keeping his voice strong, calm, and even. John was angry, and that was what he wanted. "Tell me what you see." "Knife. Knife. It's right there!" John turned to point once more but the knife was gone. The blood specked cement had returned to the white, smooth, clean floor of the high security building and John was both confused and relieved in equal measure. "Something...something's wrong with me..."

Greg shook his head. "Flashbacks, John...just flashbacks. PTSD. You're okay, you are. This is...well hell, I don't want to call it normal, but in your situation it's normal. Keep telling me what you see. I'm not going to hurt you. It's me, John. Just Greg. Nothing special, just me," he assured, easing his grip, not wanting John to feel restrained.
John was starting to come back. He could feel Greg now, he could see his worried face. "I...Greg...” He couldn't make sense of what had happened. Flashbacks were a familiar thing to him. It wasn't totally alien, but it was more intense and more terrifying than anything he had been used to. This felt less like the fear and panic of a nightmare and more potent and real like a hallucination. "Hurts, Greg.”

"I know...I know, John. God, I'm sorry. I'm sorry.” He watched John, a tear sliding down his own face, nearly drowning in guilt. "I have to find him and I am so sorry I came to you, I have to find him. Christ I'm sorry, I'm sorry.” He shook his head, wanting to pull John to him, scared to hurt him.

Now that the room was back to normal John felt exhausted and more pitiful than he had before. "Can...can I have a sedative?” It had been nearly two weeks since he last asked for one, and John thought maybe that was a good record, but he was in no mood to be awake right now. It didn’t matter that he’d been awake for a grand total of ten minutes. "P-Please?”

Greg nodded, "Yeah, John, yeah," he breathed, wanting to pull him into his arms and hold him close. He did not dare. Instead, he shifted John over and carefully got up, walking over and picking up the bottle they so rarely used. He tipped a pill into his hand and walked it back, extending it to John, his fingers shaking lightly. He stared at his own hand, ashamed of it, his own stress so very minor in the face of John's. "I'm sorry," he breathed.

John took the pill with one hand and Greg’s shaking one with the other. "It's...it's fine.. Sorry..” He took the pill dry and held Greg's hand. "W-would you...stay with m-me until I fall asleep?” He was ashamed to ask another man to hold him, but he was terrified to sleep on his own.

Greg held up a finger, too rattled to text. He dialed Mycroft and waited for the man to answer. "P-Positive I.D.,” he said into the phone before hanging up, swiftly toeing off his shoes and crawling up in the bed with John. "I won't leave," he breathed, opening his arms to the man if that's what he wanted, "even after you fall asleep, I won't leave." He felt lower than low, horrific for doing this to John. Not only was he presently soaking in guilt, what was likely being done to Sherlock was nearly more than he could bear. What if he came back like this? What if he couldn't hold Sherlock and John together. He'd made promises, but here, with John looking so small, with Sherlock unaccounted for, he began to question if he could really do it.

"God, John I'm sorry.”

John crawled into Greg's arms and placed his hands on the man's chest. "Not your fault," he whispered wearily. "It's never your fault. Greg's good to me. Always good to me.” John's eyes fluttered shut and he seemed to go limp, as if he had been holding massive amounts of tension in his weak limbs. "You're good to me, Greg. I love you.” He drifted off then, mind foggy and delirious with exhaustion and stress.

That did it, breaking Greg's composure down. He held the limp man to him and dissolved into tears, his forehead tipped to John's crown. He was going to lose them, both of them, if he hadn't already. Mycroft was nearly a stone lighter, his face aged nearly a decade. He had no idea how he personally looked outside of the stranger the mirror showed him when he shaved. He wept, terrified of his own promise. Terrified of life without anyone in it, terrified of the life he may force John to lead. He shook his head, his chest catching terribly as he gripped hard to the man, feeling as though he were betraying Sherlock and losing John and damning himself.

Chapter End Notes
Mycroft is closing in.
Sherlock is still in torment.
John is only staying alive because he wants to help.
Greg is breaking down.

Readers. Tell me. What do you think? Do you want more chapters?
It was not until several hours later than Greg finally found sleep, his breath still catching with every inhalation until he finally drifted off.

Mycroft checked in later on and, finding the two curled up together as he so often did, left without a word. He did, however, take a moment to write a short note for Greg.

_Narrowed it down to a thirty kilometer area. We're going to send in a few surveillance teams. You're doing brilliantly with John._

_M_

John was blissfully oblivious to the world of suffering outside and the chaos inside his prison of a mind for several hours. When he finally did begin to climb up into the cold light, out of his hazy, dark, safe slumber, he remembered what had happened and snapped his eyes shut. Sleeping forever would be lovely. Perhaps they could just keep him sedated for the rest of his life. John nuzzled into the crook of Greg's shoulder and willed his consciousness away,

Greg felt John come awake and opened his eyes. John was clearly trying to go back to sleep, so he did not speak. His hope, however, was sliding away. John was...fucking hell...he had so much farther to go. What was to happen to him if he saw Sherlock in distress? Was Sherlock even alive? What if they'd tortured him to death already? Was all this just to build up to a needle in John's arm anyhow? Greg closed his eyes, his lower lip unsteady as he tried to still his breathing, calm it down. He could not help himself as his chest caught and he made an unmistakable sound of trying to control tears. A moment later he was clearing his throat, trying to smooth it over so that John was not uncomfortable, otherwise holding quiet.

John opened his eyes a bit when he heard the sound. He was all too familiar with it. It was the sound of those who had been strong for far too long, of those who thought of others and not themselves, and of those who couldn't afford to fall apart just yet.

"Are you alright?" John asked quietly and felt Greg's rapidly rising and falling chest with his hands. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah," he whispered tightly, nodding perhaps a bit too emphatically, "yeah, 'm okay." He dragged in a strained breath, looking up at the ceiling and blinking rapidly, pressing a hand over his eyes, "Sorry, just...just need a minute," he breathed, clearly his throat over and over again, feeling the slide of tears under his palm despite himself.

"Oh, alright." John watched him quietly with eyes that appeared too large from their wideness. He wrapped his arms around Greg and gave him a frail squeeze. "Are you sad about Sherlock?" He asked in a disconnected tone. "I'm sad about Sherlock too. Or are you sad because I'm broken?"

John had no trouble admitting he was causing pain. Even if it wasn't his fault, his condition was still hurting people around him.

Greg was beginning to understand the jumpers he'd talked down. He had no idea the depths self-loathing could bring one to. John's words sliced through him and he had to drag in a sharp, involuntary breath. He could not tell John the whole of it. "I..." he sniffed hard, dragging his hand over his eyes, ashamed of himself, "just...yeah scared for him, grieving over what happened to you. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, this is foolish." He cleared his throat again, his goddamned chin refusing to stop
quivering. "How are you feeling?"

John pulled Greg closer and ran his fingers through the man's hair. "It's alright. I know you're sad. You don't have to be alright. I know you're not. You're so good to me, Greg. It's alright if you get sad." He had reverted to a safer, simpler childlike state of mind wherein things were simpler. Saying things like 'sad' and 'hurt' were easier than 'utterly devastated' and 'tortured to the point of insanity'.

Greg could do little more than tip the side of his head to John's as it rushed over him. John's childlike state like a confirmation to his fears, breathing as steady as he could as he cracked back down, his nose swelling shut, tears dripping off his lower lip, at times flung away with the force of his breathing. He closed his eyes and just held on for the ride, doing his best to keep his head above water in the flood of it. "I'm sorry," he would manage from time to time. Sorry I made you live, sorry I forced hope on you, sorry this happened to you of all people, sorry I didn't know, sorry I didn't save him on and on and on, hiccupping with the force of it, the only way he managed air at all.

"Greg, don't be sorry. You've been good to me. You're a good person. You're never bad." John brushed some of the tears off Greg's face, upset that a man who had not done anything but help was still in so much pain. "If...if you think it would be better for you to go, you can." John swallowed hard and braced himself. There was not a fiber in his being that didn't compel him to cling to Greg with all his strength. "You know, if you think you would be happier in a normal place with less sadness."

Greg cracked a smile though the tears, "Th-think that for you all the t-time," he whispered, pulling John closer to him, "$\text{m not leaving you, I'd go mad.}$" That, at the least, was the raw honest truth of it. He shook his head and pulled John in tight. "$\text{If...if...I just want you to know that I am only t-trying to save you. I'm sorry if that...I'm s-sorry if I'm being selfish. I am. Oh god, I am.}$" He pressed a swift kiss to John's head. "Please...please know that."

"Okay, I'll have ice. I can try it with the powder if you want. Or try applesauce." John wanted desperately to show Greg that he was improving, but the childish nature to try and make all his sadness go away with a simple gesture gave light to how broken his mind truly was. "I'll have the ice and powder and show you that I'm going to be alright so you aren't sad."

Greg smiled gently at him and shook his head. "No, John you have ice and powder, or applesauce, when you want them. You're doing just fine, I just got a little too in my head." He shifted and got out of the bed, his face falling with his back to John, starting to wonder, honestly give thought, to the idea that John may well and truly be lost to them. That nearly all of the man he'd known might be gone, not buried like he was banking on. In the next moment he asked without thinking, "John...if we found Sherlock mentally sound...would that help you do you think? If you could see him again, would you want to?"

John seemed a bit confused at the question. "If he's alright, then what do you need me for?" The question was asked innocently and with genuine confusion. "You said if he was hurt he would need
me. That he would need me to recover. But if he's fine, then I get to leave early, don't I?"

"So...if he's okay, I lose you." Greg shook his head, pressing his forehead into his hand. "What do I need-" he shook his head. It wasn't fair to do this to John. John couldn't help it. "I- I need you, John. You don't owe it to me, and I won't ask it of you, but...Jesus, the idea of you not being here anymore...how would I even say goodbye?" He sniffed hard, his words catching at the idea of killing John, an event that seemed more and more inescapable. "Sorry, Jesus I'm sorry. Ice." He pushed himself up, tears still sliding down his face, and fetched the cup and the spoon, bringing it to John.

John opened his mouth then closed it again. He wanted desperately to make Greg happy, but he didn't think he could handle living without the knowledge that there was a needle in the future somewhere. "We said goodbye a while ago, I think. I remember that. I was supposed to be going with Doctors Without Borders. You said goodbye then. Suppose it's not much different." John wrung his hands and chewed on the inside of his cheek on the right side as he had just recently taken to doing. "It will hurt you to let me go, won't it?"

Greg had sunk into the bedside chair at John's words. We said goodbye a while ago. It had been over a pint, all smiles and a clap on the shoulder. He could deck his younger self for doing such a woeful job of telling this man goodbye. He clipped a sound of intense grief and had to look away, tightly controlling his breathing. John's question wrapped around his throat, nearly choking him. "I m-made you a promise," he replied, trying to get himself back under control.

"I don't want to hurt you," John remarked quietly. He had his hands in little, protective fists and his arms pulled close to his chest, a luxury and comfort he had been denied while prone on the table for so many months. "And I'm not going to 'toss Sherlock out' by leaving before he gets better. I just want to sleep." He heaved an exhausted sigh and seemed to sink lower into his bed of pillows. "I just want to leave....To die, to sleep. No more." That quote made sense to him now. "And by a sleep to say we end the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep....Or something like that..."

Greg nodded and tapped the cup of ice. "Just...we will just take it one day at a time. Let's just s-see how he is when we get him back. Please?" He had his face back under control, even if his breathing was taking a bit longer to get there. Greg scrubbed a hand over his tired face and stretched, looking around the room and deciding to get up and switch on the telly. Talking heads from some lively morning show were chattering on about the latest Daniel Craig film, and Greg dropped the volume low, just needing something, anything outside of the four walls and his screaming fear.

John found himself just a bit more shaky with the ice after having seen Moran's picture, but he managed it anyway. "Greg," he began once his unease settled, "If I stayed, if I didn't leave after we make Sherlock get better, what would I do? Would I just sit around in a mental hospital all day?"

John didn't like the idea, but he couldn't imagine living in the normal world. The first choice that he had latched on to was Greg's promise to let him go, but John was starting to see how much the idea was hurting Greg.

Greg drew in a deep breath and then shook his head. "I was hoping you'd come home with me...or back to Baker Street, whichever you felt like at the time. You don't need to stay in a mental hospital if you don't want to. I...I want-" he cleared his throat again and took another breath. "The point is to find your new normal. You are better every single day. I think, very much, that the trend will continue. I really do."

He stared at the muted smiling faces, carrying on over the telly, a distraction from reality he continued to welcome.

"I'll think about it, alright?" John offered, though he was almost certain he was going to choose the
needle. John glared at the people on the Telly. How dare they be so happy when he had been tortured, while Sherlock was missing and Greg had tears in his eyes? "I'll think about it because I don't want to hurt you."

Greg nodded, watching the pointless drivel on screen, not trusting himself to look at John just yet. He'd done quite enough of breaking down in front of the man already. He shook his head at the screen and switched it over to another channel, where the London Symphony Orchestra was playing, and bumped the volume up slightly.
"Oh, I like this." John said and smiled just a bit. He knew the tune and hummed along a bit, head nodding in time.

After a few minutes, he spoke again, his voice a bit rough and tight, "Can I get you anything? Do anything for you?"
"There's nothing more you can do for me," John responded. "You've already done everything m. You've helped me so much."

Greg closed his eyes at that. That was likely accurate. He cleared his throat and nodded. "I'm going to shower then, if you're alright," he said softly. He pushed himself out of his chair and walked to the attached lav, his bag already in there, turning on the shower and stripping out of his clothes.

The next half hour was a haze of attempts at washing and full on, unrestrained weeping. He spent most of his time with a hand braced against the wall, leaning into the spray with his face to the floor, shoulders shaking hard as he allowed himself to break apart in private.

When he finally came back out, he was groomed and dressed in fresh clothes, eyes a bit bloodshot and red rimmed but otherwise dry. He walked back over to the chair and sank back down into it, watching the screen.

John was curled up on his bed, clutching his pillow with a pained look on his face. Even though Greg was just a few feet away, it was incredibly stressful. He looked up silently and could see the evidence of crying on Greg's face. To John, Greg was a perfect man who shouldn't ever feel pain. Not ever. Lying in his bed, John felt so terribly useless. "I'm sorry you are sad. I don't want you to be sad, because you've been so good to me." John fidgeted a little and rolled the hem of his shirt between his fingers. "Come here," he opened his arms and motioned for Greg to come into his bed with him.

Greg looked at John for a moment before complying, standing up and then sitting down on the edge of John's bed, making it obvious that he'd comply with whatever John wanted to do. "It's not your fault, John. It's not. I'm okay," he tried to assure, his voice finally steady and clear. He was exhausted from the cry, but he felt much better for it. He'd need to eat soon, but otherwise, he was as sound as he could be. He looked over at John and swallowed hard, wondering if the man was still in there. He'd assured Sherlock on that fateful day that I'm still in here, I'm still me, several times. It had fueled Greg's resolve to see John through this.

He hoped he hadn't been wrong.

John pulled Greg into an embrace and decided to be as cheerful as he could for the man's sake. He would smile more, eat his ice chips without complaining and not panic as best he could. He knew how terribly little that really was, but it seemed to be the only thing he was capable of doing. "No, You're not okay. You're not. But that's alright, because nobody here really is."

Greg leaned against John and closed his eyes, breathing slowly. He was quiet for a long time. When he finally spoke, his voice was soft, distant, and fond. "We used to go every Sunday evening for a pint. Do you remember?" He shook his head with a sad smile. "You walked me through the worst of
the divorce, right when it was fresh, when it hurt so bad I was sure I'd never make it. You never failed to take some of the weight off my shoulders. I'd listen to you talk of Sherlock, the things you put up with living with him. It was so obvious how in love the pair of you were. Sometimes it was difficult to see while I was losing my own family."

He had to stop then, his voice catching slightly. He went quiet, just breathing slow and deep. "You lot became my family. I missed you terribly while you were gone. Sherlock started having that pint with me, and he was so different...so...he was just different. I knew he missed you. I'd never seen him like that before."

John had been having a difficult time remembering a life before his time in the warehouse. He had bits of his childhood, college, his time in the army, and even a bit after the war, but almost anything concerning Sherlock was a haze. "I think I remember that." John remarked quietly. "I remember you were in a rough spot at the time. I don't think Sherlock and I were in love. I don't think I was gay. Or maybe I was. Am. Don't know. It hardly matters now." Something as simple as his sexuality didn't matter much to him anymore. He had never had any soft of attraction to a man. Perhaps then, after all his memories of the man being confused and tossed about inside his mind, he had reason to doubt what their relationship had been. "He never acted like a man in love."

Greg shook his head, "No, he didn't. You two were never...I'd never have thought you gay, John. I don't think you are. Whatever it was, it was specific to Sherlock. I don't even know if there was a physical element to it. What do I know, is that were you to spend the rest of your life with that man, you'd have been happy with it. You lot would have fussed and grumbled all the way to the end of old age. Might never have been physical. But...you never knew Sherlock before. Since you came into his life...he's been different. In a good way. In a way I never thought I see from him. It wasn't until you left for Africa that he acted as a man in love. It was as close to pinning as I thought him capable. Well, until after..." until I watched him waste away.

"I can't remember most of it," John said rather dejectedly. All those memories that he had held so dear, the ones that dragged him out of his depression and breathed life into him were muddy and blurry in his mind. "I would have been happy to live that way forever. It would have been nice. But I'm different now and he's going to be hurt. It won't go back to the way it was." John tried his best to clear his head and put the memories into some sort of cohesive story. "He was mad when I said I was going. He got angry and shouted. I think I hurt him. He never seemed like he wanted me to stay."

Greg huffed a laugh through the sharp stab of crushing defeat. "You are all he has, really. He'd walk away from everything else without batting an eye, but you? You were it." He scrubbed a hand over his face, "He wasn't angry with you when you left though. He was just...scared, I think." He took a deep breath and looked at John then, staring at him, looking for traces of the man he used to know. Surely this could all be recovered. "I...I have pictures, some video...you kept a blog of the cases and life with Sherlock. Would you...you could look at those if you'd like."

John went pensive for a few moments, murmuring something to himself. "Blog? I don't remember...Oh! Yes, I remember. My therapist had me make it. I wrote about Sherlock."

John looked up to Greg, suddenly hopeful. "D'you think it will help me remember if I read them?"

"I hope so, yeah. I don't think it can hurt," he said softly, watching John and hoping he was making the correct move. "We have a tablet in here if you'd like to start."

John nodded and waited for the tablet to be handed to him. He typed in the name of his blog easily, though he couldn't recall how he remembered. With wide, glassy eyes John scrolled through case after case. Some of them he remembered and some only made him feel hazy and forgetful. It was with sudden emotion that John realized the depth of what he had lost. The realization that the most
fantastic thing to ever happen to him had been stripped away, not even leaving the memories intact, was brutal and devastating. John placed the tablet face down. He'd lost everything. His friend, his life, his work, his home, his things, his body, hell, he lost his sanity!

When John set the tablet down, Greg held his breath, not sure what was going on in the man's mind. "Are you..." are you what? Alright? Hardly. "Can you tell me what you're thinking?"

John exhaled very slowly. "I was happy then. I was very happy. I had friends, I had work, I had a home." The bitterness of loss and change were combined with the agony of knowing it was something irreplaceable. "And he destroyed it. I can't even remember it properly! He didn't just take it away! He took my memories of it too!"

"You still have friends, and that home has its doors wide open to you if you want. You've not lost those. Your memory improves daily. I know this is terrible, but it's not all lost. It's not. I don't know if you will be able to work like you had been, but that's not something you have to worry about right now."

Greg ran his fingers through John's hair, hoping Sherlock would be able to at least learn that John no longer believed him to be the one responsible. "This all will be a comfort to him, at the least."

"It will comfort him? That I'm confused? Or that I've gone back to being the one person who doesn't think he's some sort of freak?" John was bitter now, but not towards anyone in particular. "I hate Donovan. She's awful. If she were a man I would have hit her. She used to call him a freak when you weren't around. Sherlock doesn't usually give a rats ass what people say, but I think 'freak' bothered him."

Greg listened to John with an upswing of hope. His words had to be the result of memory on some level. His blog would never lead someone who had no intimate knowledge of Sherlock to think that being called freak-and Christ was he going to get at that woman- would bother him. "He'll be comforted by your lack of hatred for him, and hopefully your...lessened fear?"

"If he were here right now I'd likely have some sort of meltdown." John grumbled. "He terrifies me, but I think I've come to terms with the idea that it's not his fault. It's difficult. I have all these memories of him beating me...or being there while I was being beaten. They're more clear than the others I have of him before. But... I don't know." He hung his head.

Greg nodded, he'd gotten ahead of himself. "Do you still believe it was actually Sherlock hurting you?" The question was soft and neutral, not wanting to upset or accuse John of anything. "I just need to know what the situation is before-" he shook his head slightly and took in a deep breath.

"I think there's still a possibility he was involved, but I know that I'm not mentally stable. I've decided just to go with the fact that I'm confused and trust you. You say he didn't, and you haven't broken down into hysterics recently, so I'll trust your sanity over mine." He folded his hands in his lap and kept his eyes down.

Greg sucked in a sharp, involuntary breath and nodded slowly. He had misunderstood. This was a complete nightmare. Not that it needed anything more, but he'd thought that John had at least pushed past Sherlock's supposed culpability. He reached out and held on to John's hand. "I'm sorry."

John shook his head and patted Greg's shoulder. "Don't be. I'm working through it. I believe you. I understand that I'm just confused. I think, logically, I know he didn't hurt me...but that doesn't make the fear any less real."

"Yeah," Greg responded softly, "I know. It's not your fault, John. I'm so sorry this happened to you." He leaned his head back and closed his eyes, his throat tight yet again. The thought occurred to him that maybe he should see someone about the stress.

"Yeah, it seems everyone's sorry. Or dead. But none of you should be sorry. You've done everything
you could for me. You've stayed with me. Mycroft protected me. Sherlock...." John swallowed the rock that seemed lodged in his throat. "Sherlock...sacrificed himself for me..."

Greg had no idea where to go from there. Everything he was saying seemed to be the wrong thing. He just kept himself still, tamping down on the urge to say that he was sorry once again. John was speaking in the past tense and Greg was doing his best to resist the tug of hopelessness.

John took Greg's silence to mean he had said something wrong and fell quiet. "I'm sure things will get better for you. You'll have a nice life once everything is...sorted."

Greg couldn't help himself as he suddenly pulled John to him in a desperate, perhaps overly tight embrace. He closed his eyes and held his breath in a bid not to break down on him again. "You mean to say you think I'll be able to live once I've killed you and Sherlock off," he breathed, cracking a nearly panicked, horrified laugh, a sob catching in his throat.

"No, Greg, that's not...that's not what I meant... You'll be helping us..." John kissed the top of Greg's head and squeezed his eyes shut. "I shouldn't have asked you to do that. I'm sorry... I should have know it would hurt you." To John it was as simple as someone offering to help and him telling them what he needed help with. In his eyes, it would be mercy, not murder.

Greg let John go and dragged shaking hands over his face. He was falling apart and they'd not even found Sherlock yet. He took in a deep breath and cleared his throat. "I made you a promise. I'll keep it. I just refuse to allow you to think things will be better without you here. I refuse." If he had to do that in the end, Greg was going to drink himself to death. There was no way he'd ever recover, and he knew it without a doubt. He'd say goodbye and then he'd put himself down with a bottle of Everclear. There was no alternative. He would never make it.

John saw the pain in Greg's eyes and found his own expression mirroring it. "So...what you're asking is for me to choose." John thought perhaps his tone was a bit sharp and hoped Greg didn't take offense. "I can leave and make you, Sherlock, Mycroft, and everyone else who has helped me suffer, or I can stay through my own suffering and continue to be a burden."

"You won't leave Sherlock, he'll go with you," Greg responded. The words were gentle, meant to comfort. "And sod Mycroft and myself, honestly, you've been in hell and I am not going to ask you to stay here for anyone's sake but your own. I just need you to know that you'll be catastrophically missed. I refuse to help you die while you believe yourself worthless and a burden." He was speaking honestly, trying to be clear in what he was communicating.

"You want me to die knowing that I'll make people sad? Thanks. That's helpful. I feel much better about it now." John turned away and tucked his knees up to his chest. "I'm here right now because you said Sherlock needs me. And I'll stay because you want me too for as long as I can. My intention isn't to make you miss me. My intention is to just cease. I don't want to hurt you. I really, really don't. But there is no 'staying for my own sake'."

Greg felt the dismissal like a physical blow. He'd yet again made a terrible miscalculation. Carefully he slid off the side of the bed and moved to his chair, breathing slow and controlled. "I wanted you to live knowing you are loved, not die washed in guilt. It wasn't a move to make you feel guilt. I was..." he huffed at himself, scrubbing his hands over his head as he looked down at the floor, "trying to instill hope. Not guilt. I'm sorry, I'm no good at this." His words were soft, nearly whispered as he stared at the floor.

John breathed in slow, measured inhales and only slightly shaking exhales. "I know I'm loved. You love me. Sherlock loved me. Loves. Not sure. Mycroft at least cares about how useful I can be. I think Mrs. Hudson sort of adopted Sherlock and I." An overwhelming wave of guilt washed over
him and he let out a choked sob. "I'm already guilty. You didn't need to instill it in me. It's there. I feel terrible. I want to be alright for your sake, but I can't seem to get everything straight in my mind."

Greg listened to John with a sinking heart. "I didn't realize that you knew all of that. Again, John, I'm sorry. I...I can step out if you'd like...give you some space. I didn't mean for this to be the outcome of our talk. I- blundering attempts at trying to help and I'm just making you feel worse."

He was drenched in self-loathing, listening to John falling apart under the weight of Greg's words. "I didn't- Christ, John, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. You have enough to be going on with. You shouldn't feel guilty, John. You even trying to stay around for any of us is selfless. I'm sorry I made you feel like this." He slowly stood up, his stomach twisting.

"No, Greg, please!" John half-shouted with a sudden pang of panic. "Please don't leave. Don't leave me. Not yet. You aren't making things worse. I need you to stay with me." His eyebrows knitted together and he reached out his hand to Greg. John saw the bones in his hand showing through the tight skin and dropped it. "You're good to me. Don't leave. Please." John had grown dependent on Greg very quickly, as he had begun to associate his safety and the absence of pain with the prescience of the man.

Greg stopped and immediately sat back down in the chair. "Okay, John, okay. I'm not leaving," he said softly. He cleared his throat and stared down at his hands. It had been months and he'd yet to even get John to drink a glass of water. They were keeping him alive feeding him through a tube in his nose, but they were not making him thrive. He sat back and looked at John, really looked at him.

He swore under his breath and looked away again, his hands shaking hard. What was he doing? What were they doing here? John looked like a holocaust survivor, only he didn't want to survive. He wanted to die. He was still scared of Sherlock, still suspected him involved. He- what the hell were they doing to him? Greg had been in a place of denial and the effect of the day took his knees out from under him.

"I'm hurting you, aren't I, John?" He asked softly, grief dragging his voice through gravel.

John counted the bones in the back of his hand and wrapped his fingers around his wrist. His fingers overlapped to the first digit and he let go in disgust. At Greg's question, John's attention snapped up. "No? What...? No, you're not. You don't hurt me. You never hurt me. You keep me safe."

John looked back down at his hands and wondered why he had grown so thin. I haven't been eating. Maybe that's why Greg is sad. "Would you like me to try eating again?" John asked gently, desperate for a way to help. "I can eat...I know I can. If I have some more medicine to keep me calm maybe it'll be alright."

Greg stood up and handed John a pill, and then, without any hope that John would manage more than a small bite, went into the little fridge they'd put in John's room and fetched him out a bit of applesauce and a spoon. He had his own food in there and should probably eat, but at the moment he was too nauseated to consider it. He set the little container down at John's side and turned up the volume slightly to they symphony, angling the screen to where John could see, wondering if it would distract him a bit.

He went and sat back down in his chair, staring at John's profile with a knot in his throat.

John took the foil off the top of the applesauce. Had those gotten stronger or him weaker? His hand shook and he tried not to think about the motion he was making as he took a spoonful. "S-See?" He stammered after the first bite, "I can do this." He took another small bite, though his face was contorted as if he were in pain. "Just...it's just applesauce. I'm going to be fine."
Greg found himself in his own personal hell. He didn't want John doing this for his sake, the man looked as though he was torturing himself, but he also didn't want to stop him because god in heaven John needed to eat. He opened his mouth but had no idea whether to praise and encourage or give permission for John to stop. He began to sweat, the pressure of his role getting to him, needing some sort of help.

"John," he said softly, his voice soft, his face pulled in agonized empathy.

John had no desire to eat. It went beyond the fear of retribution, or the pain response he had been programmed to feel. Eating was something people did to survive, as that just was not on the top of John's priority list. He wasn't going to actively kill himself, but he couldn't help but think eating was counterproductive, or at least a futile effort. But there was Greg, looking torn, and John continued on. "I'm alright," he forced himself to say, though he sounded out of breath. He continued on with tiny, pained bites and took frequent breaks to calm himself down. He stared at the ceiling, or the telly, or Greg, but eventually started back up again each time. When he had finished the entire cup, which was still rather small, he dropped the spoon and put his hands over his face. He let out a clipped, frustrated scream and rocked himself back and forth. "There. I'm d-done."

There was no elation in that for Greg, no elevated hope, nothing but sickness at his own behavior which had so terribly affected John. He gave him a tight nod. It was...potentially...a major breakthrough, but John had clearly not wanted it and did not feel better for doing so. He stood up slowly and took the cup away, pitching it in the bin, before returning to his chair.

"God, I'm sorry, John. I'm sorry." He swallowed hard and wavered, "I don't mean to do this to you."

"That's alright...d-don't be sad. P-P-Please. Don't be upset." John was terribly confused now. He thought that Greg wanted him to eat, that it would make him happy for some reason. All he'd wanted was to make him happy, and he'd apparently made things worse. Maybe he's sad still because it was difficult for me. "Y-You aren't...aren't doing anything t-to hurt me. J-Ju-Just t-trying to help. I thought...I thought you wanted me to eat...I thought it would help you not be hurting." His lower lip quivered and he sniffed, eyes starting to water up again. Stupid John! Stupid, fucking idiot! You can't do anything right.

Greg got up and moved over to John, hesitating slightly before leaning down and wrapping his arms around him. "I do want you to eat, and I am glad you were able to. I'm- I'm just having a hard day. You're doing fine." He closed his eyes and ran his fingers through John's hair before pulling back and giving him a small smile.

"I'm...I'm just trying to help. I didn't mean to make you sad, I thought you wanted me to eat but then you seemed unhappy and I'm sorry it isn't easier for me but I tried and-and-and.-" John coughed and pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes. "Tried...I want to h-help..."

Greg swore under his breath and pulled John to his chest, his own heart beating too fast, too hard. He was sick with himself, his gut twisting in knots. "I'm sorry, you're doing fine, I don't know what's wrong with me. I just want you to eat so that you'll feel better, but it was making you miserable, and I'm scared I'm making you suffer."

"I just...I just don't want to eat, I just don't. It's not even completely because of the hurting. It's because I just don't want to eat!" He nuzzled into Greg, his whimpering slowing just a bit at the comfort it provided. "You aren't hurting me. You're just helping. I-I need to be able t-to eat when Sherlock gets back so he thinks I'm alright."

Greg wrapped his hand around the back of John's neck and leaned into him, holding him close.
"You do what you need to do. God I wish I could take this from you, I'm so sorry you have all of this pain, John." He pulled him into a firm embrace and tipped his face to John's shoulder, breathing deep, trying to settle himself down. This was completely unacceptable.

"W-Will it h-hurt you t-too much to let me go?" John looked up with wide, fearful eyes. Greg's expression dropped at that and he shook his head, "That's not something you should worry about," he replied gently, loathing that John had no other plans at all. Greg swallowed hard and made himself try and breathe normally.

John's chin trembled and he bit his lip to keep it steady. "You're going to be hurt, aren't you? You'll be sad. You won't..." John stared up in abject horror. "You won't try and leave too, will you?"

Greg turned his face away from John just for a moment before he was able to master himself. "Not while I have people who depend on me," he skirted. John and perhaps Sherlock were the only people on earth who ever gave a damn if he was around. That had been more than enough. Hell, he'd probably have been fine were the three of them to have a falling out and gone other paths. But to carry on after forcing John to live, to face his fears for so long, only to push enough drugs to stop his heart months later? No. No, he wasn't going to survive that all on its own. If the same had to be done for Sherlock...he swallowed and repeated gruffly, "not while there are people to depend on me."

"That means yes," John whimpered to himself. "Once Sherlock is back you'll know. If he needs you you'll stay with him. I want him to be alright. I want you to be alright. I want to be... Dead. John shut his eyes and drew the covers up over his shoulders. This situation would have been overwhelming for John even if he hadn't been tortured. Losing Sherlock to a sadistic killer while Greg withered away would have been enough. Now, broken and scarred as he was, it only fueled his goal of sleep.

"But you don't want to be alright, do you, John? Even if you could be, you don't want it." Greg spoke in monotone, watching John with a heavy heart. "I can't...John I can't force you to try. If you...I feel like a monster, trying to help you when you don't want to be helped, when you don't want to get better. God I want you to get better and I know you can, but it won't happen if you don't want to. I can't...I can't keep doing this to you." He scrubbed a hand down his face as a few tears slid down his cheeks, despite his efforts. He needed to see someone about the stress, needed to sleep, to eat properly. He was falling apart. He trailed his fingers through John's hair gently as he spoke. "You're my best mate. I don't want to keep hurting you."

John understood what this meant. It meant that he was going to have to pretend like he wanted to get better if he was going to help Greg. In his damaged phaneron, his own death would end everything. The world would cease to exist, thus there would be no pain once he left. He just needed everyone to be happy when he left. "I'll get better, then. I don't want you to think you're forcing me. I trust you. If you tell me to do something I'll do it. Not because I have to, no, you're nothing like Moriarty. I'll do it because I trust you. You are good to me."

Greg shook his head. "I'm not trying to manipulate you, John. You don't have to suddenly change how you feel for me. I've likely made you do that far too much. Christ," he breathed, his hands shaking. "Even if Sherlock has been tortured...will you want to see him? Will you let him see you? You still think he was involved. I don't know..."if he can stand that," I don't think you should be doing this just for Sherlock."

"I want to see him. I know what he went through. I can help." John sounded so terribly feeble offering to help someone while still himself rather broken. "I care about him. I don't know what happened, or if he was involved in hurting me, but I still want him to be alright. That's why I suspect it was a trick. Because even though he scares me I still want him to be alright."

"That's good, John, that's good." Greg offered a kind smile, which John returned. "You helped."
Greg stopped then and took a breath. He needed someone with actual experience in this field to guide him. "That friend of mine should be coming by sometime today, if you are still willing to talk to him. But John...honestly...I don't want to do this to you if- this isn't what I want to do if you are just going to..." He sighed and shook his head, at a loss. "Everything I do is making you worse. I-" he stopped talking, hoping to hell Mycroft was making progress. He was reaching the maximum of what he could deal with. Every fear, every moment of worry and anxiety he watched John suffer through felt heavier and heavier on his shoulders, the weight of guilt finally dragging him down low.

"As long as you promise to stay. The last one was bad. He was very bad. You mustn't leave me alone with him." John already looked a bit nervous. "And he won't strap me down, right? He'll stay away?"

Greg just nodded, chewing on the insides of his lips, forcing himself to maintain. He reached down and took John's hand, squeezing it tight, exhaling a slow, shaking breath. "He won't hurt you." "Then I'll talk to him. What do you want me to tell him? Just the same things I've told you? I don't have any secrets."

Greg just stretched back in the bed beside John and closed his eyes. He was quiet for a long time, just thinking, trying to find his way. "I don't know what he'll want you to talk about," he said with a shrug, rolling over and texting Mycroft.

How is the progress with Sherlock, and has Paul contacted you about coming today? GL

Yes, he said he can be in whenever is convenient. I will be monitoring.

John swallowed hard. "He won't be upset if I mess up, will he? He won't be mad if I start to panic?"

Greg wrapped an arm around John's hips just after texting the request that John send Paul in as soon as he could. He pulled John to him gently, tipping his forehead to John's shoulder. "I am right here, John. Right here. I would dismember anyone who tried to hurt you with my bare hands. That aside, Paul is an old friend of mine and he would never be upset with you, or I wouldn't let him near you. Promise." He was so, so exhausted. The situation with John was wearing him thin fast. The progress they'd made had been against John's will, and that knowledge was slowly killing him.

Chapter End Notes

Greg....Oh, poor Greg. Our wonderful, loving Greg, so torn, so broken.

30 kilometers.
They're closing in, but John is tearing himself apart. He has no desire to live. How will he continue on like this?
Will Mycroft get to Sherlock in time?

This could be a tragic end, or an even more hopeless beginning.
John looked up warily when he heard the buzzer for the first door, the one several meters from his own, go off. "He's going to be good to me, right?" John asked one more time before straightening himself in bed. "I trust you, Greg. I really do. You'll keep me safe."

Greg knew he should move. He dragged himself up and slid out of the bed, walking over to his chair and taking John's hand in his. The door opened, and a moment later a lythe, shorter man with salt and pepper hair much like Greg's came in, smiling from behind square spectacle frames, a forest green jumper on over well loved dark washed jeans and loafers. When he spoke, he had a soft Scottish accent, a pleasing cadence and tone that was gentle and welcoming. He clearly took in the look of both men and came to stand at the foot of John's bed. "Hello Dr. Watson, my name is Paul Schmidt, though please do call me Paul. Hi there, Greg, it's been quite some time."

Greg smiled back at him, a tired, empty gesture, and squeezed John's hand. "Hey there, Paul. John's a bit nervous."

Paul smiled back to Greg, the gesture meeting his eyes, everything about the man open and easily readable, no hidden agenda. He took a seat a few paces back from the foot of the bed, trying to give John all the space he needed. "Well, that's to be expected. Dr. Watson, is it alright if I call you John? Or do you prefer the title?"

John had a white knuckled grip on Greg and he whimpered softly. He said nothing through the initial meeting and only spoke when asked a question. "John. You can call me John." His voice was a croak and he kept his eyes away from Paul. He stated at his hands and wondered how one would go about gaining weight on their hands. He looked nearly skeletal. This new man, Paul, seemed rather warm and kind to John, who shrank away. He trusted absolutely nobody except his Greg. Nobody else. But Greg wanted him to speak, did he not? He wanted him to improve. "Uhm...I'm supposed to tell you about what happened, I think."

Paul kept his focus on John, while Greg held his hand. He nodded at their joined fingers. "Mycroft has told me that Greg is with you quite a bit. Can you tell me a bit about Greg? I've not seen him in many years, and it would be interesting to hear what his friends have to say." His tone was just as it had been when Paul entered, soft and gentle, the words rolling and easy on his tongue. He smiled to Greg and then simply waited to see what John would do.

John was relieved at the easy question. It would be much easier for him to get used to talking to the man before they addressed anything stressful. "Greg is good. Very good. He keeps me safe. He killed people to keep them away from me. He saved me from Moriarty's men and set the building on fire. Greg is the most wonderful man in the entire world."

Greg hadn't realized John had any memory of that. He stared at John, obviously startled. Paul made a face that reflected mild surprise and rapt interest, "Is that so? Well, I can honestly say I've never encountered that particular response before. That's quite impressive. I'm guessing that you mean a great deal to him." He looked John over and spoke again. "What are your days like, John? Do you read, or listen to music to occupy your time?"

John was clearly programmed in some way to answer questions. "I talk to Greg a lot. Sometimes I
watch Telly. I used to have a video of Sherlock that I watched." John flinched a bit at the name, which he hadn't been doing recently. The meaning of the word might not be just 'Sherlock' to Paul. John trusted Greg, but the word 'Sherlock' still might mean 'hurt me' to this new person. When no beating came, John decided that this was another man who didn't torture him for saying it. "I eat ice chips sometimes. Or applesauce. I got to go outside....yesterday? I saw a beetle. It was nice."

Paul smiled broadly at him, "You tried eating! That's wonderful. You've made remarkable progress on your own, John. I hadn't expected as much already. And a trip outside, that's wonderful. If you're up for it, I think it would be great if you kept making trips outside. But that's something we can talk about later. Before I ask you anything else, would you like to ask me anything? I like to be as accessible to you as possible."

John lit up a little at the cheerfulness and the praise. "Wonderful? Thank you." He gave Paul a tiny smile and stopped rolling the fabric of his shirt. "I have a question. You're going to try and fix me, right? I don't want to be broken. But I get afraid of things. I get really afraid. And I've got to not be afraid of Sherlock because if he's been hurt I want to be able to help him before I leave. Also I don't trust you. The last one of you I worked with hurt me. I don't like other people who are not Greg, but I want you to fix me."

Paul listened to John with his full attention, nodding his understanding. "Well, John, I don't like to think of it in terms of 'fixing.' I like to think of myself as a guide. You're pretty deep in the woods right now. Can make it difficult to see more than just a short distance ahead and there is a lot in your way, branches to trip on, things like that. I am just here to help you get your feet back on the path out, alright? I don't see anyone broken here. Just lost and tired." He looked to Greg then as well, taking a moment to study him with sharp, attentive eyes.

In the next moment he was focused back on John. "I think it says a lot about the man you are, that even while you are so in need of help yourself, your focus is on a man that scares you. We can work with that, John, absolutely. There are a few things we need to address first, but I want you to know that I hear you. I certainly want to get you seeing clearly before you leave. Can you tell me where you are going?" Paul had no question of John's meaning, but they were going to have it out on the table at the least.

John didn't like to refer to it as dying. Dying was messy and terrible and hurt other people. By calling death 'leaving' and torturing 'hurting' he could disconnect just a bit from what had actually happened and put it in a format his mind could handle. "Leaving. As in I'll get some morphine and use enough to leave. I don't want to do it to make them sad," he added, sitting up abruptly and leaning forward, an expression of urgency on his face. "I just don't see any point."

Paul hummed at that, noting that Greg was no longer looking at them, his eyes closed and head hung low. He'd address that later. For now, he looked at John. "You nailed it there, John, with not seeing the point. That's why I'm here, to help you out of the woods. It might take some time, and that's alright. For now, can you tell me when you planned on leaving?"

John hadn't expected this level headed logic. It was utterly refreshing. "I planned on leaving once Sherlock gets better. If he's alright, and doesn't need me, I get to leave early." John sat up and crossed his legs underneath himself. "It could be in two days or a year. I don't know. But it'll happen." As abstract as the idea was, John pulled comfort from it. He was still very wary of Paul, but Greg was in between them, and he solidly believed that Greg would rip the man apart if he tried to hurt him.

Paul nodded his understanding. "Alright, John, fair enough. Thank you for telling me. I just like to know our time frame." He looked over at Greg, who was no longer holding John's hand, one of his own pressed to his eyes in a clear effort to control himself. Paul looked back to John. "So, I see you
still have an NG tube in your nose. Don't imagine that's very comfortable. Can you tell me what your situation is with eating and drinking?"

"They're bad. It hurts to drink and eat. It hurts in here." He tapped his temple. "Because I wasn't allowed and now I am but I still seem to think I'm not allowed or something." John hung his head and scowled at the sheets. "It's stupid. I know. But it hurts."

"Are you alright?" John said in a dull voice and looked over at Greg. He wanted to be sure the man was alright, so he reached out and took his hand. "I don't like talking about some things, but I have to get better. I'm supposed to tell you things, right?"

Paul leaned back slightly, watching Greg as the man curled his fingers around John's. "You are not supposed to do anything, John. I'll ask that you try a few of the things I suggest, but none of it is required of you. Yes, talking will help you, and you have your code that stops it all when it gets to be too much. You have the control here, John."

He smiled softly again. "So John, can you tell me a little more about how it hurts when you eat? I understand what you've already said, can you describe it? Is it a physical pain? What does it feel like?"

"Once when I stopped eating so he wouldn't hurt me, he forced me to eat then beat me with a whip until I went unconscious. Then I got in trouble for sleeping." John spoke the words in a rush and didn't exactly know why he was sharing this. Perhaps he wanted to shock Paul, perhaps he wanted to invoke pity so the man would be kinder, and perhaps he just wanted these things out of his mind and into other people's heads. "Sorry...I mean, I feel pain that had happened before when I ate and I get scared because I don't know if they're going to hurt m-me again and... and..."

Paul sat calmly while John explained what had occurred. He nodded when John trailed off, watching as Greg, without being asked, carefully shifted to sit at John's back, gently sliding his arm across John's chest and holding him securely.

Greg leaned in, whispering softly to John as he held the thin man to his chest, "I'm right here with you."

John leaned into Greg and tipped his head to rest on his shoulder. "Thanks, Greg. I'm scared. I'm really scared. But you're here, so I'm okay."

Paul let the moment hang before speaking softly. "That is a terrible thing to have done to you, John. It is only understandable that it would cause you distress to eat. You said that you have been eating a little. How has that gone?"

John stiffened just a little bit and the hairs on the back of his neck bristled. What if he is one of Moriarty's come to make sure I'm still silent? "I...Yeah. I did. I'm not allowed...wasn't allowed to speak."

"The doctor... the one like you.. he
hurt me f-for writing and..
"John, I want you to take a moment and tell me where you are, and who you are with. Can you do that for me?"

John's breath hitched and he blinked rapidly at his surroundings. White walls. White floor. No, cement floor. Blood. John put his hands over his eyes. "I'm in a high security building... with Greg..." At the word of his friend and protector, John seemed to calm down just a bit. "Greg's here...Greg's here... I'll be alright..."

Paul nodded as Greg shifted his hold on John, moving so that he had one leg stretched out alongside John's, holding John's back to his own chest, arms slung across John's torso and fingers wrapped protectively around John's shoulder. His thumb worked slow, small circles there and he kept his own breathing calm and steady. John seemed to be responding to it well, as he held on to Greg's arms and copied his breathing.

Paul watched, letting a minute slide past in an effort to let John calm down. "Let's start from after when you were attacked in hospital, John. How were you able to overcome your fear of communicating when even writing ended up hurting you?"

"Uhm...There was... there was a doctor... He started tapping." John tapped his hand on his leg. "And
he said I was allowed to tap. I didn't want to, and I was scared, but he sat there all day. I responded,
and he didn't hurt me. But then... Later... Something bad happened...wasn't allowed t I can't
remember." John shook a bit and turned to Greg. "Can you tell him? I don't like talking about why I
voiice strained o talk. It feels wrong."

Greg cleared his throat and looked to Paul, his own hand heavy. "That was Sherlock who got him
communicating in Morse. There was an attack. Sherlock was in John's room dressed as a physician.
He would not leave once he caught that...that hurting John, but he didn't want to frighten John
either. Couldn't get him to leave. He ended up having to reveal himself. Protected John, but ended up
having to leave."

Paul looked to John. "Is that what you remember?"

John nodded and breathed a small sigh of relief. "Yeah. I remember the attack. Someone held me
down when I tried to get away." He had his arms in an X over his chest and his thin legs tensed as if
he were going to run. "The doctor had hurt me and I thought all of them were going to. I'm still
suspicious about you." John hung his head, ashamed of his own fear. "Greg says you won't hurt me,
and I believe him, but I can't help it."

Paul gave John a soft smile. "John, I did not expect you to even speak to me today. You are doing
brilliantly. Perhaps we've gone over enough for the day. My main point with the issue of
communication is that at one point, communication hurt, it was terrifying. Yet here you are, in
command of your words. This is exactly what we are going to manage with food. Now, what I'd like
for you to do is this: a single spoonful of broth, applesauce, yogurt, or anything else you would like
to try, once an hour from the hours of 8am to 6pm. That's it. One spoonful. Of course, you can have
more than that if you are ever inclined, but we are going to start teaching your brain that food does
not mean pain."

John did not feel like he was making terrible improvement. He was a fully grown man scared out of
his wits by eating. "Alright. I'll...try. But if I have to try eating every hour... It takes me that long to
recover from it. I'll be scared all day. I don't... I don't want to do that...

Paul nodded to John. "It will get easier, John. I promise." He looked over to Greg, then. "And I'd
like to speak with you in private for just a moment."

John looked to Greg, terrified, wide eyes asking if this was right, if he really was to eat every hour all
day. "Why do you have to speak to him in private? Why can't I know?" John tightened his hold on Greg just a bit.

Paul nodded, "Alright, John, let's break it up for this week. Drop it to every two hours, okay? I've got to speak with him in private as it's about him, and I'm trying to respect his privacy."

Greg tightened his hold on John for just a moment, whispering to him, "You're alright, mate, you're okay. Just give me a moment."

"Alright. Come back though, won't you? You'll come back?" John let go of Greg but kept one hand on his shoulder.

Paul was on his feet, though he was still smiling softly. "John, let's work together on this. I'd very much like to get you eating, as would Greg. I believe that, like your use of Morse Code, tiny bits of food on a regular basis will help make this less painful. What would you feel comfortable trying? I don't want you hurting. Do your medications help with the fear any?"

"They make me less scared, but I can't think either. I don't really remember things clearly if I have a lot. Or maybe that's just my mind. I'm not sure. It's confusing..." He gave Greg one last squeeze and drew his arms back to his chest. "Alright. I'm alright. You two go talk or whatever."

Greg frowned at John's response, but got up anyhow, moving over to Paul. Paul nodded to John, "Alright, John, I'll see how you are doing tomorrow."

He and Greg slipped out of the room, Greg refusing to shut the door, leaving it cracked so he could hear John if he needed him. He was gone all of ten minutes, he and Paul discussing Greg's physical and mental health. In the end, it was decided that Greg would start on a very low dose of anxiety medication to help keep him steady.

Paul left and Greg returned to John's room, disappointment with himself all over his expression.

"You alright?" John asked nervously when Greg returned. He didn't like Greg leaving, and though he was sure the DI could protect himself, didn't like the idea of a new doctor being with him. "You don't look alright. He was nice, I guess. The first one was nice too, until he started hurting me. But... this one won't, and I'll get better, right? What did he tell you?"

Greg nodded. "Paul is safe, John, he's a good man. He'll help, I really think he will. Did you like him?" He came to the side of John's bed and sat down slowly, rolling his head on his shoulders. "He just wanted to talk to me about some things that worried him. I'm alright."

John crawled over to Greg and put his head in his lap. "I'm sorry I couldn't tell him all of the things. I did try. I got scared. I don't like talking to a doctor about how a doctor hurt me for talking."

Greg rest his hand on John's head and closed his eyes, leaning back against the bed. "You did brilliantly, John. There is nothing to be sorry for." He cleared his throat and pulled the blankets up over John better, trying to make him feel secure.

"Are you doing alright," John asked softly.

Greg huffed softly. "I suppose I'm as alright as is possible to be. I'm just...tired. I'm fine, John, you worry about getting yourself better, yeah? Speaking of eating, what do you think of the plan? You seemed quite angry about it."

John gave an irritated huff. "He's asking me to eat all day. If I could just get it all over with at once it wouldn't be so bad. I could get it all done and stop being afraid. But all day? I'll have to be anxious about it all day. I'll be thinking about it. I'll check the clock. It'll be awful."

Greg nodded his understanding. "I know, John, I know. I don't think it will stay so bad for long, and it's been months since we got you back. Even if..." he took a deep, shaking breath and pressed on, "even if you're going to leave," he shook his head, furious with himself and his lack of composure. He cleared his throat and tried again, "I'd feel so much better if you were able to eat until then. Once
"It's not so scary, I think food will help you think clearer and feel better."

"It's been months?" John echoed quietly, eyebrows drawing together and his mouth pressed into a thin line. He couldn't remember it being months. Surely if it had been months he would have recovered by now. "It... it can't have been months. It... there's no way. I would be alright by now. It's been... days? A week?"

Why hadn't he said that when Paul was around? Greg pressed a hand to his eyes, keeping his fingers in John's hair. "Nearly six months, John," he replied softly. Sherlock had been gone six... or was it eight weeks now? He was losing track of time himself. "You've been horrifically tortured, John, there is no way you would have come so far in so little time."

John started to shake then, eyes closed, tears leaking out the sides despite his efforts to remain calm. "I want to go home. I want to not be tortured. I want everything to be alright." It was unfair of him to ask, but he hadn't ever wanted something so desperately. "And... And that means it's been so long for Sherlock."

"We are going to find him, and we are going to get the pair of you home, John, we will. Mycroft is close, so close. I'm expecting word literally any minute, surely in the next few days at the longest. We are going to get him back. We are going to get you well." His tone was perhaps a bit desperate, but he needed John to understand how deeply he meant the words. He was thrilled that John had not said I want to leave, that had to be a start, surely?

John broke down in tears then, clutching Greg, eyes closed and shoulders shaking. "I-I hate this!" He cried and raw emotion made his voice slice through the air. "Why did this have to happen? Why couldn't he have just killed me? Wouldn't that have been easier?"

Greg just let him cry, holding on to him, grieving alongside him. He had no idea what to say, no answers for the man. He slid his fingers through John's hair, holding on to him as best he could. "I'm so sorry, John. I'm so sorry."

Although he thought he had emptied himself of tears, John cried until he had nothing left. He trembled, shouted, and nearly made himself sick. When it was over he felt weaker than before and drifted off into uneasy slumber on Greg's lap.

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Moran walked back into the room where Sherlock was strapped down to the small bed he had been living on for the past week. The front of the room was a white wall for the projection screen, and various speakers were placed in strategic places. The sadist was pissed today, and walked in with his breath stinking of brandy and cigars, the former of which was never a good sign for Sherlock, as Moran was even more violent when drunk. He snarled at Sherlock before walking over and striking him across the face without any warning or bravo.

"We're going to have some fun today, Sherlock."

Chapter End Notes

Tell me what you think.
Tell me how fast Mycroft should get there.
Tell me what songs remind you of this.
Tell me what fan art reminds you of this.
Tell me what you want to see.
Tell me what you think will happen.

And, for God's sake, don't give up on our boys.
Alright, friends, Sherlock's torment is coming to an end, but this chapter is still depressing. I hope you have fun. Or cry.

Sherlock's voice was gone from screaming. His eyes cut to Moran and he instantly tried to speak, "Please," he gasped, eyes wide and glassy, forehead slick with sweat, entire body shaking hard, "I'm s-sorry, p-please, please."

Greg texted Mycroft as John went quiet.

*Please tell me we have progress. GL*

*These men are active. It's hard to narrow down which buildings they are actually frequenting. We're going to take one in and see if we can get any information. M*

"What are you sorry for, Sherlock?" Moran asked almost kindly. He pulled up a chair and sat down next to the head of his bed. "I don't want him to hurt you. I can make him stop if you just tell me what you did to John Watson."

It was the same process over and over again, but repetition was the key to learning.

Sherlock's lips worked silently, confusion clouding over his expression. "I...I...w-what did you w-want me t-to say?" He swallowed as he stared at Moran, "P-please...p-please I- oh oh I h-hurt him! I hurt h-him. P-please stop!"

Moran clicked his tongue. "I don't think you're really sorry. You're just repeating words. That won't work. You have to be *truly* sorry." You have to believe. You have to truly believe. Moran took out a small pocket knife and carved the outline of a rectangle on Sherlock's wrist. "Have you ever seen how a wrist works? Would you like to?"

Sherlock was far too dehydrated for tears, and his screams now were just a rasping whisper of sound. He balled his fist, despite the puncture where the spike had been, despite the broken bones, feebly pulling against the restraints. He was hyperventilating, stars cracking along his blurred vision.

"S-sorry! Oh g-god I'm s...sorry please," he slurred.

"Are you sorry?" Moran asked and gently put his hand on a uninjured spot on Sherlock's shoulder almost kindly. "Do you remember the time when you were cutting him and he begged you to stop? Or when you whipped him until he couldn't stand?"

Sherlock started nodding so fast it nearly made him sick. He was going to black out, breathing too panicked and too quick, "Please, *please*, I r-remember," he panted, desperate.

"Tell me some of the details then. How it felt. How it smelled." Moran waved his hand and had a rag soaked with old blood brought into the room and set in the corner. It smelt terrible; metallic, rotting and sweet. "Do you remember?" The tapes should have given him something to base this new fabricated memory off of.
Sherlock whimpered at the request, his brows knitting, trying to call up crime scenes to pull from. His mind had all but shut him out, higher functions shut down, leaving him slow and dull. "F-felt," he started to speak, his stomach rolling and lungs seizing up on him as a spasm of pain licked through his body. "'s h-heavy...sp-spongy, oh, pl-please, please, I'm s-sorry, pl-ease."

Moran was somewhat pleased. It had been weeks, though, not months, and to fully train him would require more time. "Thats good. Good. You hurt him, Sherlock. If you ever think that you didn't hurt him, that you didn't cut him and whip him, I'll torture you and him until there is no flesh on you left unmarked. Do you understand me?"

Sherlock was nodding, parting his lips and trying to vocalize that he did, eyes up to the man who'd been torturing him in Moran's absence. "Pl-please...j-just a bit of r...r-rest, please."

"Ok," Sherlock breathed, closing his eyes and absorbing the words. He could be those things, on some levels was those things. He'd never have done this to John, never ever would have harmed him like this, but he was rather selfish as a whole. "O-okay," he whispered again, his throat on fire, his purpled arm so swollen that natural fissures had cracked along the skin so that the swelling could weep.

"Yes, it's rather sad, isn't it? You were too wrapped up in your work to ever care about anyone else. Poor John. That's probably why he hates you so much." Moran unclasped his wrists, as he was quite sure he wouldn't move the broken arm and knew any attempt to leave would be futile. "Well, that and because you hurt him so badly."

Sherlock sobbed as he pulled his lesser-damaged arm to his chest, understanding in a horrific and visceral way why John had done so with such relish. He grit his teeth and turned his face away from Moran, trying and failing to shift to his side. "Please," he whispered, loathing his own heart for it’s act of betrayal in still beating.

"No, Sherlock. Begging won't help your cause. Begging, while lovely, isn't what I want to hear from you. Not just yet." He didn't pull the man's arm away just yet. It would be more effective if he let him have it for a while. "I'm going to show you your memories again, Sherlock. If you're good and watch them for a while, I won't have you hurt for the rest of the day."

In the windowless room, he was quite sure Sherlock would have no idea how long that would be. "N-no pl-please no. Pl-please no," he panted, suddenly curling as his stomach caught and heaved, "c-can't...I c-can't." The idea of listening to John screaming for hours was nearly worse than lying there as a pin cushion. He swallowed hard before falling down into a coughing fit, still quite ill.

John was lying still on the cement with his hands tied behind his back. It was clear from the angle at which he held his arms that it was hurting his injured shoulder, which had a slightly shorter range of motion, but he seemed in some sort of exhausted, shallow sleep. Sherlock's voice suddenly boomed over the loudspeakers and Moran rushed in, quickly waking John with kicks to the stomach.

Sherlock shouted at him, "Th-that is you," he yelled as loud as he could manage. "Tr-training h-him to f-f-fear me." He was suddenly clear, if just for a moment, and there was rage in his expression as he reached out, suddenly grabbing Moran by the front of his shirt, unable to physically do more than that. "Y-you are the m...monster," he growled, gasping for breath, willing the man to kill him, "You." Moran heaved a slow sigh then, with a sudden burst of movement, brought his elbow across Sherlock's nose. "No. You are responsible for what happened. Sometimes you beat him, sometimes I did. You told me to beat him. You remember that." He slammed his fist over Sherlock's bruised body
over and over, punctuating his words and pauses with pain for emphasis. "YOU. If you don't understand that it was you, I will continue to hurt you. Do you want pain? Is this what you want?" Despite the horrific, nearly indescribable pain, Sherlock pressed on, his vision washed red from the blood in his eyes, hardly able to breathe, screaming and trying to deflect, rejecting what was told to him. This was how he was going to manage it. No one was coming for him. He was going to get himself killed. "Y-you..." his words failed him as his lungs spasmed, "l-let J-Jim die, y-you lost al-al...al-ready," he pressed, unwilling to play the game any longer. John was safe. Greg had John. He'd been soaked in fever before, but the treatment he'd been given at least allowed him to think on that level, to remember. He gave Moran and bloodied smile.

Moran left the room for a moment and came back with a crowbar. "Do you care about your legs, Sherlock? Fancy being a in wheelchair for months while they pin the bones back?" He struck his shin on the left side, hard enough to bruise but not to break. "Do you really think I'll let you die in here? No, Sherlock, no. I'm not going to let you die until I've watched you and John meet up again. Now that you're all broken, it'll be even more entertaining than the first time."

Sherlock jerked his leg, panting hard, glaring at Moran with intense hatred. "N-no wonder he..." he closed his eyes, swallowing hard, trying to think on the odds of a death by clot if he let Moran shatter his bones. The idea was nauseating, horrific and terrifying. He sobbed, choking on his reality, the sudden flashes of clarity making everything so much worse. "y-you're s-so b...boring."

"Yes, and you're terribly interesting." Sebastian rolled his eyes. "At least I was unpredictable. He couldn't pin what I was going to do. But you? He had this entire event written out. In a notebook. He had ever second of every day planned. He knew when John would start speaking again and when you would succumb and text him back. You're so predictable. If I were to read it now it would say exactly the things you were." He unstrapped Sherlock's leg and bent it at the knee. He then started working on the calf, which was much less receptive to force than the other muscles.

Sebastian struck him over and over again. "You think you're clever? Interesting? You weren't WORTHY of his attention! You're pathetic! You're worthless!" He beat around Sherlock's ankles until he no longer derived satisfaction from the thudding sound. Sebastian slashed across the back of Sherlock's ankle savagely, severing his Achilles tendon the same way Moriarty had done with John. He was crazed with anger and no longer gave a damn about training Sherlock. He just wanted to do damage.

Sherlock blacked out nearly at the same time he began to vomit up the can't bike he had in his lungs. There was no more screaming, hardly breathing after all of that. He stayed down, or cold.

Moran growled at Sherlock in irritation. "You hurt John. If you remember and understand that, I won't hurt you. I won't hurt John. Listening to me is the only way not to be hurt." Moran held two needles; one in each hand. One was a barbed, dull, thick one with a rough handle on the back, and the other was a thin, sterile injection of Morphine. It just depended on Sherlock.

Sherlock did not respond at all, crying desperately as he started without focus at the ceiling, trying to recover from the seizure. He had shut down, the pain he was in overwhelming his senses, striking him dumb and dazed. He whispered his brother's name over and over, unresponsive.
"Mycroft, is it? That's who you want? I would love to see a man of his composure fall apart on my table, but that's not part of the plan." Moran left the room for a bit then as he could clearly see he wasn't going to get anywhere with Sherlock.

The tapes he had of Sherlock's beatings were already converted to digital form and he had one of the particularly nasty ones of Sherlock begging sent to Mycroft's phone. "Take the phone somewhere far away and send it. Then destroy it. We don't need to take any unnecessary risks." His personal sniper nodded and left.

Greg came awake sharply, startling hard and on his feet, one hand out to John as he put himself between John and the door in the seconds after waking. He blinked blurrily, his chest rising and falling in a panic before he realized it was just Mycroft. It took another several seconds before he realized how pale and off he looked. Greg checked over his shoulder to ensure John was still in his drugged sleep before walking over to Mycroft, gently pushing him back out the door and into the hall just in front of John's room. His heart rolled in his chest, prepared to hear that they'd found Sherlock's body.

"What is it?" he asked gently, a hand on Mycroft's shoulder.

Mycroft couldn't manage words. It had been different when he had thought there was a possibility of Sherlock being tortured. Now he didn't have any doubt, any way to deny it. He was forced to face the crushing reality. "He..." Mycroft choked and put his hand over his eyes. "S-Sent m-me..."

Mycroft stopped and pushed his phone into Greg's hand.

Greg took the phone, though before he started watching whatever it was on the screen, he pushed Mycroft gently into a chair at his side. He looked at the screen then, instantly hissing at the paused image. He was looking at Sherlock, he was sure, but the man was a bloody, swollen mess. He gingerly played the video, dropping the volume swiftly as Sherlock began screaming. Over the course of the video, Sherlock alternated between desperate screaming and weeping, his brother's name and occasionally John's falling shattered from his lips. Greg slowly ended up crouching beside Mycroft, his hand over his mouth, feeling like he was going to black out. He gasped and finally stopped the video, starring off ahead of him. "How soon, Mycroft? We....we have to get to him. How soon?"

Mycroft sank into the chair and dropped his head all the way down to his knees. He curled his arms in, the action he could tell Sherlock had been trying to do. "I-I...we found one...brought him in... Won't talk..." Mycroft let out a short, gasping whine and shook his head. "He l-looks so broken."

Greg wrapped an arm around Mycroft's back and made no move to make the man sit up, sure that Mycroft would faint if his head were up. "One thing at a time, yeah? One thing at a time. Used sodium pentothal on the captive yet? That plus heavy torture will surely loosen his lips. Do you need help? I'll go do it myself if your men are not properly motivated." He would hang the man with his own innards if necessary. He was going to be sick, but Mycroft...he couldn't imagine what was happening to Mycroft. The older brother nodded and waved his hand dismissively. "Of course. We've tried that. We've tried everything! His fingers are all broken and he's been beaten black and blue. It's clear he's used to torture."

"We are going to find him," Greg insisted. "We are."

"No," Mycroft said in his usual, monotone voice. "We're going to find what's left of him."

"Don't you give up on him, Mycroft. Don't give up on him. He's in agony, don't judge what he's capable of on this. We put recon teams on the buildings in the area, move in on all of them then. Don't you give up."
He was back on his feet, posing, for a moment wishing they'd gotten hold of John instead. John had the trackers, they could have found him. "Step up what's being done. He can be made to talk. Step up what they are doing. Don't give up, Mycroft. You can't give up."

"We broke his hand and he blinked, Greg!" Mycroft shouted, suddenly very angry at the situation. "We've beaten him until he went unconscious and he didn't even think about telling us. It is clear he fears what will happen if he talks and Moran gets him more than what happens with us. We can't match his torture. We don't know how. Moriarty was obviously superior in extracting information."

Greg ran a hand over his face. "Okay, okay, so he's not worth anything to us. Okay. So we send in teams. You said you had it narrowed down, we send in teams. We-" Greg swallowed hard and muted the phone, sitting back down and playing it again, trying not to look at Sherlock. He stared at the surrounding information, pausing the video and pointing, showing Mycroft. "Look there, that panelling, and-" he played it again, and when it ended, he repeated it, doing his best not to look at Sherlock, slowing it down and staring at the screen, trying to find detail. "You are looking at a concrete flooring, cinder block walls with metal framing, wood paneling in areas. Sherlock is screaming like hell, so nothing occupied in the surrounding area, that's not a soundproof room."

He was desperate. "Send in teams, flood them out. Mycroft. Send in the teams."

"I've already made teams. They're ready to go." Mycroft said with a shaking voice. "I'll...I'll... send in teams..."

His mind was still caught up with the man in the cell in the basement. "Ask John what made him hurt the most. Get information on what was effective." He had stood up rapidly and blinked at his dotting vision. "Anything. I don't care if it upsets him. Get the information."


He drew in a slow breath and spoke again, "Is Anthea...or whatever her name is...is she a help to you at all? I don't- Christ, Mycroft I just want to help. What can I do to help?"

"Figure out what Moriarty did to John to make him so damn complacent." Mycroft growled and balled his hands into fists. "Then you tell me exactly what he said, and I'll go do it to the man downstairs."


Greg nodded and chewed at the inside of his lip. "Mycroft I don't know if John...what was done to John happened over months, I don't know if it will work here. I'll, Christ, alright. Give me a few minutes okay?"

Mycroft knew that he was being terribly, utterly selfish, but he didn't mind at this point. "Just get the information."

He walked back into John's room and slid a shaking hand down his face before moving over and touching John's shoulder. "John...I need you to wake up for me, John."

John stirred and stretched his arms out before pulling them back to his chest. He blinked blearily but smiled when he saw Greg. "Morning. Everything alright?"

Greg dragged a hand over his face and sat down beside John, taking his hand and tipping his forehead to John's knuckles. A few deep breaths later, he spoke. "Oh God, John, I'm so sorry. I have to ask you some really hard questions. I'm so sorry." He sat up, keeping hold of John's hand. "I- fuck
I hate to ask this- John I need to know what...what was done to you that," he swallowed and held tight to John's hand, "what hurt you the most, what made you do what he wanted, even when you didn't want to? What...what was the worst of it?"

John's eyes opened wide and his mouth fell open. "Greg," he said in a betrayed voice. "I... Why? Why do you need to know that?" John had his hands curled into fists and his arms in a tight X across his chest. "He...there was a lot of things...god, Greg....I can't..."

Greg's face fell. "I know, god John I know I'm sorry. Please, I- John I need you to tell me this, please John. If...if you had to get a man to talk desperately, if everything, and I do mean everything was riding on it...how...how would you do it? What...what would you do to make him speak, when nothing seems to shift him? John please, I'm so incredibly sorry. Please." John whimpered. The only time he thought of such things was when they were triggered involuntarily, and that usually caused panic. Such knowledge was locked in a neat little box, tucked into a cage, and dropped into the darkest corner of his mind. "He...there's the pins...and knives... In the knee and elbows...water... Uhm...clamps.." John whimpered and rubbed one of the scars on his arm. "I-If you d-don't care you can cut their t-tendons then p-pull them with pliers...and...and the w-water is...is" John was desperately trying to disconnect, and each word had to be forced out between sobs.

Greg got up and moved stiffly into the hall, his face pale and hands shaking as he relayed the information in dead monotone to Mycroft. He shook his head and slid back into John's room, tipping out his anti-anxiety medication into his hand and offering it to him. "I'm so sorry, I'm so, so sorry," he breathed before turning a terrible shade of green and tossing up into the bin beside John's bed with no warning. When he finally stopped he dragged his hand across his face and tied off the bag with terribly shaking hands, getting up on shaking legs and moving away.

He tossed it into the trash in the lav and washed his hands and face, moving back to John's side. "I- I really want to h-hold you right now but I understand if you'd rather I n-not."

John was shaking from head to toe, eyes squeezed shut. He let out a short scream as images flashed in his mind's eye. "G-Greg...h-help..." He sat up and looked wildly around. Grey walls, dingy with dust and grime stared back at him, mocking his sanity. "...Greg...I...I see..." John screamed once more, not loudly, but in a confused, terrified way. "H-help...Greg..."

Greg pulled himself up on John's bed and dragged John into his lap, wrapping around him as best he could manage. "You're safe. I have you," he assured, rocking John gently, pulling the blankets up over John. He was so disgusted with himself he could hardly breathe, hoping against hope that anything he'd offered to Mycroft would not be in vain. "You're safe, no one is going to touch you. I'm so sorry, you're safe. I've got you, you're safe." Paul was due back soon enough, hopefully he could help as well.

"No, no, no, Greg..." John jerked against Greg's arms and screamed once more. "H-help me. I can't...can't..." John dropped his head down and covered it with his hands. Blind panic ripped through him and he jerked erratically in anticipation of pain..

Greg's heart twisted in fear and he began to sweat, grabbing hold of the sides of John's face and pulling his head up, trying to emulate Paul. "John! Tell me where you are, tell me where you are John," he repeated, speaking loudly, horrified of what he'd done to the man. John's eyes were wide, but he couldn't see the room around him. He looked down and saw the cold table with his own blood coating the surface. John screamed and jerked away, flailing and clawing his way off the bed and away from Greg. "Help me!" He screamed, "HELP!" John kicked away and hit the floor, immediately scrambling away.

Greg stared in wide-eyed horror, watching John as he swallowed and swallowed again, tears sliding down his cheeks without his knowledge. He moved, following after John, no idea what to do.
"John...John please," he whispered, going to the floor with him and catching him before he hurt himself, pulling him tight into his arms and not letting him go, using the extent of his strength to keep hold of him. "John, you're okay, you're okay," he repeated again and again, shaking half to death himself.

"No, NO! HELP, someone please, please!" He fought against Greg, eyes still unseeing. John's mind couldn't make sense of anything that was happening, his awareness shattered and replaced by fragments of terrible memory. "P-please, s-someone help, please..."

This was the scene Paul came in on. He stared at them for all of ten seconds before running out, and returned a few seconds later and hitting his knees next to Greg. "His arm, give me his arm," he instructed as John flailed and pushed and panicked. He did not try to speak to John as he slid the needle into John's vein, pushing the sedative. "This migh not knock him out, but it will knock him down," he said to Greg, holding tight to John's wrist as the man panicked and fought. Greg kept talking to him, though. "John, you're okay, you're okay," he said through the tears on his face, gathering John closer as the strength started bleeding out of John's muscles.

"No, NO! STOP IT! GET AWAY!" John looked up at Paul, needle in hand and pure, unrestrained horror ripped through him. John screamed and tipped his head back as phantom pains shot up his limbs, down his back and through his chest. He tried desperately to escape, but felt the sedative start to drag him under. John seemed to see Greg for the first time and his expression changed to both hope and betrayal. "Greg, help! H-Help me, p-please!" Tears streamed down his face even as Greg spoke kind, soft words to him, and within a minute he had blacked out.

Greg pulled John tight to his chest and broke down hard, sobbing into John's hair, pulling them both back into a corner as he held on to him. "Don't touch us, Paul," he warned as the man stepped forward, his knees bent up around John, rocking him as he held him. He was clutching John so tight he was in danger of bruising him, hiccups in an effort to even breathe, "Please don't take him from me. Don't take my John!"

Chapter End Notes

So? SO?

You wanted a new chapter, and you've got it.
They will be coming sooner now.
Maybe once a day again!

Until then, God's speed, Mycroft.
Paul moved back with his hands up and came back with a blanket and a pillow. "Here, Greg, I'm not going to touch him. Easy. I won't touch John." Paul pushed the pillow behind Greg before draping the blanket over the pair of them. Greg couldn't help himself. He pressed his face down onto John's shoulder and screamed.

Mycroft had been walking through the hall. He had called a meeting to over the final plan for recovering Sherlock, but it would be another two hours before it started. He heard the scream, Greg's scream, and half-ran to the front of the room. He was used to John screaming. That sound he knew. It was confused, pained and panicked. Greg's was different. It was broken, agonized, and grieving, full of utter, abject despair. Mycroft tapped Paul on the shoulder in question before entering. Paul had his entire focus on Greg and startled slightly as he was touched. He looked over at Mycroft and slowly got up, turning to the man and pointing to the door, leaving Greg, who had only just then stopped screaming, broken down into hyperventilating panting. As soon as they were out the door, Paul cleared his throat.

"What has occurred today, Mycroft? What's happened? John was in a full blown flashback when I came in, not all surprising, but Greg looked as though-" he trailed off, staring at Mycroft, who had tight lines around his eyes and mouth. "You're not alright either. What's happened?"

Mycroft was crushed with guilt. "It's...it was my fault. I've got a prisoner, one who could potentially lead us to Sherlock. He won't talk. I needed John to tell me what Moran and Moriarty had used on him so we could use it against him." Mycroft raked his hand back through his hair. "It was my fault. I just needed... I need to find Sherlock before they...before he..."

Paul nodded, understanding what was on. "Alright, Mycroft," he said softly, reaching out and touching the man, "it will be alright. Bit of a scary setback for him but frankly bound to happen at some point. I've sedated him, and when he wakes, I'm hopeful Greg and I can get him back calm."

He stared at Mycroft for another moment. "Was it helpful? What he told Greg?"

Mycroft turned a deep shade of red. "Nothing is worth that. I've caused a major setback, haven't I?"

This man was trained to read expressions, and for just a moment, he ignored the vulnerability of the action and allowed his face to reflect the utter devastating guilt he felt.

Paul simply watched him, taking it all in. After a moment he spoke again. "Yes, he's likely to have a rough few hours when he wakes, I'll give you that. Though, as I've said, he is going to have these as he heals. Frankly, Mycroft, it may be a boon to us. His mind is open now, floodgates and all that. While it might be a less ideal way to treat him, the trauma is accessible. He is shockingly, and dare I say unprecedentedly strong. I've never seen anything like it, to be frank and honest. I fully believe he can make a recovery. I'm going to make the assumption that you've learned without doubt that your brother has or is actively being tortured. John Watson thrives on helping others. They may save the other in the end. You, and Greg, are exhausted. I understand this. It is hard to see the truth in such a state. Focus on your brother, Mycroft. Let me handle Greg and John."

"Yes, yes, that seems logical. It's all open now. Nothing suppressed. That sounds good." Mycroft nodded and took a deep breath in. "I'll...god, I've got a meeting..." He was worried they might take him off the job if he appeared to emotionally compromised. It had already been implied that he was too emotionally involved in the situation, and if he didn't have a track record of being utterly emotionless, he might have been replaced.

"Come and see me when you're done," Paul said. "You are your brother's best hope, Mycroft. Let
me worry about these men." He gave Mycroft a tight nod, and turned back into the room on the 
sound of Greg screaming yet again.

He walked in and turned the lights low, going to crouch in front of Greg at a bit of a distance. "Greg, 
I need you to try and breathe, alright? Just take a few breaths. All is not lost here."

Mycroft gave a short nod. "Right. Yes. You keep the two of them as sane as you can and for the 
love of god don't get attached to either of them. I don't need anyone else breaking down." He turned 
on his heels and left the hall. The sheer amount of damage in this building was overwhelming.

It was hours before Greg was willing to so much as look at Paul, who'd simply moved between the 
room and the hall, pacing and waiting for Mycroft to return. Greg felt John shifting just as Paul was 
coming back inside. "He's moving," he whispered, his voice panicked. He shifted John in his arms, 
and Paul frowned at how pale Greg was.

"You're going to scare him if you don't calm down," he warned gently, crouching at an arm's 
distance, "ease your grip if you can't make yourself put him down."

Greg eased his grip and began to softly call out. "John," he whispered, trying to help him wake up.

John's mind started to wake up and he rebelled against the consciousness. "N...no..." He muttered 
and turned slightly. John snapped to attention immediately as he found that he was, even slightly, 
restrained. John's eyes flew open and he immediately struggled against Greg's arms. "N-No! No, 
don't...don't!" He thought that perhaps he shouldn't speak, and shook his head violently. 
Greg's face fell instantly and he allowed John to move away from him, staring at his own hands. Paul 
watched, keeping a close eye to ensure John didn't hurt himself. "John," he said softly, "You're 
right, John. Can you tell me where you are?" Greg pulled his knees up to his chest and tipped his 
forehead down over his arms, breathing in shaking, sporadic bursts, narrowly keeping himself from 
breaking down. 

John pressed himself back against the wall and stare up at Paul. The man's image seemed to fade out, 
sometimes looking like Moriarty, or Moran, and occasionally Sherlock. "G-Get away!" He warned 
with fists raised in expectation of blows. "Stay the HELL away from m-me!" John shook his head 
again in a silent plea for him to be merciful.

Paul backed off. Typically he'd sedate the man once again, but he wanted the memories available to 
them. Greg was watching once again, his cheek resting on his forearm, which was propped up on his 
knees. He had silent tears rolling down his cheeks, pale and withdrawn. Paul felt the weight of the 
room easily and was prepared to juggle them both.

"John," he said softly, "I'm Paul, and over there is Greg Lestrade. You are having a flashback." 

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them. Greg was watching once again, his cheek resting on his forearm, which was propped up on his 
knees. He had silent tears rolling down his cheeks, pale and withdrawn. Paul felt the weight of the 
room easily and was prepared to juggle them both.

"John," he said softly, "I'm Paul, and over there is Greg Lestrade. You are having a flashback."

John had sweat beading on his forehead and his chest heaved. He cast wild glances around the room, 
which looked like the warehouse in some areas and the facility in others. When his eyes hit the bed 
his mind had twisted into a cold, steel table, he screamed once more. "No! NO! DON'T!" Bile rose 
in his throat and he turned and heaved violently onto the ground beside him. When he looked up he 
seemed to notice Greg for the first time, as he always did, and his expression became pleading. He 
reached out both arms like a child asking to be picked up. "G-Greg? Greg, I n-need help."
Greg was moving then, pulling John into his arms, surrounding him with his body in a bid to make John feel protected. "No one is going to touch you," he assured, otherwise saying nothing.

Paul watched John's face, glad he hadn't dislodged the feeding tube. "John, tell me what you are seeing right now. What don't you want me to do?"

John wept tears of relief when he was pulled into Greg's arms. He buried his face in his shoulder and dampened his shirt with tears. Upon Paul's request he looked around, only to jerk violently and turn back to Greg. "I can't...I see the warehouse and...you..." He was sobbing far too violently to talk properly and nestled again into Greg’s shoulder.

Greg held him close, keeping as protectively around John as possible, making himself a human shield for John. He slid his hands through John's hair, murmuring softly to him. "I have you. I have you. Breathe, John. You're safe, this is not the warehouse, this is safe," he tried to assure again and again. Paul was not about to let the moment pass, though.

"John, look at the room, describe it for me. What scared you about the bed? Or did that scare you? You can come lie down if you'd like."
"T-table." John corrected and pointed at the bed. "It's a table. Y-you c-can't make m-me lie down. I've g-got Greg." To John, having Greg with him was all the reason he needed for not complying and getting on the table. Greg would keep him safe. "Don't..don't m-make me get on the t-table." He pleaded quietly with Greg. "I don't w-want to."

Greg pulled John into his arms and turned to face Paul, dragging John into his lap and keeping him as secure as possible there, not wanting John on the floor. "He's not going to hurt you," Greg assured, sliding his fingers through John's hair again, trying to keep him as calm as he could manage.

Paul looked at the bed and then back to John. "Who do you think I am, John?"
John was on the tail end of the flashback now, and things started to fall into place. He noticed first that the cold metal table Moran had used hadn't had sheets, or pillows. It seemed rational then that it wasn't a table, but a bed. "You...you looked like M-Mo...Mori. " John grabbed fistfuls of Greg's shirt and clung to him desperately like a child. "But you...you're Greg's friend..."

Greg ran his hand down John's back again and again, whispering softly to him that he was safe, that he was okay.

Paul watched John pull himself up and out of it. "Just remarkable," he said softly, honestly impressed, shaking his head. "John you're doing incredibly well. Keep breathing, I know you're scared. Do you want anything?"

John broke down in tears again and was unable to speak for a long time. He screamed into Greg's shoulder out of fear and confusion. Occasionally he would feel a jolt of phantom pain as if he had been cut, but after he saw that there was only a long healed scar in the area he decided it must have been his mind. That, in turn, frightened him even more. A full thirty minutes later he spoke again with a hoarse voice. "He's inside my mind, Greg. He's torturing me inside my mind." Another agonized, tormented scream tore from him and he seemed to shrink in size.

Paul nodded and got up, taking himself out of the room to fetch something for John.

Greg held on to him, speaking softly as John began to scream, "John, look at me. Please look at me. Right here, I need you to stay with me. He can't do this to you anymore. You are with me, yeah? Look at me. We are going to figure it out. Please. Let's talk, yeah? Anything other than that. Can you remember medical school? Or your house from when you were a kid?"

John shook his head at Greg's request. "C-can't. Can't." John broke down anew and shuddered in Greg's arms. He was getting nowhere with calming down and at this point didn't even see the point in trying. "He-he's ins-side m-my h-head..."
Greg had no idea what possessed him to do it, none at all. In the next moment Greg was on his feet, carrying John with him into the lav, walking them fully clothed into the shower. He held John to his chest as he turned on the taps, keeping them dry until it heated up, then swiftly stepping into the warm spray with John in his arms, the man's feet off the ground, one arm under John's knees and the other slung across his back. He kept John's face out of the water, just letting it hit John's body, speaking to him constantly. "I've got you. He can't keep hurting you. I have you, John," he carried on saying, making an attempt at shocking John out of it.

John didn't mind being carried by Greg. He curled up and placed his head on the man's shoulder as the aftershock sent shivers through him and made his breath hitch. It was when he heard the water that he panicked. "Greg?!" John demanded with a tone of worry. He desperately wanted to trust Greg, but the second he touched the water he started to scream. John came undone. He screamed like a madman until his voice was hoarse while thrashing and hitting anyone and anything in his range. "NO! NO! PLEASE!" John struck Greg over and over with weak fists as his world collapsed into pain and terror.

Paul returned, running like hell with a syringe in his hands as he heard John in absolute terror. He came skidding to a halt, utterly shocked that Greg had moved them into the water. He pushed into the lav and took a moment to assess what was happening. Greg was bloodied slightly, John clearly doing his best to get free. He decided to back out of the lav to give himself time to think. John mistook him for Moriarty before, he'd not risk him doing that again.

Greg, however, was as calm as he could be. He'd expected John to panic. He just kept talking to him, slowly easing them down to keep his hold on John, sitting on the floor and keeping John in the fall of the water, ensuring none of it touched his face. He just absorbed the blows, weak as they were, carrying on talking to him. "You're safe, John, you're safe. Look around, you're okay," he kept up softly, rocking John slightly in his arms.

John could hear the running water, but it sounded distorted and strange. Each drop seemed to burn his skin and he kicked off the wall in an attempt to lunge free. "Y-You're HURTING ME!" He screamed and locked terrified eyes with Greg for a split second. It was just long enough to give the man a pleading, heartbroken, betrayed and horrified look before his eyes rolled back in his head. John seemed to seize, every muscle in his body contracting at once in a futile effort to escape. Greg's hand shot out and killed the taps before he screamed for help. Paul was into the lav in the next moment, watching John before just popping the needle into John's bicep and injecting him with an anti-anxiety med. It wasn't a sedative, just a heavy dose of the medicine to calm him down, help John detach from his own terror. It would leave his limbs heavy and his speech sluggish, but he'd likely remain awake. He grabbed a towel and wrapped it around John, taking the jerking man out of Greg's arms and carrying him into the room, laying him down on the bed. He made quick work of stripping John out of his sodden clothes, dropping them on the floor as he layered blankets over the almost skeletal man.

John relaxed slowly and his screaming turned to the occasional tired whimper until he felt someone pulling at his clothes. John swallowed around the thick lump in his throat and struggled weakly, but desperately against Paul while muttering that this oh please dear God did not happen. When he was back in sweatpants he calmed a bit more and stopped his frantic struggling. He whimpered pathetically as his hair was dried with a towel and his comprehension of what was happening flew out the window.

Greg stayed in the shower, soaked to the bone in his clothes, fingers fisted in his hair as he rocked himself, the image of John's horribly betrayed face seared into his skull. He heard Paul call out; "Greg! He's going to be scared without you, please come here!"

And scared John was, but perhaps it wasn’t due to Greg’s absence. “I...I thought...that...that...he was....was my friend..." John hadn’t been able to fathom why Greg would have put him in the water and he certainly couldn't wrap his sluggish mind around it now. John tried to sit up when Paul drew away, hoping perhaps he could escape. He found his head to be incredibly heavy and his already
weak limbs all but repugnant to his command. "H-he tried...to hurt....me..."

Greg leaned against the wall, listening to John speaking to Paul, having to stop mid-change to sick up. He looked at himself in the mirror, his face slightly bruised in places, the corner of his lip bleeding. He cut his eyes away and changed into dry clothes, coming back into the room and taking up a seat far away from John's bed, his face in his hands, elbows heavy on the arm rests.

Paul spoke softly to him. "John, he was trying to help. It wasn't the best way to go about it, but Greg wasn't trying to hurt you."

John lay on his back with his arms by his sides. It took him a great amount of effort and concentration, but he pulled them across his chest to protect himself. "H-He...put me in water," John accused and rolled his head to the side to look at Paul. "I didn't...I don't deserve the water... I didn't ask..." Tears rolled down his face and he whimpered again. "Is it because...because I ate?" John asked with sudden and abject horror. "It's...it's because I was...was eating...not supposed to..."

There was a distressed sound from Greg's corner and before Paul could turn or instruct him, Greg was on his feet, his shoulders shaking as though he were freezing. He shuffled over to John, keeping at a distance. "I'm s-sorry John, I thought- I'm such an idiot, I thought it might help," he tried to explain, ready to lodge a bullet in his own brain. "I didn't mean to hurt you, I thought...I was just trying to help."

"I can't...I don't..." John tried to scoot away from Greg, but his limbs rebelled in their stagnation and heavy immobility. "I didn't... I didn't deserve the water," John cried and tears burned his vision. "Y-You said y-you...w-w-wouldn't hurt me." The one thing that John had been latching on to, the one reality other than pain that he knew to be true was that Greg would always keep him safe. Greg. The word had become synonymous with safety, often murmured when he felt uneasy to keep himself calm. To grasp that Greg had forced him under the water and held him there was more than John was capable of handling. "C-Can I-I just have the needle?" He wasn't quite sure if he meant the sedative or the morphine that would end this, and at the moment it didn't really matter.

Greg's knees nearly went out from under him and he openly sobbed, backing away from John with a hand over his mouth, so pale that Paul was moving towards him in worry that Greg was going to go down. Greg shook his head and kept backing up until he hit the door. He nearly tripped over himself as he slipped out of the room, sinking, where he sank to the floor in the hall and screamed in agony. John watched Greg go with a terrible mixture of relief and fear. Was it possible to be terrified of someone and yet crave their comfort in one instance? It was a horrible, tearing feeling that children with abusive parents often experienced and John was now privy to.

Paul looked over to John. "John, you realize your face was always dry, yes? He never put your face under the water. Does your nose hurt? Did you choke?"

John touched his face and found Paul was right. "He put m-me in water..." John sobbed, looking to Paul for sympathy. "Water. D-Don't deserve the water."

Paul nodded, "I understand. I know you are scared of water. His intent was not to hurt you." He sat down beside John, listening to Greg screaming in the hallway. "I'm sorry that happened. I know he is a comfort to you."

John flinched at the sound of Greg's distress, worried both for his own safety and the man's health. "What's wrong with him?" John slurred with a heavy tongue and lungs tired from screaming. Paul shook his head, "He's having an episode. I think he's breaking over the damage done here today." He pulled the blankets better over John and eased the head of the bed up so that John wouldn't feel like he was flat on his back. "Can I go check on him, John, or are you going to hurt
John didn't want to be alone, but he also didn't like Greg screaming, so he nodded his consent. "If he's sad he hurt me he shouldn't have put me in the water." John said indignantly.

Paul nodded to John in a non-committal way and made for the door. "I'll tell him not to come back," he said quietly, walking into the hall. He was gone for a few minutes, the screaming stopped, before he returned to John's side. He stood beside John's bed and looked around the room. "He'll not come back, John. He asked that I tell you how sorry he is. Would you like me to put on music?"

"I wanted Greg to not hurt me," John said in a heavy voice ridden with pain and confusion. "He...he knew water hurts me. He knew it." He shook his head at the music and tried to turn over. "You KNEW IT!" He shouted bitterly at the door, though his voice failed to be as loud as he would have liked. Paul stared at John for a moment. "It's good to be angry on your own behalf. I'm glad to see it. He won't come back, I've asked him to keep away from you for now, at least. He's not thinking clearly enough to be near you. I am sorry that happened."

Greg was still against John's door, still tearing at his hair, teeth grit in an effort not to scream. With violently shaking hands he texted Mycroft.

If he isn't talking yet, I'll make him do so. GL

"He's not thinking clearly?" John had mostly recovered from his panic with the help of the medications, but was still devastated by the event with the water. Panic had left, but in it's absence were confusion, fear, sadness and mistrust. Greg, his protection, his savior, the one he had become so dependent on, had held him in the water. John thought vaguely that he would rather have been tortured again by Moriarty than have it be Greg. "Is he confused like me?"

Paul hummed, taking the chair next to John's bed. Greg's chair, or had been. "Not confused. He's...desperate, to be frank with you, John. Desperate, and not trained in how to help someone who's been hurt like you have. He made a mistake, and you, unfortunately, were emotionally hurt as a result of it."

Greg sent another text to Mycroft, on his feet now, pacing, getting looks from security. He had deep circles under his eyes and he looked a bit manic in his intense grief.

I will get the information out of him. Let me try. GL

I can't just allow some DI to torture a suspect. Come to my office. M

John didn't like the idea of his Greg being anything less than an emotionally sound fortress for him to hide in. "Then you've got to help him. He's sad because of me, isn't he?" John's speech was slow and subdued.

Paul cleared his throat. "John. I cannot sit with you as Greg did. I cannot exactly leave you...free and on your own, either. I'm afraid we are going to have to ensure you don't become a danger to yourself when alone. Do you still like to listen to music? That may help things be less...frightening."

John shook his head. "I don't want any stupid music!" He tried to shout, but it came out more of a subdued wail. "Can you just give me a sedative? Maybe enough so that I don't wake up?"

Paul shook his head, staring at John. "John," he said softly, "can you tell me what Greg has been doing these last few months with you?" Not for you, wanting John to just explore on his own, perhaps get him a touch calmer.
"He-he's been gaining my trust." John said almost stubbornly. "S-So it would hurt more when h-he did that." John wasn't sure if he believed it, but had decided to claim it on the chance it was true. Maybe he could look like he had the upper hand. To John, the plan was logical.

Paul hummed and leaned back in his chair. "He didn't actually hurt you though, John. Use the proper terms. He scared you, unintentionally, but he did not harm you."

John's mind rebelled against this idea of using proper terms. Using blanket words had kept him from accepting the harsh reality while still being able to communicate effectively. "He hurt me." John retorted stubbornly, unwilling to let go of the tiny safety net he still had.

Paul arched his brows in surprise at John. "Well, I am glad to see you defending yourself. Alright then, he hurt you. Can you show me the damage, or explain to me what he did in greater detail?"

Mycroft was shaking his head. "He thought you were going to hurt him at first, remember? He thought you were going to hurt him at first, remember? He thought we all were. He warmed up to you, and he will again. There is no possible way John won't come back to you. He's dependent on you." Just saying those words made Mycroft realize how badly it must have devastated John if he believed Greg had hurt him. "He clings to you. I'm confident he'll return to that state once the shock has worn off."

John glared at Paul with drooping, tired eyes. "He had me in the water. He was holding me in the water. He wasn't letting me go. I couldn't breathe. It's just like what M-Moriarty d-did."

Paul stood up slowly, going to the small set of drawers and fetching out the soft medical restraints, only two, beginning to affix them to the bed. He gently put one of John's wrists into the soft sheepskin and buckled it. "Your face was dry, John," he reminded, watching as the man was starting to fall asleep. "I can't stay, I'm afraid. Would you like music on or no?"

John whimpered when he saw the restraints, but the medicine had already started to drag him under. "No..." He muttered weakly and tried to resist. "Please... Don't...I've been...good..." John's eyes fluttered shut but his mind still held a dull sense of impending agony he always got from the restraints. "Don't...I don't...like the table..."

Greg moved fluidly through the halls and followed the men waiting to bring him to Mycroft. He pushed into the room without knocking and eyed the scotch and tumblers in the corner, going directly for it. "I resign m-my position then, let me go there, I will get him talking." Greg tipped himself a rudely large five fingers in the glass.

Mycroft allowed him the drink, but surveyed him with disapproval in his eyes. "You're emotionally compromised," he stated though it was rather obvious. "I won't have you taking out your anger on him. In this stage he might provoke you into killing him. Sit down and tell me what John said."

"Well, it's over. I have single-handedly ruined everything. He trusted me and because I am an incurable idiot I destroyed that trust. He's scared of me now." Greg clipped his jaw shut and put the mostly full glass to the side, raking his hand through his hair as he nearly fell apart. "He was having a flashback and I fucking thought- no, correct that, I obviously didn't think at all- I just had in mind that perhaps the comfortable heat of a shower would make him feel better, I thought he'd panic a moment and then realize I wasn't drowning him. I- Christ I- I'm just going to give him his morphine, Mycroft. It's over. I somehow became his one shot at recovery and I hurt him." He was shaking hard and pacing on legs with knees far too weak. All those months. Thousands of hours of work, undone by less than five minutes in a shower. He was sure he was going to drop dead any second of a broken heart.
Mycroft swore under his breath. If John's progress was indeed ruined, then there really was no point in hoping for Sherlock's recovery. "I'm sure he'll trust you again. He was being logical when I last saw him. He was thinking. I'm sure once he starts to think again he'll realize that you didn't mean to hurt him." Mycroft couldn't imagine being in Greg's position. "Has...has he drank a glass of water yet?" He didn't mean it to be rude, but there had to have been a reason Greg thought John would handle a shower. "Or calmed about the ice?"

"No, John's not had water, he's mostly okay with the ice but he's not- I don't know what happened. I- all those hours I-" he broke then, covering his face with his hands, the full weight of his error crushing the life out of him. He gave himself a full minute before he got it under control. Greg listened to Mycroft for just a moment.

"Greg, they will get better. I promise. He's already making great strides."

Greg sat down and looked at Mycroft with as much sincerity as he could muster. "No...I'm so sorry, Mycroft. I- I," he shook his head, tears sliding down his cheeks as he raked his hand through his hair, pulling harshly. "I'll...I'll give him...I'll give him the morphine. I'll do it for Sh-Sherlock as well. You don't need to worry at least about that part." He dried his face and suddenly looked so pale and drawn that he appeared years older than even the morning. "I'm so sorry."

"You'll do no such thing." Mycroft said with an understanding but firm voice. "You'll earn his trust back after you tell me what broke him down. You did get the information, I presume?" Mycroft got up and paced just a bit. He walked to the door, then back to his mobile lying on the desk, then to the door again. "Tell me and I'll have the man in charge do exactly what John has suggested. We'll get Sherlock back. Tell me, Greg, is he worse now than he was when you first got him?"

Greg dragged his hands over his neck, "It's as I told you in the hallway, Mycroft. It was a long process of breaking him down, and then all the methods I gave you before trying to calm him back down, what with the burns and the clamps and the digging at tendons with bloody goddamn pliers." He tugged at his hair and shouted, a clipped, desolate sound. "He will never extend trust to me again. He shouldn't. Look what I did!" Greg was nearly hyperventilating. "Paul asked me not to come back. John doesn't want to see me again." The words shredded at his heart. He'd grown...incredibly attached. He already felt panicky not having an eye on John, not sitting with him and keeping him safe. With one stupid move, he'd lost everything.

Mycroft put his hand on Greg's shoulder. "I'm sending someone to go interrogate the subject right now. Would you like to come with me? If not, I highly suggest a bath and some sleep. Perhaps a meal. Don't worry about John. He's with your friend."

Greg shook his head, "Paul can't live with John as I've been doing. No, I'm going to go sit at the door. I can't-" he shook his head, sick with himself.

Greg was going to be sick. "It's- what have I done?" He knew he was dependant, knew John relied on him, which was exactly why he was offering to do what he promised.

Paul assured John that he was okay, that no one was coming to hurt him as he fastened John's other wrist in as well. He ensured the cameras were on so that John could be monitored, and slipped out of the room, scribbling a note that he'd be back the next day.

Greg met him in the hall, shaking his head when Paul opened his mouth to speak. "Don't. I know. I won't go in. I know what I've done." He simply moved past Paul, dejected, and sat himself down at John's door, much like Sherlock had all those months ago.
Greg managed to fall completely asleep at John's door. He had to be moved so that John's medical doctor could go in and give him a feeding and check his restraints. Otherwise, he passed the time right there at the door, waiting for...he wasn't sure.

Meanwhile, John's advice seemed to be working. Or, rather, Mycroft's declaration that they had someone who had been through Moriarty's torture and could replicate it had frightened the man into giving some information. Mycroft had what he needed now.

He could begin.

Chapter End Notes

Mycroft. Hurry.

Poor Greg. Poor John.
But we knew this would happen, didn't we? We had to know that eventually something would happen. John was becoming so very dependent on Greg, and Greg was cracking under the weight.
Is the already formed attachment John has to Greg enough to pull him through this?

Tell me your thoughts.

Also, two chapters in one night!

Show us your love by making us art. PLEASE???
John woke up several hours later and began to cry. Not loudly, or our of fear, but softly in grief, only quiet weeping with the occasional whimper. John gave a futile tug at the restraints and tossed his head from side to side. "Can someone let me out?" He cried feebly, "I won't hurt anyone. I'll be good."

Greg could hear John and failed to keep to Paul's request. He simply cracked the door open, though he made no move to enter and stayed sitting on the floor outside John's room. "John, I'm- I'm here if you want me." His voice was low and pained, and he was not at all sure how John was going to react. "I won't come in unless you want me to."

John flinched and tried once more to free himself, though at this point it was more out of habit than actually trying to escape. "Greg?" John called back. The confusion and medication made his voice slow and thick, but betrayal was still clear in it. "Greg, I....I didn't deserve water... I didn't...you said you wouldn't hurt me..."

Greg listened with a heavy heart. "I made a terrible mistake. I'm an idiot, John, I'm an idiot. I wasn't trying to hurt you. You didn't deserve the water, I'm sorry." He swallowed, still sitting on the floor in the hallway, the door cracked just enough for him to speak. "I know I'm supposed to leave you alone. I just...you were crying..."

"You said..." It was clear from his voice that he was crying once more. John gave the restraints another desperate yank before continuing. "Y-You said you wouldn't hurt me!" He lamented towards the door. "A-and n-now he's tied me up again and-and-and they c-can hurt me and-"

"No one is going to hurt you, that's why I'm sitting right here. I didn't mean to hurt you, John. I didn't mean to hurt you. I thought it would help. God, I'm sorry I thought it would help. I want to let you loose. I'm so sorry. This is my fault, John, I'm so sorry." He kept his voice calm, though he could not push the sadness away. "I'm so sorry."

John felt more than betrayed. He was shattered from the inside out, broken in every way possible. The one rock he had built his progress, his trust, and his hope on had hurt him, and he didn't know if he even wanted to recover from it. The cornerstone of his recovery had crumbled. "I trusted you," he said to the door. "You know water hurts me. I can't...I c-can't even have a c-cup of it and..."

Greg had to give his small, pathetic defense. "Ice used to hurt you too. You...your mouth hurt you so badly without it...it used to hurt you. And I- I was insistent you try and now...now it helps you feel better. I am an incurable fool. We never tried the shower. I thought...I thought maybe it would settle for you, would be okay after a minute. I- god John I made a horrible mistake. I'm...I would never willfully hurt you. I'm sorry. I'm more sorry than I can express. Please, John please at least hear that I wasn't trying to hurt you, I'm just bloody stupid."

"WATER!" John slurred and tried to lift his heavy head off the pillow. "Greg, you KNOW how long it took for the ice to stop hurting. Why..." He couldn't continue. John sobbed and tried to wiggle his skeletal wrists out of the restraints. He kicked his feet, but only managed to move them a few inches. "L-Let me GO! Pl-lease!"

Greg ran his hand down his face, shaking as he sat there soaked in his own loathing. "I'll let you go, but I've got to come in to do that. Will you let me come in? I'll leave, I won't come back, I just...I just want to help." He was going to die, his heart was in shards and he was honestly ready to go out back.
and put himself down.

John couldn't decide. "I want...Greg... But you hurt me..." John glanced down at the restraints that left him open and vulnerable to anyone who wished to come and hurt him. "I-If you come in, will you promise not to use the water on me?"

Greg stood up and slowly moved to the doorway, letting the door open enough for John to see him, not advancing at all. "I won't even touch you. I'll just get them off and then I'll go." He swallowed down the urge to beg forgiveness. John wouldn't grant it. It was clear that his mistake was irreparable. He didn't have it in him to stand properly, one arm wrapped around his middle, his shoulders slumped. He spoke to the floor, his voice heavy and resigned. "I'll go."

John let out an unreadable sound when he saw Greg. The months of love and protection from him were still in his mind, but they were darkened by the feeling of the water biting his skin. "I..." He cleared his throat and tried not to sound pathetic. "I wanted you to not hurt me," John stated in despair, "I wanted you to be my friend. Now everyone wants to hurt me." Tears squeezed out of his eyes which were shut tightly. He'd wanted one person, just one to not hurt him.

Greg swallowed all of the pain in John's voice, taking into himself as he decided he deserved it. He moved then, shuffling his feet intentionally so that John could hear him coming. He stopped at the side of John's bed, managing to get the first cuff off without touching John's skin at all. He repeated the motion swiftly on the other side, and pulled the blankets up over John's shoulders in the way John always wanted when he was scared.

He backed off in the next moment, putting as much distance as the room allowed between them. He'd not touched John at all. "I never want to hurt you. If I could go back..." he slid his hand over his face, blinking up at the ceiling. "I'm going to go, John. You don't ever have to see me again. I-I wish I could explain how- I can't believe I did that. I was so stupid. I'm so sorry I scared you."

John trembled when Greg came close and stared at the man's hands. It was with great relief that he pulled his arms tightly to his chest, and he grabbed fistfuls of the fabric there. John had no desire to be afraid of Greg. He didn't want to fear anything, really, but he knew he needed Greg. "I...I don't want...don't want to be afraid of you." John muttered as crept his hands up so they covered part of his face. "I want you to be my friend. B-but...but..."

Greg nodded, moving towards the door to assure John he was going. "I am your friend. I'm your friend, and I made a mistake. I am so sorry I ruined this, I am, god I am." He pulled the door open, standing in the doorway. "I'm...I'm going to keep trying to protect you, but I won't- you don't have to see me. I'm so sorry I hurt you. I'm so sorry. I-I kept your face dry, I didn't want you to think...I kept your face dry. I thought that would...would keep you feeling protected. I'm sorry. I am so sorry."

John let out another sob and reached out for the door. "Greg...am I confused again?" He asked. John wasn't sure about anything now. He wasn't sure about what had happened, or why, or how, but he was sure that he was afraid of Greg and that he didn't want to be. "Oh, God... What's..what's wrong with me?" He stammered and curled up on his side.

Greg hesitated, not sure what to do. He wanted to go to John, to assure him he was okay, that he was safe, but he had no idea how John would react. Really what he wanted was..."I wish I could come hold you and keep you feeling safe. I won't- I won't, just...I'm so sorry. The last thing in the world I want is to hurt or scare you. I thought, I honestly thought that if your face stayed dry, that if your head stayed dry, you'd find it comforting. I thought- god I'm an idiot. I'm sorry. I scared you, that's what's wrong. I scared you. This is my fault, John, not yours. We- they sent a video of him, John, and I panicked. I panicked and I wasn't thinking clearly, and I made a huge mistake. I'm so sorry."
"You panicked?" John rolled the idea around in his head. That didn't make sense. Greg didn't panic. Greg was John's rock, his protection, his foundation and security. The bruises on Greg's face seemed to catch John's attention for the first time. "Did someone hurt you?" He asked with sudden fear spiking his voice high. If someone was hurting Greg, what kept them from hurting him?

"They are from you, John," Greg said softly, touching his cheek. "They are just from you. I'm okay, no one hurt me. No one here is dangerous."


Greg moved swiftly then, letting the door close, dropping down into the chair -no longer his chair- at the side of John's bed. He reached out to touch him, pulling his hands back suddenly as he realized what he was doing.

"No, no John you didn't hurt me, you didn't hurt me. You were scared and you were trying to protect yourself. It's nothing, I'm fine. You aren't hurting anyone."

"Don't..." John warned as Greg reached out to touch him. His mouth tasted of bile and copper from where he had bit down on his tongue. "I hurt you when I was panicked. You said you hurt me because you were panicking." The sentences felt like they might make sense, but they failed to reach the center of John's fear. "Y-You aren't supposed to hurt me. You help me. You're supposed to be good to me. I'm supposed to love you b-but I-I-I'm hurting y-you!" Everything about this felt wrong.

Greg nearly knocked his chair over in an effort to back away from John, glad he'd not touched him. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry I'll go. I'm sorry. You are scared, I just wanted to help. I'm sorry."

His stomach was heaving as he moved across the room, using the wall at his back to keep himself upright. "I'm sorry," he repeated as he moved for the door.

"Greg?" John called just before the man reached the door. He had came to a terrible, horrifying conclusion. Everyone hurts me. I've just got to find the people who hurt me the least. In that instant John resigned himself to a life of pain, fear, and uncertainty. Everyone was going to hurt him, he believed, but he knew Greg had done it the least. "You d-don't hurt m-me as much as everyone else does. I don't...don't want you to go." John knew he had nothing else. Without Greg he was completely on his own, and the fear of solitude and uncertainty pushed him past his fear of what had happened. Greg promised to protect him, and since staying with Greg he'd been hurt the least out of all of it.

Greg stopped moving, his eyes closed, a pained exhalation slipping past his lips. It would have hurt less had John driven a blade into his gut. He slid down the wall, sitting on the floor several feet from the door, dropping his head in his hands and trying to breathe.

You don't hurt me as much as everyone else.

It had taken him thousands of hours to earn John's trust. Thousands. It was over now. He'd never gain it back. John would be scared of him forever. He just sat there, trying to get his head straight.

John tried to reason with himself. If Greg hurt him the least, then he needed to keep him around. Someone always needed to help him, and if it was Greg, he had a lower chance of being hurt. "Was that wrong?" He asked with fear in his voice. "Was that the wrong thing to say?"

Greg shook his head right where he sat, making no move to look up. He swallowed hard and spoke
softly, "No, John, you can say whatever you want. You can say literally whatever you want. This is just me hating myself. It's not you." He dragged his hand over the back of his neck and looked up at John finally, his own eyes bloodshot and red-rimmed. "I made...I made you a promise. I intend to keep it. I've not right to even ask you to-" his throat closed off and his eyes watered. Christ, he was falling apart. "We...we're close to getting Sherlock back. I can't make promises there but we are close. I just wanted you to know."

"I did something to deserve what happened, didn't I? You wouldn't have done it otherwise!" John couldn't seem to accept the fact that Greg hadn't meant to hurt him. He'd been hurt, and from what he'd been trained to believe, it was entirely his fault. "Are you going to leave me?" John questioned and used his hands to cover his face.

Greg couldn't help himself as he began to cry, silent tears rolling down his cheeks, falling heavy off his chin and shattering apart on the material of his shirt. He tipped his head back to the wall and stared at the ceiling, trying to just breathe properly. "I will do whatever you want me to do, John," he replied in a flat, dejected way.

"Then stay. But don't hurt me. Please. God, Greg, please..." He shook his head and tears flooded down out the corners of his eyes. "Please don't hurt me again. Please. Please. Please." John trembled quietly and repeated the word over and over to himself.

Greg nodded quietly to himself, gooseflesh blooming across his body as he listened to John. "Won't touch you," he assured, making no move to change his position, "won't even come near you." He closed his eyes, his pulse thundering in his ears, head hurting horribly. He stared at John, feeling the weight of guilt heavier and deeper than anything he'd ever experienced in his entire life.

John seemed a bit relieved, but couldn't trust Greg's word. "You said that before. Said you wouldn't make me do anything that hurts." John turned away, then, feeling vulnerable with his back turned, faced Greg again. He pulled a pillow over his head and trembled visibly as if expecting a blow.

"You're afraid of me," Greg whispered, resigned and so deeply soaked in pain he could hardly breathe. "I- I can just sit on the other side of the door, John, keep people from coming in besides your doctor. I don't want to scare you, and I am. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." He did not move yet. If John wanted him there, he'd stay, but he couldn't imagine why he would.

"That's probably best," John said quietly. It was getting rather difficult to hold quiet all the terror and grief that expelled all other thoughts from his mind. Without warning he let out a long, drawn out scream. He arched his back off the bed and tilted his head back, mouth open wide. After a moment he flopped back down and laid very still. "I'm sorry..." He whispered. "Sorry...

Greg's heart was racing so hard he was nearly sick. He had no idea what to do. Greg watched in horror, knowing he'd done this to him. He dragged a hand down his face and gasped for breath. "I- oh god, John, oh god." He pushed himself up on shaking legs and backed away towards the door. "I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry," he repeated, moving for the door. "I'll just- just-" his throat closed and he could not carry on speaking, sweat rolling down his face, pale and ill with his crimes.

John didn't attempt to escape. He knew it was futile and he needed to stay alive for Sherlock, so his main reason for escaping was invalidated. Occasionally a scream ripped itself free from his throat and he felt phantom pains on his arms and chest, but or the most part he was as quiet and still as the death he so longed for.

Greg sat outside his door, crouched in place, pale and staring at nothing at all. He listened to John, each scream ripping through his own chest like a dull blade. He took to pacing after a while, finally texting Mycroft again.
I can't keep doing this. I've killed him, I've killed him. I have to let him go, I can't keep doing this, he cannot bear what I've done. GL

He was just going to get the Morphine. There was nothing else he could do. He'd lost John entirely, and now each ticking minute was an act of torture.

No. Greg, you are not to kill John. You'll regret it all your life. If I feel that you are a danger to him I will have you watched, or removed. Sherlock needs him to be alive. M

I'm sorry. But Sherlock needs him. M

John screamed once more. His voice tore at the air and his throat, making them both raw and shaking with pain.

Greg read the text with terribly shaking hands, narrowly avoiding throwing the phone against the wall. What the hell help could John be to Sherlock now? He pulled at his hair, cracking strands loose. He paced like a trapped animal, time and time again going to John's door, only to stop with his hand on the metal, closing his eyes and shaking his head. He forced himself away, setting into pacing again.

Please, can he not be sedated at the least? He is in hell right now, Mycroft. GL

I'll have him sedated. Do you need help? M

Greg shoved the phone in his pocket and pushed the door to John's room open, speaking loud enough for John to hear him. "John...going to let your doctor put you to sleep, okay? Just let you sleep." All he wanted to do was push Morphine for John, send him off this coil with soft apologies and warm narcotics, followed by a round in his own head. That's all he wanted. Nothing more. How there could be any other outcome, he hand no idea. He'd wanted it so terribly, but this...this seemed so incredibly final.

John looked up at Greg with a mixture of fear and longing. He wanted nothing more than to be held, but the last time he had been in Greg's arms he was being held against his will in the stinging water. "I need to sleep. I should sleep. Can I not wake up until Sherlock is back? I need...I'm going to help Sherlock."

"I'll try, I'll try to get them to just let you sleep. I'll try, John," Greg assured, his chest so tight he was hardly breathing, wanting nothing more than to pull John back into his arms and fix what he'd inadvertently, foolishly done. He started to move back to the door. "I'm sorry I came in, you've been screaming and I've been trying to stay out like you've asked. I just...wanted you to know they are going to put you to sleep, give you some relief. I'm sorry, I'm so sorry." He put a shaking hand on the door, doing his damndest not to cry again. He'd cried more in the last damn week than in the whole of his life, he was sure.

"I don't want you to be mad at me," John muttered to Greg. "I don't want you to hurt me either. I thought I could..." He was doing his best to communicate in a way that Greg would understand instead of simply screaming, crying and thrashing like he wanted to. "I thought I could trust you. I held on to you because I thought you wouldn't take me somewhere bad. I don't want to be afraid of you, but...but it hurts...and, ah..." His mind was starting to break down, the effort from speaking clearly starting to drain him emotionally.

John was never, ever going to stop carving his heart out. Greg had the inclination to take a blade to
his own chest and have the offending thing out for John himself. He closed his eyes with his hand on 
the door, nodding and allowing John to speak his mind. "You trusted me, and I ruined it. John...John 
for me, the shower is the most comforting place in the world. I thought...thought if we just pushed 
through your fear, you'd find comfort in it too. It was stupid, and selfish, and so idiotic they don't 
make words to describe it. I- I loathe myself for what I've done to you. I'm not mad at you, I'm so 
furiously with myself that I just want to lie down and die. I'm so indescribably sorry I hurt you."

He could speak now without dissolving into tears, his voice heavy with resignation and self-loathing. 
"I will just...just do what I can for you from a distance, now. I...forgive me, John. I made the worst 
mistake of my life."

John started to weep quietly, out of grief rather than fear. The fact that he had lost something so dear 
to him was agonizingly painful. "I want to believe that." John said in an almost apologetic tone. It 
didn't sound logical that Greg hadn't been trying to hurt him, but John wanted so desperately to trust 
someone, to have one person who he could allow near him without fear. "But...hurts..." Words 
started to fail him and he slipped back into the childish state of mind. "But it hurts...you hurt...it 
scares me and I don't want you to scare me b-but...I thought...." John closed his eyes and turned his 
face away. What had he thought? That Greg loved him? Stupid. Of course not. John knew himself to 
be awful, weak, damaging and a burden. Of course Greg didn't love him.

Greg whispered once again that he was sorry, forcing his feet to let him out into the hall. He sat 
down slowly in the chair beside John's room, his heart in his throat, his head in his hands. He 
watched as the physician finally came to the door, nodding to Greg, "Going to put him to sleep and 
give him another feeding. Better mixture this time, more calories, upping the omega 3, see if we can't 
get him thinking a bit clearer."

Greg could not respond. His knee was bouncing and he could hardly breathe around the tight band 
around his chest.

John leaned his head back against his pillow as the doctor came in. Usually he would look to Greg 
for comfort. Usually he would reach out and take Greg's hand, or curl up in his arms. This time, 
however, he wept alone. "Put me under for a while, please." He asked the doctor in a frail tone. "I'm 
in pain."

Greg looked at his watch. More medical staff came in several minutes later. They fed John and 
bathed him, changed his clothing and his bedding, reset a new NG tube and tossed the old one, all 
John's medical maintenance taken care of. After that, they let him be. John had been unrestrained and 
alone nearly a full day, they had no reason to strap him down. Greg slid in when he was told that 
John was down. He pulled John's blanket out of the drawer, the one with the worn spot that he liked 
to run his thumb over when he was nervous, and fanned it out over him. He turned the telly to the 
symphony and turned the volume down low. Anything to keep John from sitting alone in the 
whitewashed walls without a distraction. He stared at John for a few minutes, his hands in his 
pockets, utterly loathing himself.

Quietly Greg moved himself back out into the hall, grabbing a bag as he went. He was an officer, no 
stranger to shock. He put the damn thing over his nose and mouth and breathed as slow and deep as 
he could manage, sitting back down in the hallway, taking watch by the door.

When the sedative wore off John lay as though dead, and indeed he wished to be. Other than helping 
Sherlock and before that had been an issue, John's only reason for living was because he trusted 
Greg unconditionally. Greg had told him to live, so he would live. Now, with his panicked mind 
convincing him that Greg was an enemy too, John didn't even have the motivation to cry.

Greg waited a full twenty four hours before texting Mycroft again.
He'd refused food, the idea of eating utterly repulsive. He was useless, sitting there in that hall, posting guard where he was not needed. He itched to go check on John. He paced, and sat, and occasionally swore, an unending pattern as his heart wore a hole in his chest.

Talking, yes. He's told us very little, but he's loosening. We've promised not to send him back to Moran if he talks. That seems to work. Might take another day. M

Are you alright? M

I've likely killed two men with gross negligence. John is living in hell because I put him there. I'm wonderful. GL

You haven't killed either of them. Setbacks are natural in recovery. M

If you need anything, ask. M

John called out once, just once, just to see what would happen. "Am I a prisoner here? If this is the government, how can you legally lock me here?" John knew it was for his own good, but he was not in a very logical state of mind. "Am I under arrest? What are the charges?" His voice was slurred heavily and was quite devoid of any emotion.

Greg listened to John calling out, pushing the door open just enough to speak softly. "You're not a prisoner, John. You're not tied down. Can I get you anything?"

"Inmates aren't tied up." John retorted without missing a beat. "Not most of them, anyways. They're just locked. I'm locked. I'd figure a way out if I weren't sticking around to help Sherlock."

Greg pushed the door all the way open and left it like that. "Free to leave," he said dejectedly, wanting to find Mycroft and punch him in the damned face. "Do you want a wheelchair, or are you walking?"

He was texting Mycroft as he spoke to John.

He's utterly terrified of me. I've taken the sole comfort he had and taught him that trusting is stupid and hurts. I believe we are beyond setback. I have destroyed everything. GL

You have not ruined everything. Just a setback. You'll get over this. M

You obviously have no understanding of the situation. GL

John twitched. "Do...do you mean it?" He asked and sat up a bit. His head spun like a top and he flopped back down. Malnutrition and mild dehydration combined with his months of inactivity had made him weak. "I...I'll need a chair."

Greg was on his feet in an instant and had a chair for John in the next. He pushed it into the room, leaving it several paces from the bed, not wanting to frighten him. "Anywhere you want to go, but I'll remind you the Thames will hurt, and I made you a promise, so if that's where we are headed let's just take you home and I'll do it there." He was choking on his own words, backing away from John, drawn and pale. He wanted nothing more than to believe Mycroft, but John looked at Greg as though he was just as horrific as the men who had tortured him, and Greg no longer had hope left.

John gave Greg a look of distrust and slowly slid off the bed and made his way to the chair. "The Thames...will hurt...oh, god," he stammered with startling realization. "Greg...The Thames...water." John didn't know how he had overlooked that, but now it frightened him. He'd regarded the Thames
as a way to die, not an actual river. "How did I...?" He grabbed the circular handle on the wheels and pulled, moving himself forward slowly. His arms were very weak, with slight limited mobility, and his hands had a hard time grabbing on, but he managed it. "I've got to be here when Sherlock gets out. If you can't find him, I will. Tell me where to look."

Greg had his hands in his pockets, keeping far back from John, allowing him to go wherever he wanted. He would put Mycroft's security on the ground for as long as he could manage it if it came to that. He owed it to John. "Look's to be northern Scotland," he said softly, "Or Timbuktu. The best men London has have been working around the clock trying to find him. I came to ask you what worked, because we caught one. Sherlock sacrificed himself to keep you from further pain, much as I have fucked that up, I'd appreciate for his sake if you didn't go and advertise you are out of a secure facility."

John swallowed hard. "You caught one?" It felt strange to be talking to Greg, as if he wanted to love him but just couldn't bring himself past his fear. "And he hasn't told you exactly where Sherlock is?" John knotted his bony knuckles together and stared at the ground. "Then you must be doing something wrong, I would have told Moriarty where to find any of you if he worked on me long enough. I'd have done anything."

Greg nodded. "I haven't seen him, personally, but I'm told he was conditioned to resist." He stood there, staring at John in his chair. Had he been through what John had been through, he'd likely have broken as well, sang like a bird. "I hope you'd tell them. None of us are worth you hurting over. Not like that. I hope you'd talk."

John shook his head. "He never asked...he just...just..." John doubled over and clutched his head. His vision had started to blot over again with white flashes and views of his own blood. No man should ever have to see that much of his blood spilled out before him. "I...I could...show you...to break him."

Greg stared at John, shaking his head. "Fuck's sake, John, I'd never ask you to do that. I just...I should never have even brought it up. No, John, you don't need...apparently when Mycroft promised not to return him to Moran, he began talking. He's starting to talk. No, you're...no."

John hung his head. "I'd do it, if you asked. If anyone asked. If I was just given a chance. I know I would. I'd cut him. I'd..." John knew he would also be a quivering mess on the floor before he even touched a knife, but he still wished he could be helpful. He was nearly sick at the very idea. "God, John," he whispered, walking over to John and sitting down on the floor at John's feet. He dropped his face in his hands and breathed slowly. "I- what can I do? Please. I cannot stand this. Please, have mercy John and tell me what I can do to make this up to you at all. I will literally do anything. Please. I cannot breathe like this."

At Greg's words John stopped. The man seemed so contrite about his actions that John couldn't help but consider that perhaps it had been a misunderstanding. "I...Mercy? I'm not...I'm not hurting you..." He didn't understand. "I don't know what you can do. Don't hurt me. Don't put me in the water. Please...just leave me alone. I'm..." Confused. Scared. Alone. Hurting. Worried. Panicking. There were many words for him to choose from. "Lost."

Please just leave me alone.

Greg could hardly believe he still had it in him to sob. He nodded, slowly getting to his feet. "Alright," he said roughly, his hands shaking visibly at his sides. "I'll leave you alone. I'll go." He dragged the back of his hand across his face. "Call button on the bed if you need h-help, I won't
come back." His chest was catching, panic roaring up in a rush across his hearing. He tapped the place where John could press if he needed someone, taking just a moment to look back at him. It was a goodbye. All of this, a goodbye.

"If...if I'd known, back when you were leaving for Africa...I'd have said so much more. I love you, John. I'm-" he bit off the 'sorry.' John had already refused him forgiveness. He didn't deserve it. He smoothed out the blanket he'd put on the bed for John in a nervous motion and then looked at him once more as he stopped at the door.

"Goodbye, John."

Chapter End Notes

Oh, our poor boys.

Also, is anyone getting/appreciating all the titles?
John huffed. "Why does everyone keep telling me they love me? First Sherlock, now you. Am I so pitiful that you feel the need to love me?" John looked up with sunken, hollowed eyes and demanded an answer. "You...you can't love me. I wanted...I...It doesn’t matter what I wanted. You hurt me. Just like Sherlock did." He flinched then, hands over his face. Had Sherlock hurt him? John was both quite sure he had and certain he hadn't at the same time. "Or...maybe not like him...I can't remember..."

It took a moment for John to reclaim his composure. "Are you going to help Sherlock when he gets back? Are you going to fix him? Give him ice?"

Greg gave John a broken laugh, shaking his head. "No, John. I'm fucking rubbish at helping anyone at all. No. I think I've done enough damage already." He shrugged, he'd said the words to John, meant what he said. John had loved him at one point. Greg looked at him and nodded once more. There was nothing left for him to do. "I'm sorry I messed up so badly."

"You aren't...you helped me. You helped me and you've got to help Sherlock...just don't use the water on him." John was dangerously close to crying again, but he felt far too empty to cry. "Why won't you help him? I can't help him. I'm broken. I'm useless. All I do is cry and scream. I can't even feed myself. If Sherlock didn't care about me I'd be dead by now, I'm sure of it. Where are you going, Greg? Why do you look so sad?" John was no longer capable of keeping one train of thought going. His mind jumped around and his attempts to sound recovered were feeble.

Greg could hardly believe what he was hearing. "Helped you? Helped you? I've destroyed you. Destroyed everything. I'm going away where I can't hurt anyone else, John. Sherlock has you, he has his brother. I- Christ, look what I've done." He shook his head, wanting to comfort John and knowing he couldn't. Hell, he was leaving anyhow, would never have a chance to say it again. "All I want to do is gather you up and hold you, keep you safe, calm you down. But I can't do that. I can't ever do that again. I've made you hate me, I've made you fear me. I'm just going to go where I can't hurt anyone else, John."

"I'm NOT DESTROYED!" John shouted as loudly as his voice would allow, weakened by screaming as it was. He balled his hands into fists and pounded one down on the armrest of the chair. "DAMN IT! I'm not destroyed!" His expression dissolved from anger to grief and he doubled over to put his head on his knees once more. He ached, his mind spun, fear crowded him and pain seemed to hover around every corner, but he still didn't like the word. "I can HEAR YOU when you say that! I'm a PERSON! You look at me like I'm something less!" And perhaps he was. Perhaps Moriarty had stripped away everything about him and left something raw and subhuman behind.
"You are more of a person than I will ever be, John. How can you say I look at you like you are less? I'm in awe of your ability and I am drowning in my own guilt for what I've done to you!" Greg shouldn't react in kind, he knew, but he could not help himself, wanting nothing more than for John to believe him, if not forgive him.

"If you didn't want me to be afraid of you holding me, why did you hold me when I was in the water? You know how it works. He'd hurt me while doing something a-and then I-I would start t-to f-fear it. Isn't that what you said?"

"I held you to make you feel safe from the water! You said I made you feel safe! I thought we could go at it together, I thought it would help you!" Greg crouched down before his knees gave on him. He let a moment pass before speaking again.

"John, please. I thought I made you feel safe."

John wheeled his chair back just a bit, not because he was uncomfortable with how close they were, but rather to show Greg and himself that he had control of the distance. "I felt safe because I thought I was safe. I thought you would keep the bad things away, not force me into them!"

John stood slowly and shuffled to where Greg was crouched. It made him feel just a bit better to finally be looking down on someone, instead of being looked down upon as everyone had been doing to him. "I told you no! The second I heard the water I begged you! Did you not hear me? I BEGGED YOU!" John's vision clouded with dark grey spots and he dropped hard onto his knees.

Greg's entire demeanor shifted and his hands shot out, catching John before he pitched sideways, breathing his name, terrified of what he'd done. "I- I th-thought," he shook his head, disgusted with himself, "I thought it would pass, oh god, I just thought it would pass. I wanted- god, so badly to give you something that would bring you comfort. I thought I could give it back to you if I just held you through it."

"I f-fucking begged you, Greg!" John stammered with as much force as he could gather. He flinched away from the man's touch involuntarily, though once he had pulled away he wished for it back. "I b-begged y-you and screamed and t-tried to escape...w-what more c-could I have d-done to say n-no?" John pulled himself to the corner and tucked his knees to his chest. "I n-need t-to b-be ab-ble to s-say no!" John could hardly speak anymore. He tore at his hair and used every ounce of his concentration to keep from screaming.

Greg pushed himself away from John, hating that the man was blocking the door. "I don't know another way to tell you that I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking. I was- they sent us a video of them working on Sherlock, I had just watched it, and then I asked you to talk and I made you scared, and I wasn't thinking properly. You are completely right, completely right. I'll go, I've been trying to do what I can. I can't fix it, I know I can't. I'm so sorry."

"No. NO. Don't you dare leave me. If you're not lying, and you didn't mean to hurt me, then you're an idiot and have no right to leave." John didn't want to be kind right now. Being angry felt good. It felt powerful and in control, something John didn't believe himself to remember the feeling of. "I look at you and... I can feel the water. B-But you can fix that. You can fix that, and I'll b-b-be okay again. You can f-fix me and I-I'll be alright." John curled up on the floor and covered himself with his arms. "Just fix me so I can feel safe again. I need it. I-" he choked and stopped. His anger was short lived and fizzled away to leave despair in it’s place.

Greg stared at John, forgetting to breathe. He had no idea how to fix it. He wanted to reach out and pull John to him, wanted to touch him, make him not feel so alone. But John loathed it when Greg came near him. He was worried for John on the floor as he was and he slowly got up to get a blanket. He pulled it off the bed and draped it over carefully and gently. "I want to fix it more than
anything, John."

John grabbed his blanket and found the spot where he had worn a hole. "Then fix it," he grumbled and pressed himself against the wall. Bitter loss and betrayal were tempered slightly by John's own uncertainty of his mind. He didn't trust himself or his fear. Perhaps then it was misplaced. "I want to love you. I want to feel safe. But God, Greg, I don't."

Greg watched John's fingers working on the blanket and he looked up at him slowly, utterly defeated, lost without any sense of direction. He'd been able to keep them moving forward, but then he'd pitched them off the cliff face. He licked his lip and spoke quiet and low. "I know, John I know. I know I've hurt you, and I've destroyed your trust. I know I've ruined all the help I gave before. I know I've destroyed all of this. I know. Oh, how I know." He grit his teeth and looked away, one hand pressed over his heart where it ached so horribly it was physical. It hurt enough to make him wonder if he was finally having a heart attack.

"I don't know how to fix it. I- I tell you I love you, you hate me. I touch you, you run from me. I show you my face, you turn away from me. What is left? My words, my touch, my presence...you hate them all. And that's...that's my fault. I can do no more than just...just go. Just go where I can't hurt you or anyone else again. I- useless, I'm useless, John. I know. Whatever it is you think of me right now, rest assured, I think worse."

John shook his head against Greg's claims, willing his self-loathing away. "You helped me speak," John offered. There was something inside him that Moriarty hadn't been able to strip away. Perhaps the psychopath simply hadn't tried, but regardless of intentions it lived. John had the fierce desire to help those he loved. He was loyal to his dying breath and even though he looked at Greg with abject horror in his eyes, he didn't wish the man to have pain himself. "I'm still speaking. I can still eat ice. I think. I can still stand. And walk. You did that, didn't you?" John wasn't speaking as much for Greg's benefit as he was his own. He needed to trust Greg. His broken mind needed something to latch on to more than it needed to protect itself. "I'm not completely ruined. I'm a person. I'm not dead. I don't want to be afraid. You fixed it before. Fix it again."

Greg looked up at the ceiling after seeing John look at him with terror in his eyes. Every time cut so deep he had no idea how he was still breathing. He took in a few deep, tripping breaths, trying to get the world to stop spinning. "You didn't hate me before. You do now. You were not utterly terrified of me then, you are now. I can't even..." he swallowed hard, his gut twisting, raking a hand through his hair. "I'm an idiot, John, remember? I'm not clever like Sherlock, I'm not as clever as you. I'm just Greg. Just Greg. I don't know how to fix it. I-" he closed his eyes and just reached out a shaking hand, palm up, holding his breath to see if John would take it.

John stared at the hand and his pulse soared. He scooted back a bit, drawing his blanket around his shoulders. "You're an idiot for not listening to me." John almost growled, then looked extremely apologetic. "I'm sorry... You're not...I'm just..." He stared at the hand once more and battled with himself. Greg didn't mean to hurt me. He was just trying to help. But he scares me. I want to run. I need to run. RUN. No. It's Greg. I know Greg, don't I? He helped me. Greg is good to me. Was good to me? Is he still? He doesn't look like he wants to hurt me. But he did. He used the water. RUN. Did the water hurt? I can't remember. John pressed his hands to either side of his head for a moment, then hesitantly reached out one out and placed it, still at arm's length, into Greg's.

Greg's fingers loosely wrapped around the back of John's hand and he spoke softly, his voice hardly over a whisper. "I kept your entire head dry, made sure the water was nowhere near your face. You were cold, and shaking, and I'm horrific and I am so fucking stupid," he hissed the words with such loathing he nearly startled himself, "and I took you where I go when I'm tired and scared and cold. I-" he shook his head, hardly believing John had taken his hand. "I never let the water come near your
head. I'll never stop being sorry, for the rest of my life I'm never going to be able to forgive myself. I can't stand what I've done. I can't."

John held Greg's hand at arm length, shoulder extended, keeping him as far away as he could. "You hate yourself." John said in an almost curious tone. "Why do you hate yourself?" The anger and hatred was clear in Greg's voice and it worried John.

Greg shook his head and put his hand over his eyes to hide how easily the tears were falling. Slowly John retracted his hand and pulled it back to its place over his chest. "I still want to find Sherlock."

Greg closed his eyes as John pulled away. "You should get off the floor," he started in monotone. "The floor is fine." John snapped back. He hadn't been angry in so long. He had been depressed, broken, scared and tired, but hardly ever angry. Moriarty had beaten the anger out of him. But now, now that he was recovering his strength, the anger over what had happened, the injustice of it all, came flooding back.

Greg put his own back to the wall, elbows resting on his knees, and stared up at the ceiling. John was angry, which, he supposed, was a good thing. He was just ill equipped to care for him now that he was no longer welcome. He wasn't going to push John, leaving him where he was, scrubbing a hand over his face.

"I'm sorry," he said yet again. I was fairly sure that was all he had left to offer, anyhow.

"You should be." John spat back. His face fell then, and he curled up tighter. Just because Greg had hurt him once didn't mean he had cause to blame him for everything. It would be terribly easy to move the blame from some dead man he couldn't hurt to someone standing before him, apologizing, but even in his damaged, confused state John sensed that wasn't right. "Sorry...I just..." He clutched his head. "I don't know. It hurts."

Greg hardly flinched at John's anger. He could be the whipping boy, that was fine. He could do that. He shook his head and spoke softly, "Don't apologize, you don't have any reason to. What happened is unforgivable." He licked his lip and closed his eyes, waiting for John to throw him out.

John wanted to get up and hit someone. He stared at Greg for a moment, fists balled and thin arms shaking. "I don't want to hate you." He lamented and his hands fell back to their place guarding his chest. "I loved you. That was better. That didn't hurt. This hurts."

"I hate me," Greg answered softly, cored down to the bone, nothing left. He looked at John then, open and honest. "I do hate me, you didn't deserve any of this, not one moment of it. Not from them, not from me, none of it." He licked his lips and kept his posture submissive. He was in no way a threat to John. The man could get up and beat him to death, and Greg wouldn't so much as raise an arm to defend himself.

"No, I...I didn't deserve it." John tried to convince himself that that was true, but something in his mind told him that each blow he had taken had been earned. "I shouldn't have been hurt and you shouldn't have used the water on me. But it happened anyway. I should just..." He wasn't quite sure. Obviously not what he was currently doing, as that was working terribly.

"To be fair, I didn't use water on you, John. Please, see it for what it was. I wasn't using water on you, I held you in my arms, close to my chest, and held onto you in the shower. I didn't hurt you, I frightened you, and again, as ever, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I have no worthy defense, and I'm sorry."

"That's what he said. He said it didn't count because my face was dry. It counts. It hurts." He scooted
just a bit further away to show his contempt. "I need to be able to say no. I don't want to not have control again. I can't."

Greg looked up sharply, his gut twisting so hard he physically reacted to it. "I thought- I thought- he used water to hurt you without it touching your face? I- I thought, oh god, I thought it was- I didn't know, oh god, John, I didn't know." He was rapidly turning a sickly shade of green, tipping his face down to the floor as stars erupted across his vision.

"I should go...I should go...John, oh god, I didn't...I didn't-" he shook his head and stopped talking as his belly threatened to make him sick up.

John saw that his words had hurt Greg. He wanted to care, he wanted not to be angry, but the injustice of it all fueled him forward. "Well, it was just a bit hotter than what you used," he snapped.

"Or cold. Depending on how many open lacerations were on my skin that day, or if I was already hypothermic."

Greg held a hand over his mouth and utterly refused to allow himself the tears that were choking him off. He nodded at John's words, letting them etch into his mind. He'd known, god he'd known, that he'd made a horrific mistake. Only now was it becoming clear just how severely he'd messed up.

"I'm sorry," he breathed behind his hand, unable to make himself look at John. "I- I'll go, I won't...won't go near y-you or Sherlock again, I- Jesus, I'm s-so sorry." He wasn't going to let himself get up until John was done with him, though. He'd sit there and take it.

"Y-You know, boiling water is worse than hot metal in some ways." He was starting to break a bit. His renewed anger was beginning to dissolve once again into directionless grief that left him trembling. "It just gets everywhere. It spills and if you're standing it can run down y-you're whole body before it s-stops. And cold water isn't better. Not when your skin is open. Not when you're raw and bleeding. Or freezing and dying." John took a deep, shuddering breath and pulled his blanket over his head. "Don't use the water on me. I don't care if it's not on my face. It hurts. I've told you s-so many t-times that it h-hurts."

Greg sat there breathing tight and controlled, moving air into and out of his lungs. His lashes were damp, but he'd managed to keep his cheeks dry, lips parted and head spinning. It wasn't possible to feel lower, it just wasn't. He wanted to put himself down. Wanted to press the barrel to his temple and pull the trigger. There was nothing else that he wanted. Nothing.

"I-" he swallowed against the pain in his throat, "won't come near you again. I don't know what to do. I will get you a gun and you can put me down. I- I don't know how to make it right." He was hardly audible as he spoke to John, pulling hard enough at the hair on the side of his head that he was tearing some of the strands loose.

"I don't...I don't want to shoot you," John stammered and wrapped his arms around himself protectively. "I don't..." John remembered the time he had held a gun to his own head and Greg had talked him out of it. "You don't want me dead. I don't want you dead. I want you to be Greg and not hurt me with the water. And I know-" John stopped and dug his fingernails into the sides of his head as if trying to claw the memories out himself. "I know you didn't...you didn't hurt me on purpose... But that doesn't mean it didn't hurt. I want you to be Greg. Be Greg and help me."

Greg held where he was, slowly letting his own hair go, looking slowly up to John. "I- all the ways I know how to help..." he shook his head and gripped the back of his neck, "you're scared of me. I don't know how to help you anymore. I want to promise I will never hurt you, but I've already done, haven't I? I- all I want is to help you. You can't even look at me anymore. I-" he shook his head and then stared up at the ceiling. "Please let me help you off the floor."
John didn't want to be helped up. He grabbed the edge of his chair and hauled himself to his feet with great difficulty. "I can manage," he retorted and took a few faltering, unsteady steps towards his bed. "I can walk around a bit. I'm going to need to be able to walk to show Sherlock I'm alright."

Greg backed off, his hands in his pockets, letting John do whatever the hell he wanted. Greg just followed outside of arm's reach, as he did not want John to feel restricted in any way. The sheets felt softer now that John was getting into them willingly. He climbed into bed and tucked the blankets around him in an attempt to get the same feeling of comfort Greg's arms had given him.

Greg moved across the room, leaning against the wall, staring at John for a few minutes before looking away. "Would you rather I leave?" He asked softly, looking down at his feet, hands still in his pockets. "That was...you're getting better at walking, that was good, by the way." He wasn't sure if he was going to make things worse by saying so, but John's mobility was improving and he wanted him to know.

Greg stayed exactly where he was, looking at his feet. He was more tired than he could ever remember being, already sharply down in weight from just a few days of the stress. He scratched at the sides of his thumbs in his pockets, a nervous habit that he'd had for quite some time. He picked the skin away and made himself bleed slightly. The tiny pain of it was grounding. "What you're doing for him...it's...it's an incredible gift. You're a good man." Greg fell suddenly silent, not sure where he was going or why he was even talking at all.

"You told me not to toss him out," John grumbled and turned over in his bed. "You said he would need me and it was selfish to leave him by himself. Is he going to hate me? Will he fear me? If he does, should I stay, or just let him watch me die? Maybe, if he's scared like I was, it would help."

Greg swallowed that down. He'd been so incredibly ignorant of how...how incredibly deep it had gone when he said that. He kept his eyes on his feet and bit down on the little split he was working into his lip. "Jesus, John I'm sorry I said all that to you. I've...fuck, I've not helped you at all." He swallowed and exhaled through pursed lips. "He's being tortured. I don't know how he will be when we get to him. I- Christ, John, I don't...I didn't mean to make you feel you owed it to him. You don't. You really don't."

"He stayed alive when I was broken. I can't toss him out. That's not what I should do." John pressed his palms over his eyes to shut out the light. "Don't belittle the progress you've made," John said, having a rare moment of clarity. "I'm a pain. Trying to avoid fear for me is like walking on eggshells and trying not to break any. The fact that you haven't hurt me before, only once, means you're the best person in my life."

Greg knew that John decidedly deserved better than that, better than him. He was quiet long enough to ensure his voice wouldn't crack. "Want the lights out?" he whispered, having glanced up at John, the familiar sound of John's voice lancing through him. God how he missed the man. For a moment, John sounded lucid, much like his former self. He didn't know if that was anything to get excited about or not.

"No, I'd like them to stay on." He wasn't particularly unsettled by the dark, but it certainly put him at ease to know that he could see what was coming. "I'm trying, Greg." He stated firmly. "I am trying.
I'm trying to get better. I want to not be afraid of you. I'd rather be afraid of breathing than you."

Greg nodded at John's words, keeping where he was. "I'm...John I...I won't ever, ever do anything like that again. I am so incredibly sorry I scared you. I'm so sorry I gave you yet another obstacle. I'm so sorry. You...if you...I'll ask, John. I'll ask and if you say no, I'll stop. I'm so sorry. So, so sorry."

"There are some things..." John trailed off and had to give himself a few minutes to regain composure. "There are some things that I need to be pushed with if I'm to help Sherlock. But that...that was too much. I can't... I can't do that again."

Greg kept his head down and nodded, which fueled John on. "I just need to be able to say no, Greg. After all that...I-I need to be able to say no when s-something I-I don't like is happening to my body." John let out a choked sob and covered his eyes with his hand for a moment.

Greg was, frankly, horrified. He was dripping in self-loathing and the desire for the earth to swallow him up was strong. "I know," he whispered. "Y-You can say no."

John shook his head. "If it will help Sherlock, then push me. But...with things like that..."

"I know, god I know. I....I'm so sorry. It's not about Sherlock, it's about you."

"Nothing is about me. This whole thing was focused around Sherlock. I was a piece, and an important one, but just a piece, nonetheless. Not a player." John rubbed his arm absentely and felt the scars under the soft cotton shirt. "I don't matter. It would have caused everyone a lot less grief had I been hit by a car before I met you. Or if that bullet had been a little to the right."

Greg moved then, compelled into action. He went to John's side as if about to reach out, but his arms fell useless by his sides when he considered that John might pull away. "Not to me...not to me. You...no, that's not how it is to me."

"Maybe not to you. But in the grand scheme of things this won't matter." John was incredibly depressed now, practically drowning in his own grief and self-pity. "This won't matter to anyone in a hundred years. So why should anyone care about me now? Why should Sherlock and you be so devastated about this?"

Greg reached out carefully and put his fingertips to the back of John's hand, heart breaking for the man. "I love you. I care deeply. I don't have the answers you want, but I am here with you. I care." His voice was soft, nearly trembling, wanting to gather John in his arms and hold him. "Sherlock loves you, he cares. He did his best to save you when we realized what happened."

"I...I love you too, Greg, it's just..." He tore at his hair and dug his nails into his scalp. "But you scare me and-" another moment of silence passed as he gathered his strength and control once more. "I don't know how not to think of the water when you touch me."

Greg closed his eyes and pulled his hand back, taking a show breath. "Sorry, I shouldn't be touching you. I'm sorry." He leaned back, twisting his hands in his lap. "I'm so sorry."

John could feel his mind slipping away from him. Keeping his fear and illogical thoughts at bay was like trying to restrain horses with ropes of straw. "Please, Greg, I need someone I can trust. I need someone to tell me what is real and what isn't. I need to not be afraid of you. Please help me."

Greg dragged a hand through his hair. He wasn't sure if John was asking for someone else or not. He stood up and moved right to the side of the bed. "Can I hold you, John? I won't move you, I...I'll let you go if you ask me to."

"No," John said firmly. "You may not." There was no desire in him to be harsh, but he needed to be
able to say no and was fairly certain he would panic. He wanted to be absolutely sure that his voice had some sort of power here, which was a concept he was only beginning to grasp. "I mean...just not today. I'm sorry."

Greg moved back swiftly, wringing his hands, nodding to himself. "I...I'll g-get Paul...I'll...god I'm s-sorry." He dragged a hand over his mouth as he moved to the door, his other hand pulling his mobile from his pocket, dropping the damn thing in his distress. He crouched and gathered it back up, trying to press the battery back in the slot, but his hands were shaking too hard to manage it. "Just...h-hang on...have the doctor page him."

John yearned for the old comfort he derived from being held in Greg's arms, but even the memory of it was tainted. Fear has a way of damaging people, especially one linked with so much torment and trauma. "He's just going to tell me that it wasn't your fault."

"But it is my fault, it's...I did this. I did this. I didn't mean to, but...but I still did." Greg stayed exactly where he was, unsure if what John wanted. "I...I tried to help and I hurt you. Sherlock sacrificed himself. You were tortured for months. Moriarty is dead. Those are all truths."

"That doesn't make it hurt any less. That almost makes it worse, because I know I shouldn't be afraid of it. Someone afraid of heights is much less worried about the rationality of their fear than someone afraid of kittens. I'm afraid of eating and hugs! That isn't normal!" John flinched and dropped his head to his chest where he could cover most of his thin body with spindly arms.

Greg nodded, his heart cracking to bits. "I don't know how to help," he whispered. He stared at the floor, the bits if his mobile still in hand. "I don't know how to take away the hurt. I...I don't know what to do. I don't want to lie to you. I made a horrible mistake."

"I know you want to help but..." John squeezed his eyes shut and seemed to wilt down even more than he had before. "I need to be alone for a bit. Properly alone."

Greg looked at him once more and then nodded, turning and leaving John to himself. He sat down in the hallway and forced himself to breathe, willing himself to settle enough to get his mobile functioning again. It was nearly twenty minutes before he got the battery back in place and booted up the phone, slowly typing out a text to Mycroft.

*Any news? GL*

John was trying to sort everything out in his mind. He had to tread carefully, though. There were some places he couldn't go, some memories he couldn't revisit without stinging pain.

*We have a location. Plans are being made. Densely populated area. Multiple exits, large basement. M*

Greg tipped his forehead to the phone clutched between his hands and breathed deeply, eyes closed, trying to settle himself down. It was more than he could have hoped for. He nearly typed out hurry, but that was so unnecessary he couldn't make himself do it. Mycroft was already falling apart trying to find his brother.

Sherlock was lost. He had no idea where he was, only that Moran was there, and Moran hurt, and he
constantly hurt. Sometimes John was there, sometimes not. Mycroft never came to him when he screamed for his brother. He’d given up English entirely, unable to respond to Moran’s commands, doing nothing more than babbling about his brother and screaming for mercy.

Mycroft had watchers in the area. The building had been pinpointed but he wasn’t about to just barge in. He planned on treating this as a hostage situation, as Moran was likely less in it for the game than Moriarty had been and therefore would be more willing to kill Sherlock.

"Wake up, Sherlock." Moran almost sang, walking in from his little break. "How are you feeling? Are you going to use English today?" He casually walked to the table and stood over him, waiting for some sort of mutter to know the man was at least somewhat awake. "Big things planned today. Let's start with a video."

Sherlock simply began hyperventilating at the sound of Moran’s voice, completely unable to move, paralyzed in pain and fear. There was a sloppy mix of French and German on his destroyed lips as he began to beg, eyes pinched shut, shaking hard enough on the table to rattle his restraints audibly. He shook his head and turned his face away, instantly in a panic.

"Tell me, Sherlock, what did you do to John Watson?" He had his cart rolled in and lined up an array of knives, pliers, clamps and saws. "Do you remember, or will I have to educate you again? The only way for you to stay safe, the only way for you to protect him is for you to remember how terribly you hurt him and apologize."

Sherlock heard the squeaking wheels of the cart and simply began screaming, his voice hoarse and raw, hardly able to make much sound at all anymore. He flexed as though about to pull at the restraints, but that simple act alone fired agony through him so brilliant he nearly blacked out. His eyes burned as though crying, but he was far too dehydrated to manage physical tears.

"No, no, Sherlock," Moran said and put his hand on his shoulder where there was a particularly large needle - or perhaps it was large enough to be a spike - still imbedded. "Screaming doesn't help. In fact if you aren't silent by the time I count to five, I will spend the entire day here working on you. One. Two. Three. Four. Five."

Sherlock’s chest was fluttering in wild panic, the act itself blindingly painful. He forced himself silent, nearly blacking out in anticipated fear.

"Good, very good." Moran commented when Sherlock fell silent. "Now, I will allow you to speak once today. You may only speak when I give you permission to do so. Anything else will get you punished. What did you do to John Watson? Answer clearly, and in English, and I will not burn you today." He had a bottle of butane and his lighter, which he’d used a few days ago but still found amusing.

Sherlock panted, his eyes pinched closed, heart like a tiny bird in his chest as it fluttered almost uselessly. He struggled for English, which had very little meaning to him any longer. "H-h...h-rt 'im..." he stuttered and slurred, sobbing without tears, nearly crazed with fear.

Moran pulled away then. "Good, very good. I remember how you hurt him. You cut him even though he screamed for mercy." He clicked the projector on and the one clip that had been played over and over again lit the room. It was the film from when Sherlock had been given an ultimatum and had to cut John. "See? Just watch it once, and I'll make it go away."

Sherlock managed to keep his eyes open, watching the familiar clip as he screamed, unable to keep himself quiet. He kept his eyes on John, horrified, knowing how John must have felt in that moment. The fear in John’s eyes dragged Sherlock’s mind under and he screamed and screamed, though he
forced himself to watch, terrified of more pain.

Once the clip was over Moran paused it on John. His head was tilted back, eyes closed and brow drawn. His mouth was open wide in a scream that froze on the projection screen. Blood was caked in his far past regulation length hair and on the side of his bruised face.

"Don't you think he looks sad? He looks so terribly hurt. Its like John isn't even in there anymore. It would be best if you killed him once I let you out."

"L-It me....o-o-t?" He slurred between broken sobs, his chest fluttering in panic. "L-It," he couldn't form the proper words, just carefully nodding. John would surely want to die, had wanted to die, he'd kept him from dying. He was selfish. He just wanted to die himself. He was so, so ready to close his eyes for good. "K...o-okay," he breathed, his voice a cracked, damaged thing.

"Good. If I brought him over to you now, would you kill him? If I gave you a gun?" Moran had no intention of letting him aim it himself, lest it turn to a suicide, but it would be interesting if Sherlock would shoot a double he dragged in. "Would you end his pain?"

Thinking John there with him in that moment, Sherlock nodded. He absolutely would pull the trigger, it would be the kindest thing on earth for John, it had been what John had wanted. He would pull that damned trigger if he had the chance, anything to help the man who'd been screaming alongside Sherlock for the eternity he'd been in Moran's care.

It took less than a day to arrange it. Moran had someone who looked somewhat like John dress in the same clothes he had been wearing in the videos. He fixed his hair, cut him up rather badly and informed him that if he spoke at all he would be killed.

"Someone help me!" John's voice screamed from outside the room. Moran had the portable telly playing one of the audio clips of John screaming.

He walked in without it, seeming to have left John outside. "Are you willing to kill him now?"

Sherlock's stomach seized on him, locking him up in terrible pain, his heart racing so hard he blacked out for a few seconds before coming back up. "J-" he breathed, teeth chattering, utterly horrified. "J-Jo'n," he cried out, nodding to Moran, "yes...y-" he could hardly get the words out, wanting to save the man from his suffering. "P-Pl'se," he whispered, eyes locked to the door.

Moran smiled and took a small bottle out of his pocket and unceremoniously sprayed it over Sherlock's face. "Thats just for being irritating." He commented and dropped the pepper-spray onto the ground.

Sherlock was gasping for air, already having a tremendously difficult time breathing before being sprayed. Pain exploded across his head as the pepper spray worked into his eyes and the extensive damage on his face.

The false John was dragged in, bleeding, stumbling, with his hands tied behind his back and a blindfold covering his eyes. A recording device had been put in his shirt on the back and it played John's voice, begging for death and mercy.

Moran walked to Sherlock, gun in hand, and removed the restraint off his better arm. "Now, say goodbye and shoot him." The man with the false John pulled his sandy hair back and forced him to stand while Moran pressed a gun into Sherlock's hand, though he never let go of it himself.

Sherlock’s fingers shook horrifically on the gun, but the millisecond he felt the trigger he simply pulled it. The crack of the pistol firing reverberated through the room to seal what he had done. He dragged in as deep of a breath as he could manage and screamed, grief and relief tearing through him.
so forcefully he couldn't think. He was close to shaking apart, hand dropping away from the pistol. He had so many things he should have said, but he could not speak, and he would not risk his chance at helping John.

The double crumpled to the ground with a thud that Moran found immensely satisfying. He was dragged out of the room then, leaving Moran and Sherlock alone. "There there, it's alright. He's dead now. You've killed him. You've killed John Watson."

Sherlock's chest was catching terribly, overwhelming loss and regret nearly drowning him, his voice raw as he screamed and screamed, unable to make proper tears, the pepper spray gritty under his lids. He didn't care about that at all.

"How did it feel, Sherlock? How did it feel to shoot someone you love?" Moran leaned over him and grinned.

Sherlock screamed again, this time in abject grief and horror.

"John Watson. Dead on a slab. Actually, we'll probably just dump him in some ally to rot until he's found."

Sherlock's mind shut down on him and he screamed for his brother once more before he went quiet, utterly quiet, eyes closed and hardly breathing. It was too much, overpowering his reality, shutting him down and breaking his mind.

"You just pulled the trigger and killed John Watson. Captain John H. Watson is lying dead in the hallway by your hand." Moran was confident that it would be devastating enough on its own and therefore felt no need to cut him.

Hamish, the 'H' is for Hamish, his shattered mind supplied as his lungs seized up on him and he stopped breathing. Perhaps that would kill him at long last. He did not react to Moran outwardly, simply floating there in the world where John was dead and Sherlock was his killer. He could not pull air into his lungs at all, not even when his chest caved in a reflexive effort to do so. His vision slowly faded out as his body locked up and he began to seize.

Moran saw that the man had obviously had enough for the day and waved his doctor in to patch Sherlock up just enough to be beaten again tomorrow.

Moran left to attend to his business then, as he had an arms deal to arrange and didn't trust his second.

_____

Greg spent his hours outside of John's room, never sleeping, just keeping close enough to hear John call out if the man wanted him. He texted Mycroft at the four hour mark, the tremor in his hands there to stay, it would seem. His nerves were getting the best of him.

What is the situation? GL

You know how these things are. We're assembling a team and making a few plans. M

Greg shook his head and texted back.

I'm trying not to ask you to hurry. But do. GL

_______
Sherlock lay on his back, coming back to himself with someone touching him, instantly trembling and calling out for his brother. The once proud man was weeping like a child, altogether too damaged to pull away from the hands on his skin.

Sherlock's doctor shuffled in and started on the stitches. It almost seemed pointless, as Moran would just rip them out, but perhaps that was the point. It was a new doctor, one just a bit more skilled than the previous and he had come highly recommended for this sort of thing.

"Stay still," he ordered, "there's no need for you to get any pain from me."

Only there was already pain as the needle bit into his skin and he wasn't sure why. "Pl...Please," he rasped, his vocal chords destroyed, "w-why? Why?! I-" he tried to pull away, not understanding what was happening, in so much pain he was wildly sensitized to any touch at all, pain blooming like liquid fire across him. He was trembling hard on the table, nearly blacking out, "D-Did w-what..." he arched and screamed, his nerve endings horrifically tripped up and shorting, "PLEASE!"

"Shhh!" The doctor whispered harshly and stopped his stitching. "They're going to come in here again and torture you if you don't stop screaming." The doctor pretended to busy himself with carefully bandaging a still bleeding wound on Sherlock's shin and tapped on his leg. It was hardly noticeable to the cameras on the walls, and he continued to bandage as he tapped in morse code.

*Mycroft Holmes sent me.*

Chapter End Notes

MYCROFT HAS BEEN WORKING.
He's got a man on the inside.
He's got the area surrounded.
But one guard with a gun could kill Sherlock before the operation even starts. He needs to be careful.

And John wants to be alone.
Phobos

Chapter Notes

Who wants a rescue?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sherlock was panting hard, sweating as tears leaked down the sides of his face despite his dehydration. It took far too long for him to recognize the code, the same he'd used for John. He had to wait for it to repeat to understand the full extent of it, his heart rolling hard at the mention of his brother's name. He misunderstood, terrified. "Pl-pl...ple'se," he slurred, drowning in agony, "n-not...d-don't...don't..." he believed them trying to capture his brother, the idea of pulling the trigger at Mycroft making his stomach flex hard, gagging him. "Pl-" his throat closed off and he blacked out under the man.

The doctor swore under his breath but took the opportunity to stitch his wounds and bind them while he couldn't feel it.

George Midston, which was the name the operative was currently using, waited until he thought the man might possibly be conscious again to try his furtive tapping. Under guise of changing a bandage that had already leaked badly, he tapped on an undamaged part of Sherlock's leg.


He repeated it over and over again as he changed the bandage as gently as he could.

Sherlock's fingers twitched in response, before he opened his eyes. The man was hurting him terribly, but that was par for the course with every doctor who had touched him recently. He stared at the man, teeth chattering, trembling hard on the table. He could not respond, other than to simply comply, keeping as quiet as his agonized body would allow, gritting his teeth as raw nerve endings fired, slicing brilliant pain across him. Sherlock finally breathed, likely far too softly for anyone else to hear. "H-help."

The doctor moved to a different spot on Sherlock's tortured body as routine would dictate. Nothing could appear to be out of the ordinary. "Sorry, mate, but there's no use asking me for help. I'm sure if you behave he'll let you off for a bit."

I am being tracked. Stay quiet. Help is coming.

Sherlock closed his eyes, hardly breathing at all, his body sporadically jerking and twitching in pain as his mind slowed back down and he went all but completely still. He slid back down into the mess of garbled language, occasionally calling out for his brother or muttering under his breath for his John. He stayed as still as he could, no hope at all that this was a real offer of rescue or aid. He was in total agony, made worse with every touch from the doctor.

The doctor left the room presently to return to his business elsewhere. Sherlock was just one patient. There were others, mostly ones Moran was trying to extract information from, who he needed to keep alive until their usefulness had run out. Generally, that wasn't more than a few days.
Sherlock heard the doctor go and began to weep once again, dry eyes from his dehydration, the sound wrecked and hardly there at all. He'd not truly hoped for rescue, but he wanted his brother more than he could ever remember wanting anything. He was having trouble breathing, each inhalation rattling and shallow, too fast and too inefficient. It wasn't long before he blacked out again.

—

Mycroft had been watching the man's embedded tracker on his screen. Sherlock was definitely in that building then. The plan to get him out was almost finalized and a team assembled.

*Getting close. M*

Greg read the text, wishing he could relay it to John. Hell, wishing he could go in the room with John at all, or go get on the team that was fetching Sherlock.

*Need anything?*

Mycroft went to answer Greg's text himself. He had grown thin, which in ordinary circumstances would delight him, but it seemed such a terribly unimportant trifle now.

"Tomorrow." Mycroft said once he was sure they were alone. "It's happening tomorrow."

Greg stared at Mycroft for a minute before standing, moving over to the man. "You are going to need to eat and get a little sleep before then, I think. He's likely going to need you." He had his own hands in his pockets. "How far away is he? Will it take long to get him here? Is he coming here? Surely not a civilian hospital, they can see him at this facility, yeah?"

"We plan on having a helicopter in the area to airlift him out, then take him to a private airport where I've got a jet waiting." He sat down on a cold, small chair and rubbed at his eyes. They were glassy from staring at a screen for so long. "Then he'll come here. I can't give you any more details, you understand. Just in case."

Greg narrowed his eyes at that. "Just in case what, Mycroft?" Was he a suspect? "You- surely you don't think...I didn't hurt John intentionally, Mycroft, I swear it. I-" the idea of Mycroft doubting him was beyond nauseating and he could hardly stand it. He moved to sit down next to Mycroft. "I- do you still need me here? If you doubt me, and I'm not wanted from John, I suppose I've no purpose. I want to help. I'm sorry I did so much damage."

"No, Greg, don't get all worked up." He held his hands up and tried to look at ease. "I suspect you of nothing other than making a small err to which John understandably overreacted. It's for your own protection, and for Sherlock's, and for John's. You could be tortured for information somehow. They snatched Sherlock. Who knows? It's just better to keep you in the dark about most things and let you work with John."

Greg dragged his hand over the back of his neck. "John's done with me, Mycroft. I ruined it. I...the damage is catastrophic. He can't even look at me. I'll do whatever I can do to help you, please let me know. Otherwise I'll just...I'm just trying to make sure..." What was he trying to ensure? He wasn't keeping John safe. He wasn't helping. He really had no reason to be there any longer. Waiting, he supposed. Just...waiting to make sure they got Sherlock back. Then he'd likely go on his way, leave this all to people more equipped to handle it, who would be less likely to do such severe damage.

"You should sleep," Mycroft insisted. "I know you've been in his room mostly, but there's a fully furnished one for you down the hall. You need a bed. This facility is secure. John is safe. Get some
sleep." Mycroft stood slowly and stretched. His posture had grown poor throughout this ordeal, a sign of stress he usually noted in others.

"I'll sleep a bit and eat. You do the same." He had hard lines around his eyes and mouth that hadn't been there previously and a touch of grey shine at his temples. This ordeal had definitely aged him. Greg nearly reached out to him, but his fingers curled in the air at the last moment and he dropped his fist to his side. He cleared his throat and nodded. "Yeah, alright. Get some sleep, I'll...I'll head that way soon." He moved back to the chair he'd occupied earlier, unable to bring himself to go outside of earshot. He rested his head in his hand and yawned, intent on keeping where he was for the night.

John awoke in the middle of the night drenched in sweat, a scream dying on his lips. He looked wildly around and confusion mixed with trepidation drew his features into a taut, aged yet incredibly childish expression.

Greg had fallen asleep against John's door. The scream had startled him and he fell out of his chair, scrambling to the door, his sluggish mind only focused on protecting him. He pushed the door open, blinking in the darkness, clearly searching for the threat. "John?" he called before remembering himself.

His heart sank and he began to back away. "I'm sorry...I heard...I'm sorry, sorry," he whispered, moving back to the door, his heart thundering in his chest.

"You...I..." John shook and began to cry. "I don't w-want to sleep again." Phantom pains pricked and stung him in places where the injury had been particularly traumatic. John let out a short cry of pain and clutched at his chest. It burned fresh as if the knife was still in him, though he could feel under his shirt the scar that told him the danger was long past and the damage already done. "Hurts, Greg."

Greg stopped moving, so torn and indecisive he was nearly panicking, anxiety getting the best of him. If he moved forward he would likely make it worse, if he retreated he would likely make it worse. His voice was shaking as he spoke softly. "It's over, John. You survived it, it's over. Dreams...they are dreams." Was that too insufficient? Was it making light of John's pain? His hands flexed and relaxed at his sides. "I'm so sorry it hurts, you're safe here, you're okay."

"I'm NOT OKAY!" John shouted and arched his back off the bed with his hands over his face. He waited another moment for the sudden feeling of fire at his back to subside before starting again. "It's a dream but it HURTS!" In a blind panic, sure against all evidence that he would find a fresh cut on his chest, John pulled his shirt over his head and stared down. For one terrifying second he could swear he could make out blood in the dim lighting, but when he touched it it was revealed to be just a shadow. The JM, carved so deep into his chest, had left a puckered and ugly scar. John was starting to panic at the sight of his own flesh and pulled a blanket up over himself.

Greg put his hands up in open surrender, "O-okay, John, I'm sorry, stupid of me, stupid. I'll...I-" he turned and ran from the room, a brilliant shade of green as he called for a doctor. He forced himself to come back in, standing there and waiting for the doctor to come give John something. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. It's...doctor is coming to h-help I'm-" he was hyperventilating himself, feeling the weight of his worthlessness.

"Not bleeding. I'm not bleeding. But it hurts." John didn't want to look at his chest again, at that horrible carving, the reminder of who had broken him. The horizontal, even burns were from the clamps where he had failed to hold his breath, and around the edges of his ribs there were scars from where the whip had wrapped around slightly. There was a latticework of thin cuts, puncture wounds,
places where there was evidence of old stitching done on torn skin, and under it all the shadows of his still visible ribs.

John's own body made him sick with terror. "S-s-sedat-tive." He managed to say and cast Greg a hopeful glance.

The doctor pushed past Greg and moved to John's side, pushing a syringe into John's port and slowly pushing a sedative. Greg stood there, far away from John's bed, his breathing wild and tears in his eyes. "I'm sorry," he breathed, over and over again. He couldn't move, his ears ringing harshly. It wasn't until the doctor drew the needle out of John's line that Greg finally blinked and began to back away, his knees jelly. He moved into the hall and sank down slowly into his chair. It was half four in the morning. The door was still open, the doctor staying at John's side to ensure the sedative was taking effect.

"Going by my weight," John slurred heavily and blinked at the doctor, "I'd need about three of those to be put down permanently." It took him far too long to pronounce each syllable, "But I've gotta wait for Sherlock," he said as he drifted off. "Gotta...wait for..."

_____

Everything was set into place by the morning. Mycroft himself wouldn't be in the area, as much as he’d like to be, but he would be in the area. He needed to be the puppetmaster, not the strongarm, and with a map of the area and each soldier with a tracker, it was to his mind an elaborate game of chess.
However, it was to his heart a juggling act where he had to balance his brother's life adopt his head.

Sherlock woke up screaming and could not stop. He screamed until he ran out of air, and blacked out, only to come up screaming again. He was at his limit, pushed just a touch too far. He screamed at the pain. He screamed for the fear. He screamed his rage. He screamed his horror at what he'd done to John. He screamed for his brother. He screamed for himself. He could not bring himself to stop, and he screamed again.

The building had been very subtly surrounded. Mycroft had his men in place and they prepared the rescue. A helicopter was in the area on standby and the private airport was close enough to reach quickly but not in the area where the fighting might happen.

*Keep John calm today. I'll give you updates if I can. M*

Greg read the text and laughed. That would mean keeping him sedated. John never wanted to see Greg again.

*I'll tell the physicians to keep him under. Please do update me. Let me know if I can help you. GL*

The doctor who Mycroft had sent nearly two weeks ago to integrate himself into the facility texted a coded message informing Mycroft of the basic layout of the building including where security was
located. It appeared that Moran was far less cunning when it came to disappearing. Clearly he had been a skilled sniper, a dutiful worker and strategic minded in a fight, but keeping an operation this large under wraps was a job for a genius. He hadn't moved around, or set up decoys, or disguised the place. He’d done exactly what he knew how; heavily fortify the place.

Sherlock slowly went quiet, his energy failing. He was silent for a long time, staring at the ceiling. Twelve panels, mold stain, black, building twenty three years old, facts rattling off in his head as he whispered to himself in a slide of language, washed in agony. I'm sorry John, sorry John, too late, too stupid, too weak, he groaned in his own mind. He was speaking to his brother, babbling about the pirate ship, wanting to go home or die or bury John properly and then die, perhaps. Either way, he hoped his time was limited.

The doctor came in once more. He disabled each of the security cameras in order. Technically, nobody watched the tapes until they needed them for something, but they were glanced at and it would be clear they were down.

"Move?" The operative, currently called George, asked Sherlock. It was a stupid question but there was still hope. He rapidly released his restraints and withdrew a concealed Browning handgun.

Sherlock blinked his focus to the man, the supposed doctor. "M-Move?" he whispered, not attempting to move his hands, unaware they'd been released. His bones were snapped and infection set deep into the tissues, the skin purple and shiny, needles in his shoulders. He looked down at his wrecked legs, his heart sinking. One tendon was already surly up near his knee where it should be at his ankle. If he tried to put pressure on his knees, one which had the patella separated from all the connecting tissue, he'd fall hard to the ground.

His eyes went to the Browning, hope soaring in his chest. "P-please just...d...do it here, c-can't w-walk," he breathed, starting to cry again, hyperventilating.

The doctor shook his head. "Stupid question. I know. But this," he gestured to the gun, "isn't for you." Luckily the table could roll and the doctor pushed it to the door. "Moran isn't in right now. He's out doing God only knows what." He scanned the area for something to make it a bit less obvious that he had moved Sherlock. He could make up some sort of illness that required him to be moved, or say he had orders, but highly doubted it would work.

He opted to inform Mycroft of the situation and wait for the team to come to him.

"Please," Sherlock rasped, still not realizing his shattered hands were free, "I can't...n-no more pl-please. I k-killed him it- I've n-nothing..." he began breathing too fast, not understanding what was on, thinking he was simply being taken by someone else to be tortured. This man had caused him considerable pain the day before, "I- p-please," he breathed before breaking down into broken strings of language, panicking.

"No, no, you didn't kill Dr. Watson. He's somewhere very far away. Please stay calm." The doctor was obviously no longer engaged in this conversation.

Why would they do this to him? Why? He was sobbing then, in agony and terrified, activity he could not keep up with all around him. He was in a stuttered panic, alternating between desperate, broken screaming and slurred begging in a mix of languages. He finally realized that his arms were free, pulling them in to his chest and nearly instantly blacking out from the pain of that.

Mycroft's team started from three locations. There was a front entrance that was very obviously going to be guarded, a back door, presumably locked and guarded, and two side doors with likely the same precautions. The front door was rather loudly shot at from snipers in the surrounding
buildings, drawing attention forward. Anyone who came in sight of the windows on the front face of the building was dropped.

The door at the back was fairly blown off its hinges by a small charge and after the hallway had been cleared the team of seven advanced to the next room. The noise would have surely drawn attention as well.

The main bulk of Moran’s men were situated towards the front of the building, but the back was by no means lightly guarded. Nonetheless, with flashbangs and heavy fire the team coming from the back entrance was able to work their way towards the front. They were heavily assaulted twice from either side, but each time managed to sweep the room and leave it clear.

George heard them coming. "Alright, Sherlock, you're going to need to stay calm. I can sedate you, though, if you need it." He took out a needle. Perhaps that was for the best either way.

Sherlock did not respond to him at all, the cacophony around them utterly terrifying him. He could not take any more pain, his mind was like glass under pressure, stressed to the breaking point. Any more pressure applied would make it shatter irreparably. He carried on babbling and fading in and out of consciousness, wanting to pull in on himself, his body too completely shattered for him even to roll on his side and tuck in on himself.

The doctor took the sedative and gave Sherlock a mild dose. "Stay calm, yeah? You'll be alright. Stay calm. Breath slowly if you can."

The third team stormed the side entrance in the chaos and met with the second. They cleared the hall and made their way to where their tracker indicated the doctor was.

Whatever he was given hardly touched the panic. He had no interest in breathing slowly. Perhaps he could get them to kill him. He put his mind to getting off the table and attacking one, but he couldn't move his hands without passing out. He licked his lips and struggled to find words that would earn him a bullet, but he couldn't manage to get his languages intact.

It was a moment later that he just gasped his brother's name and fell down into broken sobbing.

The doctor looked out the door where Sherlock had been kept. The hall was clear now that there was fighting going on in various places and he was able to wheel Sherlock down the hall. "Shhh, stay calm," he whispered and practically sprinted. He heard footsteps behind him and doubled his pace.

Sherlock had no choice. The rattling of the table over the concrete floor was too much, shocking brilliant, horrific pain through him. He gasped and choked on his own throat and then slipped unconscious, going lax on the table, hardly breathing.

George did not slow down. He dashed down the hall and around a corner. Gunfire erupted behind him and he fired a few shots back, never stopping in the jolting ride down the hall. A round caught him in the shoulder and he stumbled, temporarily unable to see for the bright spots. He almost gave himself and the subject up for lost when he heard a group coming up in front of him, but at the realization that it was Mycroft’s men set him at ease. Half surrounded Sherlock's table and rushed for the back exit, while another half went into the rooms on the side of the hallway for cover and slowed the advance of Moran’s teams.

Sherlock came back up for a few seconds at a time, panicked, wide eyes flicking over the men until there was some sort of physical jolt, either from the bed bumping something or a sudden turn or stop.
He did not have the endurance and slid back under each time pain exploded across his mind. All he knew was chaos and movement was occurring. He could put nothing else together in his state.

Heavy gunfire erupted behind them and George had already started to deteriorate. In truth, the team didn't notice when he stopped, as he had been in the rear anyway.

The doctor's death bought them some time and they made it to the exit. There was no helicopter in sight, but the team could hear it shredding the air somewhere in the area.

Sherlock could hear a military helicopter. Why could he hear a helicopter? He cracked his eyes open, tears drying on his face in the freezing cold, the metal table at his naked back growing more and more freezing by the second. It hurts, god how it hurts, and his heart is racing hard in his confusion. He starts begging with the men, pleas in French and German for them to shoot him, eyes rolling back in his head in the cold and panic.

The helicopter dropped down a gurney like table with straps and the men put Sherlock onto it as gently as they possibly could while time was still of the essence. Sherlock was about half-way up when the remaining of Moran's men came flooding out.

Chapter End Notes

Well, readers, you wanted action.
Here it is.

Now the question is, will it be successful?

Again, is ANYONE appreciating the titles of our chapters?
Gunshots rang out.
The air was clouded with dust the chopper’s blades had churned up with the torrents of wind, and the team exchanged fire with virtually every building in the area.

Still, the little stretcher was rising into the air through the firefight.

By the time Sherlock was in the helicopter, he was in such a stark panic that his lungs stopped working. He was making efforts to drag in little gasping breaths, but was wheezing terribly as his bronchioles constricted in his panic and the shock of cold air. He lay on his back, eyes wide, foam collecting at the sides of his mouth. Despite the natural inclination to panic while suffocating, he was hopeful this would be the end. He was in horrific, blinding agony and would have been screaming should his lungs have managed the task.

Suddenly, Sherlock was in the chopper, and it was speeding away. But the danger was far from passed, as Sherlock was in critical condition.

Warmer, humidified oxygen was fed directly to his nose and mouth by a mask and the paramedics began work on some of the worst of his open lacerations.

The helicopter landed on the pad in the private airport and they made the transfer quickly to minimize the amount of shock Sherlock would have to take.

Sherlock began screaming when he was suddenly moved again, oxygen finally getting to his lungs. He was utterly, out-of-his-mind terrified and confused, and in addition everything horrifically painful. No one was recognizable and as they moved him into a plane he was screaming for Mycroft. He tried to draw his hands to his chest but found the pain of moving far too great.

The paramedics had no need to restrain him as he wasn't moving terribly much. "Do you want to talk to Mycroft?" One of them shouted to be heard above the din and shouting, "I can put him on the phone!" They had managed to stop most of the bleeding and set him up on an IV. Morphine and saline solution went into a small spot on an undamaged crook of his arm.

Sherlock instantly went still and quiet, his heart racing. "Pl-Please," he breathed, not daring believing what was offered. The idea of hearing his brother's voice was nearly enough to break him down into pathetic tears. He could tell there was morphine in his line, but it was hardly enough to touch his pain. "Please, oh...god please."

One of them dialed Mycroft who answered before it even began to ring. "He's alive. Badly injured. He wants to talk to you."

Mycroft felt a sickening mixture of relief and terror. Badly injured. He wanted to ask if Sherlock was in a stable condition, but he could hear the phone being brought down and heard the beep as it was set to speakerphone. "Sherlock?" He asked cautiously. What if his own brother feared his voice?

Sherlock instantly began to cry, leaning toward the sound of his brother's voice, struggling to speak through the mask and the choking tears. He reverted down hard to a more childlike stance than he'd ever been in his adult years, calling Mycroft by his childhood moniker. "My," he all but wailed, obviously terrified and in agony, "My...help...help..." he devolved down into French then, gasping...
for air, speaking in a butchered, slurred accent, "hu-hurting me, My...pl-please..."

Mycroft had to sit down and take a deep breath. He had hoped that Sherlock would have shouted at him, cursed at him for taking so long, comment about how he had gotten slow. It was a fools hope, and it's shattering shouldn't have bothered him as much as it did. "Hey, Sherlock, it'll be alright. These people are trying to help you. I know you are in pain, but they aren't causing it. Could you trust me and trust them?"

Sherlock wanted to touch his brother, or to see anyone he knew. In the next moment he broke down, still in scattered French, despair grabbing his voice and twisting it over the raw damage his vocal chords had already endured. "I...I sh-shot John, I shot John, I killed John!" he couldn't slow himself down, agonized with the revelation, "I lost John and then I killed him! I killed him, brother!"

"No, Sherlock, you didn't. You didn't kill him. He-" God, this was worse than he had imagined. "Sherlock, I've got John with me. He's alright. I can have him say hello in a bit if you'd like."

Someone was at his arm, pulling pins out of it, and he screamed out in pain. "My!" he shrieked just before blacking out.

Mycroft winced internally and externally at the scream. "Sherlock? Sherlock!" A paramedic took the phone back and informed him that Sherlock had blacked out, but the frightened older brother refused to be taken off speaker phone. "Just keep me on in case he wakes up."

Sherlock wasn't down long. They were doing something with the leg where his achilles had been snapped and the morphine was laughably insufficient to do much about his pain, like acetaminophen for an amputation. He came back up in garbled French and German, begging for them to stop, please just stop. He called out in his blurred confusion for John before recalling that he'd killed John. He went quiet then, openly sobbing, but he was still too dehydrated to make tears despite the fluids. He swapped over from calling for John, now begging for his brother, his voice raw and muffled behind the strong force of oxygen given through the mask.

"Sherlock, I'm here," Mycroft called over the phone. "I'm here. You're going to be with me soon. I'll come help you. Do you need a sedative? Or would you rather be awake?" Mycroft's tone was smooth and gentle, giving no hint to the pure horror he felt. Back at the facility, his head was down with one hand messing his hair and the other clutching the phone with white knuckles.

Sherlock's eyes snapped open in startled surprise. He tried to focus his blurry vision, looking around, eyes falling on the ever moving medics around him and the belly of the plane. "Wh-where are-" he faded off, noting the phone, closing his eyes and nodding again. "Th-this is...this is y-your t-t-team," he breathed, clear for just a moment. Then someone put pressure on the patella that had been sliced away from the connective tissue and he screamed sharply. Sherlock arched his back, grabbing another breath to scream again as pain exploded up his leg, engulfing his chest and seizing his lungs.

"O-okay!" he shouted in desperation, lost and confused again, "I- w-w's mmme! I- w's me h'rt him! I h'rt 'im pl-please!" he gasped for air, repeating the words he knew he was supposed to say when he felt pain.

Mycroft put the phone against his leg for a moment and made mental note. Sherlock believed he had killed John and likely also believed he had hurt him, judging by his panicked confession. "Sedate him. Why the HELL haven't you sedated him?" Mycroft shouted into the phone.

There was a curt "Yes, sir!" after which Mycroft assumed there would put his poor brother under.

Sherlock was gasping and whimpering in horrific pain when he felt the heavy weight of a sedative reach up and twist around his mind. He breathed Mycroft's name, desperate for a moment of comfort,
of anything that didn't bring him blistering agony, sobbing on the familiar reminder of childhood peace. In the next moment, Sherlock was engulfed in the darkness, his body going lax against the softer gourney.

"It's going to be alright, Sherlock," Mycroft soothed as he heard his brother's voice grow soft. "It's going to be alright." Once the screaming stopped he addressed his team. "Bring him to me as planned. Lose any tails and keep him safe. If there are any complications contact me."

Greg was going mad. He went up to the little courtyard he'd taken John to, back when he had a purpose, and smoked half a pack of cigarettes in one sitting. Finally he texted Mycroft.

Mycroft jumped. He had completely forgotten that Greg even existed during all of this, much less that he should be keeping him updated.

Sherlock is stable and on his way over. He believes he killed John. Extensive psychological damage as well as physical damage. In shock. ETA 3 hours. M

Greg read the text over and over again, not sure what he was feeling. He got up, shoved the smokes in his pocket, and made his way to Mycroft's office. It took nearly forty-five minutes to finally gain access to the man. He knocked gently at Mycroft's door, calling out to him. "Mycroft, it's me."

"Just over two hours." Mycroft said and stared at Greg. "He'll be back. At least we know what's happened. He told the paramedics that he had 'hurt him'. I'm guessing that's what he was conditioned to say when he wanted the pain to stop. He also had informed me that he killed John, leading me to think that he was conditioned to believe he hurt and killed him. It makes perfect sense. Convince John that Sherlock tortured him, then convince Sherlock that he tortured John."

Greg shoved his hands in his pockets and leaned against the wall just inside of Mycroft's office. "Unless he's gone like John is, it will be easy to show him he didn't do those things."

"I agree. Moran isn’t the master. Moriarty was."

"I hope he isn't. Is there anything else I can do for you, Mycroft? I...mostly just in the way here now. I'm happy to help in any way I can, but I don't imagine you'll want me near your brother, and I can't help John any more." He swallowed hard at that, feeling decay down to his bones at what he'd done. "My offer...that stands, just seems a bit...early to make the call."

"Every medical cabinet is guarded. You couldn't kill him with drugs unless you want out and got them yourself." Mycroft was thinking of John now; how he was suicidal but surviving, alive but dead, healed yet terribly broken. "Let's see if Sherlock has a chance of recovery. If he does, John will come around. Besides, I think John might learn to care for you again. Just try staying in his room or something. Get him used to you again."

"I scare the life out of him, or rather, I'm sure he wishes that was a literal statement. I've tried...it doesn't matter how he feels about me as long as he has someone. That won't be me again though, Mycroft. He loathes me." Oh, and how that hurt, but it wasn't fair for him to say so. It wasn't fair for him to have anyone to talk to about this, John was alone and suffering, and that was entirely his own doing. "I wasn't going to do anything without your say so, but...even still...I think if he...if that's what you want to do, it would be best done by someone who doesn't terrify him. "If you don't need me here for you...or want me here for you...I think it best if I go before I hurt anyone else. I am so sorry I-" he cleared his throat, "I love John and your brother, Mycroft, and I'm sorry I failed so spectacularly."
"It's quite clear you love them, Greg," Mycroft said without a touch of scorn in his voice. "You need to stop beating yourself up about this. John clung to you. He needs you now more than he did before. He was terrified of you before and he will learn that you meant no harm. Has he said that he hates you?" Mycroft had stood and offered Greg a drink. "Has he directly said that he doesn't want you around?"

Greg took the drink in a severely shaking hand and stared at it, not yet bringing it to his lips, not particularly wanting it. John had no relief, how was he to accept this? "He always wants me out. He's said he doesn't want to be afraid of me, but that I terrify him anyhow. Says he feels physical pain when he looks at me, feels..." *I can feel the water when I look at you.* Greg closed his eyes as his color rolled slightly green. "Just being around me is physically painful to him. He- I've tried everything I can try, everything I can think of. Don't matter here, Mycroft. I just happened to be available to help. I have done basically fuckall for him in months. Got him talking, that's about it. I've undone the other progress with my stupidity. If he's going to improve anymore, it won't be from me. It would be terribly selfish of me to insist that he learn to acclimate to me again."

"You know, I was going to have him put down. I thought perhaps that would be easier for both him and Sherlock. But you were making progress. I still believe you can." Mycroft watched the ice cubes melt slowly in his drink and was reminded again that they might have to go through the same process with Sherlock. "You're his only chance. He still loves you, I think. Stupid a sentiment as it is, it can be quite the motivator. Have you tried asking him what he wants? He wants you to not be in the room, I've gathered, but he doesn't want to be afraid." Mycroft set his drink down. "If you want me to hire someone to sit with him around the clock I can. But there won't be that attachment you have to him, and he'll know it."

"When I try to get out of him what he wants, the answer is basically for me to never have done that in the first place." He cracked a brittle laugh and felt his throat constrict. "I've offered him everything. I was going to let him kill me at one point. He's furious and disgusted with me, and when he's not that, he's terrified of me. I don't want him to die, I think he can get better as well, and as you've said, if Sherlock has a chance then so does he. John won't tolerate anyone in that room, really. He doesn't even want to see Paul. I-" he dragged a hand over his mouth and set his drink aside. "He can get better, Mycroft. He'll see Sherlock and he'll have a point to rally around, and if they can at all be saved, they will save each other. I- believe me when I say I want nothing more than to fix what I have done. I-" he cleared his throat and stopped talking. He looked up at Mycroft, willing him to believe him. Greg was going to go home, and he was going to put himself down.

"I hate that this is on your shoulders, and I dropped the ball so spectacularly. I know you think it's all foolish and stupid, but I care for you as well as them. You lot were all I had in the world." Greg gave a tight nod then, clearing his throat.

Mycroft listened politely, occasionally picking up his drink as if to take a sip then placing it back down. "I believe you are devastated about this. I believe you had no intention of hurting him. I also believe that he needs someone with a sound mind to base off of. Sherlock will scare him. He thinks he killed him. John doesn't need to rehabilitate Sherlock. It would be the blind leading the blind. I can hire someone, perhaps a woman to sit with him and take care of him, but I can't buy someone to love him." The entire business had put him in a rather foul mood and he repeatedly checked his phone for messages. ETA one hour and forty five minutes. He muttered to himself. He had gone weeks without seeing Sherlock before. That was common-place. But he had always known that Sherlock was in control of the situation, wherever he was. Truthfully, he'd always had him monitored. This was different.

"He doesn't want me Mycroft!" Greg shouted at him, snapping Mycroft out of his mental prison. "I've done all I know to do! What do you suggest? That I force him to accept me? Shall I tie myself to him
bodily and listen while he screams and begs me not to hurt him, begs me to leave? I fucking know he
needs me," his voice cracked and he moved over to Mycroft, suddenly in the man's personal space,
furious. "Months I've spent with him, months, every moment of every day trying to put him together
and then in one fucking clumsy, stupid move I made him despise me! Don't sit there fucking aloof
and above it all, Mycroft Holmes. If you-" he nearly suggested that if Mycroft were in his shoes, he'd
not handle it well, but then he stepped back, the anger flooding out of him. If Mycroft had been in his
shoes, he'd never have done something so horrifically stupid. "I'm in here trying to do what I can. I'm
standing here offering whatever help you could ask of me. I've offered to be the one...should it be
required...to gently send off your brother and his partner so that you don't have to feel that pain so
don't sit there like a smug prick and treat me like this. I don't see anyone else offering you help
without conditions. Why must you be so fucking cruel to me?"

Mycroft took the verbal abuse in stride and kept his face impassive. Insults from a man clearly sleep
deprived and traumatized were not exactly something he was vulnerable to. "Lestrade, please. I am
not accusing you of anything. I am trying to express that I am confident in your abilities. I am saying
that you are John's best chance, whether he wants your not. I'm saying that you've been a blessing to
this ordeal and I'm imploring you to continue working with him." He stood, still quite close to Greg,
but there wasn't a trace of anger in his voice. He looked tired, though he had gotten one night of
sleep before this entire affair. "If you have your heart set on me bringing someone else in for John, I
will do so."

Greg swore under his breath and looked sharply away, snatching the glass up and killing it in one go.
"So that's a yes then. You believe I should force my presence on John and hope for the best. Last I
employed that tactic, this happened." He looked sharply away and then back to Mycroft, his tone
changed. "When they are in agony, Mycroft, they are not themselves. I do hope you are more gentle
with your brother."

"I'll be gentle." Mycroft said and closed his eyes briefly. He opened them to watch Greg go and time
the reaction of the security. Once more he checked the clock.

With that, he swept out of Mycroft's office, feeling impossibly worse. He paced outside of John's
room ten minutes later, all of security in that direction knowing him on sight, and closed his eyes,
trying to get his head on. Finally he stopped, took a deep breath, and shut himself off. When he
walked into John's room, it was with his jaw set. "John," he said gently into the darkness, "they've
found Sherlock."

John's attention snapped up from the scar on the back of his hand he was examining. "They..." Oh,
God. "Is he alright? Or is he... You know...like me?" John looked both relieved and even more
acutely worried than he had before. "I need to see him. Do they have him, or is he still there? Did
they train him? Oh, god, Greg, I'm scared of this. I don't like this." He shook his head in a childish,
stubborn way to show his distaste. John was quickly finding that he could not handle stress. The
tinniest bit seemed to set him off the edge. "I don't like this at all."

Greg put his hands out in a calm manner, "Look at me, John," he said steadily, forcing himself to
detach and deal with this. "He's enroute here and he'll not be leaving for anywhere else. He spoke
with Mycroft on the phone. He's hurt, very severely, but he knew his brother and understood what
was happening. I do not believe he's been made to fear anyone." He took a slow, calm breath to
gauge John's reaction before carrying on.

"No, n-no, he can't be hurt. I can't-" he took a shuddering breath. It was terrifyingly difficult to keep
control of himself. "I can't help him...I-I don't... If he's injured I can help but I don't." He was
stammering now, making little sense and trying to articulate to Greg the panic that swelled inside
him. "Will you t-take me to him?" John more demanded than asked once he had gathered his wits
best he could. "You've got to take me to him. If he isn't afraid of me then I've got to show him I'm alive. You said that would help. Y-You-you said-" he gritted his teeth and dug his fingernails into his scalp.

Greg sharply gathered himself and squared his shoulders, moving over to John in quick strides and taking John's hands, pulling them away from John's hair even as the man flinched and let out a startled cry. He held them, looking at John full on, demanding eye-contact. His voice was calm and clear. "John. It is not your job to help him and this is not on your shoulders. I will take you to him when they've stabilized him. Look at me, John."

John was trepidatious about Greg touching him, but at the same time wanted to be held, was nervous and stressed to see Sherlock yet could think of nothing else, and above all was confused by his own mind. "It's always my job to protect him." John retorted. "Always. He's a colossal and incurable idiot when it comes to his own safety. But..if he's been hurt then there will...he..." John couldn't put his stress into words. There would be blood, cuts, bandages and pain, things that terrified him to just think about.

Greg nodded, "Yes, there are those things. John," he kept his voice steady, holding fast to John's hands, keeping the eye contact, "you can do this, you absolutely can. You've lived. You've mastered speaking, you've started to walk, you have survived and you are going to show him that he can survive. And when you need to walk away, then we walk away for a bit. You are not alone." He squeezed John's hands. "We have hours yet, I am betting, before they are done working on him enough for you and I to visit. Hours. That, and he-" Greg cleared his throat, "He's been made to believe he killed you, John. So we've that to keep in mind."

John's heart, or what meager shred was left of it, seemed to crumble into ash and sink to the bottom of his gut. He pulled his hands away from Greg and put them over his face where he dug his nails slightly into his forehead. "He's going to be scared. And in pain. Don't let them tie him down. It hurts to be tied down. It's bad and it hurts." John had begun to scratch one of the scars on his right temple and was in danger of breaking the skin. He didn't seem to notice until he scratched a bit too hard and what to anyone else would seem a pinprick of pain went through him. It was enough, given the circumstances, to send him over the edge again. "Help...H-help m-me..."

Greg snatched John's hands right back into his own, sitting on the edge of the bed, holding John's hands at the palms with a grip strong enough that John would not break free again. "John, breathe." His tone brooked no argument, "Open your eyes and look at me, breathe. You are safe. No one is going to tie you up, we are not going to tie Sherlock up." He was gentle, yet incredibly firm in the way he was speaking, twisting apart with insecurity internally, outwardly a stone. "John."

John whimpered and drew in breath to scream. It took an incredible amount of will power to clamp his mouth firmly shut and exhale slowly through his nose. "Greg," he said, jaw still clamped, "I do not like this. I don't like this at all. You said there would be hours. Sedate me. I don't...blood and cuts and burns and...and he was trained...he'll be confused...and the whips and...oh god..." John tried to rip his hands away and shook his head desperately when he couldn't. "No, Greg, no! Don't! Please, don't. That...that hurts.." It didn't hurt him in the slightest, but 'hurt' was his safe, blanket term that included 'scare'.

"John, I love you, god help me I love you. I know you can calm down, I know you can. I'm going let go of your hands, but if you start hurting yourself, I'm going to take them back." He held on for another moment before carefully releasing John's hands. "Now look at me. Slow down, tell me where you are."

John pulled his arms to his chest immediately and balled his hands into fists. "Greg, I...I know that I love you, but..." He pressed his knuckles into his eyes and tried to rub the flashes in his mind away.
"I'm in a room on a table." The word seemed to startle him even as it dropped from his own mouth and he leapt out of bed and towards Greg. "God, no, tables aren't good...I can't be on a table."

Greg stepped back in shock as John moved. He had a hand out to catch John if he needed. "You're not on a table, John. Never on a table, not anymore. Look at me, no more closed eyes. Tell me where you are."

John got off the bed rather hastily and back stepped until he hit the wall. "I can't be on a table again. Can't..." He slid down the wall and put his head down on his knees. The question Greg asked didn't seem to make any sense. "I'm...secure facility... But t-table."

Greg moved with John, standing toe to toe, and crouched in front of him a breath away without touching.

"There is no table here, John. Open your eyes, look."

"No, no!" He shouted and definitely kept his eyes shut. "It's a table. I know what tables are for." John rocked himself and tears slid down his face. "T-Table and y-you....there'll be water..."

Greg still did not touch John, though he made no move to step away. It hurt, Christ did it hurt, but he forced himself to absorb that and press forward. "John, you are in control of this situation. No one is touching you. There is no table. You are not restrained. If there was a table, and if I was going to hurt you, you'd not be able to move freely. Stop this, John. Open your eyes."

John cried out in frustration and dug his fingers into his hair. "I-I'm tr-tryin-n-g!" His mind was not cooperating in the least. He wanted to regain control, but fear had taken over and was calling the shots. He screamed once and forced his eyes open. For half of a heartbeat he could have sworn he saw the table and cold concrete floor were dust had been gathered together by his blood. But presently he saw the white floors, walls and sheets and forced a shaky exhale.

Greg's tone instantly gentled. "Good, that's good, John. I know you're trying, you're doing wonderfully. I'm not going to touch you if you don't want me to," he held his hands up, palms to John to demonstrate. "Keep looking at that bed, John, and take a few slow breaths for me. Breathe slowly."

It took him nearly fifteen minutes to get his breathing back to normal. He still trembled lightly, but it was the aftershock of coming back into awareness and finding yourself hopelessly lost. "M'sorry....s-sorry... I can't..." If this was how he reacted just thinking about seeing cuts and bruises, John was terrified of think how he might behave when he had to see Sherlock.

Greg was fully seated on the ground now. He was itching to reach out and pull John into his arms, though he knew that aspect of what was left of their relationship was gone now. He took in a deep, slow breath and spoke very softly. "You don't have to see him, John. You don't. Let's just take this slowly, okay? You're shaking, can we get you off the floor?"

John struggled to his feet and touched the bed. It wasn't cold and sticky with blood, so he climbed on and curled up into a tight ball. "I've got to see him. He'll be sad. I need to help him. I...I want to look normal. Do we have any of my clothes?"

Greg nodded, keeping his distance. "Yeah, we do John, we do. I'll get them for you but let's just take it slow, okay? Do you want them now?" He felt much like John looked, ready to sit on the floor and scream until his heart stopped, but that was not an option just yet.

"I want them now. I want to look normal when Sherlock comes. You said I could help, right? You
said that if I died it would make him sad. I'll show him I'm alive so he isn't sad." Such simple, childish reasoning was the height of John's mind at the moment.

Greg nodded, "Yeah, alright John. You can help. In fact, I think you are the single most important person here for Sherlock. Let me go get your things."

He moved out of the room in search of clothes for John. They would be overly-large at this point, which gave him pause, but John wanted his things and frankly, dressing as he was used to might help. He came back and set a pair of jeans and John's layered shirts on the foot of the bed. "If you want help, I'm right here, or I can get someone else if you'd rather I not stay."

John picked up the jeans and stared at them for a moment. They felt rough in comparison to the sweatpants he had been wearing, but they were familiar and he knew each mark on them. "I don't...I don't like not having clothes on," John whispered and gathered the sheets up around him before he began. He took off his shirt and the grey sweatpants and stared at the scars on his legs. He hated his skin. It was lumpy and ridged and scarred, in no way beautiful or smooth. It wasn’t for vanity’s sake that he hated it, but it was simply such a stark reminder that he was disgusted to look. He kept his pants on, as being even this amount of uncovered, with the blanket draped around his skeletal shoulders and the sheets over his lap, he felt far too exposed. Wanting to be covered, he tugged his far too loose jeans on and grabbed the slack in one hand. "I'll need a belt, I think."

Greg didn't hesitate. His fingers were on his own, loosing the buckle and sliding the leather through the loops. He handed it over, the belt betraying how terribly his hands were shaking. John looked like a burn victim, one who's skin would never fit right again, nearly every inch of it twisted and pitted horrifically. He wondered if the man would ever be able to function without his daily regimen of painkillers. He took a slow breath and cleared his throat. "We can get you better fitted ones later, if you like."

John had to tighten the belt to its lowest setting and even then the jeans still hung low on his hips. He put on his shirt and it drooped off of one shoulder, giving him the appearance of a young child who had tried on an older sibling's cloths. "I've gotten smaller," he stated although it wasn't necessary. "Will that bother him?"

Greg shook his head, his chest aching at the sight before him. "No," he said honestly. Sherlock knew before he left...left...before he was abducted, that John had dropped in weight severely. It had gotten worse since then, but not massively. "No, he's just going to be relieved you are still alive and willing to see him, surely. You've gotten smaller, but that will change eventually. Have you taken all your pills today? Maybe try a bit of ice with the powder to help give you some energy?"

"I had the pills already. I don't want ice. No. No. I can say...I can say that. No. I don't want to have to try and calm down again." John pulled a jumper over his head and wrapped his arms around himself. "Maybe after. I don't want to be tired. It's difficult to stay calm." He was avoiding Greg's gaze, looking at the bed, his hands, his cloths, the walls, but never at Greg and never towards the bathroom door.

Greg noticed John's unease around him. "Okay, John, whatever you want." He backed up, putting as much space between them as the room allowed. "It's going to be a while before he's here. Do you want me to go? I can see that I'm making you nervous."

"I'd rather have you here," John said and twisted the fabric of his jumper. It was almost to the same tune as the video feed on Sherlock, but he also wanted to keep Greg there for comfort. He was trapped like a small child with an abusive parent, even though in reality Greg had never harmed him. "Please stay."

Greg nodded, so shocked his heart skipped a beat, though he outwardly remained as he was. He
moved to the chair furthest away from John, sitting down and strictly schooling his breathing. There was so much he wanted to say, though most of it was pure desperate repetition.

John tried to get used to the idea of having someone who had hurt him in the room. "You..." He tapped his fingers against his leg nervously. "How...how have you been?"

Greg swallowed down the honest answer and tried to come up with something passable. "Stressed," he said gently, the tamest response he could come up with. He hated how scared John was of him. He wanted to claw through the drywall and hide himself, anything to ease the distress John was in. He was sharply down in weight himself, scruffy in the face and dark swatches under his bloodshot eyes. Greg looked like hell, which was likely better than how anyone else deeply involved looked. "I-" he cleared his throat, "not important. I'm fine...I'm..." he trailed off lamely, his voice low and rough.

"Course you're important." John grumbled with his chin on his knees. "You're more important than the doctors and Mycroft and them. I can talk because of you." He tried to smile, but it didn't work. He only managed a small twitch of his lips that didn't even come close to reaching his eyes.

Greg looked over sharply at that, hardly believing what he was hearing. He stared at John and then dragged his hand over his face, clearing away the threatening dampness at his lashes. He had honestly planned on going home and shooting himself. To hear John saying anything of the sort was shocking to say the least. He cleared his throat and tried to speak normally, though it mostly came out a breathy whisper. "Thank you, John."

John gave a small nod, but still kept his eyes away. "And...I..." He gritted his teeth and wrestled against the chaotic fear that had its grip on every aspect of his mind. "I believe you didn't...didn't try to..." He wrapped his arms tightly around his knees and rocked himself back and forth. "The water, I mean it's..." John gripped his hair hard enough to tear out a few strands, so desperate was he to keep composure.

"John, please," Greg said softly, shaking his head, "you don't have to say anything about it if you don't want to. I don't- Christ, John, I don't deserve..." He shook his head and cleared his throat. "Please don't upset yourself on my account. Let's focus on you, okay? I can just sit here quietly with you, you don't have to talk to me." John was killing him in his panic, he could hardly breathe as he watched himself carrying on hurting John just by continuing to be.

John shook his head, trying to communicate that he needed a minute. It was, in fact, six minutes before he spoke again. "P-please d-don't...don't give up on me." John broke down into fresh tears and sobbed onto his bony, damaged knees. He was desperately afraid that Greg would simply chalk him up as lost and leave. John knew how damaged he was, how irrational his fears were, yet he was still a slave to them.

"Never," Greg's reaction was easy and honest, the conviction complete in his tone, "Never, John. I-" he cleared his throat and shook his head. "Myself before I'd give up on you. No. I- I'm-" he stopped talking, taking a few deep breaths. It took a moment to get himself under control again. "I haven't left your door. I've been sleeping on the floor outside. I- it wasn't me giving up on you ever, John. That's never what it was."

"I thought..." He didn't know what to think. He was afraid that the water had meant that Greg wanted to hurt him. Then he was afraid that he was going to be abandoned for being afraid. Now he was worried that being afraid of Greg would make him try to leave like Sherlock had been. "I just don't want you to be mad that I'm afraid. Please don't be."

Greg looked away, his gut twisting. He forced the facade of calm he'd held since speaking with
Mycroft, detached, presenting armor to John and not his true self. "I am only mad at myself, John. I've never, never been mad at you."

John gave a small nod. "I wish... God, I wish this hadn't happened. At the very least I wish I could trust you. I mean, I know I can, but it hurts..." He was slipping again and he shook his head. Now was not the time to be poking at such emotional knots.

The thing was, Greg knew John couldn't trust him. He'd broken that trust irrevocably. Now he could at least see John from a distance, detach and observe as someone would who didn't love him, who didn't know that track three on the green disk was perfect to get John to sleep, and track nine on the blue worked for when he was terrified. He flexed his hands in his lap and took a steadying breath. He was not going to fall apart. He had no right to.

"I know I'm an unforgivable, broken record, John. I am so sorry. I," he cleared his throat and tapped his knee, "what can I do to help you right now? Do you want to talk about Sherlock, or would you rather something to distract you, like a movie or a book?"

"Uhm..." John tapped his hands together. "I don't know. I don't know what I want anymore. I want to be alright. No, I don't care about me. I want you and Sherlock to be alright. But for you to be alright, I've got to be alright..." He dropped his head. "And I'm failing miserably. I know you think I'm doing so well. But it's been months and I can't eat. I can't even bathe myself. I'm useless and worthless and broken and suicidal and I'm not helping anyone."

Greg cleared his throat yet again and looked at his lap, not sure how John would take this next bit. "John," he kept his voice soft and steady, "they sent us a video of Sherlock being actively tortured. It was short....ten, fifteen minutes? Just what I saw in that footage...even if it had been just that time and nothing more...it would be incredible, simply incredible, for you to recover. That you've made the progress you have is remarkable." He looked up at John then and forced himself to hold John's eye. "I feel much the same way. I don't give a damn about myself. I really, really don't. You and Sherlock are what matter, and I've failed you both." There was no change in his matter-of-fact tone. He was clearly not seeking rebuttal, it was just a statement.

"And before, Sherlock didn't care about himself. Look at the three of us! Surviving when we would all much rather be dead." He crossed his arms and glared straight ahead. "I haven't made improvement. I can talk. That's it. I'm scared of stupid things and sometimes I just panic and I don't know why but it hurts so bad." John was whimpering to himself, muttering quietly about how it was hurting him. Twice he jumped and gave a cry of alarm, looking closer at one of his scars to confirm that the sewing pain and fresh, red blood had indeed been in his imagination.

Greg held himself quiet. He'd said it all to John before, and as of late, any time he tired to open his mouth and help he made things shockingly worse. He watched John, hating himself, useless and wasting the air in the room. "I think you're remarkable," he said honestly, looking closer at one of his scars to confirm that the sewing pain and fresh, red blood had indeed been in his imagination.

Greg held himself quiet. He'd said it all to John before, and as of late, any time he tired to open his mouth and help he made things shockingly worse. He watched John, hating himself, useless and wasting the air in the room. "I think you're remarkable," he said honestly, looking away so he didn't have to see John try and shut him down. His stomach rolled at the thought of Sherlock's condition. He checked his watch, it wouldn't be long now.

John couldn't look at his hands. They were covered in scars as if he were one of Frankenstein's earlier, less successful models, patched together after numerous failed attempts. "If I were remarkable I would have shot Sherlock then myself when I had the chance."

Greg closed his eyes and touched a few fingers to his lips. What was there to say to that? It sounded like Sherlock had tried to do that in captivity. "There is nothing wrong with keeping hope. In fact, it's incredible you've been able to. What...what if it's possible for you two to heal enough to live a pleasant life together? May take a while, but you could have years, real years, of living comfortably."
John chewed on the inside of his cheek absently. Not enough to cause it to bleed, as he likely would have panicked at that, but enough to make it raw. "I don't think that's an option. I can't be away from you. I can't be near him for too long without getting scared. I don't want to be scared constantly. I'd rather just be nothing."

There was a time when Greg wouldn't have understood that, would have fought John like hell on it. He damn well couldn't be planning to go home and take his own life while telling John to hold on to his, could he? He was quiet when he spoke again, gentle in his tone, still detached and distant. "I made you a promise," he reminded softly, "I hope you'll give yourself enough time to really see if that's what you want."

At mention of the promise John relaxed considerably. He had a way out. As long as he had that safety net, things didn't look as hopeless. He breathed a long, slow sigh, as if attempting to exhale all his troubles and heartache in one drawn out breath. If only such troubles were carried away that easily. He was about to speak once more when Mycroft burst in, white as a sheet, but otherwise composed.

"He's here."

Chapter End Notes

I am terribly sorry we haven't gotten a chapter up. But...IS anyone ready for them to meet?!!?  
How do you think it will go?  
More chapters more regularly now that my schedule has evened out.
Greg's eyebrows nearly shot off his forehead, pushing to his feet swiftly, his focus on John. He'd not expected Mycroft to burst in like that. "It's going to be alright, John," he assured immediately, looking over to Mycroft. His voice was soft and low, "Have you been to see him yet? Or- what's going on? What do you need?"

"He's being stabilized by the EMPs. He's badly injured. Very badly. I haven't seen him yet. I came here first." Mycroft had regained his color and stood up straight, though he still had an energized look about him that was quite contrary to the dull look of jaded serenity he usually upheld. "He asked for me before they sedated him. I'm going to go sit with him. I just thought you should know."

Greg nodded, his stomach somewhere in the vicinity of the floor. "Keep us updated, yeah?" He glanced over to John, wanting to go to him and not daring to invite himself closer.

Mycroft was hoping Greg would come with him, as emotional things generally were not his area. "I'll let you know how he is mentally. If you wish to come see him, the men outside will direct you as always."

Greg narrowed his eyes for a moment before looking back to John, holding up a finger to Mycroft to get him to wait. "John, are you alright for a little while? I will stay with you if that's what you need." He had not anticipated Mycroft wanting him around.

John gave a small nod and got back under the covers in his jeans and jumper. "I'm alright. Go help him."

Mycroft turned and led the way past layer upon layer of security. He had two key cards, guards, and passwords to present before he reached the room where Sherlock was being tended to.

Greg stood next to Mycroft, staring at the floor, not at the bits of Sherlock they could see. The floor was..."Jesus," he breathed, watching as the booted staff crunched over freshly opened medical wrappers, bloodied gauze everywhere, smears of blood where he'd clearly just dripped off the gurney. There was massive activity, people at each of Sherlock's limbs, one at his head breathing for him, the rhythmic squeeze and release of the pale blue bag setting tempo for the room. Greg dragged a hand over his face, blinking rapidly.

"Jesus."

Mycroft looked on with a calm, collected and impassive face that would have fooled even the best interrogators. His brother was... God, he looked worse than dead. Mycroft searched for an area he could look that wasn't covered in blood or black with bruises, but he failed to do so. His heart gave a painful twinge when he saw Sherlock's swollen, purple and weeping arm. "I hope they kept Moran alive." He said quietly. He would make that man look exactly like Sherlock. He would catalog every cut, bruise, and burn on Sherlock's tortured body and inflict it on Moran with twice the pressure. He was certain he could.

Greg did not hesitate in his movement. He put his arm across Mycroft's back, gripping his shoulder. "He's strong, alright? He's strong. This looks..." he shook his head, hardly able to stand, "It's not been as long as John and he knew what he was facing before hand. He may just...once that pain is
under control, he might not be like John."

"He's... Oh, God..." Mycroft back stepped with his hands back, searching for a wall to lean on.
"Right...he hasn't been gone as long. He thought he shot John, though. He sounded so..."


Greg moved with him, keeping a hand on Mycroft. "Listen to me, Mycroft. Pain, really severe pain, does things, okay? You can't go off how he was, you've got to wait and see what he's like when he's not hurting. No way he's slept in that sort of pain. No way. He...give him a few days before you decide how he is." He looked back over to the team working on Sherlock and then back to Mycroft.
"He's strong. He's strong, okay?"

"I should have been able to find him sooner," Mycroft chastised himself. Sherlock was his little brother, his little brother who he had to protect. To see him so utterly destroyed was a nightmare. "If I had been just a day earlier he wouldn't have...oh...those four." He pointed to a cluster of cuts on Sherlock's arms that appeared to be the freshest.

Greg closed his eyes, holding on to Mycroft's shoulder. Mycroft's mind worked like Sherlock's. He'd know when, and for how long, and with which method of each and every wound. Sherlock's torture had ended, but Greg had a feeling Mycroft's was just beginning. "You could not have possibly done anything else. You've worked yourself sick, Mycroft. You did the best that anyone could have done. Don't do that to yourself."

Mycroft forced himself to scan Sherlock and catalog each and every wound. He walked himself through every day of Sherlock's torture, informing himself of what each wound had been made with and the manner in which it was done. *Knife. Whip. Knife. Bludgeon. Knife. Burn. Pliers. Clamp. Knife.* It was painful to do so, to see his brother's skin and made such terrible deductions, but it couldn't be helped. He stared, wide eyes locked on Sherlock, and didn't respond to Greg for nearly a minute as his mind whirred. He scanned and cataloged. He knew everything. Every detail. The information assaulted him all at once and Mycroft had to tear his eyes away.

Sherlock's former, extensive drug use worked against him. He came up despite the sedative, dragging in a deep, desperate breath, the act painful with his lungs so infected and damaged, fighting against the man breathing for him. He shouted, tugging his better arm abruptly away from the men working on him, and screamed at the pain of proper medical treatment without realizing what was on. "STOP!" He shrieked, panicked rage in his tone. He'd thought...he'd thought his brother..."MYCROFT! MY! WHAT H-H-A'V Y-YOU DONE W-TH MY B-BROTHER?!" he tore away from the people pinning him, he knew that he had spoken with Mycroft, he knew, and now he was horrified he'd have to put his brother down as well.

"Sherlock!" Mycroft shouted and worked his way through the medical personnel, over the wrappers and blood splatters that littered the otherwise clean floor. "Sherlock, I'm here. I'm right here." He stood over his little brother and held up his hands. "These are doctors. They won't hurt you. Be still. It's alright. You're safe." Mycroft's tone was as calm as he could possibly make it at this stressful moment.

Sherlock did stop, silenced by the shock of his brother at his side. The monitor at his side marked the severe uptick in his pulse. Greg didn't have to see it to know that Sherlock was near panic. John did it all the time. He expected to hear begging, closing his eyes in preparation.

Instead, with the room in shocking silence compared to the activity of earlier, Sherlock's shattered voice was calm and soft. "T-The team, y-" he swallowed and closed his eyes, back arching slightly
with the pain of it, "y-you're l-late." H, e was cryinhis chest quivering with the agony he was in, but his eyes were lucid and aware as he looked at his brother, relief nearly palpable rolling off him in cascading waves.

A crushing amount of guilt and relief washed over Mycroft and his knees threatened to give out. "I know, I know I'm late, but you know how the government can be, so hesitant to spend taxpayer's money." He reached one hand out to run his fingers back through Sherlock's hair in an effort to fix it, which he had done often in their childhood in an attempt to make him look somewhat presentable. He dropped it, though, worried there might be a painful bruise he couldn't see. "You're safe now. Secure facility. Nobody will hurt you anymore."

Sherlock's eyes were locked to his brother, his breathing erratic, his voice hardly over a whisper. "I...g-god it h-hurts, My...it hurts." He tried to reach for his brother, the act of moving his better arm still sending slicing, terrible pain through his body where there had been pins and spikes in the muscles of his shoulder. His breathing caught and he began to sob, "My, h-help."

"Shh, it's alright. It's alright. We'll put you on some painkillers and a sedative." He waved his hand to one of the attendants to indicate he wished his words to be put into action. "It might hurt a little bit more, but it's over. There won't be anything else done to you. Can you lie still and let them sedate you? Could you be still for a moment?"

"Don't...don't l-like-th-doc-doctors," he whispered to Mycroft in a slurred mix of French and German, whispering as though they couldn't hear, "h-hurt as mmmuch as th-the others." He closed his eyes, nearly falling asleep within seconds when he jerked himself awake, screaming at the agony of it, shaking his head and starting to beg, "Pl-please it- please I- w-wait, wait!" he was falling down hard into panic, tears rolling down his face as he grit his teeth and began to hyperventilate.

Greg sore under his breath and shook his head, staring as the team pushed sedatives as fast as they could. He started breathing again as Sherlock went limp on the table.

"Shhhh....it's alright..." He spoke softly and gently held the least damaged part of Sherlock's wrist for them to push the sedative into his arm. He stroked the side of Sherlock's temple where the only mark was a bruise long faded, and waited for him to draw breath steadily. "You're going to be alright," he still spoke, even once Sherlock was under, the words more for his own sake. "It'll be alright... You'll be fine…"

Greg moved over to Mycroft's side, putting a hand on his shoulder, ignoring the team fussing over Sherlock and letting them work around them. "He was lucid there, Mycroft, that's light years past where John was. He knew you, knew where he was, he's lucid. He will be alright, he will.

"He knew me. He was lucid." Mycroft repeated the words back in some attempt to keep up conversation while his mind worked. "He'll need to stay out of pain. Heavy painkillers or sedation. I don't care if he is out of it for a month. Psychologically he needs to feel the minimal amount of pain while he is here."

Greg nodded, heartily agreeing with that, staring at the mess that was once Sherlock's arm. He was going to need surgeries like John had. "He was trying to protect you, did you notice? That's...takes a good bit of...he has fight in him, is what I'm saying. That's...there's hope here, Mycroft. I'm, Christ I'm sorry for what's happened to him but there is hope here." He squeezed Mycroft's shoulder again, staring at the wreckage of his friend, wondering how the fuck he was going to explain this to John.

Mycroft took a long, slow breath. Breathing is the only true physical connection the body has with the emotions, and thusly by slowing his breath he forced his mind into an artificial calm. "Yes, I have assessed his mental state. He was there for about one seventh of the time John was, and Moran was
his torturer, not Moriarty. I believe his physical damage is nearly as extreme as John's was when we found him, but he hasn't been broken down psychologically to the same extent."

"Body can be healed," Greg agreed, "so can whatever has been done in his mind. Mycroft, I have to go check in on John, okay? I will come back but I've got to go check on him. Are you going to take some time off, or-" or are you leaving him alone. He couldn't say it. It was harder for Mycroft to get away from work, and he didn't honestly know if that was something Mycroft would be willing to do for Sherlock.

"I will conduct as much of my business as I can from here," Mycroft stated and made no move to leave Sherlock. "Anything else can wait. I've never taken a holiday. I've earned this." It sounded strange, as this was as far from a holiday as a man could get. "Go talk to John. Reassure him and whatever it is you do to calm him down."

Greg nodded and gave Mycroft's shoulder another squeeze. "I'll be back. Text me if you need anything." He crunched over the wrappers and moved away from the bloodied room as fast as he could go, needing to see John for reasons he could not quite understand. Security had been bumped up incredibly and it took even him a long while to get back to John's room, noting the guards that were by his door all of a sudden. He wondered if perhaps Moran hadn't been killed or captured, and then banished the thought. He pushed into John's room, moving to go sit in the chair where he had been earlier, trying not to breathe in a panic.

John had gotten up once to practice walking. He found the door locked and while it didn't quite matter, as he hadn't really wanted to leave, it upset him to be a prisoner and he sulked back to bed. Upon seeing Greg his stomach rolled violently with nervousness and apprehension of what news he might bear. "Sherlock? Is he...?" John wasn't sure what he was asking, but expected a full story either way.

Greg dragged a hand over his face and cleared his throat. "He was lucid. He knew Mycroft. He...it's bad, John. It's bad, but his mind seems to be there." He took a deep, slow breath, "Security has been upped through the whole building. Sherlock's room is incredibly hard to get to."

"I don't think I can see him right now," John muttered mostly to himself. "I'm just going to see the cuts and panic. I-I know...it'll hurt to see that..." He had to change the mental images in his mind to something pleasant. His happy memories seemed to escape him, and he drew from the nights where he could lie on Greg's chest and sleep peacefully. "So he isn't broken?"

"Greg?" John asked after he had allowed his own pensive silence to stretch on for over a minute. "I said I didn't want to be afraid of you." John gathered up his courage and held out his hand to Greg. "And I am. I am afraid, but you can fix it. You always fix it." He looked down, sickened by the amount of sheer will power it took to keep himself calm. "Please?"

Greg stared at John's hand for a full ten seconds before it registered to him that John was asking for him to be closer. He pushed to his feet, trying to resist the urge to run, and took John's hand in his own, closing his eyes and exhaling slowly, the damned tremor always there now. "I won't hurt you," he whispered tightly, loathing that he even had to say it.

"I know that." John stated through clenched teeth. His face was turned away as one would to avoid
the heat of a fire or a bright light. He winced at the touch, but didn't let go. He squeezed Greg's hand and whispered Greg's name to himself for comfort.

Greg resisted the intense urge to pull away. John was enduring him and it was nearly as horrific as feeling the man seize from fear in his arms. He nearly lost his armor, John's terror and efforts to teach himself not to be afraid ripping right through his heart where Sherlock's condition had already blown a massive hole. He cleared his throat again and again, losing a tear now and again despite his best efforts. "John..."

"I'm...I'm sorry..." John stammered and leaned away from their hands, though he kept hold. "I'm so sorry. I'm trying. I'm trying I swear I." Fearing Greg was terrible. Because he hadn't been conditioned severely to, it was clear to the logical side of his mind that something was wrong. But the damage had been done and he couldn't help that. "I'm trying..." To hate something you know you should love is conflicting to say the least, and John wasn't handling it well. “Trying, G-Greg.”

Greg shook his head, "You've nothing to be sorry for. You don't deserve this." He opened his hand, not at all applying pressure, wanting more than anything in that moment to let go of John and put a gun to his head, correct his mistake. "God I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry." He dragged his free hand over his ever dampening cheeks, hating himself just a little bit more with every liquid failure that streaked down his face. He was fucking worthless.

"No, I didn't." To John, he still deserved parts of it. He had been stubborn in the beginning and it gave him a sense of having brought it all on himself. John drew Greg's hand to him and pressed his lips against his fingers. "I'm trying," he repeated and closed his eyes. He tipped his head forward and rested it against Greg's hand. His whole body trembled and he could practically feel the water stinging his damaged flesh, but he kept still.

Greg was sure this was how he died. No clean shot for him, just John's fear and John's endurance and John's words. This was what would kill him. He stayed where he was, helpless to the tears that now had free reign to slide down his cheeks, clumping his lashes and reddening his eyes. He knew John was trying and oh god did it hurt.

"I know this hurts you. I'm sorry." John whispered. It wasn't terribly difficult to, as he loved Greg and wanted to trust him. It was difficult to give action to his words, however, when mind-numbing fear held him captive and prevented him from showing it. He kept Greg's hand pressed to his forehead and his eyes shut.

"I forgive you," John whispered. It wasn't terribly difficult to, as he loved Greg and wanted to trust him. It was difficult to give action to his words, however, when mind-numbing fear held him captive and prevented him from showing it. He kept Greg's hand pressed to his forehead and his eyes shut.

"I know this hurts you. I'm sorry."

Greg used his toe to hook the chair by the bed and drag it over before his knees went out. He sank down into it, of course leaving John his hand, pressing the other to his eyes as he leaned heavily against the armrest. He didn't dare put weight on the bed. He could not speak, knew if he formed
words they'd be drowned out with tears. John forgave him. It was more than he deserved, more than he'd ever expected to get. He put his focus to breathing, trying desperately to collect himself.

John forced himself to get used to the hand he kept pressed to his forehead. He made himself calm, though it was still a rather small step. "Could you tell me a story?" He asked, "A distraction or something." He had a look of pure concentration on his face; eyes shut, mouth in a thin line and brow drawn. Breathe. It's Greg. Greg is good. He is kind. He is gentle. He only hurt me once. He didn't mean to. Just once. Just once.

Greg dragged his hand down his face and cleared his throat again. "There was a night, uh, what? Two years ago now, that you came off shift from that insane overturned milk lorry, only it wasn't full of milk they were carrying that absurd soap mixture that had all but gone to jelly. You were utterly coated in it from working A&E, and I had it everywhere from working the scene. Went out for pints without really bothering to change..." he slid easily into one of their funniest memories, that ended with the pair of them drinking with Italian twins. It had been a crazy night, it was a story that never failed to make them both dissolve into laughter. Well, until now, but it had been one of their favorite stories. He spoke softly for the better part of twenty minutes, stretching out the detail as best he could.

John listened and a small smile graced his lips. "I think I remember that. That was a good night, wasn't it? I liked that night." He still sounded strangely disconnected, as if the words he spoke came from far away and he had already forgotten just why he had chosen to speak them. "Can we do something like that again? Something happy? I want to do something happy. I've been sad."

Greg felt the first breath of actual hope for John he'd had in...he didn't know how long. "Yeah, John, of course we will. We always had a good time out." He gave John's fingers the ghost of a gentle squeeze, not wanting him to feel trapped or out of control. "I- yeah John, of course. I'd- that sounds wonderful."

John gave the barest of nods and finally let go of Greg's hand. He leaned back onto his pillow and lay as though asleep for several minutes. "Do you think it will take a while for Sherlock to be alright?" His voice was alert but his body and face still appeared to be asleep.

Greg nodded, flexing the hand that John had been holding and pulling it to his chest. "Yeah...John yeah it will."

"When can I go see him?" He asked and opened his eyes a fraction of an inch. "I don't know if I want to. If he's been cut I might get scared."

Greg ran his hand over his mouth and cleared his throat. "Best to wait ah...few weeks, I think, if that's the case." He checked his watch and hummed. "I should actually go check on Mycroft soon."

"Weeks? He's that bad?" John seemed to curl in on himself further. He reached out and found the worn corner of the blanket that he had rubbed a hole in and twisted it between his fingers.

Greg nodded gently, not wanting to lie. "Pretty much the same as we found you, only not much has had a chance to heal. He wasn't in captivity nearly as long as you were, so it's..." fresh. He swallowed down the acid in his throat and itched to lean forward. "You can see him sooner, of course, but he's...they are not scars yet."

"Oh." John nodded and kept his eyes down. He had been given time to heal. He had been beaten until his heart was ready to give out, until it only took a pinprick for him to black out, then he would be left alone. Of course, they psychological torture was ongoing, but they had let his body heal. "If you got him before they let him heal for the first time he'll likely be a terrible mess of cuts. They
never let anything heal during that part."

"Yeah," Greg agreed without further commenting. Sherlock was a mess of lacerations, broken bones, burns, severe beatings, and god knew what else. John had all the scars, they'd had to re-break all his ill-healed bones and set them properly again, he'd had his leg repaired, he'd had the painful therapy for the extensive scarring to ensure the skin wasn't too tight. Most had been done while John was dead to the world. Sherlock had not undergone the conditioning, nor had sheer exhaustion set in and broken his mind as it had done John's.

"He's got the advantage of only having been there a little under two months. He'll...I think he'll be okay. Do you want a movie or something while I'm gone?"

"If it's going to be weeks until I can see him..." Weeks. That sounded like an eternity to a man who struggled to keep control through every minute. "Am I allowed to be put to sleep again today? Could I just...sleep?" Weeks. "I'll be fine while you're gone. Just... come back, alright?"

Greg moved over to the foot of John's bed. "You are allowed to see him whenever you want, John, but...let's just take it a day at a time, okay? Paul still is coming to see you, and you've plenty to work on. You can sleep today, if you'd rather. It's been a hard day."

"I don't know if I want to see Paul. He confuses me and says things that... they don't... they don't fit."

John had a narrative in his mind of what had happened. Greg contradicted it by showing him that he could have ice and that Sherlock wouldn't hurt him, but that had been done almost comfortably over several months.

Greg nodded, "I know, John. I know it's uncomfortable. Could... could you see him as a favor to me? I- it would help me tremendously to know you're seeing him." He felt like a right arse asking John Watson for favors, but he'd do anything to ensure John continued to get help.

John gave Greg an almost pleading look. "I will if you say I should." He muttered and held his blanket over his chest. John had decided to trust Greg even though he was afraid of him. "If Sherlock asks how I'm doing, lie. Tell him I'm recovering quickly."

Greg shook his head. "No, I'm not going to do that, John. Your progress is remarkable as it stands. I'm not going to lie to him, just as I won't lie to you. Paul won't come here without me, like you asked, not until you feel safe with him. Do you want anything before I go? I'll be back," he looked at the clock on John's wall, "about one hour, and if you need me you can call the doctors and they will page me, okay?"

"No, I don't need anything. Just go. Don't lie, I suppose. He'd be able to tell. Just tell him the good stuff." John gave a long sigh again and ran his fingers back through his hair. He felt a rough scar and noted that he couldn't recall it being made. Perhaps he had been delirious. "I'll see Paul today, since you want me too, but not without you being there."

"He's likely in theater, John, but when the time comes, I'll tell him the good things." Greg nodded to him and pointed to the clock, "About an hour. Try to sleep."

Security gave him hell as he made his way to Mycroft and Sherlock, picking through security, seeking out the eldest Holmes.

Mycroft was sitting in chair, eyes still fixed on Sherlock. He knew every tendon, every muscle and every blood vessel that had been cut into or burned on Sherlock's damaged body. He hardly noticed Greg, giving a soft hum in response to acknowledge his presence. He couldn't help but give the doctors that still buzzed around him critical and judgmental glares.
Sherlock had at least three drip lines in him now, much more efficiently stitched and bandaged. His chest was wrapped, white gauze over burn dressings over sutures. His better hand was stitched and the fingers splinted, the right arm was being seen to behind a propped up blue surgical screen, one of the physicians had lanced into the purpled infection, draining it as a surgeon saw to the horrifically fractured bone.

Sherlock had a tube in his throat where they were breathing for him, and the entire room was an odd mix of messy, bloody chaos and draped sterility. Sherlock's left side was calm though, most of the medical staff at his right side, the only other cluster a team at Sherlock's destroyed knee. Greg, like Mycroft, was handed a mask and made to put on a gown, though was allowed in the room. He sat down next to Mycroft, reaching out and resting a hand on the man's forearm.

Mycroft didn't pull away as he normally would. "He's been through more in two weeks than anyone should go through in a lifetime." Mycroft could see the damage that had been done and already knew exactly what part of Sherlock's body would ache with each movement. Walking would be a nightmare, if he got to it. "How did John take the news?"

"Better than I expected," he answered softly, keeping his hand on Mycroft. He took in a deep, slow breath. The odor in the room was horrible; sweat and fear mixed over the iron sweetness of blood. He licked his lip behind the mask in a nervous habit, staring at Sherlock. "Has he stayed down?"

"He woke up once, but not as violently as before. Other than that he has been quiet." Mycroft hadn't taken his eyes off of Sherlock for the duration of his treatment. He watched every slight movement of the doctors' hands, scrutinizing and worrying without pause.

Greg nodded to the tube in Sherlock's throat which connected him to the ventilator. "John treated a good friend of mine once, real crack up of an accident, he was bad off. Said that ventilator was the kindest thing that could happen to someone who's body was working so hard, took a lot of the effort off. That should help him, yeah?" He was trying, god how he was trying. Mycroft was clearly in hell, and Greg wasn't sure he could help him much.

"Have...what have they been telling you, if anything? He- still a good sign he was lucid. Knew you, knew where he was." It was repetition, but in the face of the staggering damage done to Sherlock's body, good news could stand repeating.

Mycroft's eyes darted over to Greg. "Yes, its good that he was lucid. But you know how recovery goes. He could regress. Or progress. Likely in stages. We won't know the worst of it until he has been awake for a bit. He thinks he killed John. That alone will have damaged him. He's gotten rather attached." Mycroft couldn't see why people would choose to form attachments that weren't forged in blood and demanded by social conventions. It always ended messy.

Greg nodded, "I know, believe me I know. You have to just take what you have and work with it. If that changes, it changes, but he's likely to need a positive outlook. Even if it goes against logic." He turned his head to face Mycroft, giving him a pointed look. "They deserve a chance, even if it means we have to stretch the truth and encourage when we ourselves are hopeless."

Mycroft had been on the other end of this little pep talk for Greg several times already. "It's a shite deal, we have to do what we can."

"If you are worried I am planning on giving up, know I am not. I am going to get him to the point that he is functioning and then resume my own work. Hopefully you manage to get John to the point where he can be in the same room with Sherlock without crying. That would help him. I suppose you know how terrible it is to have someone you love fear you. You must have a full new range of sympathy."
Greg sucked in a sharp breath and let go of Mycroft. The barb was unexpected. He cleared his throat and nodded. "Paul is coming to help, we will focus on his ability to be near Sherlock over everything else. If I can sit with them both, I'm sure it will alleviate your burden."

"I will consult you if necessary, of course, and I think the socialization will be good for him. He did directly ask for me, though, which leads me to believe I will be active in his recovery." He was back to his usual, detached tone of speaking by this point which was necessary for him to keep a level head.

Greg nodded, "Yeah, I'm glad, I am. I think you can help him more than anyone else right now. I only meant for later."

He went quiet, watching the staff work. Sherlock was heavily medicated, if he came awake he'd panic with the tube in his throat. Everyone did. They didn't need him fighting the vent. Greg just remained for Mycroft's sake. Even if the man would not outwardly show it, everyone needed someone. This was his baby brother on the table, it had to be affecting him. When forty minutes had passed, he took in a deep breath. "Going to go help Paul with John. Text if you need me, Mycroft. Don't forget to eat something."

Mycroft didn't look up. "Eat? Oh, right. I suppose that would be logical. Go work with John. I appreciate your help. If you can push the subject of Sherlock, and perhaps get him used to looking at his own scars in preparation, that would be lovely."

Before Greg left, Mycroft stopped him with a hand on his shoulder. He stared at Greg for a long moment, searching his face and expression. "Do you think we are being heartless, making them live?"

Greg stopped, looking back at Mycroft, keeping close. He had been about to remove his mask in preparation of stepping out. He blinked twice, trying to get his mind straight. "If you'd asked me this morning, my answer would have been yes." His eyes cut over to Sherlock and then looked back to Mycroft. "John has asked me to take him somewhere enjoyable in the future. He envisions a future, at least fleetingly, of something outside of this. I think...if John can manage that...if Sherlock can still...no, I don't think at this time it's cruel. If that changes, I'll let you know."

"Ethics has never been my strong point." Mycroft said to dismiss the conversation. He agreed with Greg, but there was a nagging voice in his mind that said it would be more humane to just end the both of them and be done with it. "I'll keep that in mind, though."

Greg stayed where he was, needing to be sure Mycroft understood all of this. "He's likely to ask you to kill him, Mycroft. He's got a hell of a lot of physical recovery and he's going to get bored, and he's going to give up hope. You have to be the voice of reason for him. I made you a promise that I would...that I would end it for them if needed. I don't...for the first time in a long while, I don't think it will be."

"I won't kill my brother, Lestrade," Mycroft snapped without fully intending to. "I won't listen to any of his crazed requests until I deem him to be of a sound mind. If he is going to die, it will have to be of his own hand, somewhere far away where I can not reach him." Mycroft realized he sounded fiercely sentimental, but the situation warranted some emotion.

Greg reached out then, putting a hand on Mycroft's shoulder and squeezing. "Good. He'll need this. Protective older brother is exactly what he needs." He nodded, reassured with Mycroft's determination to keep Sherlock living, and moved out of the room. He pulled off the mask and gown, asking one of the suited workers in the hall to ensure someone got food and drink to Mycroft in the next hour.
He made his way slowly back to John's room, walking in and sitting down in the chair across from the bed, not sure how close he would want Greg at the moment.

John had his arms crossed high over his chest, a position that was a bit more relaxed than the frightened shell he had been making with his forearms but still not very trusting. "You look shaken." He observed as soon as Greg walked in. "Is he that bad?"

Greg hadn't intended to look as he did. He ran his hand over his mouth and closed his eyes, nodding, not trusting himself to speak. He gave himself a full minute before looking back at John. "He can recover," he said gruffly, making eye contact so John could see the honesty of it, "it's just...hard to see either of you suffer."

"I wish we didn't have to so you wouldn't be sad." John tilted his head to the side and gave Greg a rather absent look. He had disconnected rather severely to keep himself away from the torment in his mind and it left him looking quite vacant. "And just because someone can heal doesn't mean they'll be alright up here." He tapped the side of his head in an inanely tranquil way.

Greg nodded from behind his hand. "Believe me, John, I know. I know. Body and mind are two different things." He stared at John, always a bit unnerved by these moments, when John wavered so very close to lucid but did not quite touch there. "John...you know that I understand you are still suffering, yeah? I mean...I know you're still hurting, I know it's not...not good for you right now. I just..." he shrugged, keeping his eyes to him. "I just didn't want you to think that I am not aware that you are hurting right now."

John nodded without seeming to have given it much thought. "I know you're aware of my hurting. That's why you look so sad." He pointed up to Greg then dropped his hand. "You know all the things so I don't have to say them. Like the lights being dim and how I don't like to talk about some things." He pulled at a string on his blanket and tied it into little knots. "Nobody else knows those things, and I don't know how to tell them."

Greg nodded at that. He checked his watch again. "Paul will be here soon. Mycroft has asked that we work on your ability to see Sherlock, or to...to look at your own body. Which of those should we try today?" He hated to push John, but, "This is the only way to help Sherlock, if that's what you still want to do."

John hated the idea of looking at his own body. He never took great stock in vanity, and he certainly didn't now, but the scars disgusted him and made the panic swell. "Sherlock. Let's start with Sherlock."

Paul knocked on the door and slid into the room without hesitating. He was dressed down in a casual tracksuit, not quite carrying the height from before. He only let himself in enough to shut the door behind him, his free hand in his pocket. "Hello John, Greg." He gave John the same gentle smile as before, then nodding to the chair beside John's bed. "Is it alright if I sit?"

"That's not your chair," John grumbled in a barely audible voice. "Fine. Yes, you can sit." With frequent glances to Greg for reassurance, he sat up and faced Paul. "What are you going to make me believe today?"

Paul took the chair and moved it away from the bed to a more polite distance, sitting down, noting how John kept looking to Greg. "I don't think I've ever made you believe anything, John," he said warmly, not taking that particular bait. "What do you want to talk about?"
Greg cleared his throat and chimed in. "We've decided that today is a good day to talk about Sherlock," he said quietly, knowing Paul knew they'd found him. Paul hummed and nodded, watching John. "I've never met him. Can you tell me about him, John?"

"He's..." John couldn't clearly remember much about Sherlock. It was all locked away behind a wall of blind panic. "Tall," John stated and decided to start with the physical aspects. "With dark hair and blueish eyes. Pale. Thin. Smart. Uhm...Violin. He...I don't know anything about his family, or...or his life before. Detective, sort of." He shot a look over to Greg. "You remember better. You tell him."

Paul held up a hand to Greg, who wasn't going to speak anyhow. "I can wait while you think. You were his best mate, his flatmate as well, yes? I'd rather hear from someone who knows him well."

"I...I was his flat mate and his friend, I think. But he didn't really have friends." John had worked a second hole in his blanket by now and chewed the inside of his lip. "He was just...clever? Not very polite but clever..." John was having a difficult time remembering Sherlock without the torture and pain he had come to associate with the man coming up to his mind.

Paul nodded. "Not very polite and clever. That's an interesting mix. Do you recall how you met him?"

Greg had his eyes on John's hands. He knew Paul, trusted Paul deeply. It was still difficult to see him pushing at things that made John uncomfortable. John, in Greg's mind, should never be uncomfortable again.

John gave a small whimper and shook his head. "Greg," he called and gave the man a pleading look. "I don't know if I want to do this. This hurts." "I can't remember that...he was just clever and not polite. He gave me coffee once but it was drugged. I didn't like that. That's all I can remember. That's all. Please..."

Paul watched as Greg stood up and walked over to John, though he did not reach out and touch him as he historically did. Before the incident with the water, Greg would have been up in the bed, holding him. "It's alright, John. It's alright."

Paul gave John a minute before speaking softly. "What happens in your mind when you try to remember the day you met him, John? Explain to me without using the word 'hurt.'"

John made a pinched expression and shook his head. "No. It just hurts." Using such a safe, almost innocent word for something so terrible gave him a sense of control and disconnected safety. "That's the only word there is. It. Just. Hurts."

Paul nodded at him, "Okay, John. Okay. Can you tell me what sort of hurt? Is it sharp? Is it dull? Can you point to where it hurts you?" Paul met his child like description with the same sort of care a physician would give a child, no mockery in it, gentle and understanding in his tone. "It changes," John said with a pout. "Sometimes it hurts sharply and I look but there's just a scar. Or dull but no bruise. It hurts everywhere and then I can't...it hurts..." Panic and loss of control, things also covered under his blanket term, threatened to overtake him once more. "Hurting!" He cried and clutched his head.

Greg shook his head and nearly reached out for John, pulling his hands back. Instead he went to the table and grabbed one of the quick dissolving anti-anxiety tablets and tipped one into his hand, bringing it over. "John," he said softly, his voice as gentle as he could make it. "Under your tongue, yeah? It will help make it stop hurting."
Paul watched the entire exchange in silence, unwilling to push a patient much harder than this.

John took the pill almost greedily. "Thank y-you, Greg." His mind was starting a dangerous downward spiral. His breathing became rapid and his eyes darted around. So accustomed to the feeling was John that he knew he would be in hysterics soon. "Greg!" He cried in panic, "Its hurting, G-Greg, I can't... I can't think... It hurts!"

Greg restricted himself from touching John. "John, all I want you to do is breathe, that's it, just breathe." He put himself between Paul and John, trying to keep eye-contact with him. "Breathe for me, John. Breathe."

John's teeth were clattering. "H-hurts b-because I know I-I'm panicking b-but I c-can't-" he let out a short cry of frustration and pain. Phantom pains shot up his arms and he screamed, head dropped to his chest and covered with his arms. "Greg! H-Help m-me! Please!"

Greg reached out slowly and touched the back of John's hand, wanting to grab him up and hold him to his chest, but terrified of making it worse. Paul was about to speak but Greg shook his head to silence him. "John...all you need to do is focus on breathing. Don't think about anything else, just breathe."

"I'm fucking t-trying!" John exclaimed and rocked himself back and forth. John would have given anything at this point to have someone hold him, but the one person he had trusted now terrified him. John let out a long, agonized scream and jerked violently. He arched off the bed and his eyes rolled back as his muscles locked.

Greg stared at him, eyes wide, stumbling back as Paul rushed forward to evaluate John. He put a hand to the center of John's chest to keep him from falling. "He's just scared, Greg, he's okay. Just overloaded."

Greg's back hit the wall and he choked on a dry sob, staring at John. "I keep making it worse. Everything...everything- I- he-" he slowly slid down into his chair, raking his hands through his hair, staring at the floor.

It took several minutes for the worst of it to pass. John screamed and thrashed, but never attempted to leave his bed. He knew he was trapped and was left to cry in misery in his captivity. "H-hurt-t-ting m-me," he managed between violent heaves of his chest.

Greg couldn't take it. He stood up and moved over to John, budging up next to Paul. "John," he called out, leaning down and sliding an arm across John's shoulders, easing him up so that he was sitting. "John, no one wants to hurt you, John look around you, look around. It's over. Look around John."

John was in a terrible, dark, chaotic world of fear and pain. He couldn't see straight as flashes of white soared across his vision along with bits of the warehouse fading in. When he felt someone touching him he screamed and tried frantically to get away. His eyes were wide but they saw nothing of the real world, only his own phaneron come alive to haunt him. "Gr-reg? He stuttered and turned to where the arm had been. Had that been Greg, or Moriarty? "H-hurts, Greg. P-Please b-be G-Greg not h-him. I-I want G-Greg!"

Greg took it as a promising sign that John continued to call for him. He still had his arm at John's back and leaned in, wrapping the other around him and gently pulling John to his chest, carding his fingers through John's hair as he stood at the side of the bed. "You're safe. It's memory, John. It's a memory. You've already survived it. It will pass, breathe John, it will pass."
John started to calm a little from the voice. It was only when he came around enough to remember his torment in the shower, or what he had perceived to be torment, that he yanked away. "N-no, Greg, can't, hurts." He strung words together hoping he would understand. "I don't want... Can't..."

Greg let him go and backed up, speaking swiftly, "I'm s-sorry, I'm sorry, I won't- I- please, I-" he started to sweat, hands shaking horribly at his sides. "Please, John, I- I can go, I can go- please I'm-"

Paul snapped at him then, "Greg! Sit down," he said firmly, trying to get the situation calm. "John, you are in a safe place. No one is going to touch you."

John shook his head and let out one last scream. The energy it took to be terrified combined with the emotional energy it took to calm himself down, which he was desperately trying to do, had drained him considerably. "Greg, m'sorry, pl-lease, d-don't leave m-me. I did-dn't mean t-to."

Paul watched the room dissolve into chaos. Greg was on the edge so terribly he was honestly shocked at his condition. John was horrified to have Greg there and to be without him in the same turn. He put his hands up to both of them even as Greg assured, "O-okay John I'm right here. I'm right here."

"John, take another," he said softly, another tablet in the palm of his hand.

John grabbed at the pill and let it dissolve under his tongue. "Greg," he gasped and clutched the sides of his head. "I'm in pain," he attempted to use words other than hurt. Perhaps Paul was right and that would help. He was wiling to try anything at the moment. "It h-hurts...I mean it...panic and its tight i- in my chest and I-I can’t think."

Greg looked up sharply at that, surprised at the explanation. "Yeah...John yeah panic is really scary. Really scary. We...we can come up with a plan for panic, right Paul?"

Paul nodded, watching John. "We can, yes. How is that medication doing, John?"

John let out a low growl of discontent and flinched. His face was twisted into a permanent wince that only left when blind terror took it's hold. "Fuzzy," he said in response to the question in his medication. It made his mind feel hazy and slow, which was somewhat better than panicked. "I just want to leave."

Paul shook his head. "John, you've got to say what you mean. You said 'leave.' What does that mean? To where?"

Greg was instantly doubting their plan. He had no idea where the line with John was, which was terrible as it seemed like John was making progress. He couldn't let John go if he was making progress.

"I want to DIE!" John suddenly shouted in response and writhed on his bed. His mouth was stretched open as if screaming but no sound came out, giving his face an eerie look of extreme agony. "Why do I-I have t-to sa-ay it?"

Greg could hardly breathe in the face of John's agony. It felt so bitterly ironic after he'd assured Mycroft that he had to hold strong in the face of this. John was suffering horribly.

Paul was calm, still present. "You owe it to yourself to hear what you mean. You said 'leave.' What does that mean? To where?"

Greg was instantly doubting their plan. He had no idea where the line with John was, which was terrible as it seemed like John was making progress. He couldn't let John go if he was making progress.

"Please just KILL ME!" John cried with wretched sobs. "Please, p-please! Oh, God!" He had stopped screaming but wailed loudly, eyes closed and tears streaming down his face. "Y-You
promised! Greg YOU P-PROMISED! I-I NEED TO DIE! LET ME G-GO! PLEASE! I-I NEED TO BE KILLED!"

Greg put his face in his hands as Paul shook his head, moving away to the medicine cabinet and drawing out a key. He unlocked it and began to draw up a sedative. Greg got to his feet, swaying as he made his way to John. He didn't touch him, though he was close to it. "N-not when you are in a panic. Not when you are in a panic. When...when you're calm...a-ask me when you're calm."

John reached out both his arms to Greg, like a child asking to be picked up. "You promised!" He whispered in a small, heartbroken voice. "Promised! You said you would help me!" John seemed to realize he was vulnerable and snapped his arms back to his chest. "YOU PROMISED!" He screamed this time with his hands in fists.

Greg had been reaching for John when John changed his mind. He pulled his own hands back, sure he was bleeding to death internally as his chest ripped apart. "John! I am not saying no! I'm saying not this minute!" He had tears of his own sliding down his face now, just on the verge of falling apart.

John had been reduced to a whimpering mess on his bed. He wrapped both arms around his pillow and cried into it. His shirt had pulled up in one area and his ribs were visible beneath sporadic cut and burn scars. The stripes of puckered scars in uniform lines from the hot clamps ran parallel to his ribs, often coloring them specifically where they had touched the burning metal first. "Promised...you promised..."

Paul spoke softly. "John, giving you something to let you sleep." He moved to the side of John's bed and slid the needle into the port, pushing the sedative as Greg stood by John's bed, ashen gray and sick at his stomach. "I'm sorry John," he breathed, holding his breath and hoping the medication would work.

John started to feel the edge taken off his panic and breathed a shuddering sigh of extreme relief. "This...this is alright...for now." To die, to sleep. No more. He wished to die, in the end, after he had done all he could, but for now sleep, death's younger, less potent sibling, would have to do.

Paul watched as John dropped down into sleep, speaking to Greg as he tipped out one of the dissolving pills for him as well. "We are going to load him up hard on sedatives before each session. I think if we can keep the panic away, we can make progress. He needs far more than I had thought."

Greg nodded as he let the tablet dissolve, easing down into his chair and pressing his hand over his face. Paul spoke with him for a few minutes more before patting his shoulder and taking his leave.

It was well over six hours when John woke again. Perhaps he didn't want to wake, and that was what kept him so dead to the world. He wished so dearly to be dead, and his body seemed to take pity on the mind, giving it a slight repose from consciousness.

John groaned when he woke and scanned the room. "Greg?" He slurred and rubbed his eyes.

"Here," Greg said softly from across the room, his voice heavy and sad. "I'm right here, John." He slowly stood up from the chair he'd been dozing in, bringing himself in John's line of sight, heart in his stomach.

The events before his sedation were fuzzy, as his panic always made things seem in retrospect.
"Could you tell me what happened?" John requested in a tiny, broken voice.

Greg nodded as he looked at the floor. "Uh, yeah...yeah...Paul asked you to describe when you met Sherlock and...I guess trying to remember made you panic...or...I don't know he asked you describe it different and then uh...it...you-" he took a deep, controlled breath and looked at John, "you got very, very upset with me because I wouldn't make good on my promise right then. I told you..." his eyes went to the ceiling as he struggled with himself, fear wrapping around his gut, "told you to ask me when you were calm."

"Am I calm now?" John inquired quietly and raised large, round eyes to Greg. "Would you consider me to be calm in this moment?" He did his best to appear as sedated and tranquil as possible, though he still had a slight appearance of tension. He didn't want to die, not yet, not with Sherlock so close and his time so near, but he needed to know when he was allowed to ask.

Greg's expression crumpled as he nodded, his breathing catching as his vision blurred. "Y-yeah, John. I...I would," he said the words as one confessing to murder, anguished and sick at his stomach, hardly breathing.

John simply nodded in response and went back to rolling the fabric of his shirt between his fingers. It was nearly two full minutes before he spoke again, though the silence hardly touched him. "Do you think I'll be able to help Sherlock soon?"

"Why? What good will it do? How cruel will it be to show him you're alive, only to have me kill you? If-" Greg had to sit down, his hands shaking horribly.

John's lower lip trembled like a scolded child and fresh tears sprang to his eyes. "I just wanted to help!" He cried and gave a small sniffle. "You said, you said not to have him come back and see me dead. Now you're saying it will hurt him anyway and-and I c-can't handle that! I-I c-c-can't handle it!"

"No," Greg said softly, shaking his head, "it will only hurt him if you die right after. It- I'm sorry, I'm sorry John. I'm sorry. I'm- I don't want to see you die after all of this. I want to see you live. I want to do something fun with you, remember? I want to make sure you live comfortably and I want you to smile and I don't want to put you in the ground. I'm selfish and I... don't want to watch you stop breathing." Greg shook his head and slowly sat back down. "I'm sorry."

John couldn't help but close his eyes at the idea of his chest ceasing to rise and fall. How lovely it would be to just cease, to float off painlessly and leave the burdens of the world to those alive to carry them. "I think I'd smile with the needle pushed," he remarked rather inanely. "But why...why did you have me live this long if it'll only hurt Sherlock? Did-" his eyes grew wide, "Greg...did you trick me?"

"No," Greg said swiftly, looking at John openly and honestly, "I told you I would do this, and I will. I did not trick you. I hoped...I hoped differently, I hoped..." he shook his head and swallowed hard, nodding sharply as he donned his mask. "Can we just...just let him know it wasn't him before we go?"

"We?" John asked and raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean before 'we' go?" His mind felt utterly slow and useless. He gave an irritated huff and pressed the heel of one hand against his forehead.

Greg pulled his chair over so that John could see him, slowly sinking down into it. He felt as though he'd aged a thousand years, the weight of gravity harsher, his body older, his mind exhausted. "Oh...yeah, we. For sure, we. I can't do this and then stay here. I'm with you through this one way or the other. You keep breathing, so do I. You ask me to kill you, and I am going to kill us both."
Chapter End Notes

Everyone seems excited for the reunion of Sherlock and John.

But I'm worried there might not be one.
John whimpered in distress and shook his head. "No, Greg, no. You're supposed to go get a wife and have happy times with your mates." He reached out one hand and put it on Greg's. For a moment he considered begging until Greg promised to stay alive, but there would be no way to hold him to it. "You...if I had just died on Moriarty's table this wouldn't have happened."

Greg shook his head, staring at John's fingers on his own, totally unexpected. "Not so sure of that, John. I- Sherlock would have spiraled out, likely OD'd on something. My family is gone. I'm alone. I didn't really have anything outside you lot. I don't have mates, John. I have you and Sherlock." His voice was gentle and sadly resigned. "Why does it matter what I do?"

"Then...get a girlfriend or something," John protested once more. Greg couldn't die. If Greg died, John would feel utterly responsible, and John was certain that he wasn't enough to keep Greg happy. "You were always popular with the women at that one pub. Just go find someone." He had stopped rolling the fabric of his shirt and started pulling at a thin thread on the hem. "It matters because I can't stand the idea of you dying because I'm dying."

Greg laughed, "A girlfriend? So...kill my only mates and then go pick up a bird? No, John, I'm done in. I love you, I know you hate to hear that and I'm sorry, but it's the truth and if I'm about to lose you I want it said as much as possible. There isn't anything left if you lot leave, and I'm not going to muck about after killing people I love."

John had begun to cry again. Of course, he wanted to die. He craved the numbness of it and thought on it constantly. But he did not want Greg to die with him. John was still fiercely protective and loyal, but didn’t know if he could continue on with this. "If you didn't kill me, if I did it myself and you still had Sherlock to be your friend, then would you stay after I left?"

Greg squeezed John's hand. "Let's not talk about this, John. If you are not asking me to do it right now, let's not talk about it. I'm sorry you are upset."

He took a slow breath and cleared his throat. "Thirsty? All those meds must have dried out your mouth. I can get you some ice."

John continued to cry, but it wasn't uncommon for him to do so and he had learned to function despite it. "You're good to me. I don't want you to kill yourself just because of something I've asked you to do. And I'll have the ice, if you want."

Greg got up and took a moment to get John ice, nearly stopping to ask if he wanted the powder in it before changing his mind. He didn't want to push anything else. He brought the ice to John and gently handed it to him then sat down at the chair beside John, texting Mycroft.

How is he?

Sherlock had been battling the sedative for the last hour, his vitals jumping all over the place as he tried to force himself back up to the surface. Mycroft's mobile buzzed and Sherlock's fingers twitched on the bedding. John took the tiny cup of ice and put one of the chips in his mouth effort he had too much time to think about it.
Mycroft tore his eyes away from Sherlock for the first time in hours to check his phone.

_Fighting his sedatives._

_Need help?_

_No, I'm alright._

He stood then and walked over beside the bed, slowly as he was torn between comforting his brother and staying back to encourage him to sleep. "Sherlock?"

Sherlock's fingers curled in the sheets as his leg shifted, stiff in its casting. The ventilator began to softly chirp as Sherlock struggled with the forced breaths, slowly rising up, chasing his brother's voice.

Mycroft gave the barest of touches to Sherlock's hand. "I'm right here. Right here. Nobody is going to hurt you. Stay calm, alright? I'm here."

Sherlock was trying to breathe out of sync with the ventilator, a common issue and often quite frightening for the patient in question. His heart rate shot up as his hand turned over, heavily bandaged, grabbing hold of two of Mycroft's fingers; the most he could manage with the thick wrappings. He had yet to open his eyes, though they were obviously dancing back and forth beneath his lids.

"I'm right here," Mycroft said and curled the two fingers around Sherlock's bandaged hand. "Try and breathe slowly, alright? You have a ventilator." Mycroft gently touched Sherlock's dark curls which had grown just a bit too long.

Sherlock finally got his eyes open, biting at the tube between his teeth, looking wildly around the room before his focus settled on his brother. He visibly relaxed. His pulse was still far too high and a thin sheen of sweat glistened on his brow, but he was less tense and no longer anticipating agony. He stared at Mycroft, letting go of his fingers with a sharp wince. He pointed to the tube, clearly wanting it out. He instantly was reaching back for Mycroft's hand, starting to panic without the physical connection.

Mycroft put his fingers back into Sherlock's. "I'm here. You aren't going to be hurt anymore. Try and stay calm for me, can you?" He traced his thumb in small circles on the back of his brother's hand. "The ventilator is helping you. Your body is..." Destroyed? Mutilated? What exactly could he say? "...rather taxed, at the moment."

Sherlock gave his brother a faint nod and closed his eyes, inadvertently losing a few stray tears over his temples which dripped down into his curls. He squeezed Mycroft's fingers, though he was otherwise calm. He was, however, in a great deal of pain. He used the pad of his thumb to tap at his brother's fingers. _Pain._

Mycroft's gut twisted. He knew Sherlock had been in pain, but the tapped confirmation seemed to make the knowledge worse. "I know, we'll keep you on painkillers until it's over. Right now is the worst of it. It will get better. Would you-" he stopped, worried about how this might turn out, "would you like to see John?"

Sherlock's eyes flew open, confusion clear on his face as his heart started racing. Despite how badly it hurt to do so, he let go of Mycroft's fingers, his hand going for Mycroft's face, touching him with quaking fingers to assure himself that this was not some elaborate ruse. His chest caught, making him wince as the ventilator forced him to breathe, tears sliding fast down the sides of his face. He didn't
understand. Was Mycroft offering to kill him as well? He pointed to himself with a trembling hand, pain spreading like fire up his side, and then pointed to his temple, miming a firing weapon.

His hand dropped down then, his monitors buzzing as he started to sob, grief twisting around him viciously.

Shit. Mycroft hadn't taken into account that Sherlock might think he meant euthanization. He cursed himself for letting his emotions blur his judgment even that small amount and shook his head. "No, no, Sherlock. John is alive. He is just down the hall, sort of. He's recovering nicely. No more cuts or bruises." He took Sherlock's hand and held it in both of his. "No, Sherlock... I'm not going to shoot you."

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Meanwhile Greg had pulled the small, thin tv on the wheeling cart over. It was absurd, but he popped in a disk that his nephews had talked about at length, a square little yellow machine on the front in computer animated fashion, smiling in the center of a trash heap with cubes of garbage at his back. Michael Crawford's voice whispered from the soft speakers at a very low volume.

John watched the screen and was thankful for the mind-numbing distraction. "If you're just going to kill yourself once I'm gone, why stay at all? Am I really worth living for? Are you wanting to die but staying for my sake, or would my death drive you to leaving?"

It was such an odd conversation to have while watching a lonely little robot busily cleaning up his animated world, My Fair Lady soundtrack rolling cheerily as an undercurrent. "Yeah, John, you are worth living for," and that was about as willing as he was to get into it.

"Are you only staying alive for me, or will my death be what causes you to want to leave?" John had to work this out before he decided when to go. John watched the robot with mild interest. "Not sure that would work," he remarked at the idea of Sunday clothes making one feel better.

Greg sat quietly with John, watching the screen with detached interest. "John...please. I'm trying, alright? I shouldn't have talked about this, I'm sorry. You need to focus on yourself. Please don't worry about me."

"I need to know, Greg," John stated quietly and looked to him. "Are you wanting to die now, and my condition prompts you to stay and help, or will my death be the cause of your wanting to leave?"

Greg closed his eyes and tipped his head back in defeated frustration. "Why? Why do you need to know? What does it matter?"

"Because it matters," John retorted. "If you already want to die and are just sticking around to help me, like I'm doing for Sherlock, I've got nothing to worry about. If you have plans on living and my death will change that..." He didn't know what that would change.

Greg looked over at John and stared for a long time. "Mate, I know you are hurting, and I'm -despite my many failures- trying really, really hard to help you. Could you just...just not dig at me right now? I'm trying, John. I really am."

"I'm not digging at you. I know you don't like this. It hurts doesn't it?" John was a mixture of
sympathetic and relentless. He loved Greg, and he didn't want him to suffer, but he wanted, needed to know what was truly going on. And besides that, misery loved company, and he hoped Greg would understand what went on when Paul asked him questions he would rather not answer. "Please, just tell me, and we can be done." His tone matched the even, calm one that Paul and Greg had both used when he himself was in a fit.

Greg ran a hand down his face and sighed. "Very clever, John. I don't want to dump my issues on you, mate, you've enough going on in your own world, you don't need my baggage. But since you damn well want it, why the hell not? I have you and Sherlock. Well, had you, sort of. I was going to go home yesterday and shoot myself, since I'd so terribly hurt you and I am having a bloody difficult time living with myself. I've tried everything I know to do to fix it, and I can't. I don't even know how to explain to you how deeply I hate myself. I'm useless. I can't help you anymore, I don't have a purpose. Then, inexplicably, you wanted me to stay. So here I am. I- no, John, I'm not going to eat a round as long as I have someone who gives a damn."

John flinched at the idea of Greg shooting himself. It seemed to defy all laws of nature that someone as good as Greg would be prompted to end their own existence. "You hate yourself because of the water?" John looked up and the pain was clearly etched into the deep lines on his face. "I-I didn't... I really tried not to panic," he began, thinking it had been his fault. "I tried not to! I swear, I did my best and I'm trying not to be afraid of you!"

Greg put up a hand, "John, please, god please calm down. This is why I didn't want to talk about it. It's not your fault and you did nothing wrong. I hurt you terribly, and I can't fix it, and I can hardly stand to live with myself. You are in so much pain already, to even consider that I added to that..." he tailed off, shaking his head. "Please, John, I don't fault you at all. It's not your fault."

"I shouldn't be afraid of wa-" Paul had said to use specific words. Other words. Had it been water? As in waterboarding and burns and stinging pain? "I shouldn't be afraid of... a shower. You're good to me. I should have known... but it hurt... I'm not mad at you, Greg, I love you, its just... I'm so easy to train now..." As a protective mechanism his mind had begun to accept associations rather quickly to minimize the amount of training time and thus the amount of pain. It was unfortunate, but the association of Greg and water had been bonded incredibly quickly.

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Sherlock shook his head. Mycroft didn't understand. He squeezed at Mycroft's hand and slowly, painstakingly tapped out to him, I shot him. He blinked rapidly, trying to understand what was going on. Why would Mycroft be confused about this? How could he say that he had John and that he was recovering nicely? Sherlock shook his head, wrestling with the vent, wanting to speak.

"No, you didn't." Mycroft's voice wasn't gentle. It was solid, confident, and left no room for argument. In this area, Sherlock didn't need coddling. "You were likely beaten to think so, or shot a double. I have seen John just this past hour. Would you like to talk to him?"

Sherlock nodded emphatically, squeezing Mycroft's hand, his eyes wide. God yes, he wanted to see John. His hands were shaking, pain and confusion making it difficult to master himself.

Mycroft prayed John would be able to handle this and sent the text to Greg.

_Sherlock has requested to see John. Could you bring him? I doubt he'll trust a phone._
Greg looked at John after reading the text. "I'm not mad, John, and you don't need to be sorry. I- I am so glad that you are not mad at me. Listen," he held up the phone for a moment, "you can say no to this, okay, you can say no. Sherlock is asking for you."

John was appreciative for the change in subject and his eyes widened. "I thought... I thought it would be weeks..." He pushed himself up and over to the edge of the bed. "Yes. Lets go. I'm going to show him that I stayed alive." Even though it was a small task, he was proud that he hadn't succumbed to his own selfish desire to leave.

Greg was shocked at John's enthusiasm, breathing a sigh of relief. He texted Mycroft to let him know they were coming.

It took twenty minutes to get a wheelchair and clear security. He paused at Sherlock's door, knocking lightly. "He's lucid, John. He looks really bad, but he knows where he is. Please remember that, okay?"

John squirmed in his chair the entire twenty minutes, going still only when the door was open. He let out a small, heartbroken gasp and his hand flew up to cover his mouth. "God, Sherlock..." He reached out and looked back to Greg. "Can I go to him?"

Sherlock looked far too pale in the small splotches of skin that John could see between the bandages and bruises. The tubes upset John and the smell of blood made him gag. "Oh, Sherlock."

Greg nodded, putting the brakes on the chair, using a hand to help John stand. He looked over at Mycroft before moving around to stand next to John in case he fell.

Sherlock was craning his neck, shaking at the sound of John's voice, hand going painfully to his mouth, shaking fingers trying to grasp the tube to pull it himself.

His eyes went wide as he got a glimpse of John, tears sliding down his face, breathing a mess as he battled the vent. He reached for John, blind to his own pain in that moment.

John shied away just a little when Sherlock reached out. Breathe. Breathe. He can't hurt me. "Hey, Sherlock." John gave a small smile and took a step closer. "I missed you. I wanted... I stayed here for you. I'm recovering, see?" He gestured to himself as if to draw attention to the fact that he was standing.

Sherlock snatched his hand back, closing his eyes as he cried. That had been foolishly unexpected. Greg flinched with Sherlock, though he had expected John to shy away.

John apologized and took up at Greg. "I didn't mean to... I just..." He took a deep breath and took another step closer. Sherlock could reach out and touch him then, if he wanted, but John had decided not to focus on himself. "I missed you. I was worried."

Sherlock's eyes flew open at that, staring at John as he lay trembling in pain, tears dropping into his hair. He took in all the details he could, eyes running over John's face, fingers twitching with want into touch him.

Greg's jaw was hanging at John's words, hardly believing what he was hearing.

John shuddered and his hands shook terribly. "I..." He had to press his nails back into his palms once more to keep from panicking. The skin was already rough and worn, and he found a notch for his nails to scrape. "I'm just glad you're alive."

Greg moved forward and caught Sherlock's eye, speaking softly. "We are working on it, Sherlock." To John he spoke calmly as well, "we can go, John."
Perhaps it was Sherlock's condition, the tubes keeping him alive, the bandages, the plaster, the stitches and ventilator, that kept John from fearing him. Thats not to say he wasn't afraid, he was terribly and awfully sick to his stomach with trepidation, but he wasn't afraid that Sherlock would get up and hurt him, which led him to believe that his fear was irrational. "I'm going to stay," he declared and took a few backwards steps into his chair.

Greg looked to Mycroft, a soft smile at his lips. This was unbelievable and something terrible and cold loosened in his chest.

Sherlock pulled his hand back to the tube between his teeth, sliding his eyes over to his brother, knowing he could not just tear it out without damaging his throat. He was on the verge of it anyhow.

Mycroft walked over and gently pulled his hand away. "No, Sherlock. You know what would happen. I'll ask a doctor if you are well enough and when they deem you ready they will take it out."

John pushed his chair forward so he was within a meter of Sherlock. "You shouldn't do that, Sherlock." He warned and what memories he had or medical training made him twitch at the thought.

Sherlock closed his eyes, close to panicking, holding Mycroft's fingers in a bloodless grip. His hand was trembling terribly as he tried to tap out the words, 'I don't understand'.

Greg was bordering tears at John's reaction, it was so much more than he could have hoped for. His heart broke for Sherlock, but there was hope there where Greg had expected none.

"I'll have a doctor take the tube out when they think you are ready." Mycroft held Sherlock's hand and looked gratefully to Greg. "Thank you," he mouthed.

John wanted to touch Sherlock, to try and help him, but he couldn't bring himself to. He was frightened it might hurt, or he might panic. "You tapped for me when I wasn't talking. Is there anything you want to tap for me now?"

Sherlock squeezed Mycroft's hand in a mix of feeling, namely frustration. He rolled his eyes at his brother, that wasn't what he'd been talking about. And then John was speaking and his heart all but stopped. John remembered. John remembered the tapping and knew it had been Sherlock. He tried to shift, biting on the damned tube, sweating with exertion and pain. He let his brother's hand go, trembling fingers going to the bar at the side of the bed, tapping for a moment with just the sheer force of his shaking. He looked at John as he very carefully, extremely slowly tapped out I understand now.

John gave a small smile, which was forced and felt utterly foreign on his face. "I've been here waiting for you. Mycroft helped me. He kept me safe. He's going to keep you safe too." It was terrible and relieving to have to worry about someone else. John had been focusing on keeping himself from panicking for so long that empathy almost didn't matter. With a great deal of mental and intestinal fortitude he reached out his hand and placed it on Sherlock's. The touch felt like hot led or electricity and he was tempted to jerk away, but he kept still.

Sherlock knew that John was forcing this. It was incredibly unnerving to see John at all. He'd shot him. They'd been torturing him there with Sherlock. Again in frustration he painstakingly tapped out, Saw them hurting you...you were there..tried to get them to stop, know what they did. I saw it all.

He was sobbing as he tried to explain, the act of tapping pulling on shredded, punctured muscle. The memories he was trying to convey were horrific as well.
"Mycroft," Greg whispered softly, "he's hurting."

"I wasn't there... I don't think I was. No, I was here. I've been here with Greg." John's arm shook but he kept his hand on Sherlock's. It was starting to hurt less, and he relaxed the small muscles in his hand allowing his palm to rest on the back of Sherlock's hand.

Mycroft nodded and intervened. "John, I think it's time for Sherlock to get some sleep." He took John's wrist and moved his hand away from Sherlock despite his small cry of protest.

Sherlock's reaction was instant and desperate, his pulse shooting through the roof as he shifted his entire body on the bed in an effort to reach John. He shook his head, fighting the vent, desperately trying to speak. His casted leg bent on the mattress and he looked as though he was trying to sit up. Greg jumped, moving around John's chair and reaching out to still Sherlock, hesitating as there was nowhere to touch him that wouldn't hurt. "Easy, easy," he said calmly, "John can stay, easy, Sherlock, relax."

John reached out and touched Sherlock's cheek gently. "Please, Sherlock, please. Don't hurt yourself. The doctors have done a good job but these things aren't meant to be mobile. Please don't move. Please?" His tone was as soft and calm as he could make it, but the final plea had a tone of desperation to it. John was having a difficult time with the stress. He kept his eyes on Sherlock's, unwilling to look at the man's physical damage lest it spark a reaction he couldn't control.

Sherlock went still, closing his eyes at John's touch, breathing in a mix of his own panic and the forced breaths from the machine. Greg shook his head and stuck his head out the door, calling for a doctor. "Oi! He needs to be sedated or this tube pulled out," he called into the hallway, returning to John's side without waiting.

Sherlock was grimacing in agony, exhausted and afraid, trying to breathe. He'd only heard John's voice in connection with John's agony and he could hardly stand the memories. He blinked his eyes open, staring at John's face with fear, anxiety, and lost love.

Chapter End Notes

So far, so good.

Tell me what you think. And, as always, any contributions, suggestions, songs, art, or ideas are wonderful.
Sherlock's panic was starting to effect John. He drew slow breaths and forced a smile, trying to appear calm and in control. He cupped Sherlock's cheek so he looked at him, much as Greg had often done when terror gripped him. "Shh... Sherlock, it's alright. Are you-" he froze for a second and withdrew. "You aren't afraid of me, are you?"

Sherlock's brow knit and he shook his head, breathing fast. He would have whimpered at the loss of touch had he been able to generate the sound.

A physician came in a moment later, sweeping his eyes over the scene. In the next moment he was pushing drugs into the drip lines. "Mr. Holmes," he said calmly, addressing Sherlock, "If you can just look at me a moment?"

And here was where John would be able to know for a fact that Sherlock did not specifically fear John. He turned his face to the physician, looking at the stethoscope around his neck, and flinched hard away. The doctors scared him to his core. He kept his eyes locked to the doctor, reaching out for someone he knew to help him, drawing away as much as he could. The doctor put his hands up and took a step back, pressing a button on the ventilator and speaking to Mycroft. "If he's breathing on his own we can pull the tube, I just need a minute to watch." The machine was no longer forcing air into Sherlock's lungs, and his panicked breaths could be heard wheezing through it.

John saw the way he shrunk away from the doctors and remembered when he had done the same. "Sherlock?" He asked and caught the man's hand when he reached out. "Sherlock, it's alright. This is Mycroft's doctor, not Moriarty's. He isn't just going to patch you up then..." John had to look away and grit his teeth. This scene was all too familiar. John had been bandaged and stitched in an effort to keep him alive for the sole purpose of being tortured again. Over time the healing and the torturing had blurred into one painful mess of fear. "Greg," he warned, eyes squeezed shut. "Greg."

Greg moved over, John's pills in his pocket, tipping three into his hand and offering them as he pushed John's chair right up behind him.

The doctor beside Sherlock nodded, having worked with victims of this nature before. He slipped another needle into Sherlock's line and gave him a decent sedative to calm him down, letting that work for a moment while he watched Sherlock's breathing.

John took the pills and popped them into his mouth as he sank into the chair. It creaked slightly and rolled backwards a bit, but he quickly scooted forward again. John realized that Sherlock was afraid of doctors and recalled his own experiences with the malicious Dr. Askins, which shot suspicion into him. He eyed the current doctor warily, much like a protective dog when out with its owner. "Don't let the doctors hurt him," he whispered to Greg.

Greg shook his head, "Alright," he assured, not wanting to add much else while John was in this mode. Perhaps if he could be protective of Sherlock, it would help.

The doctor finally nodded, looking to Mycroft. "I think we can take him off this, just give him heavy supplemental oxygen via a mask." To Sherlock, he spoke softly, "Sherlock, I'm going to pull that tube, okay? There is a little balloon of air at the base I will deflate with a needless syringe, and then I'm going to ask you to cough and we will pull it."

The whole process took less than five minutes, leaving Sherlock sputtering and gasping behind a
mask, though much more relaxed despite the pain. He could not yet speak, though he croaked for water. The doctor handed Sherlock an actual plastic bottle of it, and Sherlock openly wept as he brought the thing to his mouth and began to guzzle it so fast that they had to take it from him, lest he be sick.

John blanched and had to wheel back just a bit when the water came out. He knew it wasn't for him, but it still triggered a deep seeded fear. This time he didn't call for Greg, as he wasn't yet ready to look for the man when he was frightened of water. "Don't...don't hurt him..." He said lamely when the doctor handed him the bottle. "Please, don't hurt him."

The doctor walked back with the bottle and John frantically pushed himself backwards in his chair. "That isn't for me..." He had to tell himself out loud. "It's not...they won't..." When his chair was pressed against the back wall and the wheels refused to turn, he paused and collected himself, which took several minutes.

Sherlock was at an incline for the tube to be pulled and aid his breathing. He turned his head and stared at John, croaking, his voice totally foreign, nothing of its former self left. "S-Still af-af-fraid of it," he said mostly to himself, the act of speaking incredibly painful. He closed his eyes, trying to catch his breath, shaking hard as he looked at Mycroft. "Y-Y-You were s-posed k-keep him s-safe," he breathed, still confused on the point that John had not actually been there when with him.

"I did keep him safe, Sherlock." Mycroft responded gently. "He was in here with me the entire time. I've got security footage to prove it, if you want. Nobody has touched him."

The man in question was trying to draw steady breaths, but panic was starting to swell in him. This amount of stress was easily past his breaking point. "M'sorry...trying..." He leaned on Greg, who had come over to comfort him.

Sherlock looked over to John, his forehead slick with sweat and his body trembling. "S-Sorry...J-J-n 'm sorry," speaking was incredibly difficult and he was nauseous, bordering delirious. "I- I d-d-d-n't m-"

he grit his teeth, eyes slamming shut as he panted behind the mask, suddenly starting to sob as pain dragged his reality away. He shook his head, suddenly screaming, "Please!" he shouted, the word clear and loud, "N-no m-more!"

John watched in abject horror and his own panic started to pick up in response. "Nobody... They a-aren't h-hurting y-y-you." He dug his fingers into his hair and ground his teeth together. "G-Greg, please, help."

John reached out for Greg with both arms, needing suddenly to be protected from whatever terrible danger was upsetting Sherlock.

Greg pulled John into his arms, one hand over John's exposed ear, pressing the other to his chest.

The physician at Sherlock's side suddenly pushed enough sedative to drop Sherlock down nearly asleep, leaving him mumbling under his breath, limp and panting, his body twitching with phantom pain, tears sliding down his cheeks. Greg held John carefully, making no move to pull away. After a few moments he said softly, letting John listen to his voice through his chest, "Let's go back, yeah? Let's go back."

John shuddered against Greg's chest, the fear of whatever had set Sherlock off greatly outweighing the possibility of being put in water again. He couldn't manage words, so he nodded several times and buried his face in Greg's chest.

Greg wondered how the hell they were going to go about this. John's room was an incredible treec and John was terrified. He couldn't give him more pills. He stayed just as he was, listening to Sherlock breathe rasping, rattling inhalations, the infection still holding strong in his lungs.
"You let me go when you're ready, John," he said softly.

Sherlock forced his head to the side, babbling in French to his brother, "My..." he managed, too heavy to do much else. Mycroft had decided not to intervene again until asked for, and at his affectionate childhood name he bent down next to Sherlock. "I'm here, 'Lock. Right here. Nobody will hurt you."

While Sherlock was latched on to his brother, John clung to his Greg and cried forcefully into his chest. He was bitterly angry with himself for not being able to hold up better, but whatever was hurting Sherlock would surely be after him next. "H-hurt-ting," he managed between sobs.

Greg held John to him, eyes closed, using one hand to shake out another pill. "Nothing is going to hurt you, I'm right here and no one is going to touch you. He's okay, he just got scared, he's okay."

"Palace is b-broken," Sherlock sobbed in his drugged confusion to his brother, clutching at him as best his battered hand would allow, "I can-can't think," he bemoaned as his tongue slid over German and collided with French before finishing off in English. Losing his languages was something he'd only historically done in the throws of an overdose.

"You'll get it back, I promise." Mycroft was on his knees next to the bed and gently ran his fingers over Sherlock's temple. "You'll have it again."

John took the pill. How many had that been today? Enough to kill him? John knew the answer was no, but dared to hope that by some glorious miscalculation he might be in a coma for a few days. "W-Want m-my bed," John sobbed and tightened his arms around Greg's neck. He buried his face in the crook of it and exhaled shakily. Greg eased him back into the chair, pulling off his light jacket and pressing it around John before silently moving them out of the room.

He grabbed a security guard and asked for help getting them back to John's room, wanting this done much faster than before. With an escort, they made it in ten minutes.

Sherlock was trying to lean into his brother, his breathing hitching hard. "He b-broke my bow arm. He- going to break your arm now, be still. I-" his breathing hitched and he cracked a dry sob, "weights, made me h-hold it out, put...put weights...so slow, god so slow. F-Fuc-Fucking terrifying. I tried- tried- wanted me to say I'd t-tortured John. I- I could n-n-ever have done that, r-right? It wasn't m-me, was it?"

Mycroft drew in a sharp breath and shook his head. "No, no, you didn't torture John. You never hurt him, ever. You saved him. You always saved him." Mycroft spoke in a voice that was equal parts soothing and firm.

Sherlock nodded, relieved to have at least that confirmed. "I didn't- I didn't think s-so. I'd- My the whole time he sh-showed me...screen as b-big as the wall...listened to John...watched John," he gripped at his brother, sobbing, "what they did to him, oh g-god what they did to him!"

"I know... I saw him when they brought him back. They did horrible things to both of you, Sherlock. But John is recovering. You saw him today. He walked, held your hand, and spoke with you."

Mycroft held onto his brother and remarked that this was likely more physical contact than either of them had consented to since their childhood. "He's getting better."

Sherlock kept hold of his brother, honestly afraid at the idea of letting go. His breathing was catching from behind the mask as he cried, broken down and exhausted. His back arched as pain licked over his nervous system. "My...help, h-help."

Mycroft had one arm around Sherlock, touching so lightly that he practically hovered above the tortured skin. "Zero, one, one, two, three, five, eight, thirteen..." Mycroft spoke quietly, hoping to numb Sherlock's mind and give him something else to focus on.
Sherlock held to his brother as best he could and slowly dropped down into sleep, simplistic math giving his battered mind something to work with.

Mycroft finished the Fibonacci sequence once he got into the ten thousands and closed his eyes, though he didn't retract his arms from around his poor, battered baby brother.

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Back in his bed, John curled under the covers completely and let out one long scream. His panic had mostly dissolved now, but it left his nerves feeling raw and his mind hectic.

Greg stood beside John's bed, his heart breaking for the man. "John I- I can hold you if- if you want."

John screamed again and shook his head. It felt good to scream, to tell the world that he was upset and angry, after having kept it to himself as best he could. John clutched the sides of his head as images and sensations flashed in his mind. There was a fragmented picture of his hands on the concrete, blood dripping between them from his mouth, the sickeningly sweet smell of older blood rotting, and the sound of a whip cracking. Then there was a bubbling view of the bottom of a barrel and the feeling of someone holding his head down from behind. Another flash showed him his own forearms raised in defense as a wooden rod cracked down on him again and again until it was coated with blood. John jerked and flinched under the covers, so real were the sensations of his memory's fabrication.

John screamed until his voice was hoarse and his entire body felt worn and empty. He crawled up to the head of the bed and curled up with his back against the pillow, like a very small child or wounded animal. "D-Did I-I hurt him?" He finally managed to ask. John was terrified he had only succeeded in making everything worse.

Greg shook his head as soon as the question was out. "Oh, John you did brilliantly. He- you figured out what was wrong fastest, and he was- Jesus the relief of his face at seeing you. John you helped, you helped."

John gave himself a small smile, pleased that he had been something other than trouble. "I can't see why. He never seemed to care for me much before this. I mean, he did, I suppose, but he wasn't even civil. I never thought he would care this much."

Greg shook his head. "You don't remember your actual, real time with him. When you remember that, you'll not have any trouble understanding his reaction, John. You just don't remember. You read the blog, that was just a small bit of it. He loves you, John."

"I don't remember him loving me. I loved him. I remember that much. He called me an idiot a lot." John lay still as though all the fight had been pulled out of him through the force of his last episode. Even breathing seemed exhaustive, and he did so shallowly.

"His way of saying he cares, crazy as that is." He shook his head and got up, walking over and dimming the lights low before turning on John's music and letting it play softly. He sat in the chair at John's bedside and watched him for a little while. "What you did today was incredibly brave. Thank you for doing that."

John's heavy spirits lifted just a little and he smiled. "I'm glad. I tried to help. I wanted to make him better. I'm sorry I panicked. I didn't want to, but the water..." He shuddered visibly and hugged a pillow to his chest. "If calling me an idiot is how he says he cares, he cares about a lot of people. Practically everyone was an idiot to him."

Greg laughed then, shaking his head. "I'm sorry, I've explained poorly," he said with a chuckle. "He honestly thinks most people are idiots. You know he cares when he calls you and idiot and still keeps you around."

John gave a small nod. He had, before the incident, assumed that Sherlock kept him around because
he helped pay the rent and put up with the bodies in the fridge and the violin at four in the morning. To think otherwise was strange. "He didn't just keep me around, though. He dragged me around everywhere with him."

Greg ran a hand over his neck and then suddenly remembered, "Oh! God, how did I forget? I've a video on my phone of you two. Pissed at a party, he's teaching you to dance of all the things. Hilarious. You can watch it, if you'd like."

He'd caught them laughing their arses off, John full of left feet on the dance floor, Sherlock fondly mocking him as he carefully moved John through the crowd, both of them just the other side of tipsy. It had been a good night, and he was suddenly incredibly glad he'd filmed them, even if John didn't watch it.

John liked the idea of seeing a video and reached for the phone. A tiny smile lit his face and he even chuckled a bit. "I see it now." He said with absolute resolution. "I see why everyone absurdly thought we were a couple." John replayed the video and noted how Sherlock smiled almost kindly at him when John was staring down in concentration at his feet, which must have been quite blurry at the time, judging by the way he was squinting.

"He loves you. I've known him many years, John. You turned his life around when you moved in. I've never seen him like he's been with you. It's been remarkable to watch." He made no move to take the phone back, thrilled to see John smile.

In the video John somehow managed to trip over his own foot and pitch forward onto Sherlock, who caught him and helped him regain his footing. John had a serene look on his face and hummed in contentment. "I didn't think him quite capable of loving."

"None of us did, I suspect. Not before you," Greg responded softly, his knee bouncing slightly and his eyes closed, enjoying the rare moment of calm.

"He is rather interesting, I suppose. Brilliant. Conceited. Clever. Beautiful." John scowled at the last one, which didn't seem to fit. "I mean, from an objective point of view. Women fawn over him. It's his personality that drives them away again."

Greg listened to him quietly, humming in a soft, non committal way. He was exhausted, and the lights were low, the room warm, and Sherlock's violin playing softly in the background. John was calm and as steady as he'd been in a long, long time.

"It's been six months." John stated abruptly. "And I can't eat or drink or bathe myself. I can hold conversations though. It's just the things that used to hurt that still hurt. Could I just go without eating or drinking for the next...oh... I don't know, however long it takes Sherlock to recover?" There really was no point in long-term recovery plans.

Greg took in a deep, slow breath. "Aren't you getting sick of that tube in your nose?" He did not open his eyes, nor did he bite to the question. He wasn't in the damn mood to discuss them killing themselves. "Have you even considered the possibility that, given enough time and the right help, you'll be well enough to live a fulfilling life?"

"I don't like the tube," he said with a wrinkling of his nose that have physical embodiment to his words, "But the pain of having to eat wouldn't be worth it. But that hardly matters. Sherlock matters now. You said he loves me. If that's true, then will he want me to love with him again? Because I can't."

Greg shrugged. "Right now, John, Sherlock's trying to breathe without hurting. Where you two end up settling in is a long way off. You also said you'd never be able to talk, never be able to walk, never be able to see him, never be able to do basically all of the things you are doing now. You've eaten a few times, don't write it off. Don't write any of these things off."

"I'm not writing it off. It just took a lot of hurting to get to this point and I don't exactly want to imagine how much more there will be before I'm ready to live normally." John slouched and seemed to curl in on himself even more than before. "Do you think Sherlock will be able to live on his own?
He wasn't afraid of water or any of us. Except the doctors, but they're bad anyway."
Greg had yet to open his eyes, his head back to the wall, face angled up, fingers laced over his belly
with his ankles crossed in front of him. He inhaled deeply and hummed. "His brother will care for
him, though he'll likely go back to his drugs and his loneliness." It was perhaps a bit too honest, but it
was the truth, and Greg was at the very end of his rope.
"Drugs? I don't want him to do drugs." John scowled suddenly and crossed his arms. "I'll have to tell
him not to, then. He won't be lonely. He'll have you and Mycroft. Molly will still love him, same
with Mrs. Hudson. He won't be alone if he chooses not to be."
"Never knew you to lie to yourself, John," Greg said without moving, his voice quiet and steady.
"You don't believe a word of what you've just said."
"Fine. Alright, fine. He'll go to hell without me there. But he'll bring it on himself. He has other
friends. You're his friend and Mycroft clearly loves him if Sherlock would stop being such an ass
about it all the time. It's his fault if he falls apart. I've got no obligation to stay just so he doesn't
destroy himself. I've got enough to deal with."
John was bitter and angry. He had every right to be selfish after what had happened to him, and he
desperately tried to tell himself that Sherlock was not his responsibility.

Greg shifted slightly in his chair, still not opening his eyes. Sherlock's music slid around them as an
ironic undercurrent. "That's true, you don't. He'll likely take the same route as you anyhow. He was
on a campaign to passively kill himself years before he fell in love with John Watson." He shrugged,
their reality so fucking heavy he just wanted to lay on the floor. "When Mycroft gets back to his
work, I'm sure he'll pay someone handsomely to sit with Sherlock as I do you."
John could hardly imagine Sherlock 'falling in love', particularly with someone like himself. "Fell in
love? He would have abhorred the phrase. And you can't just pay someone to sit with him." John
catched himself protesting the idea. "Unless it was a particle physicist or chemistry major he'd find
them terribly dull. And it wouldn't be the same. You can't just pay someone to love him."

"He would mock me endlessly for the phrasing. I'm sure," Greg responded, getting himself more
comfortable. The warmth and low lighting of the room was making him heavy, an almost drugged
sensation washing over him. He hummed, "No, can't pay someone to love him. Unfortunately, the
people who he counted among that small pool are in here. Since we are leaving, that makes
Mycroft's options very limited indeed."
John fidgeted. The idea of leaving Sherlock behind to his suffering wasn't very pleasing to him, but
staying in the midst of his own was even more repulsive. "How long do I have to stay before he won't be depressed if I leave? How long would it be before he is emotionally able to exist on his
own?" Sherlock had seemed so rock solid before, but now John was starting to see how frail he
really was.
Greg exhaled slowly. "Well, he's what? Thirty-five? I have known him since he was twenty-two and
I've yet to see him emotionally able to exist on his own. Now that he's been through this?" He
shrugged sadly. "Molly Hooper, bless her, could not keep up with Sherlock exclusively due to her
infatuation with him. Mrs. Hudson, dear woman, will house him and feed him, but can you imagine
her handling him in a strop? Can you imagine her wrestling a needle from him if he sinks low? He's
as alone as you and I, only more so due to his inability to be social. We love him despite that. For
me, that took years and years to happen."

"I always thought he was so above it all." The memoirs were starting to loosen a bit, and John could
at the very least remember his own thoughts of Sherlock, if not the actual time they spent together.
"He never seemed dependent on anyone, let alone me. If I stayed, you make it sound like I'll need to
be with him forever, or at least until he finds someone else. I can't do it that long. I can't be practically
married to the man just to keep him from killing himself. Not when I want the same."
"I've not once told you to do that, John. I've not once said that it is your responsibility, or that it's
what you should do. This is your life. I've no right to say such things." The pressure was back behind his eyes once again, sleep and weariness tugging him down. He kept his breathing still and even, trying to stay in the moment. "That man saw what was done to you, and willingly walked into the same situation with his arms wide open, no dissolution as to what would happen, in an effort to keep you safe. He loves you. Take that as you will."

The thought hadn't occurred to John before that Sherlock had actually gone willingly to the torture to save him. "I thought he had a plan..." He muttered and scowled at the wall. "He... Oh, God, he did it willingly? He knew what would..." John had gone pale and his eyes were round. "I don't deserve to just leave him. But I can't stay. I can't... I can't do this. But I can't leave him. Not if he...did that."
"Can you stay today?" Greg asked softly, finally opening his eyes and looking at John, surprised that had reached him. "Can you make it through today? Because today is what matters. You don't plan for next week, you just focus on today. That's all. Just today."

John groaned and covered his head with a pillow. He couldn't imagine walking willingly into torture. To have the knowledge that Sherlock had done so on the chance that it might help John escape made John's choice to leave or to stay very difficult. "Then you'll say that tomorrow, and the next day, and then after that. Do you know what one day is like, Greg? Do you have any idea how terrifying everything is?"

Greg closed his eyes again, breathing deeply. That's what he could do. Breathe deeply. Take the small pills Paul had given him, breathe, and try. His voice was very calm and very small when he spoke again. "I've not left your side in four months, John. I cannot feel what you feel, but I've watched you every minute of those days. Even when you've refused to see me, I've just been opposite your door. I have made you a promise that six months ago I'd never imagine making, one that terrifies me beyond measure, and one that I will keep if necessary. I cannot feel your fear, but I know how exhausting, how difficult your days are."

John seemed satisfied and have a small nod. "How long are you willing to stay with me?" He inquired hesitantly. John was terribly worried that one day Greg might leave, just decide he'd had enough, that John was hopeless and give up without letting John go first. "Because I need you. I can't do any of this without you. But you're a grown man, and you need a life, I suppose. I shouldn't be in your way like I am but I don't think I'll ever function without you there."

Greg opened his eyes and put his hands up. "John, you are my life. That makes you uncomfortable to hear and me a bit to say but...the days you wouldn't see me...there have never been worse days, and my family left me if that tells you anything. As it stands, I cannot imagine leaving you when you need me."

John processed the information. Greg really did love him, then. The knowledge made fearing him worse, as it only made the gravity of what he had lost more apparent. John reached out both arms to Greg and opened and closed his hands, indicating that he wanted him closer. The stress of the day had been incredibly difficult to bear, but John thought he could control the panic just a little longer. Greg stared at him for a moment in shock before moving up out of his chair, offering John his hands, cautious in his approach and allowing John to direct how close, how fast, and how long he wanted him. "I know this all hurts, I wish I could take the pain away from you. I'm right here with you while this all happens, John. No matter what, you're not alone, okay?"

John took both of Greg's hands and winced. With Moriarty, the faster he accepted the association of one trigger with the sensation of pain the faster he was released from it. Thus, over time, his mind became more accepting of learning new associations, both consciously and subconsciously. "I don't want to fear you, Greg. I need you more than I need to not be afraid of Sherlock. Could you sit with me?"

Greg toed off his shoes and tapped John's hip, waiting for him to budge over. When he had, Greg
climbed up and sat himself next to John, reclining back on the elevated head of the bed, one arm open if John wanted to lean against him, but not in a way that would make John feel pushed. "I am sorry I gave you reason to fear me, John. Never, ever, ever again, I swear, god I swear."

"I'm sorry I'm so easy to train." John hung his head in shame. He couldn't help his conditioning, of course, which had trained him to accept things or be beaten half to death, but he could lament it. Even the fact that he was still using the word 'train', as if he were still some animal or slave, gave testament to how far he had to go.

Greg resisted the urge to pull John to him. He shook his head and spoke softly. "I will tell you again and again, John, I think you are phenomenally strong. I honest to god doubt I would have retained any of myself were I the one who'd been subject to that sort of treatment. I know you think John Watson is dead, and that you stand in his shoes, but that's not the case. It's not. You may be different when all this is over, but that happens in any life event, we change. Your core though? That's still the same. You are still the same man, and I am still so amazed."

"I'm not strong. I snapped. I did everything he asked, in the end. I'd have done anything. I'd have killed Sherlock, or you, even Mrs. Hudson..." The thought made him sick and he turned to Greg, curling up under his arm. "I wasn't strong. Moriarty just didn't want me completely broken."

Greg closed his eyes and wrapped John up, having to take a moment as his eyes began to sting and his throat closed. He'd thought this gone forever, honestly, deeply thought he'd lost this. When he spoke again, his voice was gruff with the weight of feeling. "Anyone would have, John. Anyone. What you endured...I don't have words. I don't. And the progress you've made...I am just floored. I know you don't see it as I do, and that's alright. I can see for both of us at the moment."

John was shuddering and momentarily considered pulling away. "Greg..." he said tensely and ground his teeth together. "You won't use the water on me, right? Sorry... I just need to hear it." He wasn't crying, or screaming, or struggling, just quietly trying to regain his comfort.

"I won't use the water, John," he assured calmly, heart breaking, dropping the hand that moved to hold John to him away so that he wouldn't feel trapped. "I won't use the water. I won't do anything that hurts, and if I accidentally do something that hurts, I'll stop the moment you ask me to."

John relaxed a bit and slowly wrapped his arms around Greg's neck. "I just needed to hear it. I'm sorry. It helps with the hurting." John dropped his head into the crook of Greg's neck and closed his eyes. After a moment he shifted and crawled into Greg's lap, feeling braver than he had in weeks to face a fear. He began to cry then, not out of fear or pain, but out of relief. He had forgotten how good it felt to be held.

Chapter End Notes

This is what Captain John Watson has been reduced to.

This is what Consulting Detective Sherlock Holmes has been reduced to.

This is what happens when they are reunited. They are pulled apart after having caused each other more damage than good.

ALSO, SOMEONE SAID ART. I WANT IT. GRABBY HANDS.
More Things Move Than Blood In The Heart

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Greg closed his eyes, tipping his forehead to John's shoulder, breathing him in deep as his throat closed. He waited a few minutes before very gently ghosting the fingertips of one hand over John's back. "I've got you, John. I've got you." The relief washing over him was like balm on a burn. He'd known the loss of this hurt, had hurt horrifically, but not until the relief came did he realize how intense it had been.

John nuzzled his nose down on the junction of Greg's shoulder and neck, supremely glad that he hadn't been hurt yet. Greg smelled good to John, as the kind of soap he used had come to mean that he was being held and in a safe place. "You've got me," he said quietly in response, though his days or being forced to repeat things by torture were over. "Greg's got me..."

Over the next few minutes, Greg slowly increased the pressure of his hand at John's back, wanting to hold him close and strictly restraining himself. He did not want John feeling trapped in any way. "I-" he closed his eyes and caught his breath, nearly overwhelmed, "god, I thought I'd lost you." It was simplistic, and pathetic, and oh so true that his lashes were clumping together and his breathing tight.

"No water, no water..." John muttered to himself, but didn't draw away. "Greg said there's no water today." He sank deeper into Greg's arms and shook lightly, but the comfort was easily worth the added stress. "Could you... Could you tell me a story?" He asked and turned his face away from Greg's neck to look up at him.

Greg looked at John and hummed as he thought of something to tell. He decided to avoid Sherlock, or John, and speak of one of his more hilarious cases he'd taken on as a fresh detective still wet behind the ears. He spoke for nearly half an hour, explaining a case that involved the Royal Navy and a traveling Gypsy circus, several watermelon, and an octopus. There were several times he made himself laugh, shaking his head at the long dormant memories.

John found himself able to lose himself in the story. He focused on the words, not the feeling of the water drumming against his skin. At one point, towards the end, John laughed. He chuckled softly and his shoulders shook with something other than wrecked sobs for the first time in months. "You're good, Greg. You're good to me."

Highly encouraged, nearly euphoric, Greg fished in his mind for something else to make John laugh. He sung clear of anything involving John or Sherlock, wanting to allow John's mind to wander. He began to tell him the plots of the latest comedy flicks that had come to the screen, the stories foolish and shallow, just what he was going for. He spoke until his throat hurt, and then he pushed on, speaking to John about nothing at all for nearly an hour and a half.

John giggled into Greg's shoulder once more and gave the man a squeeze. "I could do this, you know. I could do this. I wouldn't leave this." He had both arms around Greg's neck and frequently moved from his shoulder to laugh, ask questions, or watch Greg's face as he spoke. Greg was doing it damnedest not to break. He could hardly believe what John was saying, his guts slowly relaxing slightly for the first time in months. "This is what we used to do, this is what we will do." He tipped his face to the crown of John's head, breathing deeply, his eyes closing as he took it in.

John could feel himself starting to fall asleep despite wanting to savor the beautiful feeling of peace he had obtained. "Could you tell me one more? Just one? I'm tired. I think I'll fall asleep." With the lightest heart he had carried in months, John crossed his arms over his chest and nuzzled his nose on Greg's chest, making it clear that he intended to sleep just there.
Greg hummed and slipped into an innocuous story from when he was a boy. It was his first time camping. He told John about the constellations he'd marked in his journal, and the fish he'd caught. He told him about the marshmallows and the fire, the sounds around the tent, the feel of cold on his face while wrapped in the warmth of a sleeping bag. All the while his fingers trailed along John's back, soft and calm, a steady rhythm with the intent to help him rest.

John drifted off wrapped in Greg's arms. Such a small thing, physical contact, had become his anchor from which he based his growth. Greg's stories and his warmth soothed John's torn, hectic mind and allowed him to sleep without the use of any of this usual heavy sedatives. He was quiet and small, but peaceful and content for the first time in months.

Greg slowly went quiet, listening to John breathe, waiting for him to fall down into proper sleep before he allowed himself a few solid minutes to openly cry. He did not shift John, and he was very careful to keep his chest as still as he could, blinking up at the ceiling when he was not sure he'd be able to keep himself silent. He was down asleep with John not ten minutes later, tears drying on his face, lighter than he'd been in months.

John awoke slowly, peacefully, his face resting on Greg's chest and one arm thrown in the area of his shoulder. He smiled then, because Greg was good, Greg would not hurt him as others had done, and Greg would keep him safe from Moriarty and Moran. He stretched slightly and pulled the covers up from where they had slipped.

Greg came awake instantly at John's movements, holding his breath, waiting for crying or screaming. "It's okay," he breathed, unable to see John's face. He pulled his hand away from John's back slowly, repeating the words, "it's just me, I won't hurt you."

John looked up at Greg calmly. "It's alright, Greg. I'm not hurting right now. Well, not much. No more than usual. I feel alright." The panic had been suppressed just a bit and the lack of fuel seemed to allow it to die down like a bonfire finally being smothered. Greg drew in a slow, deep breath, closing his eyes in blissful relief. "Did you rest well? It's been hours. I don't know about you, but I certainly needed it."

John nodded and his light stubble brushed against Greg's shirt. He was quite certain they shaved him every few days while he was out cold, as the scratchy hair seemed to go in cycles. "I slept the whole time."

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"JOHN NO, JOHN!" Sherlock tore out of his sedation to the blare of his heart monitors, jerking hard on the bed, tears on his face as he breathed wildly into his mask. He tried to curl in on himself, screaming at the top of his lungs, his body shaking terribly as he lost himself. "Mycroft," he breathed, voice like a child, starting to sob as pain shredded across his body, dragging his higher functions right down with it. He believed himself still in Moran's care, all memory of the day prior yet to establish itself in his groggy, pain-soaked mind.

Mycroft rushed to his side. He had been sitting still, watching his brother, his mind mapping out in great detail exactly what would be needed for him to recover. He would need John. Greg seemed insistent that John have the option of death, and Mycroft, trusting the man but always verifying, had locked down everything that could possibly be used to do such. He would need to physically recover, as his own pain derived from moving and simply being was pulling him down into panic attacks.

These things would take time to be resolved, however, and Mycroft was willing to exercise patience.
"I'm here, Sherlock. I'm here."
"Make him stop, g-god make...make him st-stop," Sherlock had not much registered his brother, still half asleep, in need of more painkillers and some sort of mental grounding. His body was trembling, the quivering muscles pulling at sutures and damage, licking pain along his nervous system and making him shake in a horrible feedback loop. "H-he has John," his voice broke over John's name and he began to scream again.
"SHERLOCK!" Mycroft shouted and put his hands on either side of his brother's head. "Sherlock, its alright! You are with me! You're with My, its alright now! I have John. Me, Mycroft. Mycroft has John, and Mycroft has Sherlock. I'm going to keep you safe." He waved a doctor in from outside the door.
Sherlock startled hard at his name, wide, panicked eyes snapping to his brother. He stared at his brother for two full seconds before reaching up with his left hand, curling his fingers in Mycroft's shirt as his breathing flailed wildly. "My," he whispered, eyes jumping back and forth between his brother's, "We- thi-this," it took a moment to realize that this was reality, no hallucination conjured by his battered mind. "L...oh, god," he groaned, holding on to his brother, "My...h-hurts."
"Yes, I know. I know it hurts. You're being very brave, Sherlock." He motioned for one of the personal doctors to come in and push more painkillers into his port. "Do you remember yesterday?" He asked, remembering Sherlock's frantic claim that someone, presumably Moran, had John. "Do you remember seeing John? He looked healthy, didn't he? He spoke with you, and held your hand."
Sherlock gripped at his brother, nodding rapidly. "H-He...I scared him...he...he's here. He's not...I didn't...I shot s-someone, My, I shot someone. I thought it was John, I w-was trying to save him." The heat of pain relief was instant as the physician, whom Sherlock had not seen, slid the needle into his port. He whimpered at the euphoric feeling of it. They were giving him dilaudid, he could tell from the deep-seated nature of his reprieve. Tears slid down his face as he kept Mycroft clutched close to him. "Th-Thank...oh g-god thank you."
"We'll keep you as free of pain as we can. I understand that you shot someone. You were made to believe it was John, but I am telling you now that no matter what you thought during that time, John has been safe with me for the duration." Mycroft's voice was extremely gentle in his approach to the subject but also wanted there to be no room for question. "John is safe and well, as you soon will be."
Sherlock held tight to his brother, his eyes slowly shifting to the physician before snapping back to Mycroft. "T-They cannot be trusted," he slurred in French, twitching on the bed, the pain still there though not as important. "My...d-don't leave me. Please. Br-brother don't leave me here. Don't leave me here. I'm..." he closed his eyes, still capable of feeling shame, "I am af-afraid. Don't g-go." He wasn't making much sense, his awareness of being with his brother the only constant, fading in and out of the room with John screaming on the screen and his skin tearing.
"I will not leave you. This is my doctor. I trust him." Indeed, each of the doctors and staff in this facility had more than rigorous background checks and interviews in addition to being tailed for weeks before they were even allowed to know where the building was. "But I will stay with you anyway. I'll not leave you."
Sherlock clung to Mycroft as though in danger of drowning, sleep already pulling up at him. He suddenly jerked, eyes snapping open, focusing on Mycroft's face with wide eyes. "J-John isn't al-alone is he? He can't...can't be alone. He can't be alone. Wh-where...who has John?"
Panic twisted around Sherlock's gut, squeezing in on his heart. "My t-they are h-hurting him!"
"He isn't alone. Greg has him. No need to worry. Greg is keeping him safe. You remember Greg. Greg Lestrade?" Mycroft held onto Sherlock and gently stroked his hair. It amazed him that even in this much physical pain his thoughts still leaned towards John's safety.
Sherlock closed his eyes. "L-strde," he slurred, nodding slowly. "Was here b-fore." His brow knit, pulling his bruised face into a mask of confusion. "G-Give me a day. Wh-what day is it? I need...t-time, lost the time." He realized with a jolt that he had no concept of how long he'd been gone, how
long he'd been back, or even how long it had been since John and Lestrade- Greg, had left the room.

"I'm...t-this is...wh-where are we?"

Mycroft slowly explained that it had been just over two months, he'd been back for nearly a day, and requested that a clock be brought in. "It's been a long time, Sherlock. I expect you know that. We're in a safe house, of sorts. Nobody knows we're here."

Sherlock stared at his brother in abject horror. It was both much, much longer than he'd thought, and far too little time in the same measure. Panic began to bubble up in his chest, overwhelmed with the implications of the duration of time. "Am I...am...will I- my l-legs...my legs, br-brother will they-" his breathing was chaotic as he closed his eyes, racing back through the damage he knew he had. The cataloged list stopped...days, perhaps weeks ago. He grit his teeth as breathing became more difficult in the wake of panic.

"Your legs will heal," Mycroft asserted though he wasn't sure if they would. "I've got the best surgeons on the continent working on you. You'll walk again, I promise." He saw the panic in his brother and spoke again softly. "Hey, Sherlock, deep breaths, alright? One part inhale, two parts exhale. Slowly."

Sherlock swallowed several times, bordering on violently sickness up. His mind was trapped in a loop, alternating between the moment he'd felt his Achilles snap up his leg, followed by the ruthless, brutal breathing with the fucking crow bar, to the sensation of his kneecap severing from the knee. "T-ook days, the p-patella, d-days with a p-pen knife, god, m-my ankle he-" his face washed green and his stomach heaved as he let go of his brother, painfully bending his arm and ripping the mask off his face, panting for air, "C-can't breathe."

"I'm going to have you sedated," Mycroft said almost sadly. He went into the hallway and called in one of the doctors. "The pain will be less sharp in a few days. Would you like me to keep you under until then? Nothing bad will happen to you. I'll be with you and Greg will be with John. You'll be safe. You could sleep some of this off."

Sherlock was shaking his head, eyes locked to the physician that came in behind Mycroft. "W-wait, wait, pl-please I...J-John I-" he grit his teeth, grimacing in panic, the presence of the physician scaring him terribly, "Pl-please w-wait, I-I'll calm d-down." Tears slid down the sides of his battered face, though he kept his eyes to Mycroft, chest flailing painfully.

"Sherlock, you're in pain. Wouldn't it be better to be asleep?" He held up his hand to the doctor nonetheless and bid him pause. "If John came in again to say goodnight, would you feel better then? Then would you sleep?" Mycroft noticed that the doctor was frightening him and asked him to step away for a moment.

"H-he's here?" Sherlock asked in confusion, reality sliding away from him, forcing him to exert a great deal of energy to his timeline. He relaxed when the physician stepped out, closing his eyes, panting harshly. "I- he's not...is there w-water? I need to s-sit up," he was forcing himself not to beg, an oil-slick grip on his functional mind. His awareness was ebbing like the tide, washing away swiftly, his anchors few and far between. He refused to take his eyes off his brother. Already he could hear John screaming, feel the burn of a blade in his skin.

Mycroft nodded and spoke quietly. "Yes, Sherlock. He's here. John is here, and John is safe. You don't need to sit up. Listen to me. I'll bring you water but you can't sit up. Your back has stitches that might tear. Could you be still?" He felt supremely guilty for what had happened to Sherlock. His men should have tracked better. He should have found him faster. Each degree Sherlock's mind had slipped represented a day Mycroft could have spared him from were he just smarter.

Sherlock nodded, tears endlessly leaking down his cheeks that he had no awareness of. He was greedy for water, so long deprived, his tongue too large and his cheeks seemingly stuffed with
cotton. "I- I w-want to see John," he whispered, still breathing too fast and too shallow, though the act of inhalation was no longer so painful with such intense pain medication in his veins. "He...they were h-hurting him s-so terribly. I sh-should have- he w-wanted me to k-kill him when I f-first..." his voice cracked as a sob wrenched its way out of his chest, "I couldn't do it, I- n-not J-John, n-not John...but th-then I could ma-ke it stop a-and I j-just...didn't e-even say anything to h-him. F-Felt the gun and f-fired. Oh, god...he's...it w-wasn't him?"

"No, Sherlock, it wasn't John. I can bring him to you, if you want. But you have to try and stay calm. Could you do that while he is here? Could you stay calm?" It was a terrible amount to ask, but if Sherlock was calm it wouldn't set John off, and they might get somewhere today.

Sherlock nodded, asking again for water. "I will try."

I need him to come in again. Sherlock's forgotten yesterday.

Mycroft handed Sherlock a small paper cup of water after texting Greg. "Slowly, Sherlock."

Sherlock went at the water in a panic, his mind instantly telling him he had only seconds to get down what he could. It ran down the side of his face as he tried to drink from his flat position, making him sputter and choke. He reached back for it, moving even his badly damaged right arm in an effort to keep it, sure he'd never be allowed another drink. It took a few moments, as the water eased the pain in his mouth and the raw nature of his throat, for him to remember himself. "I- s-sorry, My, I'm sorry," he whispered, shaking against the bed.

Mycroft slowly raised the head of Sherlock's bed, moving at a snail's pace to allow him time to adjust. "Slowly, Sherlock. I will give you water anytime you want." He re-filled the little cup from a water bottle and handed it back to Sherlock. "We will give you as much water as you want."

Sherlock's hand trembled as he held the cup, bringing it slower to his lips this time, forcing himself to sip and not guzzle. He handed the cup back after he'd emptied it, though he was sure he'd never stop being thirsty. "Please," he whispered, reaching for Mycroft's hand, needing something physical to keep him present, "I kn-know we don't do this...I can't...my m-mind is not..." he shook his head, sniffing through his wrecked nose as tears carried on leaking down his cheeks. "I s-scared him. I remember I- he p-pulled away f-from me," his brow knit and he dragged in a deep, anguished breath. "I've l-lost him anyhow, h-haven't I?"

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Greg read the text and shifted, peering at John. "Sherlock is asking for you, seems he doesn't remember yesterday. Are you up for it? Sounds like he might be scared."

John held on to Greg and gave a small nod. "If you think I can help I will. If he forgot, then that's bad. He could be broken. Maybe if I sit with him for as long as I can he'll remember." He was hesitant to get up, as Greg was quite comfortable and he knew that only stress awaited him, but this was his job. This was so clearly what he was supposed to do that he got up out of the warm comfort of his bed and stretched his stiff, sore arms out in front of him.

Greg moved John to his chair and gathered up John's favored blanket, which he wrapped around his shoulders. "He's on a lot of medication, John, and he's only just gotten back. It's normal for people who have been sedated to forget. I wouldn't read too much into this yet. We leave when you want to, okay? Mycroft is with him, he will be alright if we have to leave.

John pulled his blanket tight about his shoulders. "If I start to hurt... panic... could you take me into
the hallway for a moment? Just for a bit? I'll be alright after a moment, if you've got the pills for me.” Greg tapped his pocket where the pills were. “I've got your meds, and we can take a break whenever you need one. I'll move you out of the room if he asks for a drink, it will be alright.” He helped adjust the blanket on John's shoulders and began the process of getting to Sherlock's room.

John squirmed in his chair on the way to the room and gave hesitant smiles to the guards they passed. "Should I just do what I did last time?" He asked Greg as they neared the door, "Just hold his hand and tell him that he's okay? Like what you do? Like I'm you?" John did not believe he was strong enough to be someone's Greg, and was nervous about messing it up.

Greg put a hand on John's shoulder and crouched down. He tipped two of John's pills into his hand and gave them over. "Let's just try with some medication on board, alright? You just do what you want to, alright? You know, sadly, a good deal of what he's feeling. You will be brilliant. I think he just needs to see that you are here."

John took the pills and swallowed them quickly. "I want to be helpful. If I'm doing it wrong you've got to tell me." He was more than a little worried about being Greg to Sherlock, as he hadn't been able to keep his composure last time.

Greg nodded, touching the back of John's hand in a reassuring gesture. "I will, John, I will." That was likely not going to happen. John caught Sherlock's fear of the doctors faster than he or Mycroft, he seemed to understand what was going on in Sherlock's head much quicker than them. The shared experience, while indescribably horrific, had positioned John as the prime candidate for helping Sherlock. He stood up then and walked to the back of John's chair, moving them towards Sherlock's room.

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Mycroft handed Sherlock the plastic bottle, which was only half full at this point. "Slowly, that's good. I'll always have more water for you, Sherlock, but when John comes I'll have to put it away. He is afraid of water." Sherlock set the bottle in Mycroft's hands, shaking his head and trying to get hold of Mycroft's fingers. "I know y-you don't l-like this," he breathed, motioning to their joined hands, "I n-need...helps k-keep me here."

Mycroft moved Sherlock's hand to the bed and held it from there, allowing his arm to rest. "I see no reason why I should object. I take it as a good sign, that you remember me and that you aren't afraid of me." He gave a small nod. All childhood quarrels had been forgotten now, and if the price hadn't been so devastating, he might have been pleased.

John entered then with a soft knock. Greg held back, just behind John with the chair. John would only need to take two steps back and there it would be, wheels locked in place in case John dropped down.

Sherlock was staring at his brother, trying to breathe slowly from behind the mask, using every bit of his strength to battle panic. He was so focused that he did not hear Greg and John come in, or acknowledge the man when he spoke.

Mycroft shifted the bottle of water behind him as John and Greg entered, which the man fortunately did not notice. John looked around the room as was his habit before his eyes settled on Sherlock. "Hey," he called on his way over, feeling much braver about approaching him this time. Perhaps it was the medication. John came to Sherlock's side and gave him the best attempt at a smile he had managed all week.
Sherlock shifted his eyes to John, clutching at Mycroft. His chest buckled on him and his lower lip failed to hold steady as he let his eyes wander over John. "I'm s-sorry," he breathed, slow, heavy tears trailing down his face, "I'm so sorry."

John pushed himself up out of his wheelchair and shuffled over to Sherlock's bed. He wanted to prove to the man that he could walk, that he was somewhat under his own control and not someone to worry about. "It's alright, Sherlock. I'm here. You've nothing to be sorry for."

"D-Don't be an idiot," Sherlock breathed, transfixed by the sight of John, "a-all this...because you know m-me...I n-never-" he closed his eyes as his heart kicked up enough to set the monitors chirping warnings. He flexed his fingers around Mycroft's to keep from reaching out to John, though he wanted so desperately to touch him. All those months he'd spent wasting away, unable to physically see John, followed by the events of the last two months, tore down his barriers where John was concerned. "L-Lestrade passible c-company?"

John looked back at Greg and an almost peaceful look came over him. "Yeah, Greg's been nice to me. He's been lovely. He's the nicest thing ever to me." After a moment his attention was pulled back to Sherlock and he stepped closer so his hip was touching the edge of the bed. "I missed you." It wasn't exactly true. He had been worried about him, but hadn't craved his company as he used to. "I was worried."

Sherlock's face pinched slightly and he tried to give John a smile, his breathing kicked up as a new and dormant sort of pain licked across his chest. "A-Always been a t-errible liar, John," he said with agonized fondness, his chest hitching up in a sob, suddenly closing his eyes and trying to breathe.

Greg exhaled slowly, his grip bloodless on the handles of the empty wheelchair.

"I was worried, though, and Greg has been fantastic. He's good to me. That's how I'm going to be good to you. Just like Greg." He reached out to touch Sherlock's face, but, seeing the bruises, decided not and pulled his hand away. "Please, please don't cry. I didn't mean... Greg," John turned back, "what did I do?"

Greg looked at Mycroft, totally lost on how to take this one. How was he to explain the months that Sherlock hardly slept or ate, or the desperate attempts to save John while in hospital, disguised as someone else, or the knowledge he sadly still had that he'd lost John as he'd known him?

Sherlock, however, took the helm. He forced his eyes open and shook his head, still actively crying though it was clear he was trying to stop. "N-Nothing, you've d-done nothing wr-wrong. I-" he turned his eyes to Greg for a moment. "Th-thank y-you," he managed. It didn't take much to see that John loved Greg, and that, in whatever way it was, Greg loved John as well. He closed his eyes again, pulling at his brother's hand in a tangled mess of heartbreak and relief.

John's shoulders sagged in relief and he hadn't realized he was holding tension. Very gently, to be careful of the bruising, John reached out and just barely brushed his fingers across Sherlock's cheek. He could already tell that the torture had been more physical and less about mentally ruining him. Though there was something about him that definitely had not been there before. To John, it looked like guilt. The crushing, devastating kind that leaves you breathless and wishing the earth would swallow you up.

"If I ever scare you, just tell me and I'll leave, alright?"

Sherlock leaned into John's touch as much as he could, gripping Mycroft so hard it was making his shoulder ache. "I- okay," he breathed, nodding to John, staring at him. He suddenly looked to his brother. "What's the d-day...the t-time?" He had to get his sense of time back before he went mad. Even as he was addressing his brother, he returned his focus to John, transfixed with the sight of him. John seemed to note the look on Sherlock's face and kept his eyes, even when a bit of panic rose in
him. *He won't hurt me. He won't hurt me.* John had to close his eyes for a moment and focus, and it was several seconds before he opened them again. Even though he knew he was in no real danger, John reached one hand backwards to Greg for support.

Sherlock watched the moment as though it lasted hours, taking in every change in John's expression, openly whimpering his distress when John reached for Greg. He turned his face away, gritting his teeth as his chest hitched and tried to drag a leg up in an effort to curl in on himself as he so often had done on the sofa at Baker Street. "Y-You're sc-scared of me," he managed, his voice breaking over the word. He nodded to himself as his mind threw up all the imagery of John being brutally tortured under the guise of Sherlock's hand in it. "I kn-know what happened, wh-what they did. I- g-god I'm sorry." He was trying to be silent and failing spectacularly as his chest caught again on a terrible sob, grief flooding over the pain.

John's face fell and he shook his head. "I know... but, I'm not scared of you, just of... just scared." Sherlock definitely triggered it, and John found himself wanting to be further away, but this was for Sherlock, not him. "And if you know what...what they did... all the beating and...and the..." John put one hand over his mouth and winced. "Then... you should know that its not your fault... and you shouldn't be mad that I'm scared. Or sad. I'm trying, I-" He took a step back, back to Greg, his rock, his protection, though his eyes kept on Sherlock.

Sherlock was trying to speak as Greg wrapped an arm around John, pulling him back to his chest and whispering softly by his ear. "He's not mad at you, John. Look at him, there's no anger there. He's just...he's just sad. Maybe we should go."

Sherlock pulled in a few swift breaths, shallow and ineffective, "I- y-you don't have to do th-this for me, John. I- if I- y-you don't have to come b-back." Oh, and it was that forgotten hell he'd left behind when they'd taken him. He'd glorified the days before his torture, yearning for them. He'd forgotten the pain of it, so unbearable all on its own. Now it was twisted with his broken body and he could not bear it. His arm was trembling hard and he was clearly looking at John as though this was the last he'd ever see of him again, drinking his fill to soothe the images of John bleeding and destroyed on the table.

John momentarily turned back to Greg. He wrapped his arms around the man's neck and took a deep breath of the soft smelling soap he used. Once he felt himself ready, he faced Sherlock, though he still had one hand in Greg's. "I'm not going to leave you, Sherlock. I'm not. I-I don't. That would be mean. I can't just toss you to the side like that. You were hurt too." He stepped forward to Sherlock's bed again, taking Greg with him for support. "I want to come back. I could have said no. I can always say no now." He gave Greg's hand a light squeeze at that. "And I came to see you anyway."

Sherlock stared at the pair of them, his eyes sliding to their joined hands, trailing over Greg before looking back at John. "H-He loves you," Sherlock whispered as stars cracked along his vision and he wished he'd just been allowed to die. The future suddenly presented itself to him, days in some god-forsaken wheelchair looking forward to visits from John and Lestrade for Sunday fucking tea. He was done, it was over. His body would never keep up to the demands of The Work, and the only person who'd ever cared willingly for him was lost.

John looked back to Lestrade as if the statement had been incredibly dim witted. "Of course he does." John stated and his eyebrows drew together. "He's Greg," John argued, as if the very word gave a testament to everything the man was, or rather, what he signified in John's mind. "Why do you say it so sadly?" He gave Greg a questioning look. "Its a good thing."

Sherlock let go of Mycroft long enough to drag the mask off his face, running his hand over the slick tears and sniffing as he nodded. "It is...it is a g-good thing," he agreed honestly. What had he expected? He let his hand drop back to the bedding, grimacing at the pain of the careless movement. "H-Happy for you." The words were barbs that tore his throat, though he was honestly glad that John had anything other than fear and pain.
Greg was dying, his innards liquefying as he watched Sherlock falling apart, guilt sliding hard down his shoulders and making him sick. He kept hold of John's hand for John's sake...and his own, were he being entirely honest. He mouthed *I'm sorry* to Sherlock, battling pressure at the back of his eyes.

John didn't understand what was happening. He was losing control of the situation rapidly. Sherlock was crying, Mycroft looked uncomfortable, and Greg had that terribly pained look on his face again. "I-I don't... I don't want anyone to be sad..." He said honestly and reached out with his other hand to take Sherlock's. "I'm trying to help you, Sherlock. Just tell me... Please, just tell me what you want. P-Please. L-Let me help you.".

Sherlock swiftly curled the fingers he could move around two of John's, holding tight, staring at him. "I-" he nearly told John again that he loved him, but that wouldn't exactly be helpful. John did not love him, could not love him, surely. It was more than he'd expected to have John willingly reach for him. He closed his eyes, entire focus on their joined skin for the moment.

*I could make him believe you raped him.*

His eyes flew back open and he dragged in a sharp breath, staring at John for another long moment. "Thank y-you, John," he breathed, trying his best to soothe the man.

John tilted his head to the side and took one long breath. "You... Sherlock, don't thank me. I know what you did. What you did back at the mental hospital. You didn't have to go willingly, but you did. You went and.... this happened and..." He moved his finger in small circles on the back of Sherlock's hand. "If I had died on his...on his *table* then you wouldn't be here..." The word seemed to hurt coming out of his mouth and John shuddered.

Sherlock was hardly breathing at this point, each inhalation tripped up by an exhalation, making speaking very difficult. "And had I- b-bloody well...overdosed...the s-six months before y-you had the misfortune to m-meet me, you'd be f-fine as well. We can pl-ay....this....all d-day long." He'd experienced it, but he still loathed himself for letting it happen to John.

"You're... Don't say that. I was worse before." John closed his eyes and took a step back. "Greg, could I have my chair? I want to stay for some more time today." He didn't want to let go of Sherlock's hand or Greg's, but his leg was starting to ache. He fell back into it when Greg pushed it to just the back of his knees, and took the pills he offered.

"Sherlock, I don't want you to be sad. If there is something I-I can do to help, tell me." He stared intently at a tile on the ground instead of Sherlock, his nerves starting to fray once more.

"I don't w-want you hurting any more for m-me," Sherlock breathed, shaking his head. "Y-You've Greg...and y-you are better...s-so much better. I- I-" he was going to black out, so overwhelmed, his legs feeling like jelly even though he was laying down. His inhalations were wheezing and he was swiftly dropping down into that dark panic again.

"I've got Greg, yeah. That helps. He helps a lot." He observed how upset Sherlock looked and quickly changed his tone. "Its alright, Sherlock." He moved his hand up to the man's bruised face and cupped his cheek. The action required him to look at the man, which stirred the embers of panic inside him. He prayed he was able to keep his expression calm. "You're safe now. You're with people who love you."

That did it.

John effectively broke him and Sherlock had to close his eyes as the tide roared over him. People didn't love Sherlock. Greg and John would leave, and his brother would go back to work, and
Sherlock had his broken body and a needle to anticipate. He dragged in a few desperate breaths as he leaned against John's hand and wept, his typical ability to brush off, be above it all, shattered in the dust. He loved John. Knew he loved him now, and John was gone. It was over. He could watch from a distance, but he'd never listen to John hen-pecking a blog or grumbling about the chip and pin machine. For the thousandth time in his life, Sherlock was utterly alone.

John looked to Greg with a worried, hopeless expression. "What did I say? Oh, God, I'm trying to help." He reached behind him and pulled his chair close so he could sit down and dropped his head down onto the bed. John's eyes burned with tears of frustration, confusion and sorrow. "Sherlock, please, I'm sorry. Whatever I said I'm sorry. We love you. You're safe now. Please, please, I didn't mean to. to s-say whatever it w-was that."

Sherlock moved his hand, his broken heart twisting in the wake of John's distress, and touched two of his fingers gently to the top of John's head. He slowly stroked over John's scalp in an effort to soothe him. "I...just...j-hust been prone to tears s-since My came and g-got me. Not y-your fault." Anything, he'd say anything to keep John from panic and fear.

Greg looked over to Mycroft before setting a gentle hand to John's back, thumb rubbing small circles there. He ached to do something for Sherlock, but there was nothing he could think of.

John was sandwiched between two people he both loved and feared. He laid his head down into the sheets of Sherlock's bed, leaving splotches where his tears had fallen. "Okay, I-I won't b-be sad." He didn't lift his head though, and was rather silent after that. The fingers in his hair and the hand on his back felt lovely, as long as he didn't focus on how easily they could turn to blows without him being able to defend.

As Sherlock kept his eyes closed, his shattered heart continued it's infuriating beating, but slowed progressively from the panicked cadence. He'd settle John and Greg, and then he'd allow himself to stop, no place in the world left for him. He'd shot James Moriarty point blank, and still he'd lost magnificently.

Greg watched Sherlock, shifting more comfortably to stroke John's back. He was caught in the urge to protect John, even from Sherlock, while at the same time wanting to save his old friend.

More than twenty minutes passed in that fashion, silent save for the two men struggling with grief and fear, respectively, when pain broke through the dilauded and Sherlock suddenly whimpered and grit his teeth.

John jerked his head up, suddenly at attention. His friend's whimper had been as clear to him as any alarm bell or horn. "You're hurting. What do you need?" He sat up in his chair and looked Sherlock over. The tendon damage, his knee, his horribly destroyed arm and broken bones were likely the most painful, though he remembered the feeling of being on fire resulting from so many injuries. John searched Sherlock's face for any hint of the old tells that many disregarded but he used as signs to give him a gauge of Sherlock's mind. "How can I help you?"

The most salient pain resonated from his destroyed arm, the bandages already needing to be changed. They had simply cut long fissures across the alarmingly swollen bicep, allowing it to drain and managing it as an open wound. Sherlock had several screws and a plate atop the bone that had splintered so terribly, and there was surely irreversible nerve damage. As it was, the signals from his extraordinary sensitized nervous system were growing in strength and number, despite it only having been a scant two hours since he was given his last dose for pain.

Slowly but surely Sherlock's muscles began to tense in effort to shy from inescapable pain, his chest beginning to flutter in fear. He had become terrified of pain, his stoic ability and high threshold
shattered. The very suggestion of that bone-deep agony he'd floated in for months was enough to steal his breath. His eyes flew open and he looked to John, his face draining of color as his eyes teared up again, lower lip unsteady. "I- I d-don't know," he managed, dragging his foot along the mattress again before remembering how much that hurt and abruptly stopping.

John's mind was fuzzy with suppressed fear. "Could you get him some more painkillers?" He requested and looked up to Mycroft, who nodded.

John watched with anxious eyes as the doctor, now in sanitary but plain clothing as an attempt to lower Sherlock's fear, brought in the painkiller. "Sherlock," he said as the doctor advanced, "I want you to remember that these doctors are going to help you. They aren't Moriarty's doctors. They're Mycroft's doctors."

The plainclothes made it worse, measures and measures worse. Sherlock squeezed John's hand, gasping as the doctor approached on the same side as him. "No, no don't t-touch him," Sherlock growled, trying to sit up, focus fuzzy and locked on the man. "G-get away f-from him," his curls were sticking to his forehead as pain blinded him, ripping him right out of Mycroft's care, his brother out of his line of sight, and right back on the table. Only this time he had hold of John. Sherlock's entire disposition shifted from fear to protective fury and he managed to get himself to something akin to sitting, finding his hands free, only heavy with casting. To John he whispered fast and under his breath, "It's okay, h-he's not going to t-touch you." His horribly pained arm was held out in defense, leaning to shield John with as much of his body as he could manage.

"Shhh, Sherlock, it's alright." John looked up at Mycroft and shook his head. "No, no, make the doctors go away. Make them leave. Leave the medicine here, but they have to leave."

Mycroft agreed and waved the doctors out. John gently pressed on Sherlock's shoulders, trying to get him to lie back down. Sherlock's panic was starting to rub off on John, making him wonder if the doctors really were there to hurt him. "It's alright, Sherlock. Think. You are with Mycroft. Mycroft has us. We are safe. Greg is here. He'll keep us safe." The second example was brought up largely for his own benefit.

Greg moved forward to help, touching John's shoulder as he came to his side, putting himself in Sherlock's line of sight. "It's alright there, Sherlock, steady on," he said calmly, apologetic as he pushed Sherlock back down. "He's safe, I've got him."

Sherlock stared at Greg, finally relaxing again despite the tears that slid down his face. He still retained a very feral expression and his eyes darted around. "I don't...w-we are...there are no tapes. No- I don't w-want to see the t-tapes right now," he breathed, falling down in his own head, catching Greg's wrist, "Y-You have him."

Greg nodded again, putting his free hand over Sherlock's at his wrist, "I've got John. He's safe." His eyes cut to the syringe of medication left behind from the doctors. "John can you give him that?"

John handed the medication to Greg without hesitation, though his attention was quickly brought back to Sherlock. "I'm here with Greg. Greg keeps me safe. He always keeps me safe. Mycroft is keeping you safe. Do you remember that?"

Mycroft slipped two fingers into Sherlock's hand. "You're safe, 'Lock. You're safe. Could you give me the sum of the fifth, fifteenth and twentieth number of the Fibonacci sequence?" It was an attempt to bring the man's mind back to the room, or at the very least remind him to think.

Greg stared at the syringe in his hand and spoke after a moment. "John," he whispered, at a loss. He'd never given anything with a needle before.
Sherlock held tight to Mycroft's fingers, rattling off the numbers over and over again, his back arching slightly as he grit his teeth through the pain. "D-Don't care a-about me," he hissed through a particularly sharp wave. He looked back over to Greg, assuring himself that John was in proper care, waving in and out of lucidity.

John took the needle and after an approving, if hesitant, nod from Mycroft, gave Sherlock the painkiller he so desperately needed. He was worried about holding it in his scarred, mangled hands, but he managed it well enough. "Shhh...Sherlock, Greg has me. Greg always has me. Greg is always keeping me safe. And Mycroft has you. You can relax. We will take care of you."

John's panic was starting to fire up again. The question of why he needed to be protected continued to present itself. "Greg, I need... Can we go outside for a moment?"

Fearing it would upset Sherlock, he touched the broken man's cheek. "I'll be r-right b-back I-I-I just need some t-time."

Sherlock was nearly sobbing with the relief of the painkiller, holding tight to his brother's hand. He turned his focus to Mycroft as Greg eased John back into his chair and slowly moved them into the hall.

"Breathe, steady," Greg said calmly as the door shut behind them. He crouched in front of John, holding his hand. "Sherlock is confused right now, he's just hurting and wanting to make sure you're safe."

John dropped his head to his knees, making himself impossibly small. He dug his fingers into his hair and muffled a scream by clamping a hand over his mouth.

Knives. The knives had been the worst. The tearing, the shredding as his skin practically ripped from the dull ones scattered his logical mind and left him raw and primal.

Or perhaps it had been the clamps, with their crushing force.

Or the burning metal that stung for hours and hurt for days.

Or the boiling water that left organic, flowing scars on his back, chest, shins and shoulder.

Such thoughts were in John's mind as he rocked himself back and forth.

Greg tipped another pill into his hand, the last John could have, and pressed it to John's curled fingers. Calmly he spoke to him, speaking soft and steady.

"You survived, it's over, it's over. You are safe, John."

"Yeah, I'm... I'm safe now..." It did very little to protect him from the memories, but kept the fear from feeling present and active.

The pill helped, but the deep rooted psychological that months of pure pain had carved was rather hard to overwrite with medicine.

Chapter End Notes

If we get art I will give another super long chapter like this.

Also, how do you like it so far? Recovery. I suppose that is what you could call this stage.
I'd call it an extension of their torment, though.

BUT SERIOUSLY ABOUT THE ART THING. DOODLE. MACARONI SCULPTURE. VAGUE IMPRESSIONISTIC POPSICLE STICK ARRANGEMENT. ANYTHING.
"God, he'll be upset that I left," John remarked when his mind was back in order. "Not at me, but just sad. I didn't mean to leave him. Will you tell him? I think he knows, but it's still hurting him."

Greg nodded. "He's going to be okay, you have to worry about yourself too, John. It's not about just him, or just you...it's okay. I'll tell him. Do you need to go back to your room?"

"No, no, just another moment. I'll be alright." John ran his fingers back through his hair again. "I'm sorry, let's go back in. I can manage. Just don't leave me, alright? Or hurt me." He knew the latter wasn't really an issue for him, but he felt better saying it.

Greg nodded and leaned in, wrapping his arms around John. "I've got you, I promise I won't hurt you." Still killed to say it, but he meant it completely.

Sherlock had pulled Mycroft as close to him as he could manage, resting his brother's fingers against his cheek where he could catch the scent of him. "Don't l-leave, I need y-you here."

"I won't leave, brother." Mycroft said calmly and held his hand against Sherlock's face. "I know you need me. I'll be here for as long as you need me to be."

John rolled himself in again, his face a bit damp and his eyes ringed in red, but his pain minimal in comparison. "Hey, Sherlock. I'm back now." It was a lame explanation, but the man clearly knew what was going on.

Sherlock did not outwardly react, though his heart rate jumped up slightly. Sherlock took a full minute before opening his eyes, swimming in confusion, holding to Mycroft as an anchor. to safety. There would be no recordings, no videos as long as his brother was there. He hated how he was hurting John, both desperate for him to stay and for him to leave so that he couldn't do any more damage.

"I...am s-sorry I frightened y-you...again," he breathed, every respiration wheezing, slowly beginning to consider Mycroft's offer to sedate him...indefinitely. "Th-they...you can w-walk despite your ankle." It had just registered to him that John was mobile despite the damage. His own knee was going to be an issue, but for now it was a boon to know that the ankle, at least, was something he could recover from. "H-How long does it h-hurt to breathe?"

John crossed his arms on Sherlock's bed and laid his head down. "Its alright. I'm just afraid of a lot of things." He looked down at his ankle, which still grew very sore after walking and had a limited range of mobility that forced him to keep it slightly pointed for comfort. In spite of all this he could walk, even if he grew weary quickly. "I can walk, yeah. It might hurt to breathe for a while. Do you need more painkillers? I could go get it. You don't need to see the doctors again."

Sherlock shook his head, "Can't t-think," he breathed, gripping tight to Mycroft and trying to lean harder into him. "I don't...I don't w-want to make this h-harder for you John I-" he dragged in a pained breath, guilt heavy and dragging him down, "n-not worth you s-suffering, John, to...god too m-much suffering for you already."

He groaned as the memories bled over his mind and wrapped around his heart, "I...god I tried to m-make them stop, I'm so s-sorry."

"I wanted them to stop too," John whispered and buried his face down into the sheets near Sherlock's
shoulder. "You don't make things harder," he lied, "you help. I'm glad to be with you."

John had to take a few deep breaths just to remind himself that he could breathe in, and the state of his lungs gave him a small bit of relief that one area of him was still relatively intact. "You'll be alright, though. I'm here for you. I won't leave you."

Sherlock looked down then, staring at John, his mouth working as shock spilled over him like a waterfall. It pulled the color from his face and made stars erupt along the edges of his vision, making the air feel thick and too heavy to manage. "You...you won't?"

John looked up at his astonished tone and gave him a small smile. "Course not. You're stuck with me." He laid his head back down on his arms, facing Sherlock so he could see the man's face. Or rather, so the man didn't think he was avoiding it. "I'll stay with you."

Tension flooded out of Sherlock like air from a balloon, his muscles relaxing, pain medication working better than it had been. His lungs still rattled with infection, but he was much calmer, much more settled now that he knew John wasn't going to walk out of his life at any second. "Okay," he breathed, nodding, "I might sleep. Can...I can do that, right? Sleep?"

John saw the way Sherlock seemed to sink down into the bed and was pleased with himself for finding the right words. "Alright, Sherlock. Get some sleep. I'll stay with you. I'll be here when you wake up, alright? I will stay right here." He lightly touched Sherlock's shoulder. "You'll be alright. Mycroft is here, Greg is here, and I'm here."

It seemed to sink in then that he was actually back, actually safe. His eyes closed as he leaned his cheek against his brother's fingers. "It's over," he breathed, falling asleep within seconds, sinking down against the bedding.

Greg moved forward, draping John's blanket over his shoulders and crouching down beside him, touching his knee. "Are you okay? Nightmares are likely, will that be alright, or should we go back and have Mycroft call us when he's up?"

John did not like the idea of nightmares. If Sherlock panicked, he knew he would follow suit. But he had said to Sherlock that he would be there when he woke up. "I'll stay. If I start to panic, you'll help me leave, right?" He sat up and wheeled his chair closer to Greg. "Usually, when there's nothing to do, you suggest that I try to eat. Is it alright if I don't?" John looked up at him with pleading eyes. Greg pulled John into a hug, holding him close and speaking softly. "You don't have to do a single thing that you don't want right now, John. Not a single thing. I've got you, and if we need to leave, we leave. I love you, I've got you." He looked over to Mycroft. "We will be here for a little while, if you need to go shower or whatever else. Have a meal, something?"

Mycroft hesitated to leave his brother, but his own accommodations weren't far, and he could travel quicker through the security than the other two. "If he wakes, call me."

A relieved smile came across John's face. "It makes him calm when I say I won't leave him." He stored that away in his mind to remember for future events.

Greg settled down in a chair next to John, reaching out and slowly taking his hand. "How are you feeling? I know this is hard." He asked John on a whisper. "This hurts. It hurts and it's scary and it's sad because he is in pain." John's expression was dejected and downcast. He wasn't looking at Sherlock anymore. He saw little point in stressing himself when the man wouldn't even know.

Greg nodded, "Yeah, mate, I fully agree with you. Hurts, scary, and sad just about sums it all up." He carded his fingers in John's hair, trying to soothe him. "If it gets too much, we can go. John hummed almost pleasantly at Greg's light touches. He had always loved people running their fingers through his hair, and now the fact that someone could touch him but not hurt him was a
constant reminder that he was safe. "Thank you for everything."

Greg sat with John like that for quite some time. Time ticked be, physicians came in to check on Sherlock, at one point posing a short acting sedative and changing the dressings on his arm. Greg wheeled John out while the doctors tended to Sherlock's wounds. "Let's have some ice, yeah? And you don't have to eat but you do need to let them give you a feeding, you've missed one already." His tone was gentle, and he himself quite blurry with the late hour.

John groaned at the idea. He hated the feeding tube, while he was a bit used to it, and ice just seemed like an impossible mountain. "I don't want to do either of those things. Can't I just have the day off?"

Greg shook his head while he looked, at the tapped end of the tube at John's nose. "I'm sorry, you don't have any spare weight, John, and your body needs the strength."

John looked down and gave the barest of nods. "Alright, but can it go quickly? I don't like it. I'm not even hungry really." Hunger stressed John. It reminded him of his capture, and that he would need to eat, which in turn stressed him once more, as he had been commanded not to eat.

"Let's have some ice, yeah? And you don't have to eat but you do need to let them give you a feeding, you've missed one already." Greg touched John's hand and spoke softly. "I've been shown how to do it. It's easy, really. Or you could do it yourself. Whichever works."

He waited for John to answer, nodding to a passing doctor and asking for a filled feeding syringe. "You do it," John said and crossed his arms over his chest. He didn't like being fed, as he thought that perhaps Greg might be less sad if John died of starvation.

Greg leaned up and wrapped his arms around John. "I'm sorry, you could skip a day if it wouldn't hurt you, but I have to keep you safe even when that means from your own fear response, okay? I know you hate this, I'm sorry." He pressed his forehead to John's as he eased back. "I think you are just incredible, sitting here with him."

A moment later one of the nurses came over with a large syringe full of the thick feeding mixture John had been on for months, which gave him a steadily rising amount of calories. Nothing was as effective as actual food, so it was doing little more than maintaining his slight weight.

Greg nodded and squeezed John's hand before reaching up and unscrewing the end of the thin tube that ran down from John's nose to his stomach. He went about fixing the needless syringe to the end and starting in of slowly pushing the feed. "Do you have any suggestions for Sherlock? I know that you calmed down a bit when he brought in things from your room to fill the walls in your hospital room. Do you remember that?"

"Make the room soft," John said and flinched a bit at the memories. "Ask him what the room was like. Just ask him. It will hurt to answer but after you can make that one as far from it as possible. It will help." When the tube was finished and John's 'meal' done, he wrinkled his nose. "I don't like that feeling."

Greg nodded and set the string aside, recapping the end of the tube at John's nose. "I know, we'll get you free of it eventually."

Greg looked up through the window to Sherlock's room where he could watch them wrapping it up with his care. "You know what you just said there...it will hurt but then it will help? That...that is exactly what I've been trying with you. That's why I push, I...I just wanted you to know that's why."

A doctor came out of Sherlock's room with a nurse, nodding to them that they could go in if they wanted. "I know why you push me, Greg. You just want to help. But sometimes I can't do it. I can only do it sometimes. I can't spend the whole day in panic. I'll die." He wove his fingers together and shut his eyes.
Greg shook his head and put his hands over John's laced fingers. "I don't ever mean for you to spend the entire day in panic. I don't. That- no. I- it kills me to see you panicking. No, I just needed to know that you knew why. I- sorry, shouldn't have mentioned it. What do you want to do? They are done caring for him and he's still asleep, or at least looks it."

John didn't want to upset Greg, or himself, or Sherlock, but he had a difficult time keeping straight what set each of them off. "I'm sorry, just not today. Not while I'm with Sherlock. I can't do both yet. Not just yet." He pushed his little chair forward into the room over to Sherlock's side. "I wish he wasn't hurting."

Greg moved over to John's side, taking a seat next to his chair. He reached out tentatively and wrapped his hand around John's. "Me as well, mate, me as well."

Hours slipped by with little activity. Greg put the blanket over John's shoulders at one point, and at another began to rub his back softly when John seemed to become agitated.

Sherlock was perfectly still the entire night, breathing deep and slow, though his respirations still rattled and wheezed audibly through his chest wall. The sun was up before Greg opened his eyes, having fallen asleep slumped against John's chair. Sherlock's monitors were blipping their warnings as Sherlock's heart raced. He was drenched in sweat, his hair sticking to his forehead, gown clinging to his skin as his fingers twitched and his breathing went rapid and shallow. Greg swore under his breath and looked to John, wondering if he should just take him out of the room.

"John...maybe we should go."

John had been quiet throughout the night. He sat in his chair and laid his head down on the bed next to Sherlock, though he still had a hint of hesitation in being near him.

When John woke, the beeping of Sherlock's monitor acting as an alarm clock with a quickening tempo, he immediately backed away. After checking to make sure that Greg was still there, protecting him, John turned his attention back to Sherlock as his own heart rate began to soar. "I think I'll be alright. I promised I would be here."

John reached out -as he was further back now- and took Sherlock's hand as gently as he could. "Hey, Sherlock. It's alright."

Greg moved, standing between Sherlock and John without blocking the view of either from each other. He grabbed a flannel from the stack of medical supplies beside Sherlock's bed and gently began to dab at his forehead with it, trying to keep the sweat from Sherlock's eyes.

In the next moment Sherlock's eyes snapped open, his breathing ineffective and wild as he flinching hard away from Greg and snatching his hand away from John. The movement jostled him and made him bloody his lips in an effort to be silent. His eyes were glassy and unfocused, red-rimmed with fever, and he clearly had no idea where he was. He pinched his eyes closed, whimpering on every exhalation in nothing short of abject terror.

"Sherlock, I'm here," John said quietly and tried not to panic. Just because Sherlock was afraid doesn't mean he had to be. Or at least, he repeated the words in his mind as a mantra to keep himself detached from the smoldering panic inside him.

John put his hand under Sherlock's, not over, so he didn't feel held down. "It's alright, Sherlock. You are with Mycroft, John, and Greg. We're protecting you."

Greg watched Sherlock as he kept a hand on John to keep him stable as he could. He did not try and touch Sherlock again. His own heart was twisting in his chest as the silence stretched out. Sherlock didn't move, his breathing poor enough to trip the monitors into a full blown wail. Greg moved
swiftly as a flood of medical personnel came rushing in, putting himself between them and John, pushing John back with his hands at the armrests of the chair, his chest directly in front of John's view until they were well out of the way. John reached out and wrapped his arms around his Greg’s neck in fear when the doctors passed and Greg

As soon as one of the doctors started to assist Sherlock's breathing by placing a mask attached to a bag over his face and squeezing a proper breath in, Sherlock started to struggle. He couldn't get much of a breath in, but when he'd managed half a lungful he screamed his brother's name, hand flailing despite the pain of it.

Greg shook his head, torn desperately with the want to help Sherlock, hating to leave him on his own as he went ahead and moved John into the hall where it was much harder to hear Sherlock. "Breathe. You are safe. Breathe. I've got you."

John watched with eyes wide and a frozen expression often worn by animals in front of automobiles. "No, NO!" He shouted when the door shut. "They'll hurt him! Greg, they're going to hurt him! They-" he tried to struggle past Greg to stand, but found himself infuriatingly weak. "They're going to HURT HIM!" John screamed and craned his neck to look at least in the direction of the room. The sudden rush of people had startled him. He could only see their backs and hear Sherlock scream. John had, and rather understandably so, assumed the worst.

"Greg, you've got to h-help him! P-Please!" The notion that they might come for him as well seemed to strike him suddenly and he paled. "Greg, GREG!"

Greg took hold of John and pulled him up to his feet, holding him tight to his chest in a protective embrace as he moved them to the windows and pointed so that John could see. "Look at what they are doing, John. The one at his head is helping Sherlock breathe. He couldn't breathe properly, John. The nurse there is keeping Sherlock from hurting himself, that other one is giving him medication in his drip line. None of them are hurting him, John. They are not here to hurt."

John pressed one hand against the window and dug his fingers against the glass as if trying to claw through it. "She's holding him down, oh, G-God..." He pulled away from the horrid show and his legs gave out. John sank to his knees and curled down into a tight, quivering ball utterly certain that Sherlock was being tormented by the doctors.

Sherlock carried on calling for his brother when he could manage enough strength to fight against the mask, slowly sinking down as a sedative was pushed, each exhalation an effort at Mycroft's name. The staff slowly began to back away, one at a time. First the nurse holding him down, then the one pushing the sedative. The doctor at his head pulled the bag mask away, watching Sherlock's breathing closely as he began to cry.

Mycroft had been in his room attempting to sleep when the nurse notified him. He immediately left the room and sprinted down the hall, bursting into Sherlock's room six minutes after the episode started.

Greg went down with John, shaking his head. "No, John. Stay with me, stay here with me. Look." He carefully managed to wrap his arms around John, supporting his weight, nodding to Mycroft as he rushed into the room. "Look, Mycroft is here for him, he's okay, look John he's okay."

Sherlock was trembling as though he'd been dunked into an ice bath, his teeth chattering, his breathing still shallow and wild which kept the physician at his side. The man spoke low and calm to Mycroft. "He woke with difficulty breathing. He's been given a sedative, but he's fighting with it."

John was greatly relieved at the sight of Mycroft, and regained the ability to stand on his own. "They were going to hurt him!" He still insisted and tried the handle of the door. It required a key card
which he did not have and while the guards did not attempt to keep him from trying, they did not assist. "Greg, please, let me go help him!"

Mycroft took Sherlock's hand and spoke loud enough to be heard. "Sherlock, it's alright. I'm here. Nobody will hurt you."

Sherlock turned glassy, fevered eyes on his brother, tears rolling down his face. "N-not the t-tapes today. I- please n-not the tapes. I'll s-say...I'll tell them wh-what..what w-was it?" his face twisted in confusion, "I d-didn't h-hurt John I-" He let out a mournful cry and leaned his head back.

"Shhh, Sherlock, we won't play any tapes." Mycroft added that to his rapidly expanding file of things that had been used in Sherlock's torment. "You don't have to say anything. You are with me. With Mycroft."

Greg waved to one of the nurses to let them in as he spoke to John. "Are you sure? He doesn't seem to know what's going on right now. You don't have to."

"I-I can do this," he said with as brave a face as he could muster. "Stay with m-me in case they try to h-hurt me." John wheeled his chair by himself into the room but hesitated at the sight of the doctor.

Sherlock caught sight of John and his eyes went wide. The room around him looked blurry and he was unable to focus on Greg's face as the man walked behind John, seemingly bringing him into the room. His eyes darted to his brother and then back to John. "Y-You said...okay, o-kay the tapes! I'll t-take the tapes! D-Don't..g-god don't h-hurt him I'll t-take the t-tapes! John! I- g-god I'm s-s-sorry, John! John!"

Greg swore under his breath, taking a step so that he was to the side of John instead of behind him, crouching down so that John's head was higher than his own. "Sherlock, it's just me, it's just Greg. John's okay, no one is going to hurt John." He had his hand over John's to keep him grounded.

That set John off again. Sherlock begging someone not to hurt John had effectively dragged the man back into the warehouse he had been tortured in. John looked wildly around at Sherlock's words. "Greg," he whispered harshly, "is someone going to hurt me?" His own breathing had picked up and he thought himself to be in real danger. "No, NO! Greg, please, h-help me. Help us! I can't... Can't be hurt again." He was doubled over in his chair, hands and head on his knees to protect himself from the expected blows."Please! Greg!"

Mycroft motioned for Greg to do something about John. "Either take him out of the room or calm him down." It would likely help more for John to be calm, as he could explain that he was not being hurt, but leaving the room was better than Sherlock having to listen to John scream.

Greg took John's face between his hands, speaking to him calmly as he moved John to look at him. "John, I'm right here and I have you, remember? I have you. We are going to have to leave if this is too much. You are right here with me, and you are safe. Can you breathe for me?"

John locked eyes with Greg and nodded. He drew in a few breaths, calmed considerably by the man's prescience. Frequent and furnish glances were still cast about the room, however, to see who was to hurt him. "G-Greg, there's s-someone who i-is going to hurt m-m-me."

Greg kept his hands on either side of John's face. "John, look at me, look at me. There is no one here that is going to hurt you. No one. You are safe. I have you. Mycroft is here. No one. Sherlock is scared and confused, that's all."

With an incredible amount of willpower John decided to trust Greg. He dropped his head down on the man's shoulder and breathed a shuddering sigh. "H-Hurts, Greg," he whimpered rather pathetically. "They're going t-to hurt m-me."

Greg took a deep, slow breath and nodded to himself. "Come on, John, let's get you back to your bed. Paul can come give you something better to help, okay? No one is going to hurt you. Let's go
Sherlock was gasping for breath again, prompting the physician to again help Sherlock take deep enough breaths. Sherlock did not fight this time, going docile with John in the room, terrified of doing anything that would get him hurt. "My," he breathed between moments of the doctor squeezing air into his lungs.

Mycroft stroked the side of Sherlock’s temple and offered a smile. "I'm here. I'm protecting John and yourself. Try to relax. Are you in pain?"
Sherlock tried to reach for his brother, closing his eyes in exhaustion and defeat. "M-M-y fault. A-All of it my f-fault." He knew his brother was there, but the swimming mix of confusion blanketed over his ability to follow the simple logic that followed, scared for John, still requiring help with his breathing.
"No, none of it was your fault. None. I promise it wasn't. John is safe. Do you understand? John is very safe and nobody is going to hurt him."

Sherlock nodded to Mycroft, leaning into the touch before he was made to lie still so his breathing could be assisted. He whimpered as he was moved away from Mycroft, his hand seeking him out, closing his eyes as he tried to master his panic.
Mycroft took his brother's hand in his own and stayed by him as the doctor attempted to force his lungs to breathe at a normal, or at least sustainable rate. "Its alright, Sherlock," he said softly. "It's alright."

John wanted to be far away from that room. It was frightening and full of danger, but he was worried that someone might hurt Sherlock in his absence. "I shouldn't go. Not while he's hurting."

Greg looked up at Mycroft as he held on to John. He watched as Sherlock gripped him and shook his head. "I think he's just frightened, John."
John was trembling. This was too much. This was far too much for his feeble mind could handle and he began to weep into Greg’s shoulder. John had his arms around Greg’s neck as was usual and though he had begun to calm the panic he did not let go.

Mycroft kept his hand in his brother's and waited for the man to remember where he was. "It's alright. It's alright. I'm here."
Greg eased John back in his chair and immediately began to move him out of the room, grabbing a security guard as before to help them get back to John's room as fast as possible. They were going to need to put their rooms closer together eventually. All the while he was speaking softly to John, keeping one hand on John's shoulder as they moved through the halls, reminding him that he was okay, that it was safe.

Sherlock's breathing finally began to mirror the breaths pushed into his lungs as he caught on to what they wanted from him. His doctor pulled the mask away as Sherlock began to regain a bit of color, still breathing far too fast, but much more efficiently. "His temperature is rather high," the physician explained, glancing over at the monitors and pressing fingers to Sherlock's neck, "going to push more aggressive medication for it. That pneumonia needs to clear and I suspect this will settle down for him."

Sherlock squeezed tighter to his brother's fingers, concentrating hard on breathing so they would damn well leave him alone.

Mycroft nodded and bid the doctors to do whatever it was they needed to do. He was exhausted both physically and mentally now from both the stress of Sherlock's ailment and the usual business of his
position in the government that he now crammed into the small allotments of time that he was not needed. "That's it, Sherlock. Breathe. If you breathe slowly and deeply the doctors will leave you alone."

Sherlock's bed was slightly elevated to ease his breathing, a humidified mask put over his face when he demonstrated that he could be calm. He held fast to Mycroft's hand. "T-Trouble keeping mys-self here," he breathed into the mask, eyes fixed on his brother, "I- lost...keep g-getting lost."

John was grateful to be back in his room when he finally arrived. He stood up and climbed into bed where he promptly covered himself with blankets to relieve the stress of his vulnerability. In his capture he had relished the opportunity to be warm and covered. No matter how tattered it had been, or how hard he had needed to work for it, having some small barrier between himself and Moriarty’s whips or Moran’s eyes was heavenly. "Sor-ry," he stuttered and his breath hitched on each syllable. "T-ri-ied." As much as he had wanted to stay strong for Sherlock, his own mind had it's limits and could only be pushed so far before he snapped. "I r-really d-di-id."

Greg shook his head and pressed the blankets tighter around John, lowering the lights and turning on the soft music, doing what he could to make John more comfortable. "You did fine, John. You did just fine. He's ill, I don't know that you could have helped him. What can I do for you, do you need more medication or do you just want to lie here for a short while? Paul can come give you something."

After a long period of silence which he spent collecting himself, John pulled the covers down a bit so he could see and study Greg. "I don't really want anything. Nothing that I can actually have, anyway. I need medication. Yes, I need that. I need to not be able to feel. Do you have anything for that? Something to make me numb?"

"Do you just want to go to sleep for a while? That took a lot of energy, we can give you something to help you sleep."

"Yes," John said without missing a beat. "Sleep. Yes, thats numb. I need to sleep." He tried to relax his perpetually morose features, but found that grief must be permanently etched into his skin.

Greg held John's hand as Paul came in, speaking softly to John for a few minutes before pushing a sedative to allow him to sleep. He nodded to Greg and promised to come back later. "There, John...it will stop now, just sleep," he said softly, sliding his fingers through John's hair.

John was ready to sleep. His head was buried into his pillow and he shut his eyes tightly. "If Sherlock needs me, just call, alright?"

“Alright, I will. Just get some sleep. It’ll be alright.”

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Mycroft held Sherlock's hand in both of his. "Yes, I know you get lost. That's understandable. You need to stay present. Your mind is going back. How can I help you?" Engaging Sherlock in the present would keep him at least somewhat away from the danger of slipping back, but he wanted Sherlock to be able to rest and recover, and playing mental games or telling stories would only last so long.

Sherlock listened to his brother and tried to turn the problem over in his mind. "I... I want t-to go home," he breathed, closing his eyes and feeling very small in the presence of his brother.
"D-damn doctors u-unsettle me." He refused to let go of Mycroft's hand, fear and pain twisting in his chest. "I...tried to keep this from h-happening to my head, I...I kn-know I didn't do that to John, couldn't h-have done th-those things to him. He's- no, no. I...not c-capable...not even M-Moriarty I- not this. Not this."

Mycroft pulled a chair up and sat down next to Sherlock. "No, no, Moriarty could never have convinced you that you hurt John because it goes against everything that you are. You would never hurt John Watson. Its understandable that the doctors scare you. If you ever want them to leave or stop, you may say so and I'll send them away."

Sherlock was quiet for a few minutes as he tired in his efforts to settle down, keeping his eyes on Mycroft as his reality slipped away when he closed them. "Y-You look terrible," he breathed at last, fogging his mask. Mycroft had dropped in weight significantly, his face drawn and more gaunt than Sherlock could ever remember seeing it. "Taxed y-yourself looking f-for me." He hummed and squeezed Mycroft's fingers. Where wit and snark would typically slot itself in this line of conversation, overwhelming gratitude forced him to sincerity. Moran had showed him fear and pain that far surpassed his understanding, making a mockery of his ability to cope, to shove it all down in a lock box and put it away.

Mycroft looked down at his cloths which had obviously been recently tailored. "Yes, I did. I'll always tax myself looking for you. I'll do anything. You're my kid brother, remember? It's always been my job to keep you out of trouble." Sherlock looked like such a child to him now, despite the deep lines on his face that had developed from his pain.

"Thank you," he said in a rush, tears sliding down his face as he thought of what would be happening to him right then, in that exact moment, had Mycroft not come to get him. "Thank you."

"Anything you need. Anything at all, I'll help you." Mycroft tipped his head forward and rested it against Sherlock's hand, which he held in his own.

Sherlock watched his brother, an odd sense of familial attachment welling up in his chest. "You don't h-have time to be in here with me always," he rumbled behind his mask, trying to move his wrecked hands. His eyes slid to his fingers as he spoke again. "T-think my v-violin may be b-better donated," his tone slipped, leaving him unsteady. It had not really come to the front of his mind before, and the injustice of it, the cruelty of the loss, was wickedly sharp in his chest. "T'll...h-he liked when I played f-for him. N-not that he's going to come h-home with me again but..."

He went quiet, grief sliding around him, making him wish to curl in on himself. "My," he breathed, lips quivering on him, "wh-what's left?"

Mycroft didn't want to consider the possibility that Sherlock might be suicidal as well, but it wouldn't surprise him. "No, I won't donate it. You'll continue to play it even when you should be asleep. It might take some practice..." Mycroft shook his head. It wasn't likely that Sherlock would be playing again, and if he managed it it would be after major surgery and therapy.

"What's left... You're alive. You're sane. You have John. You have me. John is getting better and he honestly wants to help you. He honestly is trying. He is working so hard. It will pay off. Perhaps the two of you can live together someday." That was, of course, if John was capable -or even wanted- to leave Greg.

Sherlock watched his brother speak, the words tumbling over filters than typically would sort and analyze the information. The gears were sluggish as he tried to part out what Mycroft was saying. Slowly he moved his head, turning away to get a look at his horrifically broken arm. He'd seen the way John moved, held himself. He'd been back half a year and still hardly moved that arm, could narrowly keep his feet, was still child-like in the way he spoke and reasoned. Sherlock looked back to his brother, his heart sinking.

"Th-there won't even be the work," he whispered, agony in his tone. "He's...y-you know he'll n-never come home to me. You know it. I c-can see that you know it. M-my violin...my work...th-
there...it's gone. What am I if they are gone?"
"You are Sherlock Holmes. You are smarter than 99.99987% of the world and nothing can stop you. You need to understand that. John will come back to you. He always does. Before he couldn't even hear your name without screaming. Now he says it on a daily basis and tries, despite how difficult it is, to come stay with you." Mycroft tried not to lie. Sherlock would know if he was lying. Especially when he was this emotionally compromised. "Greg loves you too. The three of you could stay together. Greg likely won't have a purpose without you two."
Sherlock watched his brother, somewhat stilled by his words. Greg might allow him...might...he closed his eyes as he recalculated the interaction between the two men. He'd be an intruder, a third wheel as he always had been in all instances outside of John Watson. He swallowed and put his mind back to breathing slowly. Panic would not help. Grief was clearly not going to leave him, so he wrapped his mind around it allowed it a home in the center of his chest. That was a fight he wasn't going to win.
"You sh-should eat. Can't b-believe I'm saying that to you, but you should." He opened his eyes, looking at his exhausted sibling. "I kn-know you can't just stay here. You n-need to work."
Mycroft gave a small laugh. "Eat? I'm fairly certain I'm turning into you. I'm not hungry. I got focused on the work. I completely understand how you go days without noticing. Before I thought you just did it to spite me." He remarked that he should eat to keep his body intact. Even though it was only a vessel, the physical state of one's mind is often reflected by the body. Keeping up with one might help with the other. "I can stay here as long as I want. Or as long as you want me here."
Sherlock huffed, fogging up his mask. "N-Not everything I've...ever done is...to spite you," Sherlock struggled to explain, exhaustion dragging him back down. "A mere t-three quarters."
He quirked a shadow of a smile at his brother before his eyes slid shut and he momentarily dropped right back off into sudden sleep. Less than five minutes passed before he startled hard awake, eyes snapping open as he looked at his brother, the clipped dream reminding him. "W-Where is John? He was here...wh-where...he was here." His eyes slid closed and he shook his head, 'My...don't make me l-listen to the t-tapes today...I don't w-want the tapes today."
"There will be no more tapes, Sherlock. No tapes. Not ever. They're all gone." He didn't know what had been on the tapes, but it was likely something distressing and to do with John. "John is safe and likely asleep."
Sherlock blinked at Mycroft. "Y-You recovered...b-but you can't destroy them, not- it's e-evidence! You can't- how can w-we...th-the tapes- every single m-moment he was there, all on the tapes! He- He won't b-believe me until he- we can't...you recovered them?" His breathing picked up and he stared at his brother in wide-eyed distress, both wanting the tapes gone and wanting them there all in the same measure. "He- god just- My they...e-every m-moment he was there. A-Always the screaming."
"Course we got them. I haven't been just by your side, you know. I've had other things going on. Moran cleared out, but we managed to find some other things..." Mycroft had gone through all the photos, including the ones of the bloody table on which his brother had been tortured. "He won't be screaming anymore. John won't be screaming. He's feeling much better." Sherlock nearly came off the bed, pulling up violently, managing to nearly completely sit up, "Moran is alive and f-free," he said as his body reacted to the sudden shift. Sherlock was pulling the mask off his face, trying to drop his destroyed legs to the floor, heedless to the sharp licks of fire across his body. "John oh god, John."
Stars were cracking along his vision as he tried to move, "he's free...he's...he's..." his mind shut down in a clutch of intense, all-consuming fear, his mind set to nothing but finding John first.
Shit. "No, Sherlock, he has no idea where we are. He wasn't in the building at the time. You're not in any danger. John isn't in any danger!" He forced Sherlock back into his bed and held him still as gently as he could. "Would you like to see John? I can bring him in here so he is safe. He will be safe. You and I will keep him safe, and Greg will be with him to keep him calm."
Sherlock struggled against his brother, his heart racing out of his chest, spiking up his blood pressure as his lungs seized behind his ribs. "Y-you don't understand! He- oh he promised h-he'd...he'll g-get in, he'll get in! Y-Your staff...s-someone has a weakness-"
"No, we're safe! I promise! I-"
"-and he'll g-get John, HE'LL GET J-" Sherlock's voice suddenly died in his throat as he choked, his nose starting to bleed, going abruptly still as pain tore through him. He turned fuzzy, panicked eyes on his brother, confusion flitting across his features, "My?" he whispered, blood leaking from the corner of his mouth as he went still on the bed, staring up in terrified shock.
Mycroft went still when Sherlock suddenly froze. "What is it, Sherlock?" He practically whispered and held his phone behind his back, completely ready to call in the doctors if Sherlock needed to be sedated. "Sherlock, I am protecting John. Greg is in his room, armed and ready, and I am confident it would take nothing short of a small army could pry John away from that man."
Sherlock tried to drag in a breath, choking as he inhaled, stopping and sputtering, his chest sinking in as he tried to breathe. He blinked up at Mycroft in panick shock that left his lips moving silently and tears sliding down his face. His heart was racing terribly and he reached for Mycroft, fear painted across his bloodied face.
Now was not the time to call in doctors. They frightened Sherlock even when he was at his most lucid, and Mycroft was hesitant to set him off. "Do you want to see John? I can bring him in here, if thats what you want. He isn't hurt. He is safe. John is just down the hall being protected by Greg 24/7. There isn't a flaw in my men, and even if Moran did get to one, the others and Greg will keep John safe."
Sherlock held his breath and closed his eyes, stars exploding across his field of vision. He was trying desperately to pull in air, turning his head to the side and smearing blood across his pillow, slicking his curls as he gaped like a fish. He managed to wrap his fingers around the discarded mask on the bed, bringing it to his face with a wavering grip. He coughed violently, splattering the inside of his mask with blood from his lips, looking a complete mess, though he was finally able to drag in enough air to keep himself conscious.
"I...J-n," he barely managed, blinking up at Mycroft.
Mycroft called a doctor then. The man stood just inside the room and was told to proceed with caution on the chance that Sherlock might be upset by his presence.
"Sherlock," Mycroft said gently, "I think you need help breathing. Is it alright if I bring someone over to help you? They won't hurt you, and I'll be with you the entire time." He placed himself between the doctor and Sherlock to demonstrate that he would protect him.
Sherlock could barely nod as he fought for air, coughing but finally able to breathe. His body was twisting in pain, bending up his good knee as he dragged his leg to his chest, awkward on his side where he'd lost the battle to get up. He let go of the mask, body shaking as he lay there cold and afraid.
Mycroft waved the doctor over. The man was calm, worked slowly to keep Sherlock calm, and moved around Mycroft, who was planted firmly by Sherlock's side. "It'll be alright," Mycroft was saying, "It'll be alright."
Sherlock blacked out not long after Mycroft called in a physician. His battle for air overwhelmed him and he kept his focus on his brother until his eyes rolled up in his head and he went still.
Two hours later, Sherlock was on his back again, a tube in the side of his chest, jutting through his ribs and draining the fluid that had collapsed his lung. The physician came to talk to Mycroft when Sherlock was as stable as they were going to get him, explaining that the infection had built up fluid that pushed his lung in on itself, agitated by the sudden shift and spike in blood pressure. They’d had to restitch some of his wounds as well. "It's my medical opinion, Mr. Holmes, that he be restrained. At least until we can be sure he's lucid enough not to do this again."

Restraining Sherlock seemed logical enough from the outside, but if the man had been strapped down and injured repeatedly, it might add to his panic. "He won't like it," Mycroft said, "we would have to keep him nearly sedated most of the time. He'll feel the restraints and panic." Mycroft looked down in pity at his brother. "How about we give him another day with John and see if he can be calm. Maybe we can not restrain him when he's got John."

"Whatever you'd like done, Mr. Holmes, that's what we will do. He will cause severe damage to himself if he pulls that tube. It is stitched in place, so I am hopeful that will deter him from pulling it. That must remain at least three days."

As it was, Sherlock was not sedated. He'd had a local to insert the tube, which was actively draining a twisted mix of straw yellow and dark, foamy red. His face was a drying mess, but the fresh blood from his nose stopped when his blood pressure came down. His hair was matted to the side, and the pillow crusted. His breathing was much less labored now that the tube was in place, draining away the infection. His fingers twitched as he began to surface, taking deep, slow breaths under the oxygen mask.

Mycroft had leaned back in his chair and watched Sherlock. It might be better for his health to restrain him, but it would be much easier psychologically if he never associated that loss of freedom with Mycroft. "Sherlock?" He called gently as the man filtered into awareness. "If you're awake I would like to talk to you about something. Is that alright? How are you feeling?"

Sherlock struggled to the surface, his chest heavy and his mind sluggish. He turned his face towards his brother's voice, blinking slowly and wincing at the light. His mouth tasted of copper and his chest felt heavily weighted down. "M-" he tried, closing his eyes and licking his lips. "H-hurts," he managed, grimacing at the effort of speaking. "I...o-" he stuttered, terrified at the idea of any form of restraint.

"Wh-what d-did he w-w-with John? Pl-Please I'll do...w-what ever you want j-just..." he trailed off in confusion, his fevered dreams crashing with his current situation.

Mycroft saw the distress in his brother and tried to put his fears to rest. "I won't let them tie you up, Sherlock. If anything I'll just sedate you until the draining is done." Of course, he didn't mention how long that would take. "I've got John. John is in my care. Do you trust me?" He held his brother's face in his hands and gave him a stern look. "I have John. I am protecting him. Moran does not have John. He can not hurt John. Would you like to see him? I can bring him in once he wakes up."

Mycroft had a thought then, and he proposed it to Sherlock. "Would it make you feel better if you could see John to make sure he was safe? Maybe we can move his bed to in here with a divider or let
you watch a live feed. Not tapes, mind you, nothing like those, because he'll be safe and calm." At this point Mycroft cared a great deal more for Sherlock's sanity than John's rest, and was willing to wager that continued exposure to Sherlock would only help John, regardless of the stress it caused him. There was another matter that was bothering him that needed to be addressed then, and he texted Greg.

Tell me when John is awake. Sherlock might need to see him again. Would he be comfortable with a camera or possibly moving into Sherlock's room? A divider can be made. Above that, we need to talk. M

Sherlock began to mutter, slurring as he shook his head, "God no, no cameras...no...no film please." He swallowed and attempted to concentrate on the whole of what his brother said to him, struggling to remain calm.

Greg looked to Paul and put a finger up to stop him leaving. "Sit with him, yeah? Need to speak with Mycroft." He texted that he was on his way, wanting to have the conversation in person regarding John. It took fifteen minutes to make his way to Mycroft, lightly knocking in Sherlock's door.

Mycroft smiled at Greg, which was a tight gesture and didn't reach his eyes. "Sherlock, do you think I could walk with Greg for a moment? I'll be right outside, and I'll come back if you call. There are guards who will notify me and I can be back in a moment whenever you need me." He didn't want to upset Sherlock by leaving, but needed to speak with Greg in private.

Sherlock closed his eyes, relaxing slightly now that discussion of cameras had passed. He nodded to his brother, just wanting everything to stop for a while.

Mycroft patted him lightly and reminded him once more that he only needed to call if he was in distress. After that he walked to his office with Greg in tow.

Once inside he sat down in his armchair and sighed heavily. "I've got something I need to show you."

Greg's brows knit and he nodded. "Yeah, alright Mycroft," he said calmly, if not a bit tense.

Sherlock lay still on his back, counting his breathing. In...two, three. Out...two, three, four, five. He wanted his brother back and was nervous to have him back all in the same turn.

Mycroft turned to a large safe hidden behind the wall panels and pulled out several cardboard boxes. Tapes were in each one, labeled and organized neatly. "I acquired them just a day after Sherlock came back. I'm assuming they have digital copies, or they wouldn't have cleared out without them."

Greg stated at the safe for a moment, blinking incredulously. "Is that...Jesus are those...hang on, cleared out? They've got away? So we haven't...ah, hell Mycroft." He scrubbed a hand over his mouth before pointing back at the tapes. "What...why are you showing me this?"

"Moran wasn't in the building," Mycroft explained and scrubbed his hand down his face. "I'm showing you because I told Sherlock I got rid of them. It might help to keep them, and I will, but I've no idea what to do with them. I'm thinking about watching some so I get a basic idea of what's happened to John. I'd suggest your psychologist does the same." He didn't dare suggest Greg watch them.

Greg took in a sharp breath, nodding. "Paul is with John right now. I'll let him know. Why would
you- oh. Sherlock's on there too, isn't he?" Greg knew that Mycroft was keeping John as cared for as he was exclusively for Sherlock's benefit. He didn't particularly care overly much about John's wellbeing outside of how it affected Sherlock, and Greg honestly didn't care. So long as John was being looked after, that was all fine. But he knew Mycroft wouldn't waste any of his time watching what was done to John for no reason. However, if the tapes featured his brother as well, that would help him know what Sherlock needed. In theory, at least. "Mycroft...listen, not to be insensitive here, but you- I saw you after you watched that video of them working your brother. I- are you sure?"

Mycroft pulled out one more box. It was smaller than the others, as Sherlock hadn't been there as long and his torment had been less extensively documented. "Sherlock's are here too. I'm going to watch a small amount. I need to know what he went through so I know what to do, and what to avoid."

Mycroft pulled out one of the tapes. It was labeled 'Admissions' and had a small 1/5 on the side. "Do you think it would help Paul to watch these? Or at least just a few?"

Greg ran a hand over his face. "I- Christ, Mycroft, I don't know. Yeah...I suppose yeah it just seems..." like an invasion of privacy. Why it felt like that, he wasn't sure. Perhaps it was the thought of watching them strapped down while someone else had their way with them, almost like watching a damned rape. He cleared his throat. "Yeah it's...hell, I may need to watch them too. I didn't know what they'd done with the water, and look what happened. Hell. I mean, if I had known..." He stared at the shocking amount of footage for John. "That's...so much. So much."

"I think some of it might be repeated." He held up two tapes, one from each box. One was labeled 'Water-boarding 1/6' and the other 'POV Water-boarding 1/3'. "I don't want to watch them. I really, honestly don't. But if there is something on these tapes that could help me understand what Sherlock is going through, I won't hesitate. I suggest you don't watch John's. It's clear that you've become very emotionally involved with him, and it might hinder your ability to give him objective care."

Greg laughed at that, shaking his head. "You still find my care objective. Well...I suppose there is that. But Jesus, Mycroft, are you sitting there looking me in the face and telling me you are not emotionally involved with Sherlock? That's more bullocks than even you can carry, mate. Sorry to say. Not that you won't do what you're going to do anyhow, I just...worry about you." He drew in a deep breath. "Are they secure here, Mycroft? Without a doubt secure? I don't know if I can take another day of dragging John through crawlspaces and vents."

"We are completely and truly secure." Mycroft insisted. "It would take an air strike, a powerful one, to even dent us. Now of course I'm emotionally involved with Sherlock. But I can handle it better than you can. I'm used to almost losing him. I know how to deal with it. Admittedly, this is the worst..." He looked at a tape that simply said 'Clamps' and shivered. "But you likely couldn't handle it. You have the opinion, but I don't suggest it."

Greg shook his head, "Alright then, Mycroft. I'm going to go back to John before he wakes up. I'm sending Paul your way. Listen, I need a way to get through security faster. Can you make that happen? Half an hour of the trip is just getting here." He stood up and dragged a hand over his neck, watching Mycroft. "I'm- yeah, I'd offer my ear or my shoulder, but you'd likely be insulted." With a shrug he moved to the door. "Take care of yourself, yeah?"

Mycroft nodded. "I'll get you a card that should aid your process. It will still take a bit, but those doors seal like that for a reason. John and Sherlock's rooms can be sealed off completely if needed. And no, I do not need any further assistance."

"Right. Well, offer stands. I'm sending Paul to you." He moved out of the office and began the arduous journey back to John's room, more glad than he'd ever been for layers upon layers of
security. When he made it back, he walked over to Paul and in very hushed tones explained what was happening.

Paul was openly surprised at the development, looking over at the sleeping John and then back to Greg. He agreed that viewing the tapes would likely be a great help, and got up to go do so, interested in having more face time with Mycroft. He'd met the man, of course, had to interview before he was granted access, but he knew precious little about him.

When he finally made it down to the office, flanked with security to include a weapon trained on him, he calmly folded his hands at his back and waited for Mycroft to authorize him in.

Mycroft had, in the time it took for Paul to make his way back, gotten a small monitor and a VHS reader. "Come in," he said and gestured to the chair that had been previously occupied by Greg.

There were far too many tapes to be viewed in one sitting. It would likely take over two years to get through John's, if one watched in moderation. "As you can see, there is a vast amount of both audio and video documenting John's torture and conditioning. If you believe it would be helpful, I will allow you to view it so as to give John better care."

Paul walked into Mycroft's office, sweeping his eyes over everything save for the tapes, leaving them for last. He took a seat a moment later, comfortable in his posture and body language. "How is your brother doing?"

Mycroft folded his hands in front of him on the desk and made his face unreadable but not unpleasant. "My brother fares better that John mentally, though he is still in a great deal of physical pain. Do you believe it would be helpful?"

Paul studied Mycroft for a moment. It was interesting how deeply effective his protective mechanisms were. "To me? Doubtful. It is simple enough to tell from the scars on Dr. Watson's body what sort of treatment he was subjected to. I know his triggers and his fears. I rather doubt there would be much for me to gain from the tapes. Greg might, but I'm not at all recommending he watch them. I've not delved into progressive therapy with John yet, as his environment is still far too unstable and chaotic to accomplish much. Most of the techniques to help him back to himself would be cruel in his present situation. However, Greg informs that you are intent on viewing the footage of what your brother endured. Might I ask to stay for that?"

Mycroft made no visible changes in expression as he contemplated allowing someone to watch his brother be beaten. Sherlock might not ever know that they had been shown, but were they his tapes he would have preferred they stay hidden. "If you wish, you may stay," he said calmly and looked at the collection of tapes. He decided to go chronologically instead of by subject, and put the earliest date into the reader.

Paul kept half of his attention on the tapes, while he focused primarily on Mycroft. The dynamic at play between the four was somewhat of a psychology dream case, and while he was concerned for the men, he could not help his clinical interest. Sherlock's torment had started swiftly, much faster than he would have anticipated.

Mycroft analyzed as he watched. Some of the threats made his stomach churn, but he have no outward appearance of it. Only once, when Sherlock screamed for the first time, did he close his eyes briefly and take a long breath. His walls were well built, and he allowed little to touch him. This was to be no exception.
Paul spoke after Sherlock's eye was spared, his voice soft over the sound of Sherlock's wild breathing on the tapes. "It was foolish of them to try and train Sherlock in this manner. This was not the original torturer, was it? This is," he waved his hand at the screen, "crude and clumsy. Not the physical torture, but the psychological aspect of it. The physical torture is...incredible, but there is a startling difference between this and what John was subject to."

"Yes, it's clear this one had seen Moriarty work but wasn't quite as clever. Ruthless, of course, but obviously just a strong arm used to taking orders and not inventing them. We should count ourselves lucky on that aspect." Mycroft would rather Sherlock's body be abused than his mind. Bodies could heal with less scarring than a mind. "Yes, John was broken down entirely. It almost makes me want to watch his tapes and see what went on."

"Yes," Paul agreed, "now that I see this...perhaps we should view one just before he was rescued, I'm interested to see how he was attempting to convince Sherlock he'd done this to John, but then I'd be interested to see what was done with John." Paul leaned back in his chair, keeping a constant eye on Mycroft.

Mycroft pulled the tape out and took the latest date that had been recorded into tapes. He was mentally prepared to see Sherlock at his worst, and the second tape began. Mycroft sat back. Sherlock looked thinner. Much thinner. His bare chest was a mess of open wounds and scabbed over burns. His arm was swollen and weeping and Mycroft could hear John screaming in the background. There was a light from the front of the room and after a moment Mycroft realized it was a projection screen.

"Ah," Paul said immediately, "that's one way to do it. I wonder if they were letting him sleep. Intense pain, sleep deprivation, and suggestive video could, crudely, manage what they were going for. Sledgehammer to set glass, but in theory it could have worked." He sat quietly, watching the tapes with clinical interest.

"Yes, it's crude, but over time..." On screen Moran was at Sherlock's side again, asking that he admit to what he did. When Sherlock finally complied, he drew away and turned the tape off. Sherlock was left crying on his own at the end, muttering to himself in French and Latin. Mycroft caught his name in the mix and was struck with guilt that he hadn't been there.

"Oh," Paul whispered at the languages, "he's multilingual, and calling for...is that a name he calls you often?" The 'My' was not congruent to the languages, and while Paul was rubbish with Latin, he knew his French. Mycroft sat across from him, watching the tapes.

"Yes, he called me 'My' when he was younger as a result of being unable to say the entire word as a child. It stuck and became an affectionate nickname of sorts. I haven't heard it in years."

"Greg has told me that Sherlock believed he killed John. Do we have footage of that? I do want to see what happened there, that bit is particularly concerning to me."

Mycroft looked through the tapes. He didn't see as clear a labeling system in these as there was on John's, but he found a note scribbled onto the date label of one tape. It read; 'Admission: killed John'. Mycroft popped it in.

Paul remained quiet as the tape walked them through the scene. He leaned forward, watching as Sherlock hardly had the strength to keep his eyes open, John's voice screaming for mercy from outside the door. This one managed to slip past his clinical detachment, honestly tugging at him. Sherlock was doused in pepper spray, hardly able to breathe as a man was walked in dressed as John.

He looked over at Mycroft for a split second, and in that time a gunshot sounded. Paul's attention jumped, snapping back to Sherlock on the screen. He had not hesitated. "That's going to be an issue
in his recovery," he pointed out gently, keeping a close eye on what he could see of Sherlock.

Mycroft carefully regulated his breathing. It was his link between the physical and emotional. 0, 1,1,2,3,5,8,13… He kept himself calm, even though he had just watched his brother shoot the man he believed to be his love. The amount of torment that Sherlock must have gone through and believed John to be going through must have been unimaginable. "Yes, it could be an issue. He was quite insistent that he had killed John. He seems to slip back into it sometimes."

"He's been out of captivity going on what? Twenty-eight hours now? I am not surprised in the slightest. That's a great deal of physical trauma to have endured, and an exhausted mind does what it can. That...what we just witnessed...that's a mercy killing. That wasn't about saving himself, that was about saving John. How is he around John?"

Mycroft shut his eyes once more. It was clear that Sherlock was fiercely protective of John. His brother was quite emotionally involved. For him to had seen John in so much pain that he didn't even hesitate about putting him down for a millisecond told him just how much he had seen. "Sherlock must be frankly devastated. He is in love with John, fiercely attached and protective too. For him to have seen John in that much distress... It must have been his own personal hell."

Chapter End Notes

Perhaps there is hope. Perhaps Moran will be back.

I'd like to give a big THANK YOU to the people who gave us art!! Next chapter I'll be putting links to their work if they choose. It really is some fantastic stuff!

If you have anything you'd like to share with this mad group of depressed readers, you can drop your email in a comment and I'll contact you. It might be shared with everyone in the next chapter!
"Yes, I think that quite clear," Paul agreed, keeping his tone clinically settled, anticipating that Mycroft Holmes was not a man who would be interested in his sympathy. He opened his mouth to speak again when there was a sudden, panicked scream from the hallway. It was distant and soft, but clearly audible. In the next moment Mycroft's childhood namesake was repeated over and over again in desperate, wailing agony.

Paul stood, intent on following Mycroft down the hall.

Sherlock was staring at a fixed point in his room, a shadowed corner, eyes gone wide as he stared in abject horror, screaming for the brother he was swiftly beginning to believe he'd hallucinated.

Mycroft rose from his chair with an air of purpose, but not blind haste. He strode to the door and made his way through security as quickly as he could, vouching just this once for Paul, but instructing his men that he was granted through without a guard as an isolated incident.

Mycroft entered the scene prepared for anything. He was at Sherlock's side and took his hand calmly. "It's alright, Sherlock, it's alright. Tell me what you see."

"John!" Sherlock answered in a tone that made it clear he believed anyone could see as he was seeing, "Oh g-god I- he's- w-hy won't y-you help him! Brother pl-" he grit his teeth as pain ripped across his chest, leaving him shivering hard and jerking his hand away from Mycroft without looking at him, his eyes locked to the corner.

Paul hung back, watching Mycroft's interaction with his brother. Sherlock's entire disposition shifted then, his eyes physically moving with his hallucination. "N-no, no, n-ot, st-stop stop," he sputtered before he began to scream in complete agony, his heart monitors reflecting the sudden, blinding pain he was in, his mind working with his body to torture him even when Moran was gone.

"No, Sherlock, that isn't John! It's not John. I've got John, remember? My has John." Mycroft had his arms hovering around Sherlock gently, only touching him in the places that wouldn't cause pain. "I can help John. Deep breaths, brother, deep breaths."

Paul took in Sherlock's physical condition. He was seriously and heavily injured. Sherlock went still as his brother circled him, Latin on his tongue as he spoke to his brother. "Why...w-why...I d-did what they wanted I said what...I...w-why? Why?" He was crying again, pain and cloying fear making his chest flutter harshly as his heart monitor held position, neither slowing now increasing. "I...I was g-going to give my eyes...w-was...I don't h-have anything left to GIVE!" He shouted the last, whimpering a second later at the magnificent pain that sliced across his chest. "H-he isn't st-stoping why- wh-what do I have to s-s-say?"

Mycroft too his brothers face in his hands and forcibly turned him so he couldn't look at the corner.

"Hallucination, Sherlock. You're alright. I've got John. Could you say that with me? Mycroft has John." His voice was as calm as ever, both comforting and commanding respect.

Sherlock studied Mycroft's face, his breathing hitching as his pupils finally began to focus. He closed his eyes, trying to breathe as he whispered back, "My has John," opening his eyes once more, openly afraid, reaching out and clutching at Mycroft's forearm with a trembling hand, "W-Where is J-John. I
can h-hear him where..." He closed his eyes again, swallowing with great effort against the panic, "My...My has J-John, My has...I can hear h-him," he cried out, shaking his head. "My, make it st-stop."

"John is safe. He is just down the hall. Do you need to see him?" Mycroft ran his fingers back through Sherlock's hair and tried to catch his eyes with his own to keep them from roving over to the empty corner where Sherlock's hallucination had manifested itself. "My has John. John is safe. If you want to see him, you'll have to be calm. Could you take a few deep breaths for me?"

Sherlock closed his eyes again, breathing deep as he was able to make himself. "Hurts," he slurred, still hearing John as clearly as he could hear himself. He took a few more measured breaths, struggling with himself, fighting off the panic with massive amounts of energy. He leaned into the touch at his head, greedy for anything that didn't hurt. "I- I can h-hear him. He's...I t-tried to s-save him from it."

Mycroft had one hand in Sherlock's hair and the other on his face. "I'm keeping John safe. Do you need to see him? I can bring him to you."

*I might need John. Sherlock is hallucinating. M*

"Do you want that? He can walk over and say hello now. The real John is safe and not in any pain."

Paul spoke softly to Mycroft from the back of the room. "Mycroft...I would encourage caution." Sherlock did not at all react to Paul, his eyes either on his brother or the pile of bleeding John Watson shying from a whip in the corner. Sherlock jumped when it struck John again, crying out for him, reaching out and clutching at his brother.

"Why are you l....letting them...s-stop, My....stop. "


Paul looked over to Sherlock, who was still quite a physical mess from the most recent medical crisis. "For Sherlock, it would be best, I think. For John? I am not sure. It will either help him considerably, or it will hurt him considerably."

Sherlock struggled against Mycroft's hands, trying to get a look back at the corner from which he could hear John sobbing in broken, agonized defeat. "John," he called out, Arabic on his tongue, "J-John please," his own voice was cracking, tears sliding over his crusty face. He looked back to his brother, "C-can't you hear him? I- p..please Mycroft... h-help."

"I'm here. John is safe. I'll bring him. I'll get him, Sherlock. I promise."

Sherlock slid his eyes over to Mycroft, pain wrapping around his chest, his side on fire, arm tingling with deep, acidic aching. His eyes were glassy with fever and exhaustion as he breathed behind his mask, his voice flat and detached. "Y-You should run," he whispered in Latin, his focus sliding to where Paul, a man he'd never seen before, stood. His face arranged in terrified resignation as John's cries echoed in his ears and he himself braced for spikes and needles and clamps. "Run."

*Bring John in as quickly as possible. M*

Mycroft bent down and gestured back at Paul. "He is safe, Sherlock. His name is Paul. Could you say hello to him? He is here to help John. Greg knows him."

Sherlock followed his brother's gesture, tears constantly leaking from his unblinking eyes, bitterly
tired and feeling incredibly ill. "W-what do I have to say today?" He asked softly, swallowing and then following the instruction to say hello."H-hi, Paul."

Mycroft cringed inwardly. He didn't want his brother taking orders so readily from him. Before this incident he would have welcomed it, but not if it had lost its appeal. "He's a nice man. A very nice man here to help Greg, John, you and myself."

Paul moved forward cautiously, advancing on Sherlock and slowly reaching out, brushing his fingers on Sherlock's shoulder before stepping back once more. "I'm a psychiatrist, Sherlock," he said softly, crouching so that his head was lower than Sherlock's, something he'd not seen any of his captors do in the tapes. "You have a high fever and have only been back a little over a day. It is understandable that you are confused and hallucinating. John Watson is not in this room."

Sherlock did not shy away from the man's touch, though he'd learned a long time ago that it was pointless to do so. He blinked at him, gripping Mycroft, slowly speaking in a mix of French and Latin. "John...y-you work with John?" That could mean several things to Sherlock's scattered mind. He looked back at his brother, watching his face. "You...what have y-you..." his stomach twisted and he looked back at Paul, groaning and closing his eyes, "y-you saw the f-film. You s-saw..."

___

Greg read the text and looked over at John. It had only been a few hours since he'd started to sleep, but the text from Mycroft was urgent. He cleared his throat and reached out, softly touching John's hand. "John? Can you wake up a moment?"

John jerked away and sat up abruptly, hands raised to shield himself and eyes wide. When he came into awareness and noticed Greg he became visibly relieved. Too many times had he been woken just to be beaten. Sometimes it was just a needle or two, but at that level of exhaustion a pinprick felt like being gutted. "H-He Greg."

Shouldn't have touched him, Greg thought to himself, gauging John's mental fortitude. "Sorry about that, John," he said softly, sitting down and keeping his head lower than John's to carry on settling him. "How are you? Mycroft is requesting us, but you don't have to go."

John was rubbing the place where he had been touched, remarking to himself that it hadn't been a needle. Just the tips of Greg's fingers. "I can go. If Mycroft is calling Sherlock must be hurting."

Greg watched John carefully before shaking his head and texting back.

John isn't well, I don't think it's a good idea.

"It's okay, John. We will try again another time. You should go back to sleep, I'm sorry I scared you."

Bring him in. I will send for him if necessary. M

John was awake now and wondering why Mycroft might have sent for him. "What's wrong with Sherlock? I should go see."
Greg cleared his throat and spoke softly to John. "Sherlock has a fever and is sick. He's hallucinating. Mycroft thinks it will help him to see you. That sounds like he's not stable, if you are going to go I want you to take your pills and be prepared to hear him scared, okay? He might think someone is trying to hurt you, but we all know that no one here will do that, yeah?"

John sat up and scooted to the edge of the bed. His bare feet were cold against the ground and he wondered when the last time he wore shoes was. "I know. I might get scared. But I need to help him." John was very well aware of the fact that this could send him spiraling down into a panic attack, but he was willing to do is anyway.

Greg texted Mycroft after helping to get John into a chair.

We are coming, but I do not like this. John is not stable, nor is he a tool to be used. Be careful with this, Mycroft.

He crouched in front of John, handing him two pills and then wrapping John's blanket around him. "Your feet," he whispered as his knee brushed against cold toes, shaking his head. "I'm an idiot, here, John, I'm sorry." He got up and walked to the little closet in John's room, pulling out a pair of house shoes for him that had been brought from Baker Street. He was very careful as he crouched down and slipped them over John's bare toes, helping to get the heel on. "Okay," he said quietly, "You tell me when you need to go. I want you to try very hard to remember that Sherlock may not be lucid, and if he's scared, it's not because someone is out to get you."

Mycroft noted Paul's actions and remembered to mimic them if they proved effective. He moved his fingers through Sherlock's hair again, trying to remind him that not all touch was painful, and that he didn't have to always expect bad things when someone reached for him. "It's alright, Sherlock. John is coming. John will come and you'll see that he is alright."

Sherlock leaned into his brother's touch. "Y-you...did you not s-say the tapes were gone? I-where...where are we, My?" he whispered, licking at the blood drying on his lips.

Mycroft didn't look away from Sherlock. "I have them in my office where nobody can get them."

Sherlock stared at his brother, ignoring Paul, his sluggish mind trying to work. "I...I look forward to h-hearing your di-dissapoint-ment," he managed, shame twisting around him at the idea of Mycroft listening to Sherlock break and beg, calling out for his big brother like a child. Paul looked between the two of them, taking in the dynamic with keen interest.

Mycroft took Sherlock's hand and dipped his head down to it. "No, Sherlock, not disappointed. You're very brave. You handled the pain better than I would have. You're recovering very quickly. I am amazed at how strong you have been." He was truly amazed that after such treatment, even after the meager amount they had watched on the tape compared to the whole, how he was even able to speak.

Sherlock jumped as the whip came down across John's crumpled form again, gritting his teeth with the pain movement caused him. "Th-then why w-won't you make....make th-them stop?" He turned his face away from his brother, staring at the wall that slid in and out of focus, sometimes the beige he'd known in captivity. The crusted blood plastered to him face, slicking back his hair and smearing his pillow did not help him stay present. He licked at his copper lips and spoke in English. "M-Moran...I- I'll...I h-hurt him. It was me. I sh-shot him, s-stop, god s-stop." This of course meant that he would be under the whip instead, which was infinitely preferable to John's endless suffering.
John stared down at his feet in the shoes. It was strange to be wearing them again, as he had no need previously when he was only in bed or taking a few cautious steps. The physical therapists didn’t require that he have shoes, and he hadn’t given them much thought. “I know, It's going to hurt. He’s going to scare me. But I’ll go anyway for as long as I can.”

Greg moved he and John through the halls, his face set in a grim expression, not at all liking the idea of taking John to Sherlock. "I have you, don't forget I have you," he reminded as they stopped at last outside of Sherlock's door. He texted again.

*We are here.*

*Come in, now.*

Mycroft was at a loss for what to say. Sherlock was clearly using the phrase he had been trained to say, the one that would in his mind save John, but it did very little to help him now other than confirm the depth of his hallucination. "Its alright," Mycroft said again, "John isn't in any pain. John is alright. John is-" The door opened and Mycroft breathed a sigh of relief to see the man wheeling in. "John is right over there."

John looked hesitant, but determined, with his jaw set and his lip only trembling a little. "Hey, Sherlock," he said quietly and reached one hand out to take Greg’s. "Are you doing alright? I heard that you were upset, so I came to help."

Sherlock had his face turned away from John, eyes closed, brilliantly aching from the tube in his side which, in his fevered mind, felt like some sort of spike or metal pipe. He rattled off in Arabic to John, "Th-they're h-hurting you and I'm t-trying to make them stop." He sniffed behind his mask, copper and humidified air all he registered.

Greg got his first look at Sherlock since they'd put the tube in his side, holding tight to John's hand and leaning down, "Whatever he says, remember that he's confused. You are safe."

*Deep breaths. Nobody is hurting me. Do I feel pain. Yes. No. No pain. Sherlock needs help.* John moved forward until he was very close to the side of Sherlock's bed. He didn't understand what Sherlock had said, other than his name, but he could grasp the desperate tone. "Hey, Sherlock?" he called in as calm a voice as he could manage. "Its John. John Watson. I'm right over here, if you would look at me. Could you look over for a moment? I'd like to talk to you." He had his hands folded in his lap and his head down, using every ounce of his physical and mental strength to stay calm.

Sherlock slowly turned his mess of a face to John, blinking at him with red-rimmed, glassy eyes. He drew in a few slow, shallow breaths, the act of moving his chest incredibly painful.

He knew how to avoid the clamps, but whatever was buried in his side was another story all together. Slowly he studied John's face before looking back to the corner, jerking again as the whip came down. He looked back to John in confusion. "Y-You're," he whispered, letting go of Mycroft in an effort to touch John with heavily trembling fingers. "P-Please," he whispered, "I...pl-please, John, I d-don't understand."

This was different than before. When Sherlock had been screaming that someone was hurting John, John had subsequently panicked. Now, with him trembling and saying he didn't understand, John felt significantly less threatened and thus was able to handle it better. He reached out and took Sherlock’s hand. "I'm the real John. See? I can touch you. Nobody is hurting me. I'm alright. I'm just fine. Can you tell me what you see?" He didn't really want to know, but that was how Paul had gone about it, as had Greg Greg, so he figured there must be something good about asking.
"M-Moran," Sherlock responded, tears sliding over the caked blood across his face, debilitating pain strangling his through process. "I t-told him what...told him w-what I'm supposed to and he st-still won't s-stop h-hurting you over th-there," his eyes slid over to the imagery he could still see, despite holding John's fingers as best he could. "I...I h-hurt, John, it h-hurts." He choked on a sob and pinched his eyes closed, looking incredibly small on his bed, his chest hardly moving for fear of more burns. "I don't know w-what he wants. I"

Greg kept hold of Sherlock's hand and stared at Sherlock, looking to Mycroft. "Can we clean his face? John gets set off by smells, that might be making him more agitated."

John bounced his leg up and down on the little platform on his chair. "Sherlock, nobody is there. Nobody is hurting me. I feel fine." His voice cracked on the last bit as his eyes wandered over Sherlock. The arm was disturbing to say the least. His face was bloody and bruised, the sheer amount of bandages used was frightening and the tube reminded John of the fluid drained from his own fractured ribs. He reached out and ran his fingers back through Sherlock's hair. "It'll be alright, Sherlock, it'll-" John froze when he pulled his hand away. Flecks of dried blood and a few smeared drops of red were on his palm and fingers. His jaw locked, eyes widened, and he was still as death while his mind tried to process this.

Greg swore and crouched down beside John. "His nose was bleeding, no one is hurting him, it's from his nose, John." He wrapped his hand over John's, using his palm to cover the blood. "You are okay, you really are okay. It's safe."

Sherlock blinked up at the ceiling, speaking in soft Latin to no one at all. "I sc-scare everyone," he whispered, cracked lips moving as he silently repeated himself. "S-scare every...everyone." He jerked again as John's screams echoed in his head, closing his eyes on a pained whimper.

John shook his hand and wiped it off almost frantically on the bed sheet. Someone is hurting Sherlock. Sherlock was hurting me. John considered himself at the bottom of the totem pole, with Sherlock above him. If someone was hurting Sherlock, they must be very powerful indeed. "Sherlock," he whispered with a tone of urgency, "Is someone hurting you?"

Sherlock did not turn his head. He dragged in a cautious, shallow breath. "O-Only John," he whispered, meaning far too many things at once. He closed his eyes and grit his teeth once more as he gasped in a fresh wave of pain. "H-Hurts...I d-don't understand." His fingers curled as reality slipped away from him as he was left untouched, drifting in his own confusion.

John had to push himself away then. He pulled his feet up onto the seat of his chair and made himself very small and protected. "Greg, I n-need h-help," he stammered. There was still a bit of blood on his hand and he curled it into a fist. "W-Want to h-help. H-how do I-I h-help?"

Paul was watching all of this with cautious interest. Sherlock blinked and turned his head toward John as Greg moved, wrapping his arms around John and whispering to him softly.

"J-John?" Sherlock asked, seeming to see him for the first time since John came in. Paul was moving, gathering a cloth and dampening it out of John's view before handing it over to Greg.

"Here, John, let me see your hand," Greg whispered, sliding the cloth over John's hand to clear away the blood. The man let out a startled cry and jerked his hand away. "No! Don’t!" He struggled with as much strength as he could muster and slapped the wet cloth away. "Don’t like it! I-I don’t like those! Hurt!” He was a stuttering child again until the wet cloth was removed by Paul. Even if the cloth was only mildly damp, it could still be held over his face, and John was not keen on any waterboarding at the moment.
Sherlock looked at his brother and pointed at John, "I s-scared him again, didn't I?" The man's panic had rubbed off on him and tears poured down his face. "Wh-Why do you keep making him come here? He...he hates me!" He drew his hand to his chest, closing his eyes as he cried out sharply in pain. "I'm s-sorry John," he managed with his jaw tight and teeth clenched, "S-Sorry John, sorry, s-sorry...s-sorry."

"Greg," John whispered and held his hand tight. "Greg, I n-need h-help. I don't... I don't know w-what to do." He let out a choked whine and held his knees to his chest.

When he looked up, his eyes were red with tears. "I d-don't h-hate you Sh-Sherl-look." John broke down in fresh tears, the sheer will it took to keep himself from screaming making him physically shake. "I-I hate M-Moriar-ry f-for h-hurting u-us."

Greg set his jaw, furious at the situation. He was very careful to keep his voice steady. "I'm taking John back. This isn't productive."

Paul held up a hand to still Greg, moving into the hallway for a moment. While he was gone, Sherlock shifted, which upset his leg and sent another crashing wave of agony over him. "I'm i-in pain," he breathed, no idea if it would mean anything to any of them. The room was spinning around him as he tried to breathe, guarding against clamps that were not there. "I-I'm sorry, please, pl-please."

Paul came back into the room with a syringe, walking over to John and crouching in front of him. "John, this will help numb you out a bit, okay? Won't put you to sleep, you just won't feel very much. Do you want this?"

John was shaking his head, fingers digging into his hair. "No, NO, I don't... I w-want to help...Need t-t just l-learn to d-do this." He slowly lowered his legs back down and wheeled himself to Sherlock's side. His hands shook. His lips were pressed in a tight line. His entire body seemed to shy away and yet he moved forward still.

"Sherlock," he said softly. "Please, I'm...I'm sorry I-I'm afraid. I'm trying...." John looked away for a moment and exhaled slowly. "I'm trying t-to stay calm, b-but its hard...and...and..." He dropped his head down to the pillow. It smelt like blood and sweat and Sherlock, and John quickly pulled away. "I-I-I n-need y-you t-to be a-alright," he managed through gritted teeth. "Greg, GREG!" That smell, the mix of fear and blood, death and Sherlock, was exactly what he had smelled constantly during his time with Moriarty.

Paul moved then, going to John's side as Greg wrapped his arms around him, blocking his view of Sherlock. Paul slid the sedative into John's line and pushed it without asking again. It would not put John to sleep, but it would numb him out and allow him to detach.

Sherlock's face pinched and he turned away, starting to cry in earnest. He was drowning in physical agony, his entire body quaking as his nerve endings fired, his wounds burning, each inhalation nothing short of horrific. John was terrified of him, and his heart seized up in his chest, making him go still, gasping with choking sobs, his limit reached. Sherlock's monitors blipped in warning as his fingers curled tight in the bedding, terrified and suffering.

Greg held John's face, speaking to him softly, "Breathe, breathe, John, you're okay," he watched as Paul pulled the needle away, stepping back to see what effect it would have on him.

John's mind was like a burn wound. It was blistered, raw, angry and red, and this medicine was like cool, soothing water, slowly settling over his mind and dampening the flame. "I-I don't...." he murmured quietly. He still felt fear, but it was distant and far away. "I need to...to help Sherlock..."
He sat up and his head fell down to his chest before bouncing back up again. The small amount of pain from the needle had startled him, the feeling blown out of proportion to his hypersensitive mind, but it was soon erased. "M'gonna help... Sherlock? Sherlock, are you alright? You were sad...

Paul looked over at Sherlock, swiftly getting to his feet. "When was the last time he had pain medication?" Greg looked over at Sherlock and swore, "God, Mycroft he's- Jesus," he moved away from John to the door, calling for a doctor.

Sherlock felt as spun glass, thin and brittle, hardly connected to anything at all as he panted, terrified of the burning clamps, tears sliding down the sides of his face as he struggled. "Hurts," he breathed, "h-hurts."

John pushed his chair slowly to Sherlock's side, not out of hesitation, but out of a new weakness and relaxation of his muscles. "It'll be alright, Sherlock. I'm gonna keep you safe. Greg is gonna...gonna keep us safe. Don't be ‘fraid of the doctors, alright?"

As if on cue, Mycroft's head doctor came in to administer the medication.

Sherlock whimpered, pinching his eyes closed and dragging his better arm in as close to himself as he could. "M-M-My, My p-please I'm s-sorry oh g-god pl-ease," he stuttered, begging for his brother's protection as he had so many times in the last two months.

Greg stepped close to John and put a hand on his shoulder, glad that Paul had given him whatever miraculous medication it was that let him detach. He gave John's shoulder a squeeze and stared at Sherlock, shaking his head sadly. Jesus, what a mess.

Chapter End Notes

I know I always end on a sad not, but I just can't help it! It's a sad story!

But John wants to help, and that is all Sherlock really needs. Right?

ALSO!

We have ART!!

So far, I've received art from Dark Threshold, and it is awesome!

The attention to detail is lovely, and she even showed that Sherlock could only use two fingers in Mycroft's hand! Go check it out if you want to.

LINK HERE: http://helloworlditsvictoria.tumblr.com/post/90878627437/wow-here-is-some-awesome-art-that-a-user-named

If you want to have your art in the next chapter, drop your email in a comment and I'll contact you about linking your DA or Tumblr.
"You aren't... going to... going to hurt him with that, are you?" John asked when the doctor gently took Sherlock's arm in his hand. "No," the man responded warmly, "No, I'm just going to help him not feel pain."

John gave a small nod, then rested his head on a clean spot of sheets, about level with Sherlock's shoulder where he would normally be when they stood. His mind felt heavy, though he was still apprehensive about something. He couldn't quite remember what he should be nervous about, though, and dispelled the thought.

Mycroft took Sherlock's hand while the doctor administered the injection. "Its alright, Sherlock. Look, John is here. John is alright." The man, hearing his name, looked up with a blank expression.

Sherlock slowly came down from his terror induced panic, gradually breathing deeper and slower as the pain began to dull. He lay there on his back, staring up at the ceiling, searching for the stains and panels that he knew so well. Greg watched him, finally stepping forward and reaching out, touching Sherlock's fingers.

Sherlock jumped hard, having forgotten there was anyone with him. "It w-was-" he began automatically, eyes cutting over and getting a look at Lestrade. "Greg?" he blinked, looking around the room slowly, "J-John?"

John raised his head from where he had laid it and gave him a slightly inane half-smile. "Yeah, I'm here. Are you alright? I was worried about you. You were sad. Are you still sad?" He frowned then, remembering how terribly Sherlock had been hurt. He had to tear his mind away from the thought of the cuts and bruises, lest he start to panic over the similarity of his own body.

Sherlock's brow knit as he stared at John, turning enraged eyes on his brother. "He is n-not a tool, Mycroft. Did...you drug him to keep... keep... him in here w-with me?" He curled his fingers into a tight fist, utterly furious.

John gave another nod. He was very well aware that he was drugged and very content with it. "Sherlock, 's alright. 'S fine." John drew out the last syllable for a bit longer than was needed and took Sherlock's angry fist in his hand. "I like the medicine. Keeps me from hurting."

Mycroft gestured to John after his statement. "He doesn't seem to mind."

"W-Well he couldn't... m-mind could he? H-how about you bring me... me m-my heroin and I w-won't mind any of this!" He was so enraged he could hardly speak, keeping his eyes away from John, swimming in guilt.

"Sherlock, you can't have heroin, thats bad." John gave him a very serious look, -or at least as serious as he could manage- and shook his head. "Can I help? I want to help. I came here to help. Please let me help you."

Sherlock tensed his fingers on the bedding. "You b-believe I did this t-to you, I...you d-don't need to help me J-John I just...just w...wanted you safe. I...g-god this hurts," he grit his teeth as some of the pain broke through the medication. "I j-just wanted to... s-save you. I am sorry, John."
"I don't think you did it, Sherlock." John looked up and gave him a sincere look. He had decided to trust Greg on that aspect, and saw his crazed, burned mind for what it was. "I just...I hurt sometimes. It's not just you. I can't shower on my own either. Or drink. Or eat. It's not just you. Its me. I am the one who is ruined. It's not something you did."

Sherlock's grip did not ease on the bedding. "D-Don't be an idiot, John," Sherlock breathed, his back twinging with pain, "n-not ruined. W-Wrinkled. Need s-sorting out. 's Greg's job...and th-this Paul. T-Tell me about...about Paul." He was breathing short and swift, though his pain was far better controlled than it had been.

"Paul is alright. He makes me think about things I don't like to think about. I like Greg better. Greg is much better." John put one hand on Sherlock's arm where he could see a small patch of undamaged skin. "If I'm not ruined, then don't be sad, alright?"

The drugs and exhaustion, paired with the odd undercurrent of detachment from his reality, the not-quite belief that this was real, loosed Sherlock's tongue entirely as he spoke to the ceiling. "I am a-allowed m-my sadness. I-h...have lost the m-most important m-man in the world. I am h-happy you are n-not ruined but I am f-fucking broken...that...that y-you are g-gone to me." His chest stuttered as he panted with that, a tear sliding down the side of his face.

John whimpered and looked over to Greg as he often did when things got difficult. "You...I'm not gone, Sherlock." He demonstrated the fact by reaching up and touching Sherlock's face lightly. "I'm not gone to you. I'm right here, right? I'm closer to you now than before. You would have hit me if I touched your face before this." He ran his fingers over Sherlock's high, proud cheekbones, now darkened with bruises. It was something he was vaguely aware that he had always wanted to do, though any reason was obscured.

Sherlock turned sharply to face John, wincing at the movement. "H-Hit you? N...n-n-no, no I-he-he m-m-made me s-say it but I...n-never, John n-never I n-n-never never, no, M-My, I n-never...tell...tell him I n-never," he had to drag in a panicked breath, shaking his head in fear, "n-never, John I didn't...I d-didn't..."

"Not...Not like that, Sherlock." John said much too calmly and flopped his head back down. "I mean you didn't like people touching you. Or at least I thought so. You sort of..." His muffled mind came up with no words so he simply leaned away and scowled to demonstrate Sherlock's demeanor. "But now I can." He kept his hand on Sherlock's cheek.

Greg could not help but chuckle softly at John's pantomime. The laugh seemed to grab Sherlock's attention, his eyes cutting to Greg, who spoke swiftly, "Sorry, Sherlock, it's just...was a good impression if you ask me." He shrugged, glad for even a brief pause in the misery. Sherlock's expression softened for a moment and he looked from Greg to John, nodding softly. "You...you a-always could have but I...not k-keen to admit it," he whispered, shrugging and then wincing as he did. "It's b-been horrible...wi-with you gone. I was..." dying. He tried to reach for John, his fingers ever trembling, heavy eyes turned to John, drinking him in. "Th-the w...water...that's the f-first thing you sh-should tackle. A-After that it's...a-all downhill."

John smiled when Greg laughed, his eyes lighting up just a bit at the sound. When Sherlock said he would have been able to touch him, he was surprised. He couldn't remember terribly much about Sherlock before the event, and what he did remember was more impressions and feelings, not purposefully retrieved and well constructed memories. "Well, I didn't mean to leave. I mean, I did...I wanted to go to Africa really badly, but...I didn't think you would miss me much. I went away for a whole week once and you yelled at me for not handing you your phone when I walked in. I don't think you even noticed." That one memory was clear for some reason, and he explored it as best he
could in his hazy mind.

"Th-that's why? That?" Sherlock grit his teeth and shook his head, speaking to himself, "Idiot, Sherlock, idiot Sherlock!" He bit his bloodied lips and arched his back slightly, pulling in a deep breath. "Liar, I w-was a liar I d-didn't want you to know...know that it h-hurt when y-you left. I was a f-fool and-" he huffed an empty laugh, a brittle, pained shell of a thing, another tear sliding down his face. "I l-loved you s-since...since...c-can't remember if it w-was when you g-got in the first cab with me or wh-when you shot the cabbie but...hours, give or take...only hours."

John thought he might be shocked, were the drug not suppressing every aspect of his mind. "I-I...Sherlock..." As it was he couldn't comprehend the information he was being given. He had told Greg that he loved him, and Sherlock the same, both of which were returned, but this sounded so different. Sherlock seemed to be so guarded that John had thought it would have taken him years to even consider loving someone. But now, after thinking about it, it seemed to make sense. "I didn't leave to hurt you. I was going to help people. I just thought I was called to it. I thought you wouldn't care. You'd go out with your skull or something. You never really needed me or anything. Why didn't you tell me? Why? If you had just told me I might... I might not have left and... oh, god... I might not have left... He might not have... If I hadn't been leaving you would have known to look for me..." John sat up and pulled away from the bed. He could not think properly in his drugged state, and very little made sense. He knew that Sherlock loving him did not fit into his idea of who the man was, and that if Sherlock had asked him to stay, had honestly spoken of the pain he felt, he would have never went to Africa. And, since John had never made it to Africa, he accidentally considered his departure to Darfur his arrival in Hell. "Why...years and year...Why didn’t you say anything?"

Greg flinched as John spoke, stepping back with John though he kept his eyes to Sherlock. Sherlock, who's face had drained of the slight color it had picked back up. Sherlock, who'd made a desperate, pained sound as John pulled away, reaching for John and then pulled his damaged hand back to his chest, turning his face away. Sherlock, who's shoulders began to shake as he obviously fell into broken sobs. Greg put his hand on John's shoulder, his thumb rubbing along the bone gently, biting his own lip in the wake of the distress between these men.

For several minutes Sherlock wept, managing to get his fingers into his curls, pulling tight in his distress, guilt and regret staggering in their weight. He finally managed, in a broken and shattered voice, "Y-You s-s-said...not...not...n-not gay...not...n-not a couple. S-So angry when...when anyone w-would m-mistake...." he dragged in a wavering breath, struggling with himself, coughing as the tears began to choke him. "A-Afraid you'd...I-leave me so...I...I..."

If Sherlock had told me that it hurt him when I left, would I still have gone to Africa? And if I never went to Africa, would Moriarty still have taken me? Would Sherlock be able to find me? John was upset now despite the medication and his lower lip trembled. "I-I c-can't... Greg, please, I don't..." He turned away from Sherlock and reached his arms up to Greg, his protection, unable to cope with Sherlock's tears. John stood slightly stooped, arms around Greg's middle and his head on his chest and attempted to regain some sort of logical function.

When he heard Sherlock speaking he turned and released his hold on Greg, though he pressed his back against him, unwilling to remove himself entirely. "I don't... I didn't mean to... I wasn't gay... I don't know. I don't know. Its possible to know you love someone, but not know how. I wasn't...No, Sherlock, not like that, but I-I cared, and y-you were my best f-friend, and..." He let out a pained whimper and pressed his face against Greg's chest.

Sherlock was dying. He was sure this was how he died. Just like this. With John's hate at his back and his own blood on his lips. He was choking on his tears, his face a mess, nose bleeding once again. "G-Go with...g-go with Greg. H-he...he will k-keep you safe. 'm s-sorry th-they...drugged you
I- n-not what I..’s my f-fault. I kn-know. I know!" his voice broke as he shouted into his mask, anguish nearly stopping his heart, dragging it through acid and razors.

Paul frowned at the developments, stepping forward as he watched John, knowing Sherlock was close to blacking out. This was far too much for a man a single day returned from torture to endure. "Perhaps..." he began, Greg taking over for him. "Yeah maybe, John do you want to go back to your room now?"

John wanted to go with Greg. That would be a very safe option. He could stay in his safe room with his safe music and be sedated every once in a while so he didn't have to take showers or eat or drink. But then Sherlock would be alone, sad, scared, left to recover on his own. He couldn’t do that. "No, Paul. Leave me alone." He tried to scowl at the man, but it came out more of a pout.

John took a few stumbling, faltering steps to Sherlock's side and dropped heavily to his knees beside it. The pain of that would have been blinding, but he was too drugged to notice. "I am trying to help you, Sherlock." John spoke in a harsh whisper. "I am trying to help you. I am here for your sake. For once in your life, don't fucking push me away."

Sherlock turned back to John, tears on his face, blood pooling in his fogged mask. "I am...t-trying to b-be h...honest with you and...m-making it all so m-much worse," he bemoaned, desperate and trapped. "It's m-my fault th-this happened t-to you...I...I should h-have turned you away a-at Bart's but y-you were so l-lonely and I w....was so lonely and I...and then you...I n-never l-loved anyone before th-that wasn't f-family and look wh-what h...happened to you! I did this! Y-you hate m-me for this. What would...would....would you have m-m me say?" He was sobbing, close to hysterics as he tried to explain himself to John, so far beyond his limit it would have been comical were it not so horrible.

John's small amount of anger shattered into pieces and he laid his head back down on the edge of Sherlock's bed. "You...you are not an easy person to care about, Sherlock. You shove people away. You hurt people. You called me an idiot, made me feel like an idiot, took advantage of my services and never said thank you, hell you even poisoned me multiple times....And I stayed." He wasn't speaking above a whisper, letting the words fall from his mouth rather than forcing them into existence. "Because thats all you knew how to do a-and-and I was okay with that. It's a-all you knew how t-to do and I-I didn't take it personally and... but god, I don't hate you. I'm terrified of you mostly, but it isn't you, really. Its just me. I can't...I can't think... Its cloudy and all..." he pushed his hands down on a wrinkle in the sheets, smothering it to give his lack of articulation some form of physical example. "We're going to be alright, though. You will, I mean. Greg's going to let me go once you're better, but you're going to be alright." His drug ridden mind had also removed the idea that perhaps that was not the best subject to bring up. Truthfully, drugging him so heavily had probably been a poor idea.

Greg swore from the back of the room and opened his mouth to speak, but Sherlock beat him to it. "You m-mean to die. I...s-still? I...you s-still...oh g-god I can't. I can't I c-can't I can't," he began to shift, blood leaking from under his mask, "no, no n-no, nonononomono! I th-thought I- and he- but...but...I no you-" he sputtered on the blood running down the back of his throat as he pulled at his hair, shouting his agony, shaking his head as his body was too small to house the overwhelming flood of panic. "Y-you...please John k-kill m-me first please, please, pleasepleaseplease! J-John I c-can't please!" he was in stark, blind, mindless panic. Childlike desperation ripped apart his mind as he thought back to the hell that was the months of John refusing to see him in hospital, unable to bear it.

John, who had been rambling almost senselessly with his head down, suddenly jerked up at Sherlock's tone. His eyes widened and he tumbled onto his back from his knees, losing one of his
house shoes in his scramble to get away. "No, no, I didn't mean to..." he looked up to Greg in an apologetic manner. "I didn't mean to do it. I didn't mean to make him sad again I-" He flopped on his side on the tile floor and rolled face down. John tucked his arms in across his chest and began to weep, not loudly and with panic like Sherlock, but quietly and with soft, tired sobs.

Paul helped Greg get John into his chair, even as the man struggled to stay on the floor, and Greg did not say another word as he wheeled John out of the room, intent to take him back to his own. "It's alright, John, you're okay."

Sherlock had taken to simple screaming, hopelessness stabbing him in the chest again and again. Paul told Mycroft he was going to sedate him, leaving the room to get the medication, as Sherlock began to pull at his dressings, tearing at what he could reach, his intent to make himself bleed to death.

Mycroft, who had hung back the majority of the conversation, lunged forward when Sherlock began to move. "No, Sherlock! Don't be stupid! It's not worth it!" He pinned Sherlock's good arm down onto the bed beside him and gave him a stern stare. "You may not kill yourself! Don't listen to the words of a man strung out on drugs and psychologically conditioned against you. Don't listen. He'll get better with time!"

Sherlock fought against his brother, anguish. "I DID THIS!" he screamed, sobbing as he tried to pull away, shifting his damaged body terribly. He was wrapped in an agony previously unknown to him, helpless to it's massive size, stunned in it's yawning expanse. "I- I can't My I can't I can't I can't I can't I-" he choked off, spitting blood from his mouth, his monitors screaming as his heart rate shot up to a dangerous rhythm.

Mycroft called in his primary doctor. "Sherlock, I'm going to have you sedated. You'll feel better in the morning, alright? Just go to sleep. You didn't do this. You shot the man who did this in the head. Moriarty did this, and Moriarty is dead. We made sure. You shot him point blank. It's over. You've won. Sleep now."

Sherlock screamed and screamed to his brother that it wasn't over, that he'd destroyed John, that John blamed him and John was leaving and he was going to die alone unless he fired right there in that bed. He screamed until he was forcibly put to sleep, his nose gushing and face a sodden mess. The medical team removed his mask to clean him up, taking the time he was sedated to treat him while Paul took physical hold of Mycroft's arm and pulled him out of the room towards his office.

Mycroft twisted his arm in a circle and glared at Paul. This man was not permitted to touch him. "I suppose you'll have suggestions."

Paul put his hands up to show that he understood. "Just wanted to move you out, you looked ready to collapse. Yes, I've suggestions. They begin with you having a bit of food and water. If you run yourself into the ground, you'll be useless to him, and he's running out of people. He cannot run out of people, Mycroft, though I'm sure that's clear to you."

Mycroft didn't want to admit that he was indeed stretched to the end of his capacity, but pride was to have no bearing where Sherlock was concerned. "He will not run out of people. Providing Greg and John don't find some way out."

Paul waited to say much else until Mycroft had a pot of tea, bowl of thick, steaming soup, and warm, crusty bread sitting in front of him, called for by Paul himself. He sat across from Mycroft, his focus on his own mobile, going through digital records. Finally he looked up, focused on Mycroft. "I'm interested to hear what your thoughts are regarding your brother and doctor Watson."

Mycroft ate slowly, watching Paul, analyzing him. "I understand that this is rather interesting for you, but you are here to help John, not psychoanalyze me."
Paul shook his head. "You misunderstand me, Mycroft. Fascinating as all of this is, I do genuinely care about the outcome here. What I am asking you is for your thoughts on allowing them to interact again. As a distant observer only now walking in, my snap reaction to what we've just seen happen is to keep them apart for quite some time. Watson is still too damaged to think clearly, he's incredibly suicidal, and he's still functioning at a juvenile mental level. Sherlock is codependent and terrified. However, you objectively know your brother and the nature of his relationship with John Watson better than anyone. I was interested in your current and active opinion. What we just witnessed was a crisis in the extreme."

Mycroft agreed with each and every thing that Paul had said, but still wasn't inclined to trust him. He decided to have the man watched just in case he decided to turn. "John has reverted to a child like state to protect himself and while he wants to help Sherlock, which is admirable, I don't believe him capable. However, you didn't know Sherlock before he had John. He was off and on drugs, occasionally in rehab when I could drag him there though it never lasted long, and in general just not a human being who you would take over high bridges. John helped him. They were happy, or as close as Sherlock is capable of coming. Sherlock fell in love with him almost instantly, though I urged him not to. He has an obsessive personality, though I'm sure you've got that in your notes. He latches onto things mentally, John being one of those things. They will not see each other until Sherlock is better healed physically. I believe the pain is just exacerbating the situation."

Paul nodded, "I fully agree with that. He's still very physically unwell. Lot of surgery ahead, I imagine. He needs to recover. It is my understanding that he'd been shot twice before capture?" "So, you lost hope when you hurt me on accident?" He was whispering now, and sat up so he could make eye contact. "Just like what I did. I hurt him. Oh, god, his screams...." John pulled away from Greg and laid face down on his bed. "I don't know why I said that. I wasn't... I didn't want to hurt him. I'm an idiot. Idiot." John understood now how broken Greg always looked once he had come down off a fit.

"Yes, he was. He sacrificed himself to give John a chance to escape. I don't think he planned on living through it at all." Mycroft leaned back in his chair and laced his fingers together.

Paul nodded, looking over his shoulder as a medical doctor knocked on the door. "He's been treated, Mr. Holmes. Given his attempt we've restrained him. We've also upped his antibiotics and cleaned him up as much as was possible."

Mycroft didn't like the idea of the restraints, but it was entirely necessary at this point. "Good. Keep him clean and as comfortable as possible. Have you treated his back? He was squirming. I don't want him to be in any pain. Whatever you can avoid, do so. He doesn't need to be lucid. Actually, it might be better if he weren't. The restraints will frighten him."

Paul listened as the doctor laid out plans with Mycroft for Sherlock. He was to remain sedated for the next three days, during which he would undergo several surgeries, the first of many to repair the arm, and start to properly correct the terrible damage done to his legs. "We don't want him under longer than that. His lungs are not in good condition at all, and heavy sedation will exacerbate the issue."

Paul looked to Mycroft when the doctor had left. "I would highly suggest you take the next few hours and do little more than sleep and self-care. I understand you've responsibilities that must be seen to, but a shower, change of clothes, and several hours rest will make a world of difference. Eat as often as you can, and delegate as much as you can. I am going to go see what progress can be made with John."

Mycroft did not appreciate being told what to do in his own facility. Paul's advice was sound, and for his own good, but Mycroft still stood and looked down the bridge of his nose. "Remember your
Paul stood then, leveling a calm, even look at Mycroft. He was quiet for several moments before speaking in a steady, even voice. "Mr. Holmes, I will remind you that I am neither under your employ nor being paid for my time. My place here, thus far, has been friend to Greg Lestrade. Your security personnel have combed through my background and criminal records and I have been vetted and found acceptably safe. While I appreciate mobility within your facility, I am not one of your hamsters. My suggestions were just that: suggestions. Take them, or leave them, the choice is decidedly yours. If you would rather I excuse myself, by all means, say the word. You obviously have everything well in hand and under control."

Mycroft listened with the same unreadable features. "And if you prove useful you will be paid for your time. I understand that you are Greg's friend and not a hamster. But you must also understand that you even knowing about this facility's existence is a risk. I would prefer to have you here full time for Greg and John, if your skills prove useful." He gave a small smile and his guard opened the door for Paul to leave.

John laid face down on his bed as soon as they arrived in his room. He had one shoe on and a bit of blood on the back of his hand, but none of that mattered to him in the slightest degree. "I hurt him." He stated once he was with Greg.

Greg arranged John properly in the bed before getting a dry sponge with a bit of hand sanitizer and cleaning him up, taking the one shoe off and pulling the blankets over him, dimming the lights and putting on the music. Finally he sat down beside John and took his hand. "You didn't intend to. He's...that was tough for you both."

John pulled Greg down next to him and began to whimper, the severity of how badly he had ruined things starting to crash down on him. "I hurt him! I'm not supposed to hurt Sherlock! I help him! That's the only reason I am alive! If I can't help him, there is no point in me even EXISTING!"

Greg lay beside John and pulled him into his arms. That had been...far worse than he'd been anticipating. He rubbed John's back and carded his fingers through John's hair. "Don't think like that just now, John. He's terrified you're leaving him. All he wants is you. He's just scared and in pain."

"I'm worthless!" John lamented and cried openly on Greg's chest. "I-I only stayed a-alive to h-hel-lep him and n-now I'm just hurting him." He had heard the screaming as he went down the hall. Sherlock had never screamed in front of him before. John had only seen occasional snatches of emotion in the past, and he had just made the man scream in such a guttural, broken way. "G-Greg, you've g-got to p-put me d-down."

Greg slid his hands through John's hair in the way that always soothed him before. He pulled in a sharp breath and forced himself to exhale slowly. "You are not worthless, John Watson. He made plenty of mistakes in the early days trying to help you. I've made mistakes trying to help you. If you die, you'll kill him. He's hardly a day out of captivity and he's sick, god he's sick, John. Give it time, he needs you, yeah?"

John sniffed and tilted his head in Greg's hand. "No no... I've ruined him. I-I should j-just die." His one goal for living had been to help Sherlock and now, with Sherlock's screams dying abruptly in a
way that pointed to a sedative, John's only goal seemed suddenly unreachable. Greg shook his head. "I'm not giving up on him like that, John. Don't give up on him like that. He needs us. He asked you to take him out first if you are going to give up. Are you willing to do that, or are you just going to leave him here suffering?" Greg loathed being so abrupt with John, but he had to shake him out of this idea. He pulled him in closer, sliding his fingers through John's hair. "I know that was scary, I know it was, but he needs you."

John flinched at that. "Sherlock will be f-fine without me," he claimed and honestly believed it. "He never n-needed people before. I tried to get close to him and he always shoved me away. A-and now he c-claimed he l-loved me that whole time..." John curled in on himself. He was quite sure he loved Sherlock, but how he loved him was still very much a mystery. The memoirs were still locked behind his mental walls and he had a feeling those emotions in particular had been muddy and confusing to begin with.

Greg clicked his tongue at John. "He was screaming for you to kill him, John. What part of that makes you think he'll be okay without you? When you were in hospital, before Sherlock was taken, he was actively killing himself once you'd finished with him. He needs you. If you truly don't care, well, can't do much for that. But I'll not sit here and listen to you lie to yourself. If you don't love him, or if you don't want anything to do with him, that's okay, that's your right. Trust me, he blames himself for what happened to you, John. He blames himself."

John, who had been loyal as a child and a soldier, wanted deeply to stay behind with Sherlock. He wanted to be of some help, to fix the damage he had done today, but he didn't trust himself. "I should h-have known tha-at it would h-hurt him to know." He muttered into Greg's chest. "But I-I'm an idiot! I'm an idiot and I w-want t-to die! Would you w-want to live through this, Greg? You're suicidal j-just watching!"

Greg wrapped the blankets tighter around John's back and shook his head. "No, I'm not. John, I'm not. I was...when I'd added to your pain, done damage I thought I couldn't correct...then I lost hope. Okay? I lost hope then, yeah, and that was wrong. But here, with you, mate I'm not suicidal. I want to live, and I want you to live, and I damn well want Sherlock to live. I know you are hurting, but you're not an idiot. You're just really, really hurt. We'll...we'll get you feeling better first before we put you two back together, okay? I didn't think it was a good idea today. It won't always be like this. It won't."

Greg reached out and rest a hand on John's back, his thumb moving slowly there. "It was only when I honestly thought I'd never be able to fix it, when I thought, really thought, that I'd destroyed you with what I'd done, but yeah. Yeah. It hurts when you slip, I know. But your are not an idiot, you have a lot of medication in you and you're run down and you were trying to help, you weren't trying to hurt. He just...he knows you blame him, and he thinks he's lost you for good. Maybe he has, I don't know, but he can't handle that right now." John pulled a pillow close and held it over his face. He tried to imagine what would happen to him if he lost Greg as an attempt to emphasize with Sherlock, but it made him flinch. "How long are you going to stay with me? I know you said as long as you can, but if I ended up living, if I ended up coming out of this, would you really stay with me? I won't... I don't think I'll ever get over this. I just don't. If I'm alive by the end of the year, I need you to stay with me. If you ever want to leave me, that's fine. Really, it is. Just make sure you let me go first." John felt like a caged animal, dependent on the love from Greg to keep him alive. If Greg left, the humane thing to do would be a needle in his arm and a gentle fade from existence.
Greg reached down and took John's hand, wrapping his fingers around it warmly. "John, I'm with you, okay? For as long as you need. I didn't say that to you lightly. I'm here today, I'll be here next year, I'll be here next decade. I've got you, okay? I've got you. I will never, ever leave you hanging, ever."

John was greatly relieved by his declaration. "A-And if I go missing, you've got to look for me. Even if I say I'm going to be somewhere, and send letters, you've got to make sure. We'll make a code. You'll look for me, won't you? You'd come after me." He wasn't bitter towards Sherlock in the logical side of his mind, and he honestly did understand that the ruse with the letters must have been convincing, but the betrayal and the feeling of abandonment were still there.

Greg drew in a sharp breath and nodded, the old, original guilt returned viciously fast. "John we...there was no reason to suspect...yeah...yeah John, if you go anywhere without me, I'll make sure. I'll make sure. We'll have a code."

John crawled back onto Greg and nuzzled down onto him. "You've got to look for me. You'll look for me. I'll make a word.. or something... and you'll know its me... and if not you'll come for me. You won't leave me."

Greg wrapped John up in his arms, breathing deep with his eyes closed. "John I'd...all of us we'd have looked, if he'd had any idea we'd have looked. Sherlock would have pulled London down looking for you. We would have come for you. It wasn't for lack of caring, John. We will make a word, we'll set a code. Just...please, John. You were not left, you weren't. He...surely you can see...I took a round for you and Sherlock went to his death. We love you, John." Greg itched over the new scar on his bicep and closed his eyes, holding John tight to him, feeling incredibly guilty. "I'm so sorry this happened, so incredibly sorry. I can't...I'm so sorry, I'll never leave you."

"I know you love me. I do. But it hurts anyway." John had been so sure Sherlock would come for him. He had held out by imagining the pain Moriarty would be in when Sherlock came. He pictured scene after scene of Sherlock charging in and beating the living hell out of Moriarty, shooting Moran and bringing a helicopter to bust him out. It had comforted him. It was only when the image of Sherlock became a symbol of pain and fear that John began to dread his return instead of wish for it. To learn that he had simply been sulking and oblivious was difficult for John to understand.

"I get it. I do. He sent letters. I just wish that someone would have helped me." John looked up and watched Paul come in. He didn't fear the man physically, but he wasn't comfortable around him mentally. John shrank away into Greg with an air of apprehension.

Greg shifted his hold on John to accommodate him and nodded to Paul, who walked in and sat at a distance. "It's alright, John, I'm not going to ask you to do anything." He looked to Greg, who appeared ready to cry, and arched a brow. "They are keeping him under for a few days. He needs surgery and rest, and the restraints will not be welcome. Better that he has a chance to heal slightly. Was John serious with what he said earlier? You mean to kill him?"

It was all intentionally blunt. John had massive amounts of sedatives and stabilizers on board at the moment. If there was ever a time he could handle all of this, it was right now.

John blinked up at Paul. As always, he didn't like what was being said, but today he didn't seem very upset about it, given the hazy state of his mind. "I don't want the doctors to tie Sherlock up," he said and tugged on Greg's shirt. "I don't like that. He won't like that. That hurts." John didn't stir from his position of safety curled up with Greg, but looked over his shoulder to Paul, wondering how his words would be received. "Don't let him wake up with the chains. Restraints. It'll make everything
Paul nodded at that. "I know he won't like that, but John, he was trying to kill himself, tearing at everything he could reach. We can't let him loose, I'm afraid. How are you feeling? Today was incredibly hard on you. Mycroft and I have decided it's best if we don't have you see Sherlock anymore. I am sorry it was so upsetting for you today."

John rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands. "Today was bad. It was all bad. I tried to help and I ruined him. I thought I was doing good, then...then I told him about me leaving and it ruined everything. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry."

"That's alright, John, you were trying to help. You don't have to concern yourself with him any longer, I know he's been a source of stress. I think that for today you should sleep, and then tomorrow we should have a little talk about who to best go about helping you, alright? You have Greg here with you, and I think once you get on your feet a little more, you will feel better."

John scowled at Paul. "I don't like you very much," he said rather bluntly and held onto Greg. "Greg is best to take care of me and I should be allowed to see Sherlock. Those two matter."

Paul held up a hand, "Of course Greg will help you, no one at all wants to remove you from Greg, John. No one. I wouldn't dream of it. Sadly, I don't think Sherlock is strong enough to see you right now. I understand you want to help, but today was rather brutal. Greg has told me the state Sherlock was in before he was taken, the last thing he needs is his guilt reaffirmed. You, however, have every right to be angry and feel how you feel. That's okay too. That guilt and fear that you laid on him today led him to a suicide attempt. He's not strong enough to endure your anger. Greg and I, though, we are. In fact, you don't even have to talk to me if you don't like me, that's okay as well. I just want to help map a plan to help you recover. Is that acceptable?"

John felt each accusation like a physical blow despite the heavy medication.

*I understand you want to help, but today was rather brutal.*

*The guilt and fear that you laid on him today led him to a suicide attempt.*

*He's not strong enough to endure your anger.*

With a heavy conscious and an utterly heartbroken expression, John let out a sad whine. "I didn't mean to. I really didn't. I don't want to hurt him. I only came when he asked. He kept asking!"

Greg held John chose, rubbing a hand down his back. "We know, John, don't we Paul. It's okay, John, it's ok."

Paul nodded, "I don't think you meant to. We will tell Sherlock you're not available any longer, it's okay, John. We need to get you sorted."

"Don't... Don't tell him that. Just say something. Say something nice. I don't want him to hate me or think I hate him. Tell him it'll only be a day or two. He won't be happy if you say 'any longer'." John felt utterly useless, his only purpose having been ruined and controlled by his fear.

Paul's brow knit. "John, this is Sherlock. He will spot me a liar straight away. I've not lied to you, nor will I to him. He learned to understand before, he will again. Now, to you. You never told me how you are now. I know that was hard on you. I'd like to talk to you about your feelings regarding the people you love, or loved, but if you're not up for it at the moment, I understand."

John decided to be open. He had nothing to lose at the moment, and while usually he would keep his cards held close, he wanted Paul to leave him alone. "My feelings regarding the people I love... I
love them still. I'm sad because I hurt Sherlock. I'm sad because I'm hurting Greg. I'm sad because everything hurts and I'm useless, but I can't leave. I don't like you because you make me think about things I don't like." The last statement was very self-aware for someone of his mental regression, as he had to think about the reason he seemed to hate someone who had never physically hurt him.

Paul nodded, giving John a moment as he watched Greg cuddle the man to him. Greg nuzzled along the side of John's face and whispered softly to him. "I've got you, John, it's okay."

Paul spoke softly, gentling his tone as he began to dig a bit deeper. "You were angry with Sherlock for not telling you that he loved you before. My understanding was that you believed you would not have gone to Africa if you knew Sherlock loved you. Can you tell me more about that? About your decision to go to Africa?"

John whimpered and held onto Greg. "I don't want to talk about it," he muttered with a downtrodden air about him. "I just wanted to, alright? Just leave it alone." John's mind had been so vulnerable to Moriarty, so open and moldable, that he rebelled against it now that he could. "Just let me be. I don't feel like telling you that."

Paul nodded. "Okay, John. That's likely more than enough for today. Would you like for me to go? Greg has all your medicines and there are standing orders here with the doctors, I'll go if you'd like for me to go."

John was both skeptical and intrigued by this supposed ability to send the man away. He had spent so many months begging and pleading for people to leave him alone and to stop, he was under the assumption that perhaps his voice held no authority. "Yes. Leave."

"You got it," Paul said with a calm, friendly expression. He nodded to Greg and slipped out of the room without another word, stopping to have a word with the physicians before completely leaving the building.

John was pleasantly surprised when the man left, a sensation which came only after several minutes when he had confirmed by listening that the man was not outside the door.

"Greg was inquiring about him, and he turned his attention back to his protection. "I'm alright. I'm all empty."

Greg nodded to him, taking a deep breath and closing his eyes. That had been horrific. He'd never, in all the time he'd known him, seen Sherlock like that. John's words had been terrible to hear, just terrible to hear, and the look on Sherlock's face when he'd said them would be burned into his mind forever. He cleared his throat and slid his fingers through John's hair, trying to help him feel valued.

"Which part of what I said was wrong?" John muttered after the silence stretched out. "I know the part about you letting me go was bad... And... I don't remember. I don't know. It hurt. But I need you to tell me what to say next time. Please?"

Greg shook his head. "No, John no it's okay. it's okay. There is...it's fine. It sounds like 'next time' might be a long time from now, we don't need to worry about it right now. It's been a hard time, I shouldn't have let you go, that was too hard for you. I know that hurt, I could see that it all hurt you. I'm sorry."

He had no idea how the hell they were going to salvage Sherlock. John had taken all of his worst fears and, hours after Sherlock had been horrifically tortured, balled them up and beat him with them. "Can you sleep?"
"No, no, Greg, you've got to tell me. I need to know." John couldn't imagine feeling any smaller, feeling any more worthless, useless and awful. If it wouldn't upset Sherlock, he would have no problem dying right now. "You need to tell me so I don't mess it up again. And I will. I don't know how not to. Please, Greg, I need you to tell me."

"John," Greg said softly, shifting and trying to better hold him, hating how small he sounded. "John you sound so broken hearted right now. You were trying to help, yeah? You have done all this work for him since you couldn't do it for yourself. I don't want to get into something that's going to hurt. For you to understand what happened there, we will have to talk about stuff that takes place before you were taken, and stuff that happened after you got back, and you don't like talking about it. It's okay, John. Please, we...we can watch a movie or sleep or..whatever you'd like."

"Just TELL ME!" John screamed suddenly and sat up. His bony, spindly hands were curled in angry fists. "You HAVE TO! You can't just keep that from me! I Know DAMN WELL that I hurt him. I know that I've set him back. I....I deserve to be cut for it. He should h-hurt me. H-He should.." John choked on his own words as if by utterance they would come to fruition. "J-Just tell me! Please, Greg, please."

Greg stared at him, blinking in shock, his breathing kicked up and his hands shaking as he put them up in an effort to calm John down. "Okay...John I'll...I'll tell you. You don't...god you don't deserve to be cut for it, John..." he licked his lip, utterly thrown, not sure how to deal with this. Telling John was going to set him off. Not telling him was already setting him off. He ran his hand over his face and began to speak slowly.

"He...he was falling apart within days of you leaving. There were several times he threatened to go after you, just to...well he had his excuses, but you had been so excited to go, so looking forward to it, and we didn't let him do it. You'd...you were so excited, John. Talked about it for months before going, just...yeah you were happy to have the chance, said you'd always wanted to do it since you were a kid. He...miserable without you." Greg paused as he remembered actively keeping Sherlock from the drugs houses and the insanely dangerous crimes.

He carried on talking slowly, trying to explain. "He was taking more and more dangerous cases, emailing you the reports, I think trying to get your attention, but you never said anything. Not really that surprising, you never took bait from Sherlock. He just...yeah...and then he called me, John, and I've never...Moriarty had called him and made him find you, and he'd trained you to be terrified of him, and Sherlock had been just...just suffering without you and here you were hurt so indescribably bad. He- Jesus the guilt, he wanted nothing more than to help and he wanted nothing more than to fix it and he was drowning in guilt, hasn't stopped, really. I've...the time you were in hospital he never left, not until I started staying. He just...he did everything he could and he held himself exclusively responsible for what happened to you. We tried to tell him...I mean really, if Moriarty wanted you he'd have found a way, even if it hadn't been Africa...but..."

He trailed off, there was too much to be said. "Basically, John, when you pulled away from him when he finally admitted how he felt, and told him it was his fault, and then told him you wanted to die, you handed him his two worst fears in the world."

John sat straight up as the words were spoken. He didn't deserve to be comforted. He denied himself even the smallest boon and held his arms by his sides instead of crossing them over his chest. This was the whipping block, or the pole he had been chained to to keep him still while he was beaten. He was to stand still, take everything that he could, and not utter a word until it was over.

But once it was, once John was sure Greg had finished, he collapsed forward onto his pillow and
stared at the opposite wall.

He did not move. He did not blink. He hardly breathed.

Each function took incredible effort, and his own lungs seemed to have decided that perhaps it was best for him to die. After several minutes of such agonized stillness, punctuated only by the occasional hitching breath, John laid down on his back and pulled the blanket up so they covered his hips. His arms were by his sides and out slightly, as if he were doing a trust fall and praying nobody caught him.

He was, of course, subconsciously mimicking the conditions under which he had been tormented. "I didn't mean to pull away. I didn't mean to tell him. I wasn't right. I am sorry. Please. I-I'm sorry. Sorry..." No tears slid down his oddly serene face as he stared blankly ahead in all-consuming, debilitating devastation.

Chapter End Notes

I'm so sorry about this chapter being so sad.

No I'm not.

Anyone want another one tonight?
Apathy, Insanity, or Death

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Greg was going to be sick as he watched John collapse. His heart began to flutter like a bird trapped in a cage and he closed his eyes, trying to collect himself. "Please, John," he breathed. He had argued against bringing John to Mycroft and he'd resisted telling John what he wanted to know and all the things had ended as he'd thought they would and- "oh, please, please, John it's okay, it's okay. I'm certainly not angry with you! It's alright! Please, don't do this. I didn't want to tell you! We...we can watch a movie or...we...we can...I can hold you and tell you stories, yeah? It's...John no, please no."

John held himself still and kept his eyes open, though he was not seeing his surroundings. Were he not on medication, he likely would have been screaming, but as it was he lay as still as death, waiting for some form of punishment. He felt lower than guilt, horror, pain or fear. This was acceptance. "It's alright, Greg. I'm just going to sleep for a bit, alright?" His voice, the deadpan yet heartbroken, still yet shaking sound seemed fragile enough to shatter upon impact with the gentle air.

"No!" Greg shook his head and reached down, taking John's shoulders and pulling him up off the bed and into his arms. "No! Stop it! Right now, stop it, I'm not losing you over this no!" He slung one hand across John's back, the other buried in John's hair. "You are hurting and it was Mycroft's damn fault for making you come! It wasn't fair to ask you to come, you didn't mean to hurt Sherlock and I know Sherlock isn't angry with you. No, John, stop this right now! Stop! I refuse to lose you to this. No!" He shook his head, holding John close, despising how distant John had become. "Talk to me, damn it, talk to me and tell me what you are thinking if nothing else. Don't run away from me again."

John was entirely limp in Greg's arms. His head lolled back as he was pulled up and his arms dangled uselessly by his sides. He didn't speak until he was sure Greg had nothing else to say. "I'm not running away, Greg." Not one muscle contracted that was not directly involved in speaking. He relied on Greg to hold up his head, to keep him upright, effectively making himself much like a doll or corpse. "I'm right here."

"John!" Greg called out in broken desperation, tucking his face to the side of John's neck, dragging in a pained breath. "John no, John no. Stop. It's okay, John, it's okay. We make mistakes, yeah? Sherlock made them, I made them, Mycroft, Paul, Molly, all of us we- John stop this," he pulled his head back, looking at John's face before touching their foreheads together, sharing breath. "Don't leave me here. Don't do this John. Please. I have you, see? Look. I'll...I can tell you stories, yeah? Or...or your music...a video? I...what, John what can I do? Tell me and I'll do it. Please...please come back, it's okay, it's okay. I, John I love you please stay here with me you're scaring me. Please, John you're scaring me."

John's eyes roved up from Greg to the ceiling, hiding most of the grey-blue behind his drooping lids. He didn't respond to Greg's fear, his pleading, or his suggestions. He simply existed, and somehow that alone was hard enough. John focused on his heart for a moment, trying to will it to stop, but its stubborn, repugnant beating was still pounding in his ears, drowning out Greg's voice and becoming a cadence to which he did nothing.

Greg cracked, tears rolling down his cheeks as he nodded, shifting in the bed with John. He put his back to the elevated head of the bed and crossed his legs as he sobbed like a bloody child, pulling John against his chest so that John sat in his lap. As he wept, he leaned back with John's head against...
his chest, supporting the limp man. He dragged the blankets up over them, not at all troubling to censor himself, settling in for however long they needed to.

"K...John...o-okay," he cried, speaking through his tears, pressing his cheek to John's forehead, "we'll do th-this...I'll s-sit here and bloody...bloody d-die with you if that's what we're doing." He wept alone in the room with John, clutching him tight, his heart breaking apart.

John's eyes moved slowly from their locked spot on the ceiling to Greg, very briefly taking in his agony before they unfocused once more. I'm hurting Greg. He didn't know to go about moving anymore. His body lay repugnant to his every command, willing himself into death. "I'm sorry." John managed to breathe, speaking on an exhale.

"I just w-want you back, John, I god, why did I tell you any of this?" He pressed his lips to John's hairline, closing his eyes as his chest hitched and dipped, stuttering on his sorrow, squeezing John to him. "Please, John please," it was so stupid to beg, he knew, but he was so very afraid and he didn't know what else to do as he sobbed against John. "I-It's okay, it's okay, please."

John didn't move. He was deathly still, pale, and seemed lighter than he ever had been in life. Not another word did he utter, immobilized by the crushing defeat. It was over an hour when he spoke again, letting the words form themselves on his exhales. "Please don't... be upset... I'm sorry... Just sleep."

Greg held on to John, sobbing for fucking hours, venting the goddamned torment of it all. John's head moved with every child-like shuddering breath he managed and he just clung to the man, keeping the blankets up high, scared to death at how pale and still he was. He wondered if John was actually sick for a while, terrified that John might stop breathing at some point in the night. He kept a hand wrapped around the side of John's head, cradling it to his chest, and let the night slip away with harsh tears and a pounding headache, startling awake any time he began to doze off.

John didn't sleep. He stayed in a state of lucid death, unmoving, unfeeling, and uncomprehending of Greg's grief. In the rare moments when he would be pulled back into awareness of his body by a sudden movement or sob from Greg, he noticed how tired the man looked. "I'm sorry," he said when the clock said six a.m., "You didn't sleep. I didn't mean for that. I'm sorry." His voice was still dreamy and disconnected.

Greg had stopped crying some time ago, now just dealing with a throbbing headache and painful exhaustion. He shook his head and eased John to the bed as he crawled out, sticking his head out the door and asking for the syringe of food and the bag of saline. He carried it back, slowly attaching the bag of fluid to John's IV port and letting that start to drip in before showing him the syringe of food, starting in on giving John his morning meal. He was quiet as he unscrewed the cap from the ever present tube, attaching the syringe and pushing the thick, high calorie mixture. He gave John the feeding slowly, and then flushed the tube and capped it again, pitching the large, empty syringe in the bin. He let the fluid drip in slowly, waiting quietly, all the fight drained out of him.

When the bag was empty he disconnected it from John's port and pitched it as well, knowing John was at least hydrated and fed, crawling back up in the bed and pulling John into his lap once more. "What do I need to do to bring you back? I'd rather you scream at me, tell me how much you hate me. I'd rather you tell me how terrible I am for you. I'd rather hear what a cockup I am, how endlessly I damage you. Please. Anything. John please. Don't do this to me. You made me tell you. Don't make me be the one who breaks you in the end. Please, not me. I didn't mean to break you. You made me tell you. God, John please I can't take this."

John let Greg work on him without so much as tracking him with his eyes. Half-lidded and slightly red, John's usually blue-grey eyes were dull and unseeing like glass. Throughout Greg's plea he
listened without giving sign to it, and at the end took a breath slightly deeper than the others.

But it was still another hour before he spoke. Time seemed to be passing in a paradox of unequaled speed, during which John blinked and the hour hand fairly danced ahead a slot, and agonizingly slow, in which time John could contemplate every mistake he had made before the second hand moved once.

With the medicine wearing off he could think more clearly, though the exhaustion and general stress left him in a haze. When he did speak, words like spun sugar fell from his lips and broke apart in the air. "I don't want to hurt anyone anymore."

Greg nodded as he held John to him. "I know, John, I know. Me too, but mate if you slip away from me and from Sherlock it's never going to stop hurting. That's not the way to do it. Come back, okay? It's going to be alright, it's not permanent, okay? Please trust me. Can you look at me, John? Just look at me?"

John's eyes moved towards Greg in increments, as if tracking the second hand of a large clock with him at the center. When he reached Greg he stopped, waiting for further commands.

Greg nodded. All the way back then. He'd pushed John all the way back. Fine. Bloody fucking fine. "It's time to go to sleep, John. We are going to go to sleep, and when we wake up, we are going to talk, alright? That's all that needs to happen right now. Actual, proper sleep. Do you need medicine to put you to sleep?"

John's eyes were still pointed at Greg, but they had lost their focus. "Yes," he whispered and wanted nothing more than the medicine. He wanted excess of it. Enough to send him sailing away from these walls and this bed and his perpetual pain.

Greg nodded and eased John down, slowly getting out of the bed before making his way to the door. He paused for a moment, a thought occurring to him. "Do you want me to leave you alone, John? Do you want me gone?" Perhaps he was yet again the problem. Maybe he'd made John worse staying there all bloody night holding John to him. The thought made him sick as he stood by the door.

It took him an impossibly long time to process the question. "I don't want to be left anywhere. Especially not alone." His eyes had suck where Greg was last, eyes a bit more open now, giving him the appearance of a corpse.

Greg just quietly went and got a doctor, and walked back in, watching as the sleeping medicine, and not a sedative, was pushed. It would let John properly rest. He sat down in the chair next to John and slowly took his hand, waiting with him while the drug started to take affect. "I'm sorry I fail you again and again, John."

John could feel the medicine gently coaxing him to relax and gave into it entirely. "You're not failing me. I'm failing everyone. I'm bad. I deserve-" he cut himself off and shuddered, which was the most he had moved since this started.

"You listen to me," Greg said forcefully, squeezing John's hand, "you are not failing, no one wants to see you hurt. You deserve to feel okay, to be happy. Now sleep, please John sleep. It will help." He stroked John's arm gently and leaned closer to him, willing John to hear him.

John slowly closed his frozen eyes and his breathing slowed. "Okay. Don't leave me because I hurt him, alright?"
He wasn't aware of falling asleep, but the next morning he filtered back into alertness. He didn't stir save the small twitch in his fingers.

Greg was just destroyed. He shook of the sleep somewhere around eight in the morning, going and getting John's feeding. He'd managed a few hours, and knew perfectly well that John was awake. "Are you really going to punish me like this, John?" He asked softly when he'd finished giving him food and a bag of fluids. He sat down and wrapped his fingers around John's exhausted and wrung out.

_Punish._ John flinched and his eyes opened slowly. "No, Greg, no. I'm not punishing you. If you lift up my shirt you'll see punishment. JM. Carved. Thats punishment." For such a difficult topic, his voice was strangely deadpan.

"No," Greg corrected, worn down to a nub, "that's psychopathic torture. That's not punishment. That's a crime. Are you this angry with me? You demanded that I tell you. I tried to not tell you, it's honestly not... I mean, John it... please, please John tell me what you want me to do. I'm _sorry._"

"I'm not mad at you, Greg. I love you. I still love you. I just don't love myself." His eyes drifted slowly to Greg, as if they were heavy and arduous to move. "Its hard to move. I don't want to move."

Greg got up and set up another mindless film on the small TV, downing the lights and dropping the volume low. He crawled up into the bed and pulled John to him, holding him close. "I put your meds in the feed this morning, figured you wouldn't want to swallow them. Just your regulars, nothing else. I love you, if you can't love yourself right now, let me worry about that, okay? Just... rest with me? Watch the movie and don't think, just rest. I'm right here and I'm sorry that I hurt you."

John closed his eyes again. "Alright, Greg. Alright. I don't mean to hurt you with this." Had he the energy, he might have cried. As it was he only whimpered and lay still.

The movie didn't interest him much, and he didn't have the energy to keep his mind focused anyway. "I'm sorry, I don't have anything to say."

Greg shook his head, pulling him closer, the volume low enough that it was easily spoken over. "John, please hear me. I know you are not trying to hurt me. I don't need you to say anything. I'm trying to let you rest however I can, I'm trying to ease this for you, I know you are suffering. I care about you and I am trying to help, that's all. I just need you here, not running from me, not shutting down. You don't have to fix anything, okay? I love you, I'm not upset with you. I just want you to rest, you're so tired, you're mentally exhausted. I'm trying to give you a day off."

"Thats what I have been doing. Resting." Or rather, he had been taking a mental break from everything, including moving. He didn't believe himself capable of handling his current situation, but was still unable to die, which left _nothing_ as an option. Apathy, insanity, or death. John did precisely that; nothing. "Is Sherlock alright? Its been... hours and hours..."

"Surgery and sedated still, they will be waking him up later today, I think. I'm sorry, I didn't realize you were just resting. I got scared... I thought... god I'm an idiot. I'm sorry, John. I should have left you alone." He tipped his head to the side of John's and took a deep, exhausted breath, "I can't do right by you at all. Jesus. I'm sorry."

"You do things right. I just react wrong. I'm broken. Thats not your fault." John moved his arms then, slowly, from their position at his sides up to his chest. He was allowed that now. His self inflicted discomfort was over, at least in that aspect. "Its my fault. I deserve your anger, not your love."
Greg was woefully slow on the uptake, but started to understand what John was doing when he moved his arms. He spoke soft and low, "John...would you...can I have a hug?" he asked quietly, not wanting John to feel pushed or trapped. "Please? I just...you feel so far away from me right now and I- please?"

John tilted his head to the side. Generally, when people at the facility asked him to do something, it was to calm down, or to talk about something he didn't wish to converse about. This seemed so easy that he willingly complied. John reached both arms out, invigorated by a purpose. 'Of course. You can come lie down with me.'

Greg allowed the relief to flood over his features, open and honest, moving swiftly as he crawled up into the bed and buried his face against John's chest. He did not dare speak, allowing some of his distress to show, gripping at John in his need for comfort and only whispering his honest, heartfelt thanks. He was so achingly tired and he really, truly did just want some comfort.

John ran his fingers back through Greg's hair and kissed the top of his head. "I'll try not to break you too. If I hurt you, please just tell me. Tell me and I'll stop." John had one arm around Greg's shoulders and wondered why the man who always was his strong protection needed comfort from someone as useless as him.

John's kindness was so welcome that it pulled tears to his eyes and he nodded, dampening the front of John's shirt slowly as the time passed. He eventually reached down and grabbed the blanket, pulling it up over them, pressing as close to John as he could and swimming in the warm relief of not further hurting him.

John held Greg and debated asking why their roles had been so suddenly reversed, but the comfort seemed to be mutual, and it was giving him a small sense of purpose. "It's alright, Greg. It'll be alright. I'll go on living and Sherlock will heal and we'll go on cases again." It was an empty promise, but all he had to offer.

Meanwhile, Sherlock was out of his seventh surgery in three days, the last having ended several hours ago. His arm better was supported in a half cast with proper screws and pins in place, and while it was much better cleaned out it was still massively swollen. The open wounds were closed with drains running out of them, stitched into the skin, and he had his legs in proper casting as well. The achilles ended up the easier of the two to treat, the kneecap requiring several pins and would need an incredible amount of work. The shin that had been fractured again and again by the crowbar was supported as well. His burned chest had been scrubbed down and treated, and the wounds littering his body stitched and treated.

Sherlock was actively fighting the sedation now, and the rattle in his lungs, pared with the still alarming amount of fluid from the tube, made them refrain from sedating him again, just as planned. One of the main physicians went to Mycroft's sleeping quarters and lightly knocked on his door, following orders to wake him should Sherlock start trying to come up on his own. "Mr. Holmes?"

Mycroft had been in a deep sleep while Sherlock was in surgery. There was nothing he could do at this point other than wait, and found himself taking Paul's advice. He sat up and fixed his jacket before answering from behind the door. "How did it go?"

"Well," came the answer, "he's been out of surgery four hours now, going on the fifth, only minor complications, nothing too unexpected. He is now, however, fighting the sedation and as discussed,
we are not putting him back down. He is still restrained. You'd asked to be alerted at the first sign of his waking."

Sherlock's breathing was kicking up, rough and labored behind the mask, trying to come out of the blankness as pain sang in a halo around his mind.

Mycroft smoothed his hair from where it stuck up on one side and opened the door. "I think I'll sit with him then." It might only wake him further, but Mycroft wanted to be there when Sherlock awoke in restraints.

The trip down the hall was irritating but not terrible for him, as he insisted that everyone, including himself, go through the formalities at each checkpoint.

Sherlock twitched, heavy and, when trying to touch the pain at his side, restrained. He did not react outwardly as he found himself tied down, with the exception of slow, thin tears that began to cling to his lashes, gathering until one slid down over his temple. It had all been a dream. John was dead and Mycroft was perhaps still looking and Sherlock was on the table, just waiting. He refused to open his eyes, monitors blipping as he began to shake.

He was clearly awake at this point. Mycroft had seen him pull slightly on the restraint. He opted to walk over then, hoping his comfort would outweigh pulling him into alertness. "Sherlock, it's Mycroft. You are safe and with me. Are you feeling alright?"

Sherlock whimpered behind the mask, keeping his eyes closed, loathing his mind. He shivered hard and grit his teeth behind closed lips, willing the voice away. He couldn't. Not today he just could not. There was pain, a great ocean of it, blanketed under the ice of morphine he supposed he'd been given to keep him living. He forced himself to think on the feeling of the morphine.

*If you'd told me, this wouldn't have happened.*

*It's alright, you'll be fine and Greg's going to let me go.*

*You're going to die alone, Sherlock. You've destroyed everything you ever loved.*

He dragged in a desperate, pained breath, a sob cracking in his heavy chest, otherwise remaining quiet.

Mycroft crouched beside Sherlock and put his hand on his. This had been his fault and he felt the reality of it severely. Sherlock had asked for John, but he had made it happen. Greg had even protested. "It's alright, Sherlock. Everything is alright. How are you feeling?" He decided that John was not to be allowed in the room again until he was far further mentally rehabilitated.

The touch frightened Sherlock terribly and he tried to flinch away, abruptly pulling hard enough on the restraint to audibly rattle it. He turned his head away in clear anticipation of violence, each breath tightly controlled, braced for the anguish the day was sure to bring. His chest tightened and he ached for his brother. The sound of his racing heart echoed around them on the monitor, pulling a physician into the room from out in the hall. The man stood at the foot of Sherlock's bed, shifting one of the many wires running off of Sherlock.

Sherlock cracked open a puffy eye, the swelling in his face shifted now that he was four days returned, though still he remained quite swollen at his orbitals. He caught view of the doctor as his breathing stuttered, suddenly whispering *My* under his breath over and over again.

Mycroft held Sherlock's hand and crouched so he was below him as he had seen Paul do. "Sherlock, it's alright. I'm here. You remember me, right? Mycroft? You were asking for me, and now I'm here
Sherlock was nearly panting in fear as he slowly turned his head toward the voice, mostly expecting Moran's Cheshire grin and a recording of his brother's voice. He slowly opened his eyes, deeply afraid, taking a full half-minute to take in Mycroft's face. "My?" he breathed, shifting, catching his restraints as terror ripped through his chest, "My run, run My, go! Run, My, My y-you have to run! Go!" He pulled at the restraints again, looking wildly around the room for Moran, squeezing his brother's fingers as tight as he could, "Oh, g-god My go, he'll h-hurt you!"

The doctor at the foot of Sherlock's bed moved to his side, drawing up medication in a syringe to help with the strain on Sherlock's racing heart and Sherlock grit his teeth, clearly prepared to endure whatever was about to happen.

"This is my doctor, and he won't hurt me." Mycroft put one hand gently on Sherlock's chest and the other on the doctor's shoulder. "I'm right here. Look around yourself, Sherlock. What do you see? White walls, clean floor, no blood. You're in a secure facility. Take a deep breath and tell me where you are." Mycroft pulled the chair up and sat down, still hunched by Sherlock. "You are safe with me. I got you out."

Sherlock reached for his brother, the restraint rattling, his eyes going to his wrists. "N-new room, a-always a new room he- My p-p-lease I-" he was swimming in confusion, drowning with the fear of it, the exposed tips of his fingers shaking. They'd put pins in both his hands, the first of many steps to repair the damage spikes and breaks had done. He closed his eyes, breathing fast as he tested how far he could move, not understanding why he was bound and his brother was there. "J-just a n-new room."

"No, Sherlock. It's my room. It's my facility. You aren't with Moran. Why would he allow me here?" Mycroft continued to stroke Sherlock's hair gently as he spoke. "You are restrained because you were pulling at your stitches. We don't want you to be hurt. You've been back for a few days now, Sherlock, and nobody had hurt you." Not physically, anyway. The damage done by John couldn't be overlooked.

Sherlock closed his eyes, slowly relaxing his muscles as he went to the exhausting task of working his logical mind above the fear. He pulled at his brother's words, running them slowly though his filters, one painful letter at a time. It took nearly ten minutes before he spoke again, his heart rate slowed down, fingers still shaking, though mostly from the massive stress to his body now. Slowly the last meeting with John came back, tangled with bits of his rescue, the helicopter and the plane, the physical agony he'd been in compared to the relative comfort he was enjoying now. He'd pulled at his stitches...because John was leaving him. John blamed him. John could hardly stomach him. John was leaving.

He pulled softly again at the restraints, more out of grief than effort to escape, and spoke on a hoarse whisper, deeply saddened as John's words slithered like cold oil around his heart.

"Did G-Greg assist him, then? Is he already...already gone?"

Mycroft felt a mixture of relief that Sherlock remembered his situation and regret that he now remembered the incident with John. "No, John is just fine. He's just fine. He didn't mean to say those things." That wasn't to say that he hadn't meant them, but Mycroft was quite sure that John would regret the conversation as soon as he was well enough to do so. "John was heavily medicated. He wasn't thinking clearly. Greg is not going to help him die, and John has agreed to stay alive to help you when he is able."
Sherlock kept his eyes to his brother's face. He was quiet for a long time, breathing slowly, taking the time to enjoy the fact that no one was about to take a whip or a crowbar to him, no needles were pressed into his skin, and John wasn't screaming in the background. "He was right," Sherlock breathed as he slowly let his eyes closed, looking to the ceiling, French rolling off his lips. "I was a c-coward and I should have t-told him. I should have b-begged him not to go, should have gone a-after him. And he knows it." He focused on his metaphorical heart, the aching place mid-line to cardiac and lung tissue, that inexplicably ached. Truly it must be a defect in his Oxycontin and dopamine, there was no physical ailment. *Heartbreak* was simply a chemical reaction. The action-reaction mechanisms of neurons and ultimately, physics.

It hurt, regardless, a sort of pain the heavy narcotics did not touch. "He want's to die. I...I c-can't say that I blame him. Wh-what they did to him...M-Mycroft...even you and I would h-have failed to w-withstand.....it redefines 'horror.' Y-You cannot begin to imagine...you c-cannot begin...he will never w-want to see me again. The only v-vice I- I did not intend to love him, My. I did not."

Mycroft had warned Sherlock to stay objective and uninvolved. Love was a dangerous chemical reaction in his opinion, volatile and immensely unpredictable. For most, it turned out alright in the end. Most people got married and by percentage most stayed married. But that was *people*. The Holmes brothers were not people. Mycroft would have been less upset to find a traitor in his closest ranks, or a flaw in his most detailed plan than he would had he found sentiment skewing his logical processes. Thus this overwhelming sensation, the driving need to protect Sherlock and punish those who had hurt him, caused him to feel the need to focus even harder on remaining objective when he was not actively comforting Sherlock.

"I know you didn't, Sherlock, and I believe you tried to protect him. You did what you thought was best. Moriarty just used you and him for his own games. None of this is your fault. If you had told him you loved him, Moriarty would have just ripped him away anyway, and your loss would be greater still."

Sherlock went quiet, grief squeezing his heart and distracting his mind. "Th-This is unbearable. He...the guilt, My...I've never f-felt such guilt. I...th-there is no penance...he w-will never forgive me. I will...m-might heal but for what? For what?" He'd nearly died alone in that flat. Now that he'd had a taste of companionship, the idea of the rest of his years spent with his own company and nothing more were unbearable. He closed his eyes and tried to breathe. Already he was going hazy, his reality fading for a moment as he began to doze off. He jerked awake, his panicked breath fogging the mask.

With a pained whimper he looked back to his brother. "A-all there is in my f-future is pain and f-fear, alone...b-bored until I cannot endure it any longer. I've lost it all, My. I've l-lost everything."

Mycroft had no response for his guilt. He supposed nothing he said would make much of a difference to a man determined to damn himself to misery. "John doesn't hate you. He is going through the natural stages of grief, and there will be times when he is angry. There will be times between, though, sometime in the future, where the two of you will be happy." Mycroft wasn't so sure it would be the two of them. Greg and John seemed codependent now, both fragile and threatening to shatter without the support of the other. "And I'll be around. We could..." He thought back to their old childhood game, the one he had always won so easily, the one he had grown out of long before Sherlock had. "We could play deductions. Maybe someday you could beat me."

Sherlock closed his eyes, choosing not to respond. He would never allow himself to be the damaged, cared for brother that Mycroft Holmes endured on his rare free time. With any luck, he would succumb to his wounds. If not, he'd heal and dispatch himself some other way. John's words carved into him as sure as rusty blades.
I won't leave you.

This is your fault.

Greg is going to let me go.

His jaw worked as he struggled to master himself, breathing through the press of tears. His walls had fallen as sure as Berlin, the wreckage souvenirs for the masses, novelties in cases. Ah, yes, remember the days when nothing could slip past the mortar?

Games with his brother. Hateful. He put his mind to the constant movement of his heart and willed it to stop. "Please tell John...tell John..." but he could not finish, his face pinching with pain as he shook his head, going quiet once more.

Perhaps they had been going about this the wrong way. Perhaps such sudden exposure to each other was the wrong idea, like feeding a starving man a massive meal or putting someone with hypothermia into a very warm room. "Let's take it slow, alright? The two of you can talk on the phone for a few minutes once he is feeling better, or maybe text." He intended to have Greg screen the texts, of course, to prevent any slip ups like last time. "Maybe you two can work up to seeing each other regularly."

"We've done, al-ready. The video-" his face swept pale at the mention of watching John on a screen. Despite his ability, his mind still had those memories as John being tortured in real-time to his own failings, not as viewing recordings of John's abuse. "He knows the t-truth now. Unforgivable. I am..." he allowed his lungs to work, keeping himself breathing for a few minutes. "Unforgivable.unnecessary... there...he w-was alone when he decided to endure me. Now he is not. It is s-simple enough to see. As y-you've said...we don't g-get to have love."

"He chose you to live with because he had nobody else. But now, he has Greg, he has no need to come see you, and yet he got out of bed and came each and every time you called for him. Perhaps you don't remember, Sherlock, but he's killed for you. He has readily put himself in a position to sacrifice himself for you whenever the case gets dangerous. He loves you. It's obvious, even more so now." Mycroft sent a quick text to Greg, asking about John's current state and proposing an idea.

*I think it would be wise to begin with texting. We can screen them to be sure that something like this doesn't happen again. How is John handling it? M*

Greg heard his phone chime, but did not dare pull away from John. He tightened his hold and kept tucked against him, dozing, allowing himself a few moments of calm for as long as he could greedily stretch them out.

Sherlock glared at his brother, still violently protective of John. "He c-comes because you d-drug him and...g-god knows what else. He's been m-manipulated...his m-mind is fragile and he-he's..." he closed his eyes, stomach twisting with nausea as Moriarty's voice echoed in his head.

*Beg me John, beg me to put this knife in your side. I'll spare your eye if you do. There's a good boy."

John had done, begging as Sherlock would have as well, pleading for one injury to avoid another. "He is t-terrified and trying to...to...p-protect himself."

John wasn't moving again, but not in the limp, hopeless way he had been before. He was terribly and utterly petrified that he would damage Greg as he had damaged Sherlock, and thus kept his mouth shut tight and simply held the man to his chest.

*I won't bring him in anymore. We won't force him go do anything. Technically, we never did. He
never came unwillingly, Sherlock. He came because he loves you. Once, when he still had the live feed of you, he got so worried about you that he tried to walk out and come help you himself. Even when he was afraid, he still wanted to help. He loves you, and wanted to keep you safe even if it meant being afraid. That love will come again and grow stronger."

Sherlock did not respond to his brother. He closed his eyes and hid behind the oxygen mask, accepting that he’d been screaming in panicked desperation the very last time he got to set his eyes on John Watson. Slowly he began to take stock of his body, starting at his shattered toes and working his way up, taking the better part of thirty minutes to complete his evaluation. It was...catastrophic. At least a year of intensive therapy, at least.

Greg finally pulled gently away from John. "Thanks, John, I'm sorry. I just got...tired, just tired." He reached out and took his mobile, reading the text.

John kissed the top of Greg's head, as the latter had done for him, but didn't speak. If he spoke, he would ruin things. He would say the wrong thing and hurt Greg, like John had hurt Sherlock, and someone would take him away. Scaring Greg was not his intention, however, so he reached down and took his hand.

_Not well. Could they text? Not now, of course, but maybe in a week. Sherlock is devastated. He thinks John hates him, or that he's lost him, or something like that._

Greg read the text several times, finally looking up at John. The man was tense, clearly. Greg's expression was gentle and warm, "Hey," he whispered, reaching out and pulling John to him, swapping their positions as John's forehead touched to his collarbone, "I've still got you, John. I'm right here, you are not alone. Breathe, yeah? Deep and slow, I'm right here."

He wrapped his arms around John's back and replied to the text.

_I can't get a handle on where John is, mentally, at the moment. Will Sherlock be physically able to text in a week? His hands looked...bad._

They looked nearly worse than John's, as though they'd been an intentional target, fingers gnarled and through-and-through wounds, burns, obvious fractures and deep lacerations throughout. He'd had, from what Greg could see, the use of two fingers with which he gripped desperately at his brother, or on the rare occasion he was granted the opportunity, John.

John gave a small nod in response to Greg, still not trusting himself to speak when he was trying to be of help. He recalled how his last day and a half of silent immobility had frightened Greg, so John squeezed his hand and attempted a smile.

_If not, he can dictate. Screen everything before John sends it. Needless to say, I won't be calling for him again._

Greg reached out and gently touched John's face, repeating, "It's okay," before going back to the phone, feeling intensely protective.

_Do I need to be concerned with him wearing out his usefulness, Mycroft?_

_I will not neglect John just because he has become a danger to my brother. He will live here until he leaves with either you, Sherlock, or both._
Greg noted how John leaned into him and began to card his fingers through John's hair, returning the text with one hand, hen-pecking at the phone.

*He is not a danger, Mycroft. Don't start thinking like that. He's just afraid and his mind is damaged, it takes time and what happened was not John's fault. It was just unfortunate. He's not a threat.*

*Don't worry, Greg. I'm going to keep John safe too. Sherlock is, rather unfortunately, illogically in love with him.*

Greg was decidedly worried. His fingers carried on in John's hair as he read between the lines. Mycroft did consider John a threat. He did hold him at fault for what happened. He was only protecting him for Sherlock. Well...he'd take what he could get. John was still safe, one way or another. He slid the mobile back into his pocket and put his full attention to John. In the next moment he leaned in, shifting with a whispered, "Here, John, let me..." as he pulled John very carefully to rest against his chest, one hand gentle in John's hair, the other softly running down John's back. "I've got you. It's okay, John. It's okay."

John didn't seem to have the energy to do it himself and allowed Greg to move him like a child. Once the roles were reversed, and he was back to being helpless, but protected, he decided he could speak without damaging Greg. "Thanks, Greg. I'm sorry."

Greg shook his head, squeezing John gently for a moment. "Hey, no, nothing to be sorry about. You're okay, John, it's okay. Listen, you've had a hard couple of days. Is there anything you want to do? Just laying here like this is perfectly fine, whatever you want. Can put on a movie or I could read to you. I can ask Paul not to come. I just want you to relax a little."

John held on to Greg lightly, but at an angle that made him capable of holding on very tightly at any moment, just in case Greg decided to leave or someone tried to take him away. "I want to sleep. But not really sleep, because then I dream. I just want to black out."

Greg nodded his understanding. "I'm sorry, John, I'm sorry. You've already had that one too recently. I can give you more of your anti-anxiety pills, hell, I will give you all four at once right now and just hold you while you rest. Would that help? I can do that." He kept threading his fingers through John's hair over and over. "I've got you, you don't have to do anything today, okay? Nothing you don't want to do."

John let a small wave of self-pity wash over him. "Too recently? But I want... I. Yes, I want the four. Is that alright? Will that make you sad? I don't want to make you sad, Greg. I really want you to be happy. Can I make you happy? Please?"

Greg shook his head and eased John off him for a moment, stepping off the bed to grab the pills before crawling right back up, leaning back and crossing his ankles as he opened his arms to John. He tipped out the four pills and handed them to him. "These won't hurt you, and I am so sorry I can't get you something stronger right now, I am John. Come, get comfortable and relax, that will make me happy."

John laid down in his bed on his side, curled up but not in the fetal position that he had grown so accustomed to. "I want you to be happy. You won't be happy while I'm not alright, so I'm really trying. I want you to know that I'm trying so hard... It's really difficult and I'm stuck. I'm stuck in here," He held the sides of his head and his eyes squeezed shut for a moment. "And it hurts to think about some things. But it's good to... But I'm still afraid of everything. I don't know if that will go away." He gave Greg a broken, frightened look. "I'm going to have to be like this forever, aren't I?"

Greg shook his head at John. "No, god no, John. It won't always be like this. It won't. I know you
are trying, you are doing an incredible job. It will not always be like this. You've made incredible progress and it gets faster and faster as we go. I know it's hard for you to see, but I can see it, and it's honestly so much better than before. I know it hurts, that's why I'm trying to help you but as gently as I can. What you are scared of, John, it will go away. It will. I would never... never ask you to stay if I thought you'd just have a life of suffering."

John hadn't understood. He had been believing throughout the ordeal that they were asking him to carry on despite his suffering. "I didn't... Oh, God, I thought..." He reached up and wrapped his arms around Greg. "I thought y-you were asking me to stay like this. B-But it... I can't get better... It's hurting." John shook the thought away and reminded himself that he ate ice now, and had applesauce sometimes. That was improvement. "I thought you were h-horrible for asking m-me to stay. I want..." John let out a small whimper and began to wonder just how much of his reality was fabricated.

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Sherlock was locked in a hellish cycle of falling asleep, only to violently jerk himself awake, forgetting where he was and panicking before his brain clicked on and then swiftly pulled him back under. Each cycle took approximately twenty minutes, and left him panting and gritting his teeth, tears tracking down the sides of his face.

Mycroft bent down beside Sherlock after his fifth cycle, trying again in vain to help him relax. "Sherlock, I can have them sedate you if necessary."

Sherlock looked up at his brother in confusion, momentarily forgetting that he was there, that he himself had been rescued, that it was over, just as the doctor in attendance cleared his throat and spoke softly from the corner of the room where he sat, monitoring Sherlock's physical condition. "I'm sorry, Mr. Holmes, but as we discussed it's simply medically inadvisable to sedate him for the next twelve hours. Have to be very careful of those lungs."

"He is in pain!" Mycroft stated firmly and took Sherlock's hand. "Mental pain. Physical pain. This isn't right. He shouldn't have to go through this. Is there anything else we can give him?"

The physician looked at Mycroft with understanding, carrying on speaking calm and quiet, not wanting to startle Sherlock. "He is on the heaviest doses of narcotics we can give him for pain without suppressing his respiratory system. I can give him something for anxiety, though it will only be upping the dose he is already on. There is a chance we will compromise his breathing if we give him more of anything. If we end up having to intubate him and breathe for him, the pneumonia he already has will almost surely worsen. I'm sorry, Mr. Holmes, we are doing everything we can."

Mycroft took a deep breath and clasped his hands behind his back. "Very well. I appreciate you keeping his well being in mind. If anything comes up, let me know."

Sherlock tried to reach for his brother when he was suddenly left on his own, rattling the restraint and pinching his eyes closed as fear tore across his chest. He let his arm fall back down to the bed, breathing tight and fast, as quiet as he could make himself.

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Greg tucked John's head under his chin, speaking softly. "John, no, god no. I've tried to explain before, I don't... I would never ask that. I know you can keep getting better. I know you can. I know some of it hurts, I know and I wish I could stop that from happening, but you are getting better. I swear it. I love you John, I don't want to see you in pain. I'm trying to help get you out of pain."

John shook with waves of relief. He had been so sure that Greg wanted him to stay alive despite his sufferings that to hear that the man actually thought they would go away was fantastic. "I'm afraid of being alive, Greg. I'm afraid of having to go through tomorrow. I might panic tomorrow and it will hurt. I might hurt you and they might take me away from you or make you leave. What if they chain me down again? I don't... I hate this."

Oh. Of course that's what John would think. Greg pulled John closer and filled his lungs slowly, choosing his words as carefully as he could. "John, no one is going to take me from you. It's different than with Sherlock, okay? It's not the same situation. I am healthy, I'm not dealing with other trauma." He pressed his lips to John's hairline before sweeping his hand over the top of John's head. "The only reason you were ever restrained with us, John, was that you were so terrified of everyone that there was no other way to keep you safe. Now, I can hold you when you get scared, yeah? And you've told me it hurts less when I hold you when you're scared."

John nodded and hummed his approval to the statement as Greg continued. "I'm not leaving you, John, not unless you have me out. I've got you, even if you yell and scream, if you get angry or scared, I've been through all that with you already, right? And I'm still right here. Right here."

The affirmation helped, but he was still worried. "You're dealing with trauma. Just not your own. It hurts still. I would like to help you, but I only hurt people when I try." John had a terrible mental image of him saying something in anger or fear that hurt Greg. Doctors would come in and drag him away, leaving John alone and scared, screaming and begging with nobody there to help him. His grip tightened on Greg for a moment and he held the fabric of his shirt in one hand. "It hurts less when you are here because you help me. Sometimes I think that everyone wants to hurt me and I get scared. God, I get so scared... But you can touch me without hurting me, so there's still good things left."

"Every time you've tried to help me, I've felt better. Sherlock is... that's another story, John. That's a whole slew of things between the pair of you that is going to take time. You have dedicated your life to helping people. You are brilliant at helping people, John. That's still in there. This fear... it's going to pass. I'll help you as long as you let me." He tightened his hold on John, wanting him to feel safe. "John, it would take an army to pull you away from me, if you didn't want to go. I'm... I've grown really very protective of you. It's... uncomfortable not to be with you, even when I get up to shower, I know that's maybe not very healthy, but it's the truth. I don't like to be apart from you." John didn't like the word shower, but he decided that it was only a word and words couldn't hurt him. "I don't like it when you have to go either. How is that not healthy? I need you to stay with me or else I hurt. Its perfectly healthy for me to not want to hurt and for you to want the same." The idea that the old John was still somewhere inside him seemed utterly preposterous, as if he wasn't John at all but a new, dysfunctional, different man beaten into place and carved into perfection by Moriarty's ingenious methods.

Greg smiled at him, snuggling John closer to his side. "Well, when you put it like that," he said with a small smile. "Listen, John, can we talk about Sherlock for a minute? If you'd rather not, that's fine. I just want to get an idea of what you actually want here, not what you think you should do or what you are afraid of, but what you actually want with him. Mycroft is asking and I'm... I'm not sure what
John scowled. "What I want?" He assumed that the question excluded the option of death, which still remained at the top of his selfish desires list. "I want Sherlock to be happy. I want you to be happy. Then..." Those were his goals. He wished to secure Sherlock and Greg's happiness then leave as painlessly as he could. But if Greg was right, and the future held a place without fear, John was willing to stay and decide that for himself. "I want to be able to see him without hurting him."

Greg gentled his expression as much as he was able, running a finger over the lines John had pulled his face into. "Hey," he whispered, carding his fingers through John's hair a few times, "easy, John...easy. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset you. I'm trying to understand, okay? I know earlier you wanted to help...but I- yeah I shouldn't have asked, I'm sorry."

He drew in a deep breath, carrying on trying to smooth away the deep lines in John's face that he'd accidentally put there.

"Its alright. You should know. I'm sorry, I just-" he stared at his spindly fingers and the scarred skin that seemed stretched tight over his protruding bones. "You and Sherlock are the reasons I'm alive. I am going to keep you two happy, and you'll help me not be afraid. I'll fix the damage I've done."

Greg shook his head, carrying on touching John softly, carding fingers through his hair and running them down the side of his neck. "You've not done damage, John. Everything that got said, Sherlock already knows in his head. He got scared, he thought the timeline was much shorter and he panicked. You've not done any damage." He was trying to tread lightly, knowing how tense the situation with them was.

"Timeline?" John's mind was fuzzy, and he was having difficulty keeping a looming sense of unending pain at bay.

"Sherlock looked as though he thought...he was confused, panicked, looked as though he thought you were leaving right then. That's all I mean by 'timeline.' Poor choice of words." "I wasn't going to leave him then!" John exclaimed as though it had been an insult. "I waited all that time for him. I would never..." He shook his head. "I would never..." He shook his head. "I suppose he knows that now."

Greg had to look away, blinking rapidly and clearing his throat as he took a few slow breaths. "He's just confused, John," Greg said, sharply deflecting, "he's not thinking clearly. He's...yeah, he's in a lot of pain and he was still scared and confused. I know you wouldn't have left him then, he just..." that poor bastard was having a hell of a time of it, and now he'd lost access to the sole comfort in his life. He shook his head, deeply worried for Sherlock.

John let out a short, irritated noise. "I’m going to stay then, until he’s better. Need to fix it."

Greg looked up in surprise and disbelief. "You don’t need to fix anything. Though it does make me nothing short of chuffed to hear you willing to stay, at least try and stay. Truly. That's...cracking good news to me, John. My promise always stands, I just...so glad you are going to give me a bit of time to try."

"Greg... I need you to understand something. I am going to stay with you. I'm going to stay as long as I can. And I really, really hope that I get better so I can help Sherlock but..." He gave Greg an apologetic look. "I might seem like I'm getting better but... if in a year, three years, or more..." he shuddered at the idea of lasting that long, "if I need to cash in, if it's still too hard, I need your word that you'll still help me leave."

He reached out, a hand on either side of John's face before he responded. "You've my word. You have it. Just...grant me the ability to talk to you about it, okay? Please? It...that will never be something easy for me to do, and I'll need to understand, okay? I just...please."
And I know it won't be easy for you. Is there any way that I could make you happy enough that
when I leave you're alright? Or are we going to go together when it happens?"

"I don't want to think about losing you, John. I just...let's...let's try and focus on things we can do to help you feel better. Please?"

John told himself it had only been a few days since Sherlock got back. At that time, John had still been screaming and afraid of everyone. He hadn't held a lucid conversation yet. Sherlock was definitely progressing better, but John was worried that he had set him back. "Well, you asked what I wanted." John muttered and changed the subject. "We can just stay here. Do you need exercise?" He asked abruptly. "You've been staying with me for so long. Isn't that bad or something?"

Greg's heart sank. Just as soon as he caught a breeze of hope, it was always, always torn from him. "Yeah, mate, I don't particularly care about my fitness at the moment," and wasn't that the damned truth? He couldn't possibly care less. He gently touched the back of John's hand, his throat tight and burning. He'd believed for a few foolish moments that what John wanted was to feel better, that perhaps they'd made a little progress. He loathed the promise he'd made. He'd keep it, he would, but it would kill him in the end. He was swiftly losing his own hope, closing his eyes for a moment and trying to gather himself.

"Okay, that's alright. I was just wondering." John looked up and saw the conflict on Greg's face and concern masked his features. "Was that wrong? Did I say something wrong? God, I didn't mean to. I didn't!" John dragged in an abrupt, ragged breath and clung to Greg. *They are going to take me away from him, just like with Sherlock.* "I didn't mean to. Please, please, I'm sorry."

"Breathe, John," Greg said softly, shaking his head and pulling John in close. "You are okay, it's okay. I might get sad sometimes, that's alright. I'm not leaving. Breathe."

"No, no, no... I can't... I shouldn't say anything. I just make things worse." He pulled away from Greg despite the terror of losing him and crawled to the opposite end of the bed. "I'm just hurting people."

"Well...that hurts...when you pull away from me. That hurts a lot. Do you want me to leave you alone? I will, if that's what you want, but I really, really don't want to. Please, John, come back," he said gently, opening up his arms hopefully.

"Oh, I'm sorry I-" John whimpered and crawled back to Greg. Everything he did was wrong. He couldn't even move without hurting people. "That's not what I wanted. That's not-" His lower lip trembled and he put his hands over his face.

Greg hummed, his heart racing and trying to make an effort at calming things down. "John. We've got to calm down, yeah? I know," he eased back and took John's face in his hands, "I know you are not trying to hurt me. You are not hurting me, John, listen to me, okay? Let's walk through this nice and slow. Please breathe, everything is okay." He gave John a moment, watching him with concern. "I love you, it's okay."

He let go of John's face, gently trailing fingers through his hair. "Now, please tell me, if you didn't have to worry about how I feel, where would you want to be right now? In my arms, or sitting somewhere else? Whatever you say is fine, and it's not going to hurt me, okay? I promise."

"No, no, no..." John dropped his head into his hands and rocked himself back and forth. *They are going to take me away from Greg.* In his mind he could already see it. He could see the doctors coming in and pulling him away to some undisclosed location where he would be punished for hurting everyone. John flinched and his expression drew into that of severe pain as his panicked mind drew events from his past and applied them to his idea of the near future. "Please, help..." he
managed to say before wincing again.

Greg pulled John tight to his chest, shifting and wrapping the blanket tight around John's back, up over his shoulders, leaning to the side and swiftly lowering the lights. He shifted them down, one arm slung across John's back and the other buried in his hair, holding one of John's ears over his heart, the other covered John's exposed ear. "I have you. You are safe and I'm not leaving. I have you. I have you," he repeated again and again as he wrapped himself up around John as much as he could, lightly rocking them, doing everything he could think of to make John feel secure.

"Th-they a-are going t-to take m-me away from y-y-you!" John sobbed and clung desperately to Greg as if he were drowning. "I-I hurt y-you and I-I-I-" There was punishment in his future, he was sure of it. It would be broken fingers and toes, they would slowly cut into his skin and pull at his tendons. "H-H-HELP!"

"John!" Greg shouted, trying to grab his attention. "John they are not going to take you away from me. No one is going to take you away from me." He closed his eyes, wishing like hell he was as clever as Sherlock and Mycroft, or trained like Paul. "John, I promise, I promise, you are safe. They will not take you. Greg, remember? Greg has you, Greg protects you. It's safe, John, it's safe."

John's world was spinning down into hectic, painful chaos like a dying hurricane, tearing itself to bits, lacking the energy needed to stay together. He screamed once, loudly, his hands clapped over his ears and eyes squeezed shut against the visions that worked as hot oil to his burned mind. "G-Greg...H-help m-m-me!"

Greg pushed John back off his chest, his heart going a thousand miles per hour, desperate to help him. He leaned over and flicked the lights on high and then took John's face between his hands, suddenly pulling John in and pressing their lips together briefly in a chaste, familiar way, the effort to shock John with something that had not happened -dear God, please, please- in captivity for John.

John's eyes widened and he stiffened in fear.

Chapter End Notes

I know.

I KNOW.

Has Greg just made a horrible mistake, or will it be well received? Keep in mind, he has no idea about the sort of abuse John was subjected to.

((Also, don't worry, no sexuality or romance planned between the two. Just a deep sentimental attachment wherein if anyone so much as looks at John in a mean way they are absolutely dismantled by Greg.))
Nothing Gold Can Stay

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

John heart fluttered in his chest like a caged animal and he could feel it practically throwing itself against his ribcage as if trying to escape. Greg was his safety. He wouldn’t hurt him. Not like that. He wouldn’t try to- "G-Greg... what...? I-I don’t..." John couldn't fathom what was happening, fear mixing with confusion and his already hectic mind trying to make sense of things. It had, however, made his panic come to a screeching halt in its progression.

Greg closed his eyes, letting John lean away. He panted in his fear, keeping his face as calm as he could. "I'm...I just...you were so scared and I-I need you to know you're safe. You don't...I don't expect anything from you. I just...you were so scared, and I'm going to keep you safe, and you...you forgot so..." he trailed off, watching John carefully, his heart in his throat.

John didn’t know what to make of it. He gave a small nod and dropped his eyes down to his hands. He scooted away a bit and curled in on himself as he watched Greg for any signs that he was going to hurt him. Fear still pulled at him, though, and eventually John broke down and curled up in his place on Greg's chest, though he did so in a very guarded way. At the very least, he could be sure that Greg meant it when he said he would stay with him. But John was still thoroughly confused by how he was supposed to love Greg. If he did wasn't a question, but 'how' remained unanswered.

Greg was not about to upset the silence for now. He ran his fingers down John's back, through his hair, his touch as chaste and familial as he could make it. He let the minutes stretch before whispering, "John...everything is okay, yeah? I just...you were afraid. I wasn't trying to put you in some sort of uncomfortable position, okay? I just wanted to help you, that's...it's all fine, okay?"

John breathed deeply of the familiar smell he had come to associate with peace and all things concerning his own personal safety and comfort. "I don't know if... I just... I can't be like that, it's too much to think about. I d-don't want you to...it's fine, but I can’t...I don’t..." There was far too much going on in John's damaged mind for him to factor this in. While he wanted love and affection, and was quite sure Greg wasn’t going to rape him, such a form of love was not something he was comfortable with."There's enough stuff going on already."

"Exactly," Greg breathed in relief, honestly glad John had gotten there himself. "That's...yes...my thoughts exactly, John. I promise. I was not trying to add another element to this." He took a deep breath, trying to relax. "Let's just lay here a while? Rest up a bit?"

John exhaled slowly and tightened his hold on Greg. "Thank you. Thank you. You're wonderful. I love you. Thank you." The weight of having to decide 'how' was lifted off his shoulders and he felt lighter than before for its absence.

Greg smoothed his fingers through John's hair, humming and tightening his grip on John's bicep. "I think the same of you, try and rest, John, I've got you, and you are safe. Totally, totally safe."

He pulled the blankets back over them and lowered the lights, warmly wrapping John into his arms.

"Alright, Greg. Thank you for staying." John dropped off to sleep fairly quickly, cuddled up against Greg's chest. It was, perhaps, the most successful attempt at a relationship he had ever had. Not that it technically counted, as Greg was a friend, not a lover, but John had quite forgotten how wonderful it was to fall asleep next to someone.
Sherlock could not stop screaming. He knew he was shouting his lungs out pointlessly, it never helped, he knew there were men trying to make him stop, knew there was pain. So much goddamn pain. He punched his eyes shut, tears rolling down his face with fear.

"Sherlock!" Mycroft shouted, "Sherlock, please, it's alright! Listen to me, you're with me. You're with My!" He put his hands on either side of Sherlock's face. "Everything is alright. It's just fine. You are going to be fine." His nerves were fried, but his voice just as even and persistent as it always had been.

Sherlock tried to reach up for his brother, dragging in a pained, childlike sob when he was caught at the wrists. He could not catch his breath to speak, dragging in another desperate breath and screaming out his panic.

"I'm here, Sherlock, I'm here." He reached across Sherlock and took each of his hands. "Nobody is going to hurt you. Try to relax. Deep breaths now, deep breaths. You're in a secure facility with Mycroft. Mycroft has you."

"Tired," he gasped, shaking his head as tears ran down his face, awareness slowly returning. He had yet to sleep for any meaningful stretch of time. "Pain, My, pain," he cried, utterly worn out.

"It's alright, Sherlock. The pain will pass. You're safe." Mycroft ran his fingers back through Sherlock's hair as Greg had been doing with John.

Sherlock closed his eyes, trying to breathe through it. "Where is John...where...where is....please...John..."

"John is safe. He's with... He's safe. Just breathe. John is safe. Nobody is hurting John." Mycroft spoke softly and decided to leave Greg out.

Sherlock's back arched and he let loose a low, panicked cry. "H-Hurts...brother p-please..." his fingers curled as much as they were able, panic low in his tone, "John...he...h-he's hurt, he n-needs help...My...g-god...h-hurts." He grit his teeth as tears rolled down his face, locked up in bitter exhaustion and fear.

Mycroft kept to the same phrases he had before, the same comfort and affirmations that had become an unending string from his mouth. His tone, however, was growing more and more desperate. "It's alright, Sherlock. I've got John. He's safe. John isn't in pain."

"Please," Sherlock panted, "Please l-let me sleep. I'm...s-so tired, My...p-please." He licked at his lip before twisting slightly and gritting his teeth. "Please, I'm...please...c-can't sleep."

"We can't give you anything stronger at the moment, Sherlock. You need to be breathing on your own." Mycroft was worried that he might have ended up like John, deprived of sleep and terrified to break the rule for fear of punishment. "The pain will be over soon. It will be alright."

Sherlock dragged in a desperate, panicked breath. "Help...Help me. My...I...I c-can't..." he panted as he struggled with the pain, panic and fear. He reached again for his brother, screaming until his voice faded down to frightened, childlike sobs.

Mycroft set his face like stone to keep his features from betraying how much this disturbed him. "It's alright, Sherlock. It's alright. You're alright. The pain will pass. We're doing everything we can."

Sherlock lay there, desperate for comfort, the deep ache of surgical pain laced around his nervous
system. His body trembled hard as he struggled to calm down. "My," he breathed, trying to touch his brother, "help...brother...p-please."

Mycroft took Sherlock's hand in his. "I can't help right now," he admitted, and oh, did it hurt. "I can help you once your lungs are functioning. But you are recovering. This is all old pain. There's no new pain."

Sherlock closed his eyes and turned his face away, not understanding. Perhaps it was a trick and this was not his brother at all. He was tired down, and there was no help for him.

"O-okay," he breathed, sobbing with exhaustion.

Mycroft stayed with him the duration of the day. He was tired, emotionally exhausted from listening to his brother screaming, and his entire body seemed to ache from stooping over.

*How is John?*

Greg hummed as he read the text, looking down at the dozing man in his arms. He shifted and began to reply, careful not to disturb him.

*Finally resting. How is Sherlock?*

Mycroft looked over to Sherlock and his expression darkened.

*He's doing badly. He is more confused than usual, and the pain is intense. He asked about John again.*

Greg read the text, taking in a slow, deep breath and sighing as he let it out. He looked to John and empathized with Mycroft.

*Can I do anything for you? Does he know where he is?*

Mycroft hadn't eaten that day, though there was a small meal in the room set for him if he decided to.

*I've told him where John is, but he didn't seem to understand. I've told him hundreds of times today. How did John handle it?*

Greg didn't understand. He frowned, face lit blue in the dark, quiet room, chest warm with John against him.

*I'm sorry, how did John handle what?*

*The entire incident. Not being allowed near Sherlock. I don't know how much you told him, but he's got to know he upset Sherlock.*

Oh. Right.

*He's...devastated. He was basically catatonic for more than a day. He's still...it's very touch and go. He's, yeah, devastated. He knows he hurt him, he'd not intended to. John is just, this wasn't fair. He hardly has memory from before being taken. Learning that about Sherlock was a shock, delivered at a really bad time. He's wrecked over it.*

*Catatonic? Is he responsive now?*

*I'm sure Sherlock knows John meant no offense, but keep in mind that Sherlock Holmes just confessed his love for someone only to be blamed for his pain and then left. He screamed for hours.*
He's responsive now, he has spoken to me as rationally as I've heard him this morning. I am so sorry for Sherlock, that was very hard to watch happen. I explained it all to John. He...he's just not healthy yet, yeah? What are you doing for Sherlock?

Sherlock lay there with tears rolling down his face, shaking hard and whispering nonsense under his breath, delirious in his exhaustion. He'd managed to fall asleep a few minutes at a time, only for one twinge of pain or another to shock him back awake.

I'm staying with him. He's awake but not lucid. Has Paul been back? If he is useful I might keep him here full time. It's for you to decide.

"It's alright, Sherlock. Mycroft is here. Mycroft is keeping you safe." He took Sherlock's hand as he had done each time the man woke.

Paul was here for a while, gave John the option of asking him to leave. He will be back again tomorrow, wanted to let John rest. I'd like him here full time, yeah. He's brilliant, really, and this is where he specializes.

I'll hire him, then. He'll have a room right across from you. I've had him tailed and it turned up nothing. Does John need anything?

Sherlock dragged in a desperate, rattling breath as a physician approached, ready to give more pain medication. "Mr. Holmes, I can give him a bit more for pain and up his sedative slightly. Might help him sleep."

Mycroft waved the doctor over. "Yes, of course. Anything to help him sleep would be perfect."

Greg looked down at John and put his mind to it.

This room needs to look less institutional. If there is anything safe that has a window, it would be better if we could move him there. He needs...I'm going to set it back up as close to Baker Street was as I can, he needs a normal bed, and a rug, and to feel safe. Likely the same your brother would benefit from.

Greg sent the text and then hesitated, closing his eyes and thinking back to the early days with John. I know this isn't your area, as it were, but John did much better with being held than he did on his own. Dunno if Sherlock will respond or if you're even willing. Just a thought.

The physician ignored Sherlock's desperate begging, his stuttered pleas for mercy, as he leaned over and pushed an increased dose of narcotics and another sedative. Sherlock's arms slowly went limp against the mattress as he lay there sobbing.

I will bring the furniture directly from his old room, if you think that would be best. I'll make him a new room and you can move him in whenever he is ready. I don't suggest anything near a window, though the interior courtyard is safe enough.

Mycroft looked over at Sherlock and wondered if his usually standoffish brother would benefit from being held. He had reacted positively to other forms of touch, though, and Mycroft was willing to try.

Right now I think I would only cause him more pain. His back is a mess and he still has a tube in his side. Shifting around isn't a good idea just yet.
Greg smiled at the idea of providing John with a room that did not look so frightening. He nodded to himself and replied to Mycroft again.

*Thank you, I think it will make a world of difference. If he could have something near the courtyard with a window, that would help him very much. If you can't move Sherlock, move yourself. If you want to try.*

He set the mobile down and adjusted his hold on John, snuggling him closer and breathing him in deep.

*I will make two rooms looking out on the courtyard, one for each of them. If you need anything else, my men will grant it.*

Mycroft walked around to the side of Sherlock that didn't have a tube sticking out of him and sat down on the edge of the bed. He awkwardly wrapped his arms around Sherlock, being very careful not to hurt him. Mycroft unclasped the arm that wasn't terribly broken and slowly put it on his chest as he had seen Sherlock attempt in the past. Mycroft’s movements were halting and awkward, but he was trying to say the least.

Sherlock instantly turned his face to his brother and whimpered in relief, his fingers curling in the material of his gown, desperate to keep his hand in and not pulled out and away. The nature of his weeping slowly shifted, from panic to slow relief, from relief to bitter exhaustion. "My," he breathed, recognizing who had him at the very least, his blood pressure and heart rate both slowly decelerating to something more acceptable.

Relief flooded over him like a tidal wave and Mycroft shifted one arm under Sherlock so he could properly hold him. He was as slow and gentle as he possibly could be, practically holding his breath in an attempt to be still. "Shhh... It's alright. My has you. My's got you. You're safe."

*Thank you.*

Greg cracked an eye open to read the text, smiling softly in the darkness. Hopefully that meant Sherlock was settling down.

*Glad to help at all.*

Slowly the terrible quaking in Sherlock's limbs subsided, fading down to naught but the occasional tremor from overworked and overstimulated nerves. Sherlock closed his eyes, breathing his brother's name from time to time as sleep slowly wrapped around him and gently pulled him down, warm and familiar, his fingers steadily going lax on his own destroyed chest as he rest in the hollow of his brother's shoulder.

Mycroft hadn't held his brother since they were very young. Even embracing had been kept to a minimum unless their mother insisted. It was a bit awkward, but he wouldn't deny Sherlock anything that might help him.

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John stirred slightly in his sleep and began to wake, hands curling in the fabric of Greg's shirt and his
eyes moving under closed lids.

Greg began to speak, low and quiet as John started to wake. He kept the light in the room enough that John would be able to see, and he wanted him to come up out of his sleep with a familiar sound in his ears. He rubbed John's back very softly and kept to calm topics, suddenly starting in on the pies Mrs. Hudson made for the holidays, and suggesting that maybe when they were ready, she'd make him one.

John was more willing to come awake when Greg was there soothing him, and he blinked up at the man blearily. "She was nice to have around on the holidays." The idea of her pies didn't frighten him much, as long as he didn't think about what happened when he ate. Perhaps using foods that he already had a different, positive emotional connection to would help. "Do you think that I'll get to see Christmas? I liked Christmas."

Greg smiled softly and nodded. "Course you'll see Christmas. We'll have a proper one no matter how things are or where we are by then, yeah? Tree and poppers, all that lot. She is still around, still wants to help very much. She came to see you the first few days, tried to help. Was a little too early then, I think, but I know she'll come round when you're ready."

It was a massive, incredible relief for John to be responding without fear for once.

John didn't remember Mrs. Hudson ever coming around, but he didn't remember much out of that jumbled, chaotic mess of sensory memories and flashes of rare reason. "I like the poppers, yeah. You and I can have Christmas, and it will be happy, not painful." It was a foreign and wonderful thing for John to actually look forward to something, and in those blessed moments he wasn't thinking about his death.

Greg smiled and gave John a light squeeze, checking his watch. It had been...potentially enough time for the movers to have prepared a room. He looked to John and slid his fingers through John's hair. "Any things that you can remember liking that you'd like now? I dunno, anything at all?" He'd have runners out all day long if there was anything he could get John to help.

"Things?" John had almost forgotten that he did, in fact, own material possessions. "My chair, maybe, so I can be out of bed but not in the wheelchair." He couldn't think of much else, as most of his former comfort items, his tea, Sherlock, and the flat had been made unavailable to him. "I suppose I miss the flat. But that hardly matters."

Greg figured that Mycroft would have sent for the chair with John's things. Surely. He nodded. "It does matter, John. It does. And it will be there, waiting for you, if you ever decide you want to go back." He pulled him in close, nuzzling the side of John's head. "I'll take care of it all, John. And when you are ready to see Mrs. Hudson, or Molly Hooper, you let me know. They both want a visit, but only when you are ready."

He sent off a text to Mycroft, hoping enough time had passed for the room to be ready.


Glad to hear it. John responds well to it nearly every time he forgets where he is. I hope it has made things slightly easier on you. Do you know if John's room will be ready yet? Also, you need to eat. Have you done?

He smiled at John and shifted to make them more comfortable.
The room is ready, though we're still installing cameras. It will be ready to move in to within the hour. I've not eaten, but I will later.

John was contemplating how he had forgotten about Harriet while simultaneously worrying about why he hadn't heard from her. "Greg?" He asked and tugged on his sleeve, "Is Harriet alright?"

Greg sighed and gently touched John's face. "We don't know where she is. We are still looking, but it's been a while since anyone has heard from her. Long before you left. I'm sorry, mate, I really am. Doesn't look like foul play or anything, just that she packed up and left."

He gave John's arm a bit of a squeeze and tipped his face down against his. "I'm sorry. But I'm right here. We won't have anyone over unless you are ready. No rush."

John gave a feeble nod. "She's done that before. I wouldn't be surprised, but usually she at least keeps in touch. I don't know, an email or something." He remembered that he hadn't checked his email in over a year, and decided to some time soon. "I hope... You don't think Moran would take her, do you?"

Greg shook his head. "He would have done a long time ago if that was the case. She went off the radar before you were taken, they would have...you would have been told." There was no way Moriarty would have sat on that. "No, John, I don't think she's in that sort of danger. I think she's just gone off. I'd not look at it like that."

This wouldn't be the first time Harriet had left. Usually, he tried to contact her, though lately he had just let her initiate. "Alright then. I suppose that's alright. Maybe she sent me an email. Or a text. I wouldn't know. I never really got to phone a friend."

Greg nodded, wincing at John's words though choosing not to say much about them. He took in a deep, slow breath and let John rest for a moment. "John," he finally said quietly, "How would you feel about moving to a new room?"

"New room?" The man looked up with a visage of concern. He had grown accustomed to this room. This was his safe place; an area that he had learned wouldn't bring him pain. "There's...there's no table in it, is there?"

"No table," Greg said quietly, "I just...I just have something for you. I think it will be a nice surprise," he said gently, hoping this was the right thing to do as he held on to John, wanting to take him over as soon as possible.

"Okay," John responded hesitantly and sat up in bed. He stretched his arms above his head and tried not to look at his bony elbows. "What is it?"

Greg sat up with him, smiling gently. "We have to leave this room. Feel up for the wheelchair?" He slid out of the bed, slipping in his shoes as he stretched and smoothing down his hair.

He smiled at John. "Here," he whispered, gathering socks and a robe, "get dressed, I'm just stopping in the lav." He gave John a soft hug and walked into the attached bathroom, handling his needs and washing his hands before returning. "Ready?"

John was grateful for the help and constant affection given to him by Greg. It was helping his progress monumentally, and he resolved to help Greg somehow in return. "I'm ready," he responded and got into the wheelchair. He preferred to move it himself now that he could, as it gave him a bit of freedom and control.

Greg stopped one of the higher level security officers and whispered to him, asking for the room
number John's things had been delivered to. He walked ahead, leading the way as John moved in his chair behind him. He went slow, taking the lifts up a level so that they were on the ground floor. He held up a finger to John as the room number came into view, indicating he should wait for just a moment.

Greg pushed the door open and was instantly greeted with a scent very close to Baker Street. There was a large, plush rug covering most of the floor. On one end sat John's chair, facing the large window, and at the other was his actual bed from home. There were rich curtains hung on the walls to drown out the white paint, and it had an overall warm and familiar feel to it. He smiled and looked back to John, pushing the door open wide, not bothering with the light as the sun was doing a fine job of illuminating the room, stepping back for John to move inside.

John's eyes were wide and he stopped in the doorway. He swept over every detail and lingered for a long time on his bed and chair. When was the last time he saw them? The room felt so spectacularly different from what he was used to, so warm, soft and inviting. It wasn't bloody floors or blaring white walls. John pushed himself out of the chair and walked on the soft carpet, which was a welcomed feeling after months of rough concrete then cold tile. He paused in front of his chair and picked up the Union Jack pillow. "Greg... This..." The oppressive white was faded and made significantly less harsh by the curtains and furniture. "You even got my bed."

Greg had been watching with his breath held, heart hardly daring to beat as he waited to see if he'd made a terrible mistake. He exhaled slowly and smiled, both of his hands in his pockets as he watched John. "Had to wait until you were well enough for a regular bed, I hoped this would feel...better. Get you a window and your things, maybe let you just...I don't know. Breathe." He shrugged and stepped fully in the room, shutting the door behind them. "If there is anything else you can think of that you'd like to have, just let me know. I'll have it delivered."

John sat down into his chair and patted the smooth fabric on the armrests. Slowly a light, peaceful expression came over him and he leaned back. This was the best possible thing he could imagine happening, and his eyes misted with tears. "Thank you. Thank you so much." John cast his gaze out the window to the courtyard and stared in wonder at the leaves on the tree. "It's beautiful."

Greg moved to John's side, pulling up a wooden chair and sitting down beside him. He made no move to reach for John, following his line of sight to the window. It was a normal day out, overcast and cool, through it was something that John found worth his attention and therefore the most wonderful day Greg had seen in quite some time.

"You're welcome," he said softly, the smile touching his tone. "I'm glad you like it."
"Its much less..." John made a movement with his hands as if pushing something down.
"Oppressive. It doesn't feel like a hospital." He tracked the path of a leaf as it made its way from the tree to the ground and wondered if his hardships and journey seemed small, like the flight of the leaf, when compared to others.

"Yeah, was hoping for that," Greg said calmly, "You said you missed home. It's not...can't go back just yet, but I didn't want you thinking it was gone. Baker Street is still there for you when it's time, and for now, this is just...it's just your room, you know? Can move about how you want, go outside to the courtyard when you want, all that business."

He pulled out his mobile and texted Mycroft.

*Room is a complete success. Thank you for your help. How is your brother?*

John felt almost normal in his chair, looking over at the bed, all the comforts of home condensed into one area. Being normal had never occurred to him as a pleasant thing before, when he had wanted
adventure and action and missed the war, but now it seemed a blessed privilege. “You...Greg, you are wonderful. This is perfect.” He got up and walked to his bed, grateful again for the soft carpet that led him there. Slowly he reached one hand out and placed it on the soft duvet. Tears streaked down his face and he wondered how many times he had fallen asleep without so much as a shirt to keep him warm, with gravel sticking to his skin and the warmth being slowly sapped from his tired body. How he’d prayed for his bed. How he’d imagined it. Dreamt of it. And now, like an apparition finally come to fruition, it was there. John crawled in and found immense comfort in the small dimple in the mattress where he had habitually slept while at Baker Street. It was soft, warm, familiar, and everything John needed. He rolled side to side and pressed his face onto the pillows just to feel the friction of the familiar fabric.

Greg watched John move through the room, incredibly pleased with the outcome. John looked...much better here. He did not have quite the same haunted, desperate expression. Perhaps in here they could get him eating, get that damned tube out of his nose. Greg loathed the tube, wanted nothing more at the moment than to get John eating and drinking, and bathing himself. All things that would surely help his mental health.

"I'm so glad it helps."

John looked around, almost dazed by the sudden change, as he had been when he left the warehouse. It felt so natural, lying in his bed, with his sheets and his pillows. It was almost as if he would get up out of bed any moment and make a cup of tea. But no, he remembered suddenly, because that would mean water.

"Do you think I’ll stay here for the rest of my time?"

Greg nodded, "Oh, yeah John. Yeah. I can't think of a reason you would have to move. Yeah, this...this is for good until you are ready to go home. Is that okay with you? I thought it would be more comfortable, but I didn't want to take the option away from you, you know?"

John did not plan on going home, but this would be a nice place to end his days. It would be much better than dying stressed in a hospital bed, scared and in a foreign place. This was much better. Here, he could drift off peacefully in his own bed. To John, dying in his own bed, with Greg by his side, was the best possible outcome at this point. But he couldn’t tell Greg. John swung his legs over the edge of the bed. It was nice to walk on the carpet, and he ended up sitting down on it, greatly pleased that it wasn’t concrete. “I don’t want to go home. Not without you. If I go back, would you come with me? That is, if Sherlock takes that long to be all right. I don’t know if he will take that long, but if I have to go home, you’ll come too, right?"

Greg moved down slowly, taking off his shoes and sitting down on the lush rug beside John. It was clear a thick cushioning pad had been placed under it, and it was quite pleasant to both walk and sit on. "Yep, John, I'm going to go where you want to go. I'll stay at Baker Street if you want me to, and if not you can come to mine. I just want to help. I'm not going to leave you, not unless you ask me to."

"Where would you be better? Where is safer?" He wanted to keep his bed and chair, but if Mycroft could get them here, he could surely get them to Greg's. "I don't want to turn your life completely upside down, though I suppose I already have."

Greg gave a soft laugh, shaking his head. "Horribly perfect timing. Wife left, swept the flat, I've slept there twice since. I don't have any attachment to it. I have no preference, John, I really, honestly don't. Baker Street is...you belong there. You do. I'd rather see you back there, I think it will help you more. That helps me, when you are doing well, I do well. So yeah, Baker Street if you can. If
not, we will figure it out later."

“I don’t want to be somewhere where he can find me easily. Is he dead? Moran? They all need to
die. There were others sometimes. People who...who watched...learned things...” John swallowed
hard and shook his head a few times. Now was not the time to think about it. If he thought about
what happened, he might start to panic.

Greg reached to the side, his back to John’s bed, and wrapped a hand around John’s. "No, he
managed to slip away. This is why we have you and Sherlock in such a secure facility, John.
Mycroft is tearing apart the globe looking for him, and he will find him. If ah, if you think you can
tell us about the others, that would be good. You don't have to now, but it would help."

John pulled his knobby knees up to his chest and crossed his arms on top of them. "I can't. They
weren't there for long. He would bring someone in to show them...things. How I was trained, or
what happened when he played Sherlock's voice, or... or how to use clamps to make people panic..."
John had an unpleasant look on his face. "I just remember there were people learning."

Greg nodded. "That's...bloody awful. I'm so angry this happened to you." He put a hand on John's
shoulder, refusing to leave him alone with even that much distance. "That's okay, John, Mycroft's
people are good, they will get them. There is evidence now and they've plenty of leads. It's okay. Do
you want to maybe try some ice this morning?"

"I don't want to. I never want to. But I will anyway, because its what I'm supposed to do." John was
a bit bitter towards the idea of progressing, as it seemed pointless to go through all the trouble just to
end up in the grave. "Do you want me to try now?"

Greg looked at John for a long minute, eventually bumping shoulders with him. "We know you can
eat ice. You've done it loads of times. Surely it's boring by now. What about frozen juice? That
would taste a hell of a lot better, might make you feel better. Will you try that for me? Sit in your
chair, have some juice made from ice?"

Paul had recommended it days ago, and the kitchen had created an entire fridge of little things for
John to try. Greg had just not wanted to push him

"I might not do well." John warned and gave Greg an apologetic look. "I might not do well at all. I
might panic. It might hurt. If you're prepared to deal with that, I'll do it." He leaned over and put his
head on Greg's shoulder. He was giving himself over, willing to comply with Greg's instructions as
long as the man was sure about what he was getting in to.

Greg snaked his arm across John's shoulders and leaned into him, holding him tight to his side. "You
might do amazing. You might do amazing, and it might feel wonderful. I'm prepared either way, but
I think it will honestly help you. It's fresh squeezed, the juice is very good, very sweet
and...yeah...you liked orange juice before...ordered it any time we had breakfast. I think it will help."

He pressed a fond, familial kiss to John's hairline as one would a little brother and eased up, leaving
John where he was and walking out into the hall. The little kitchen area was just there, so that they
did not have to call for these things all the time. He pulled the ice from the trays and took to breaking
it up, leaving chips that John could make a go of with a spoon.

When he came back, he smiled, calm and collected for John despite his nerves. "Why don't you sit in
your chair? Or you can sit on the floor and I'll let you lean on me?"

John stood up and walked to his chair, trepidation filling him in response to the stress he was about to
undergo. He took the chips and plastic spoon, noting that it was the kind that snapped in half without
shattering. He would have been almost offended, but remembered that his file *did* constantly remind people he was aggressively suicidal. "I think the chair is better. I was on the floor a lot."

John stared down at the orange juice ice chips, spoon in one hand, wondering if this counted as eating or drinking, and which punishment he would receive after.

It was shocking to taste again, simply for the reason that other than blood and bile, he had been given little to experience with Moriarty. Is this eating, or drinking? Will I be punished for both? John forced himself to take another spoonful. Greg will protect me. Greg said this is good for me. John gagged when an image of water pouring down on him surfaced in his mind, and his throat closed up involuntarily.

"John," Greg said softly, crouched in front of John with his hands on John's knees. "Come back here, open your eyes. Look around your room. You're safe, you are. Do you remember that little bird at the cafe across from the Yard?" He started in on a story from John's past, well before the abduction, calling back to mind a woman they had both fancied and playfully flirted with. Anything to keep John's mind off negative thoughts and associations.

John took deep, deliberate breaths, filling his lungs as much as he could and exhaling for as long as he could manage. "I-I think so..." he stammered and put the spoon down on his leg. His eyes were shut tight but upon Greg's request he opened them and looked around the room. Not concrete. "I... I don't like this."

Greg shifted, keeping hold of John's knees. "Can you tell me what you don't like, John? Let's talk about it for a minute," John was uncomfortable, but if Greg could keep him focused, they could potentially make progress. "Talk to me, please. Keep your eyes open so you don't get lost, yeah?"

John fixed his eyes on Greg's, though they wavered and occasionally dropped. "It hurts. I can feel it. Its like I know its coming, like when you see a fist just in front of your nose, or something heavy about to fall on your foot. I know what's going to happen. I know! I know how he's going to hurt me when he finds out, when he realizes that I've been talking and eating and-" John had started to speak in the future tense, as if it were an imminent event that would come regardless of the fact that Moriarty was dead and Moran gone. "Oh, god..."

"John, I've got you. I'm right here. He is dead, John, and none of that is going to happen. Can you talk to yourself a moment? Remind yourself out loud that he is dead, that no one is going to hurt you?" He was very careful in his wording, not wanting this to feel like training.

John held onto Greg's hand and pressed it to his forehead. "I'm s-safe. Safe. Y-you're here. M-Moriarty is dead. Dead. Sh-Sherlock killed him." He leaned back in the chair then immediately leaned forward again, not wanting to feel vulnerable.

He turned his attention back to the ice chips, staring back at him with a sunny yellow-orange color that in no way reflected the blackness of his mood. John took the spoon in a shaking hand and managed to get a few of the chips in his mouth, though most were lost on the ways due to his trembling. *Just like Mrs. Hudson's pies. I ate those, and it never hurt me. I can eat these too.*

"That's it, John, there you go, keep looking at me, yeah?" Greg gave John's leg the faintest squeeze as he watched him, incredibly pleased that John was pressing through his fear. "You're doing just fine, safe and protected, yeah?" He kept his voice gentle, returning to the story he'd been referencing earlier.

John hated these chips with their happy, bright colors and their sweet, lovely taste. He hated the joy they could bring, as it only served to throw into sharp relief the pain they brought him instead. "I hate
"him," he hissed through tears, "He took everything. I can't even fucking eat."

Greg reached up then, gently and slowly taking the cup from John, just setting it to the side on the little table. He pushed up on his knees and reached out, wrapping his arms around John. "Truly tried to take everything, but you're taking it back. You are taking it back, John. He didn't win, he lost and he lost terribly."

"No, he won. He wanted to ruin us. He couldn't stand that he didn't have Sherlock's attention." John tuck his knees up and dropped his head down. He dug his fingernails into his legs through the fabric and tried to steady himself with his breathing, which had become quite sporadic. "H-He took everything. I have n-nothing. I can't do anything! I-I'm useless. I even hurt Sh-Sherlock."

Greg shook his head and took John's face in his hands, angling his chin up so that John had to look at him. His own face was very close to John's as he spoke. "John Watson. He took your voice. You took it back. He took walking, you took it back. He took your memories. You are taking them back. You are not worthless and I refuse to let him keep at you like this. Tell me what you've taken back for yourself, John. Say it out loud. You are amazing and you must allow yourself to know it."

"I-I can speak..." John began timidly, worried that 'taking' something from Moriarty wouldn't be allowed. Would he be punished for this? "I can walk again. And I remember some things. But... I can't even wash myself. There are people who wash me when I'm unconscious." He made a face and wrapped his arms around his body protectively. It wasn't as if he had anything to hide. He had already been so vulnerable that being washed by kind, helpful men shouldn't really bother him, but the prideful part of him said it wasn't right.

"You can speak. You were horrified to speak, John. Horrified. You were so sure you were going to be hurt for it. Never happened, and you got better at speaking, and then you got even better at it. John, you've done incredible things. I know you've not tackled water yet, but that's not your fault." His eyes cut away for just a moment as guilt reached up and slapped him hard. "And you've eaten a little and you keep trying. You will get this, John, you are winning."

John shook his head and tears dripped onto his knees. "Not winning, Greg. I'm surviving. I'm barely surviving. I don't even want to be surviving!" He looked up and gave Greg a look of anguish. "I was a soldier. I fought in wars. I've saved people and killed people and none of it ever took away my need to survive. Its animalistic. We need to survive. But me? I'm not even a proper animal. Even animals know they should eat, drink, and live."

"Alright now, stop it," Greg said gently as he swept his thumbs along John's cheeks. "You are hurting, John. You're a doctor, you know that pain makes people different. We are getting you out of that pain, we are, but it's taking a while and I don't want you losing hope. Hell, John. You've only been safe for eight weeks. Properly safe. You had to run with me, yeah? That's not very helpful, and yet look, you're here, you're strong enough to do it even when you don't want to."

John looked up hopefully then, eyes bright with tears but his expression changed slightly. "I suppose I did manage the ice. Orange juice is sort of food, right? And I've had applesauce. It hurt... but nobody hurt me because of it." He nodded to himself, eyebrows drawn, concentrating on the events. "I suppose thats good."

"Hell yes that's good, John. It's bloody fantastic and I'm incredibly proud of you." Greg pulled him in and hugged John properly. "I know this is so hard, John, I know. You are amazing, and you are going to recover from this. You will. I know you will."

He pulled back and crouched low again, "Now then, how about you have your morning pills, we get your breakfast over with -I can push the feed if you'd rather- and then maybe go outside for a bit?"
John made a face at the mention of breakfast. It wasn't really breakfast. Breakfast was the pleasant, bleary eyed meal you ate in your slippers while you rubbed sleep out of your eyes. This was liquid nutrition force fed through a tube in his nose. But protesting wouldn't be good form, and would upset Greg, so John agreed. "I'd like to go outside once it's over. We could see the tree again."

Greg was careful as he pushed the feeding for John a few minutes later, wishing they could just skip it. John had gained a small bit of weight, slightly fleshing out his belly and the spaces between his ribs. It was something, at least. When they were done with that, and John had taken his pills, Greg smiled, pointing outside. "Looks nice out. Your shoes are in the closet, and most of your clothes are here. If you want them, that is. No pressure."

John decided it might feel good to put on his clothes and shoes like a normal bloke again, instead of having everything done for him while he was sedated. It took him a little longer than it had in the past, and the neck of his jumper kept slipping over one of his now very narrow shoulders, but he felt good to be in normal clothes, even if the cotton sweatpants were more comfortable than jeans. "Ready."

Greg brought the wheelchair in and instead of holding it for John to sit, he offered John the handles. "See how far you can make it today. When you get tired, you just sit down and I'll take you as long as you need me to." He smiled and stepped to the side, glad to see John in his own clothes.

John took the handles and leaned on them slightly. His legs could use the exercise, but he still fatigued fairly easily, and had a new, strong desire to avoid anything even remotely uncomfortable. The frequent stops gave him time to rest and he was able to get outside and halfway down the path before he grew tired, at which point he still insisted on pushing himself with his arms. "I'm getting better at moving. Its almost like I could function or something."

Greg smiled at that. "I can't believe you made it this far, John. That's...yeah that's impressive." He nodded as he walked with one hand hovering out at John's back, watching John's legs shake terribly. He wasn't about to stop him, though. "If you want ice, just regular ice, you let me know, okay? Exercise might make your mouth dry." He was trying to avoid key phrases that had upset John in the past, avoiding 'water,' and 'thirsty.'

John wheeled himself to the large tree in the center, the oldest one with a gnarled bark and a large canopy of branches. "I'm alright for now. Theres water in the 'breakfast'". He looked up at the sky which blotted in and out between the leaves. It was strange the things you forgot existed when indoors for so long. "Can I stay out here until it gets dark?" He asked hopefully. "I think I would like to see the sunset."

Greg smiled and nodded, dropping the bag on his shoulder to the ground beside John. He pulled out one of several blankets, fanning one out so that John would not be stuck on his back. "I've got bottles in here, John, in case you see inside. They are for me, okay? Not you. We can stay out as long as you like, I've got your medicine with me." He also had a deck of cards and a book John had been reading before he'd left, just in case.

Greg settled down with his back to the tree, looking up at the sky. "It's a nice day," he said, "Nice, if not cold."

John gave the bag a nervous look when he heard that there were bottles inside, but decided that Greg wouldn't have said anything if he planned on hurting him with them. "I used to love the stars. When I was on night patrol I'd glance up. They're clearer in the desert, but I'm sure they'll look nice tonight. I haven't seen the stars in over a year. That's kind of sad, isn't it?"

Greg hummed. "Yeah, John, yeah it is. We can stay out tonight, watch them. You talked about the
stars, we knew you liked them. We can see them, and then you can go to sleep in your own bed, in
your own clothes. Sound good?” He reached out, wrapping his hand gently around John's ankle.
"Thank you for letting me be here with you," he whispered, suddenly incredibly grateful all over
again for his second chance with John.

John leaned against Greg. Each time touch didn't hurt, it seemed to wear down the times it had. It
was through the gentleness that he was beginning to conquer the pain. "That sounds good. It sounds
normal. Maybe I'll be normal by the end of this." He watched a tiny black ant make its way over a
root and through a patch of grass, only to scurry back to where it had came. As he watched, it led
several others back with it. "I like it out here."

Greg smiled and slid his arm across John's shoulders, just giving him a place to rest if he needed it.
"You did some incredible exercise. If you start getting uncomfortable, let me know. I've medication
for pain, okay? We can stay out here, and your room lets you see out here as often as you need." He
tipped his forehead to John's temple before leaning away again, just sitting there, keeping him
company.

John stayed that way peacefully for several hours, making light conversation with Greg and in
general enjoying the feeling of being normal. It wasn't entirely normal, of course, to be wrapped in
the arms of his friend in a secure facility, shying slightly away from water bottles in a bag, but it was
as close as John was currently capable. When the sun started to sink towards the horizon John laid
down on the blanket, his head on Greg's lap, watching the sky for the blue to dissolve into color.

Greg looked down at him with a soft smile. They had passed the day calm and quiet, and while they
were both chilled, it was as comfortable as Greg had been in a long time. Mycroft had never replied,
and Greg very much hoped that indicated sleeping on his part.
"It's been a nice day," he said quietly to John, threading his fingers through John's hair.

John hummed happily and held Greg's hand. "I like it better out here. Maybe Sherlock will too. He
could come out here and watch the clouds and not scream." His attention was caught when the sun
touched the horizon and fantastic golds and reds erupted around it, melting the blue of the sky into
fading shades of orange.

John was in rapturous awe as he recalled sunsets. Reds shot up from the horizon and settled in strips
around the clouds, which were burnished gold and orange. John hadn't seen so much color in over a
year. It was glorious, euphoric in it's beauty and John once again had tears in his eyes.

Greg hummed and looked up at the sky with John. "Maybe when he's healed, maybe we will try
then." He closed his eyes as a cool breeze slid across his skin, making him lightly shiver. If he was
slightly cold, John must be freezing. He would let them stay out a bit longer though, let John have his
stars. The peace was brilliant, a deeply welcome reprieve from the terror.

John scanned the sky as the stars started to appear. They reminded him of how small he was, how
tiny the problems of one man were when compared to the entire cosmos. He had begun to grow cold
and tucked himself into Greg's shoulder. "Maybe it'll help him remember where he is. Is he going to
remember anything from before?"

"Yes," Greg said without hesitation, "he already did, he was lucid, has been lucid. He knows his
reality when he's not in pain. When the pain slows down, I think we'll have him back." He wrapped
John closer to him, staring up at the sky as their breath fogged in the low light. "It's quite cold. Are
you ready to go in?"

"Yeah, we can go now. I'll be able to see a bit out the window, right?" He stood shakily and went to
his chair. Already his legs were sore from the activity, and his injured calf felt tight, but it wasn't too
bad and John didn't feel the need to fear it. "Thanks for staying with me."

"'Course," Greg said with a smile as he began to pack up their things. "When the lights are out in your room, you will be able to see out the window. If you don't like the view, we can move your bed to something better, yeah?"

He moved them the short distance back into the building and bypassed security easily, getting them back into John's warm room. He left the overhead off and just walked over to click on the bedside lamp, toeing off his shoes before moving back to John. "Want to change into night clothes?"

"Yeah, I do. It's normal." John went to his dresser and sat down in front of the bottom drawer that usually contained his night clothes. Everything seemed in place, though he could tell it was searched before being brought. John had no desire to step into the bathroom to change, or at least, he assumed that's what the door on the side of the room led to, so he changed in his room by the dresser once the door was shut.

Greg had turned his back, facing the window and taking in John's view. There was a decent patch of sky for John to see, a few stars winking out from holes in the cloud cover now and again. He could easily see the tree that Greg had mentally dubbed John's Tree, and it was, overall, as much as he could have hoped for. He waited, giving John his privacy, not intending to turn until John asked it of him. He began to speak softly, his breath fogging the cold glass.

"John...do you think you might be willing to text with Sherlock later? He's...well, it doesn't matter. If you're willing, or ever become willing, let me know, yeah?"

When John was finished changing he crawled up into bed and relished it's softness with renewed appreciation. "Yeah, I think I could. I don't want to hurt him though. You'll have to tell me what to say. I might say the wrong things and make him scream again."

Greg moved then, walking over to the side of the bed and nodding. "Not going to rush it, that's not something I want to do to you. It's okay, he will manage. He has his brother." Greg looked back towards the window. He'd not allowed himself to think on Sherlock much, there was simply too much stress involved. But he'd known Sherlock for years and years, pulled Sherlock out of gutters and drugs houses, saved him from overdoses, worked endless cases, ran miles and miles with Sherlock at his side. They'd never been anything close to what John and Sherlock were, but Greg was attached to Sherlock, loved him deeply though he was sure Sherlock would die if he were to tell him.

It had been nothing short of hell watching Sherlock through John's initial weeks in hospital. To see him in the aftermath of torture was indescribable. He hoped that Mycroft was managing.

He cleared his throat, realizing that he'd grown deeply sad, blinking the thin line of moisture away. "Do uh, do you want me to stay?"

John didn't think that Sherlock would handle it as badly as he had. Sherlock had always been the strong one mentally, always on top of things, if not completely separate from them. But learning that it truly bothered him when John went away cast a shadow of doubt on his infallibility, like finding a broken brick or rotten beam in a supposedly strong building. "I do want you to stay, if that's alright. You don't have to, but I prefer it."

Greg visibly relaxed and sat down on the edge of the bed. "I didn't know if you'd want me in your normal bed or not. God, this one feels better than the hospital beds, doesn't it?" He bounced lightly on the edge and shook his head, smiling a bit. Perhaps John would properly sleep tonight. "Of course, I can stay and not up here with you. Whatever is more comfortable for you."
John reached up and wrapped his arms around Greg. Bad things didn't happen when he was with Greg, and when they did, they were over fast. John had hinged his entire recovery on the man and didn't wish to be without the comfort he brought. "I'd rather you stay here in case I have nightmares or someone tries to hurt me."

Greg happily moved with John, laying down next to him, getting comfortable in the bed at his side. "I just didn't want you to feel trapped. I'm glad to stay with you," Greg whispered softly.

"I only feel trapped when I am. Or when I could be. Like with water or restraints. I don't like restraints." He leaned over the edge of his bed and found that there were no padded cuffs to tie him down. "I'm glad its just my bed."

Chapter End Notes

We gave you guys a happy chapter!!
Well, sort of. But still, good things happened!

But beware, for as always, the title is a literary reference that relates to the chapter.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Greg pulled out his phone one more time, sending another text to Mycroft.

_How is Sherlock?_

_You were right. He relaxes considerably when I'm with him._

Mycroft shifted slightly, holding Sherlock like he would a frightened child.

Sherlock had managed to properly sleep for a solid two hours. Suddenly he came awake sharply, only to take a few panicked breaths before realizing he was with his sibling. He settled back down, going lax against the bed, humming low in his chest as his mind grated along the data.

"Is he alive?" He asked for the twenty seventh time that day, his face turned to his brother's waistcoat, heart racing though mostly lucid.

"John is alive, safe and uninjured. We are in a secure facility where nobody can hurt us. John is being protected." Mycroft repeated the words in the same low voice he had been using, finding that Sherlock responded better to it than his usual, authoritative one.

"And I am...given to episodes of...delirium...p-panic," Sherlock breathed, keeping his face close in the safe hollow of his brother's arm, deducing his situation through their unlikely positions. "How m-many days? I am...ex-experiencing a g-great deal of pain, Mycroft."

"Its hardly been over a week. You're recovering swiftly, but the pain drags you back. Heavier medications are coming, but your lungs must heal first." Mycroft held his brother's head close to him, mainly mimicking the actions he had seen Greg go through with John.

"Had the...the in-infection the entire t-time. M-Moran dug the r-round out and...then the w-water, I couldn't...c-couldn't breathe. Fever...is...is there I-lasting damage? Was high enough t-to make me hallucinate...oh, god...is there...d-damage, Mycroft? I- don't make me...I don't want t-to recover if there is damage."

Sweat began to collect along Sherlock’s brow, dotting this hairline as a tremor set in along his shoulders. "M-Mycroft I cannot..." he began breathing faster, a different panic setting in at the idea of life without John, without his mind, in a broken body, alone. "P-please, brother, I c-cannot."

"As far as we know you haven't suffered any brain injuries. We won't know yet. You can't be moved easily until you are healed more and lucid. Physically...You are damaged, yes, but you are being repaired. Nothing we can't handle. You'll need physical therapy, but you'll recover." Mycroft tried to calm him, lightly touching his hair and a spot on his shoulder that didn't appear too damaged. "You'll recover, have John, and go on cases again. That will be nice, won't it?"

"D-Don't placate m-me," Sherlock shouted as loudly as he could, pulling back slightly from his brother, meeting his eye, "D-don't lie to m-me, I am...I..." he could hardly stand the distance, pulling back in close, shaking his head as pain ripped his body and squeezed the air from his lungs. He took a few minutes to breathe through it, groaning and panting in his struggle. "I...I am _h_ere, brother, d-don't lie to me."
Mycroft could never tell how lucid Sherlock was when he just woke up. Sometimes he would understand his situation, and sometimes a simple; 'John is safe' would suffice. "I'm not lying. John is recovering. You're both young. Healing physically is over for him, and he's already come to visit several times. It is feasible."

"He intends to die," Sherlock whispered, hardly able to choke out the words, "He- that is not...and I am..." he shook his head and leaned into his brother, pulling at the bindings. "Can y-you not...loose me of...this is quite un-unsettling," he whispered, feeling the shame twist with pain and sliding confusion, struggling to keep himself present and aware.

"You have a tube in your side. It is draining the infection and if you go into a panic attack you'll hurt yourself terribly. Besides, that one is broken. You can't move it anyhow." He didn't want Sherlock to end up reversing the healing he had done, but hated to see him panic. He unclasped one of his wrists and both of his ankles, though he doubted Sherlock would try to move his damaged legs. "Better?"

Sherlock nodded, pressing his face to his brother's side, shifting his legs and cutting off a sharp cry at the movement. Christ, his brother had meant it when he'd warned not to move. "Thank you," he said quietly, closing his eyes and going still again, just trying to breathe. "I want to just...put me to sleep, My...please....I...this is p-painful."

"I'll see if I can. A doctor will come in though, but not to hurt you. Do you understand? They won't hurt you." Mycroft texted one of the doctors and asked them to come in quietly and slowly.

"I won't...won't watch," Sherlock breathed, keeping his eyes closed and pressing down on the panic. He shivered hard as the door opened and the sound of a man walked in and leaned over to speak softly with Mycroft.

"We can try sedating him again, it is not without risk, but less so than early this morning." Mycroft was hesitant. "Maybe just something to relax him. It won't be worth it if he is reverted because of the painkillers. Do whatever you can, but do it safely. What is your confidence level that he will be unharmed by it?" He held Sherlock, wrapping his arms over him like a blanket. "Its alright. He's my doctor. Mycroft's doctors help, not hurt."

"D-Dear god is th-that how you've been having to t-talk to me? You...you m-must be diabetic b-by now," Sherlock mumbled into the material of Mycroft's waistcoat, making absolutely no move to pull away, if anything leaning closer into him as he shivered in fear.

Mycroft laughed then and smiled down at Sherlock. "Well its taken you long enough to come up with a decent quip. I was just going to see how long I could pester you." He motioned for the doctor to move to the other side of the bed so Mycroft would be between the two.

The physician arched a brow but said nothing of Sherlock's remark. "We can give more pain killers. I would put a one to one risk with sedation, his lungs are still very weak."

"Then no sedation. The risk is too great. Anything else you can give him, any sort of painkiller, would be appreciated."

Sherlock hummed as the physician nodded and began getting things together. He staunchly refused to beg, despite the way tears stung at his eyes and slipped past his lashes. "Yes well...d-delightful as the vacation was...t-taking a while to recover from it." He felt someone touch his hand and flinched before schooling himself, starting to nervously ramble, "You've n-not eaten in a day...p-poorly the three prior. I've been down...th-that long then and....there w-was the incident w-with John...won't
likely s-see him again...M-Moran is not in custody and...and...missing...m-missing something what am...what...

Dilaudid whispered through his veins, whisking away the pain on a surface level, nearly pulling consciousness from him. He struggled to stay up, reaching with his better arm and grabbing Mycroft's shirt. "Ch-changed my mind p-please, I don't...don't want to sleep," he whispered in a panic, "Focus...h-help me focus."

"I haven't been hungry. You know how that is. I've been watching you, keeping you safe." He was greatly relieved to hear Sherlock rattling off his usual deductions and wit, even if his voice did sound broken and agonized. "No, Sherlock, you need to sleep. You don't need to focus." He took Sherlock's hand as best he was able and looked him sternly in the eyes. "Its best you sleep. I'll be right here with you, and the pain will diminish the longer you wait. John is getting better too. He went for a walk today. He asked if you were alright and wants to help you. Its alright for you to sleep, Sherlock. Its best for your health if you can sleep without sedation. You need to recover to help John. That's what you want, isn't it?"

Sherlock stared at his brother. "I kn-know my body requires sleep. I know. I know I am j-just afraid. It is f-foolish that I have f-fear but it is all." his brows knit and he struggled to explain, "It's a m-mess in my head and.....and h-he....he is there when m-my eyes are closed and I..." He dragged in a deep breath, wincing in pain as he moved his ribcage, nearly whimpering before catching himself. "B-Brother I...god th-this must be intolerable f-for you...I am afraid."

"Your mind needs rest as well, Sherlock. While you are asleep, you can get that rest. Forcing yourself to remain calm can't last forever. Please, once you're asleep it will get better." He cupped Sherlock's face in his hands. "You can trust me. You are emotionally and mentally compromised. I am not. Trust me and sleep."

A heavy tear slid down Sherlock's cheek as his brother spoke. He desperately wanted sleep. He was terrified of dreaming. He stared at Mycroft as he had so many times before as a frightened boy, keeping eye-contact and nodding. "F-foolish," he muttered of himself, closing his eyes even as his heart rate kicked up, his breathing becoming more shallow in anticipation of pain, be it physical or mental.

"You are exhausted. Let yourself sleep. If you have a nightmare, I'll wake you. I'll keep you safe. Please, Sherlock, just get some sleep." He motioned for the doctor to dim the bright overhead lights as he went out, but not turn them off entirely.

Sherlock bit his lip and nodded, taking a few slow breaths as he tried to settle down. Slowly but surely sleep crept up on him, a rising darkness he could feel, tentatively embracing it. His heart rate began to slow as his breathing evened out, still raspy and crackling, through more effective than his efforts while awake.

He managed a full three hours before it began. Sherlock's eyes began to jump behind the lids as he moved out of the darkness.

_Water, feted and freezing, lapped at his toes. Sherlock blinked in the total darkness, looking down and seeing only the moonlit reflection on the caps of the thin waves. He shouted out into the darkness, afraid. Slowly the stinging cold became an acidic burn, John's echoing screams rising up out of the water on green mists and indistinguishable shapes. "What did you do to John, Sherlock?" Moran's voice broke into peals of laughter as fire wrapped around his chest, the scent of his own burning skin in his nose, his mind snapping off as his nervous system grabbed at nothing but pain_.

"Sherlock, wake up. It's alright." Mycroft could see the change in Sherlock immediately and it had shaken him from his own pensive, blank state. "It's a dream, Sherlock," he said over and over, giving him a light shake. "Come back to me. Come back to Mycroft."

Sherlock's eyes snapped open and he flinched back violently from Mycroft, nearly unseating himself from the bed, pain slamming into him as surely as if he'd hit the floor. He screamed as his monitors started to blare, bleeding from his side nearly immediately, his entire body shaking hard as the nerves set themselves off like fireworks.

Mycroft held Sherlock down by the shoulders and tried to keep him from further damaging himself. "Sherlock, Sherlock, its alright. Its all going to be alright. You're with me. Tell me where you are. Use your mind."

Sherlock nodded even as he screamed, panting as tears rolled down his face and medical staff rushed in, "W...with you...pain...d-dream but now...god help...I..." his back arched and he shouted again, tears matting the hair to his temples as he struggled to breathe, "My, help...help!"

Mycroft had one hand on Sherlock's chest and the other running through his hair. "You are with me. Just try and breathe. Deep breaths, alright?" He took long, exaggerated inhales to set a rhythm for Sherlock to follow.

More pain medication was pushed a mild sedative given before hands were all over him, moving him back into position. Sherlock tried desperately to repeat his brother's example, forcing himself not to look at the medical staff, his breathing still erratic and stuttered with pain and tears as gauze was pressed to the wound at his side and he bit down hard on his tongue to keep from screaming.

The doctors knew better than to try and move Mycroft from Sherlock's side. He grabbed a clean roll of gauze and held it to Sherlock's lips, giving him something to bite down on that wouldn't bring him further pain. "Shh, Sherlock, its alright. Breathe. Breathe slowly."

Sherlock nodded to his brother, viciously biting down on the gauze as his breathing rattled between his cracked, parted lips, much like one sounds after a vigorous sprint. He gripped at Mycroft with his better hand, hardly noticing the pain that caused, struggling to ignore the doctors.

Mycroft held the hand gently and tapped his fingers on Sherlock's wrist in a pattern, the basic phi ratio on a loop with each digit having one added each time. "Stay in the present. You are safe."

Sherlock followed the pattern when he sluggishly caught it, his breathing even for the most part by the time he began to anticipate the next pattern. He watched his brother as the doctors set him straight, not feeling it as he was bound back as he had been. He just watched his sibling as the pain medication began to work, slowing him down and taking the worst of it off. An hour after waking, his jaw was beginning to relax.

Mycroft, seeing the tension leave, gently took the gauze away to get him one without saliva and traces of blood on it. "How are you feeling?" He asked, attempting to gauge his mental state.

"L-like a...j-jumping...fool," he breathed, exhausted and slick with sweat and tears. "D-Don't..much c-care for breathing," he added, swallowing hard and then remembering that water was a thing he could once again request. "Oh g-god...water....f-forgot I can have w-water."

Mycroft left him immediately and got a small plastic cup. He filled it with water and placed it into Sherlock's hand. "You can ask for anything you want. How can I help you?"
Sherlock downed the water before shaking his head. "I...I just..." what they hell could he ask for to help? "I n-need to sleep. My mind is in ruins I will...not be able...to....to contain this if...I need sleep. I am terrified of sleep."

Mycroft refilled the small cup and handed it back to Sherlock. "I know. Its still dangerous to give you anything, though, due to the state of your lungs. it will get better, though, and you'll be able to sleep soon. You got a good three hours in before the dreams started."

Sherlock nodded as he started back in on the water. He pulled away from the cup as his stomach gave a violent twist and he nearly dropped it. He shook his head and turned his face away, breathing through slightly parted lips, eyes closed and body trembling, painfully aware of his own insanity.

"I'm...I'd n-not intended...not...l-like this. I w-wouldn't have c-come back if...h-had a a s-say in the matter." He was entirely sure his brother faulted him for surviving when he was down in such deplorable straits, and was apologizing for failing to do what obviously needed to be done. He licked his lip and focused on his pained breathing, trying to sleep despite his fear.

"We are all relieved you came back. John is relieved, and I am relieved. We knew that you wouldn't be perfectly alright. This will pass. It will pass and you will go back to your normal life." Mycroft took the little cup and filled it with water again, setting it on the small stand where he could give it back if Sherlock appeared ready.

Sherlock said nothing, trying to crawl back into the places in his mind where he used to be safe. It hurt, oh how it hurt to push the boards aside and crawl over the burning rubble just to find the door. His body shook and tears rolled down his cheeks from time to time as the hours passed in complete silence, Sherlock not so much as whimpering when the monitors chirped as his pulse shot up and his blood pressure reflected renewed pain, summoning the physicians to come and push their medications. Sherlock hardly moved for the next fifteen hours.

Mycroft, who had stayed awake each time that Sherlock slept, great weary from the inactivity and laid beside Sherlock on the bed, hoping that he was making some sort of progress towards his mind palace.

John awoke with a start, screaming and trying to claw himself away. The nightmare hadn't been particularly realistic, but confusion and terror had been prevalent in realism's absence and he was left terribly disoriented. He clung to Greg now after the initial phase of pushing him away in fear, but his abject horror hadn't receded. He shivered like a man freezing to death and took irregular gulps of air. "Y-Y-you w-wouldn't..." he stuttered heavily and found speaking difficult. "...w-w-wouldn-n't h-hurt m-me...r-rigt?"

Greg had let John go as soon as he shoved away, and then readily opened his arms back to him and held him close. "Never, John. I would never hurt you. You are safe. In your own bed, in your own clothes, with me. You are safe. Only a dream." He carded his fingers through John's hair and gently rubbed his back, allowing John whatever he needed.

Sleep was **exhausting**. For John, it only served to throw the memories he kept at bay straight back into his face in a setting that he had no control over. He buried his face into the crook of Greg's shoulder and tried to physically hide from his mental ailments. He had drawn the covers up tight around them for protection and tried to shrink down as much as possible. He was a shivering, whimpering mess of pain for another thirty minutes.
Greg held John the entire time, keeping them bundled tight in the blankets, trying to make John feel safe and protected. He whispered that he had John from time to time, speaking softly, fingers gentle in his hair and along his back.

When John finally slowed down, going lax, Greg spoke softly. "John...I think you should talk to Paul today."

John was still shaking lightly, not out of fear but out of the sheer exhaustion caused by keeping himself calm. "I don't want to," he whispered and leaned his head into Greg's hand. The fingers through his hair felt fantastic and he derived great comfort from them. "But if you say I should, I will."

Greg nodded, pulling John in closer and tucking him down to the bed, wrapping him up tight. "I'm going to get your meds, yeah? Get some fluids and a bit of calories into you, that will help. You're so tired, it will help." He carded his fingers through John's hair, "Is that okay?"

John looked down at his arms and remarked that there was just a hint of flesh on them now, enough that his elbows didn't stick out as prevalently. "I suppose that's a good idea." He glanced up for the clock that he had kept above his dresser and found it had been moved into the room as well. "Christ, it's still morning." The days were so unbearably long, each moment feeling like an eternity, yet once the day had past him he seemed to forget it's time almost entirely, causing the days to blend into weeks without him noticing while the minute he was in refused to end.

"It's already been a rough day for you. I'm sorry. Let's talk to Paul and maybe we can go sit outside again?" He was up, going for John's pills. He made it through the feed and watching John dutifully swallow before allowing himself a moment in the lav. He'd need a shower later in the day. John would need one again very soon, but now that they were not having to sedate him to sleep, that was going to be...interesting. When he came back out, he walked over to John and sat down. "Can I give Paul a call now?"

John had tucked his knees to his chest with his arms around them, keeping his vital organs protected and making himself small out of habit. "Yeah, sure. But don't leave me, alright? You're going to stay. And I can tell him to leave if I need to, can't I?" The small amount of power he had been given boosted his confidence. He had never been able to send Moriarty or Moran away without first completing whatever act they had requested. To have peace simply by merit of wanting it was profound for him.

"Yeah, John, of course. I'll stay as long as you want. And Paul well leave when you tell him too, but...Please try before you send him away, ok? Just try. If it's too much, then we stop."

Greg sent the text and then crawled up on the bed behind John, wrapping one arm around him.

Paul knocked ten minutes later, waiting for Greg to call him in. He entered and looked around with a smile. "Well, this seems much more comfortable. Where may I sit, John?"

John looked around. He didn't really care where, but he didn't want Paul on his bed. "Anywhere you want, I guess. Just not here." He scooted back a bit, eyes wary. "You're going to ask me about things I don't want to talk about, aren't you?" It came out as an accusation.

Paul took up the wooden chair and looked around the room. "No, John. I'm actually not." He finally looked to John, his expression calm and non-threatening. "I understand the dreams are becoming a problem. I want to teach you how to help yourself matter them, and it doesn't require that you tell me anything."
John didn't believe him entirely, and continued to watch Paul warily. "Alright. Then go. Tell me how to stop having bad dreams. I don't think you can. He told me sleeping would bring pain and he was right. He was right. Moriarty was right. Moriarty is right. Always right." John's eyes became slightly unfocused and he dropped his head to his knees. "It hurts, even if he isn't the one doing it."

Paul nodded, "I know it hurts, John. He wasn't right about everything though." Paul gave John a moment to settle, watching as Greg quietly whispered to him, wrapping him up tighter. 
"John," Paul finally said, "I'm going to teach you lucid dreaming. Have you heard of it?"

John rocked himself back and forth, reverting to an almost infantile stage of his mind which had been damaged during his months of screaming. "Heard of it." He muttered into his knees.

"John," Paul called out, "can you look at me? You are very uncomfortable. Can you tell me what's upsetting you?"

Greg still had a hold of him, giving John range of motion within his arms. John kept his mouth shut and shook his head. He let out a short whimper and rocked himself back and forth. After a moment he looked up to Greg. "I'm so tired," he whispered, though he hadn't asked Paul to leave.

Paul hummed and looked at John for a few minutes before speaking. "I'm going to put you back on medication to help you not dream at night, John. While you have that on board, you and I will work on lucid dreaming instruction. That doesn't require you to think on anything scary. Also, I've spoken with your doctors. You need two more feedings a day to keep up with your new activity. Greg told me you'd started with frozen juice, please keep on that. It's wonderful."

Paul looked to Greg and then back to John. "I don't want you taking the pills until after dark, you'll throw off your cycle. Rest today, watch movies and relax, and I'll come again tomorrow."

John looked up to Greg, amazed that it had been this easy. "Honestly?" He asked, skeptical that he had gotten off so lightly. "I don't have to... say anything? I don't need to say anything or tell you about the hurting?" John had his hands curled into fists, prepared for any sort of trickery the man would bring.

Greg smiled at him, shaking his head. "No, you don't."

Paul was on his feet, giving John a calm, steady expression. "Don't have to tell me about any if that again unless or until you are ready. Here out, we are targeting things that hurt, like sleeping, and fixing them. That's it."

John leaned over onto his side and rested his head on Greg's lap. He had grown fiercely dependent on the man, growing nervous when Greg wasn't close, in his sight, and at times even when they weren't physically connected. "Okay. I can do that. I want to not dream badly."

Paul nodded. "Have a good afternoon, John," as he slipped out.

Greg ran his fingers through John's hair and let the silence hang fit a bit. "How was that?"
John hummed at the touch. "That was easy. I can listen. I can learn things. Thats an easy thing to do." He turned and laid down on his back, head still in Greg's lap. He didn't mind being vulnerable side up as long as he could keep his arms close to his chest and Greg was there to help him. Greg smiled at him and leaned in to hug John tightly. He whispered against the side of John's head, "I think you are fantastic. Let me get your things, can you try the ice with the juice? We'll pop in a film and watch something so your mind doesn't start wandering, how about that?"
He leaned back and smoothed his palm over John's head, smiling warmly at him.

Floors below, Sherlock's doctors were failing to get a response from him. He lay next to his brother, his eyelids slightly parted, staring without focus. They'd stopped trying short of painful stimuli, failing to get Sherlock to respond to commands or even turn his head for Mycroft. Were it not for the slow, sporadic blinking, he'd appear comatose.

Mycroft held Sherlock by the shoulders and looked him in the eyes. "Sherlock, Sherlock please." He glared up to the doctors menacingly, though this wasn't their fault. "Mind or body?" Mycroft checked the beeping monitors and decided it must be something in his mind. "Sherlock, stop this. Move. Look at me."

There was still no response at all from Sherlock. The physicians were listing him as catatonic. Dr. Richard Miller was brought in to take a look, evaluating him and going over his charts before speaking to Mycroft. "This is likely trauma induced. It's not an indication of his brain function, nor does it mean that this is a permanent shift. Could be beneficial, as he would ideally still be under heavy sedation for these wounds. We can get aggressive with this, if you'd prefer. Either way has risks."

Mycroft held Sherlock, hoping that somewhere inside him he could still feel it. "If you think this is the safest way to approach getting him through the pain, then I understand. However, if there's a chance that this is dangerous to him, we should be more aggressive about pulling him from it."

Dr. Miller nodded to Mycroft, "I suggest we do little else for now, allow him to heal. I understand he's been in a great deal of pain, this may be the limit of what his mind can endure. His injuries are...catastrophic, there is no other way to describe them. This could be an effort to mentally salvage himself, or it could be the downswing into something less reversible. We will keep a close eye on him." Sherlock's breathing hitched for just a brief moment before evening back out.

Mycroft was supremely worried about Sherlock. If the man went catatonic, John might 'leave' them. If it took him years to recover, Mycroft would surely have to go back about his daily business for his position in the government. "Just...do whatever you can."

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John consented to the ice and juice again, though he was still hesitant. "Okay. Whatever you say. I'll do whatever you say, Greg."

Greg went and collected the frozen juice, one for John and one for himself, before returning to the room and setting the cups down on the night stand. He pulled out John's laptop and within a few minutes had a mindless series of shows pulled up that he knew John enjoyed before he was taken. He turned up the volume and sat down, gently pulling John to him before handing John a cup and taking one of his own. "Cheers," he said warmly as he began to eat beside him.

John watched Greg eat his ice chips, which made him a bit braver about eating his own. He managed a few scoops without much trouble, but the motion of eating began to stress him and he was forced to stop and take deep breaths. "Doing...I'm doing a bit better." He commented once the shivering had stopped.
Greg smiled at John as he chewed his own ice, deciding that spoonfuls of frozen orange juice were nothing short of brilliant in the morning. "You are doing amazing," he said as he crunched, trying his best to normalize food once again for John.

John had one hand in Greg's. The physical connection was needed constantly now, though if he couldn't touch him, at least being able to see him would help. John had grown fiercely dependent on Greg and built all of his improvement on his one rock of safety. "I think we should go outside again today. I like it outside."

"That sounds fine, John. Finish up the cup there and we will go out. Can even bring the laptop, watch a movie outside if you decide you want that. I've got to take a shower before we go, yeah? You can change while I'm in there, won't take me but a few minutes." He took another bite from his cup and gave John an easy smile.

John flinched and curled in on himself. He didn't like showers. They seemed to touch an illogical and damaged part of his mind, a deep seeded fear that he could do very little about on his own. "I'd like to go outside. We can do that after your...thing."

Greg looked to the lav and then back to John. "I think I'll uh, go down the hall if that's okay with you? I'll be quick, and you can look outside after you change and pick where you'd like to sit?" He regretted upsetting John, but Paul had suggested attempting to normalize their language. Greg would eat and drink around John, and use normal words, and slowly but surely they would not be so frightening.

John nodded, but found himself fairly anxious about Greg leaving. He wrapped his arms around his neck for a moment, holding on quite tightly. "You'll come back, won't you?" Separation anxiety was already starting to gnaw at him.

Greg looked up to John's clock on the wall. "I swear I will come back. Look. Look at the clock. Give me twelve minutes to shower and take care of myself and I will be right back. I promise. I will tell them not to come in here at all without me, okay? I'll be right back. Twelve minutes. Think about a movie we should watch outside? Get dressed? Make yourself bundled well, it's cold. Could snow today."

"Okay. Don't leave me though, please. Don't be gone for too long." John shuffled over to the dresser and got his clothes, the warmest he had, and brought them back over to the bed. It had always been his habit to lay his clothing out on the bed, perhaps stemming back from childhood when his mother had laid them out that way. Whatever the cause was, he derived some semblance of comfort from the habitual action.

Greg grabbed his things and bolted, a close eye on the clock. He managed to shower, trim his beard up, brush his teeth and handle his needs before swiftly dressing in fresh clothes, jogging back and grabbing a muffin and a blissful cup of coffee with a lid on the paper cup. Altogether, it took nine minutes. He knocked lightly on the door in case John was still changing.

"John? It's me. Can I come in?"

John was curled in a ball under the sheets. To anyone passing by, it might look as if a pillow had gotten stuck under the covers by some forgetful child making the bed. He was in the dark, hands clapped over his ears. It was clear from the slight creaking of the bed and shuffling of the covers that he was rocking himself back and forth. "Greg? Y-Yes, come in. Please."

Greg swore under his breath and moved to John's side, not sitting down on the bed yet. "Hey, John, are...are you ready to go outside?" He didn't want to draw attention if he could coax John out of it.

The sound of Greg's voice sent waves of relief washing over John so strong that tears came to his
eyes. He reached out from under the covers and felt around for Greg's hand. "Okay. Just...just one moment. I just need a moment."

Greg squeezed John's hand, but did not move closer. John was trying to soothe himself, and he would not interfere in that process. It was beautifully encouraging. John was so terrified he was nearly in tears, and yet he was speaking rationally, trying to keep his mind calm. He knew enough, that he could focus on relaxing and not on the threat. It stole Greg's breath away.

John's only connection to the outside world was Greg's hand in his. The rest of his mind was focused on the small, safe little cave he had made inside the covers. Long breath in, twice as long out. John hadn't liked being alone. Anyone could have attacked him, come and hurt him, and he would have been helpless to defend himself.

But Greg was here now, he wasn't alone, and nobody had hurt him. John pulled Greg's hand into the enclosed, safe cocoon with him for a moment, focusing on anything but what could have happened in his protector's absence. "A-Alright, I-I'm okay."

Greg crouched at his side, letting John have his hand. "You are okay," he repeated warmly, a smile on his face. "Look at that, you brilliant man. I am so proud of you. You are okay. Take your time, there is no rush. I'm right here." He hadn't been so thrilled in days. He rubbed his thumb over John's knuckles softly and stayed crouched down next to the bed.

John made himself as physically safe as he could. He put Greg's hand atop his head beneath the covers and tucked his arms over his chest, hands on his neck with the palms protecting his carotid arteries. His knees were outside his elbows and tucked close as well. "I'm okay. Greg's here. Breathing... Not hurting. Not going to be hurt. Greg's here. Breathe." He talked himself through the next few minutes, stopping once the gnawing terror had subsided.

Greg carded his fingers through John's hair and let him talk himself down, forcibly keeping himself from reaching in and wrapping around John. John had to learn that he was strong, that he could help himself. Nothing would be more empowering than that.

John was on the tail end of the spiral now and the fear had dissolved into a small amount of anxiety and exhaustion. He peered out from under the blankets for the first time and instantly pulled back in. Deep breaths.

After another minute or so he pushed the covers away, leaving his warm little nest and kneeling on the edge of the bed. He almost threw himself at Greg in an effort to feel secure again, landing his cheek against the man's chest heavily.

Greg hummed warmly and wrapped his arms around John. "Brave man," he said fondly, whispering the words under his breath so only John could hear them. He held him close and nuzzled his nose against the side of John's head. "I've got you. That was wonderful. I've got you now. You did brilliant."

John was physically and mentally exhausted. He was shaking like one who had run a marathon, every muscle aching and trembling. "C-can w-we go to the t-tree?" John kept hold of Greg, who he now relief on on fully for both physical and mental support.

"'Course," Greg said gently as he trailed his fingers through John's hair. He hummed and pulled John to his chest tight, wrapping up around him as much as he could. "Breathe, John, I've got you. No more alone today, yeah? I am sorry, I had to take care of that, but I won't leave you like that again today. Breathe. You did very, very well. Let's go outside."
He pulled John up and brought him to the wheelchair, putting him in it and then wrapping him up with his favored blanket. "Feeling any better after the juice? Should have given you a bit of energy. I'm sorry today has been hard, let's enjoy the rest."

"A little, I guess." John matched his breathing to Greg's and reached one hand back to place on his while he was wheeled along.

The air outside was crisp and cold. It tinted John's pale cheeks with a healthy blush of pink and turned the tip of his nose red. He stood once they were near the tree and shuffled over to the base with his blanket around his shoulders.

Greg followed him over, setting down the bag and eating to the ground at John's side. "If you want another pill, you can have one. We need to do another feeding soon, but we can wait a few minutes."

"Okay. We can do that in a few minutes. I'm just going to rest for a moment."

John spent the rest of the day peacefully. The combination of Greg at his side and the peacefulness of his tree kept his frayed nerves settled. It was almost pleasant.

Mycroft, however, was still nearly nauseous with nerves. "Sherlock," he said once again, "are you there? Are you alright? Come on, speak to me. Move. If you are capable of moving, do so." He had been pleading for some time now, and at this point had little hope that the catatonic Sherlock he held in his arms would respond.

Dr. Miller sat in the corner of Sherlock's room, having observed and cared for his condition throughout the day. He finally stood up and walked over to Mycroft. "Mr. Holmes, would you be willing to speak with me outside in the hall?"

Sherlock was still completely unresponsive, not a sign that he was hearing Mycroft or anyone else. Mycroft gingerly lowered him down onto the blankets. He wasn't entirely convinced that the man couldn't feel pain, despite his unresponsive state.

In the hallway, Mycroft leaned against the wall and ran his fingers back through his disheveled hair. "What is it? Can he be helped?"

"I've no idea," Miller said quietly. He looked Mycroft over. "I asked you to step out here with me because I'm worried about you, Mycroft. You've not slept, nor have you had much by way of food. He isn't responsive, we have him very well cared for. I urge you to take a few hours to rest and eat, I can also give you something for nerves, if you'd like."

"I don't need to be medicated." Mycroft tried not to sound agitated. "I want him to be cared for in every possible way. I'll be monitoring on a live feed."

"Of course."

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Mycroft settled into his bed with a pang of guilt. It was difficult to be comfortable when Sherlock was so pained. Slowly he began to filter through his logical processes in his mind. The perfect machine, with all the parts fitted with such divine proportion, was full of grit and sand. Mycroft started at the beginning and tried to work it free, but sentiment, doubt, fear and attachment got in his way on the path to objectivity.

So gradually he gave in to it. He let himself think on what had happened to his baby brother.

Tears began to slip past his defenses and Mycroft turned over in his bed. He pulled the covers up to
his shoulders and cried in quiet dejection.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys!

We were thinking about doing some sort of game with you. Anyone who makes a tumblr post about this story gets a ticket. ((If you did, link it in the comments, please))
I'll draw one ticket at the end of the week.

Whoever wins gets one of the following.

-A 2,000 word fic or scene of anything you choose ((Except smut. There are other people who do that.))
-A chance to talk to any character in the story as any character you want, or yourself.
*Example: If you want to be your own character, just pick someone in the story you'd like to rp with for the day. Or, pick someone you'd like to be, set the scene, and we'll continue! Who knows, you might even give us ideas for the story!

If anyone has any ideas for other stuff they like, feel free to show it in the comments.

BTW, here's more art! http://helloworlditsvictoria.tumblr.com/post/91046963562/i-miss-you

Otherwise, the story will continue on as normal, so if you don't want to participate, you don't have to.
Phaneron

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Through the night Sherlock was tended to carefully. He was given pain medication around the clock, and there were continuous efforts to rouse a reaction out of him, all failing to do much at all. Eventually, Sherlock fell asleep, and brought down his heart rate considerably.

His vitals shifted ten minutes before he came awake screaming and twisting against the restraints, teeth clenched as he shouted behind them, shaking hard and suddenly gagging. Miller snapped awake, moving swiftly to Sherlock's side as he called for a nurse to come help him. He spoke as calmly as he could to the man. Sherlock was not looking at him, staring at some point across the room as he struggled.

Mycroft was alerted by the sound of screaming on his monitor and sprinted down the hallway. He threw the door open and rushed to Sherlock side, setting himself in the blank area at which Sherlock stared. "Sherlock, I'm here. It's alright. It's alright."

Miller began pushing a low dose of sedative even as Mycroft began to talk to his brother. Sherlock was still staring, glassy-eyed and unfocused, gasping for breath with rattling lungs and contracting chest muscles, working hard for each inhalation. His French broke apart as he began to brittlely call out for Mycroft, obviously not seeing him, stark white and shaking hard. Miller shook his head and pushed a mask over Sherlock's face to help him get air, elevating the bed slightly. Mycroft held both of Sherlock's shoulders and stayed right in front of his face. "Sherlock, its alright. Try to look at me. Its Mycroft. My is here." He looked back to the doctors as if asking what to do.

Sherlock turned his eyes to his brother as he began to panic, trying to breathe. "Please-" he choked out, confused and in pain, "I...m-my brother I- please I-"

Miller called out to him. "Sherlock," he said in a loud, forceful voice, causing Sherlock to shrink back as though struck. He looked over Mycroft's shoulder at the doctor before suddenly jumping his view back to Mycroft, finally seeing him. "M-My!" He tried to reach for his brother in his fear, not understanding what was going on, dizzy with his effort at breathing. Miller began to speak again, "It's panic, Sherlock just breathe, it's alright."

Mycroft put one hip on the bed and leaned over to wrap both arms protectively around his brother. "Sherlock, I am here. I'm here and nobody is going to hurt you. You are panicking. There will be no more pain. No more pain. Do you understand that? No more pain. You're going to be alright from now on."

Sherlock turned his face to rest as much as he could against Mycroft, his chest fluttering in fear, wild respirations fogging the mask as he tried to catch his breathing back down. God, but he was in pain. "Hurts," he panted, his gut twisting on him again, "where...w-what's happened to John?"

Mycroft never imagined the sound of Sherlock's pained, panicked voice would bring him such relief, but compared to cationic silence, it was welcome. "John is safe, Sherlock. John is safe. You are both safe."

Mycroft shouted to the doctors, asking if it would be safe to give him another pain killer.

Miller was already on it, slowly pushing medication to help.
Sherlock watched his brother's face as the medication took the edge of it off, easing his breathing somewhat. "Don't leave," he whispered, whimpering with fear as his hand was caught by a restraint, "Please don't leave me here. I don't want t-to be here. Please I don't want to stay here."

"You'll go back to Baker Street as soon as you are well enough to. Be calm, Sherlock. Nobody is going to hurt you. Could you tell me what is upsetting you?" Mycroft removed the restraint on Sherlock's uninjured arm and slowly moved it to his chest.

Sherlock grabbed the material over his chest as best he could in an effort to keep his hand there, feeling vulnerable and afraid. His hand ached terribly and the wounds along that arm burned, but nothing so terrible as the other side. He grit his teeth at the unwelcome, clear memory of the bone finally giving, the slow, indescribably painful agony of it along with the horrific sound. He groaned and turned his face away as his breathing kicked up, nearly choking as bile flooded the back of his throat.

"Afraid," he breathed, "I'm afraid." His words were hardly audible behind the mask.

"Alright, that's understandable. You don't need to be afraid anymore. You are with me. I came and took you away from the pain. I came and got you. Now you're safe." Mycroft put his hand over Sherlock's and placed the other on his cheek. "You don't have to be afraid. You can relax."

Sherlock looked back to Mycroft as Miller moved around the side of the bed, hanging a new bag of fluid for Sherlock, loaded to the gills once again with antibiotics. He took a moment to stand close and listen to the quality of Sherlock's breathing before nodding and stepping away.

He gave the brother's some space as he wrote down new information on a spiral of paper, walking it over and holding it where Mycroft could read.

'There is still a risk of damaging his lungs, but it may be the best course of action to put him under for a week or so and allow him to physically heal. Still put the risk at one to one.'

"One to one is not acceptable. What is the risk of leaving him awake versus the risk of him being under? Do either have the possibility to kill him?" Mycroft had shifted and was holding Sherlock in his arms. They weren't terribly far apart in size, but Sherlock had grown thinner in his absence. The knobby elbows and protruding shoulder bones made Mycroft feel like he was holding a holocaust survivor.

Sherlock went very stiff and very still at Mycroft's words, no context for them at all. He closed his eyes as his breathing kicked up. Fast, make it fast, please brother make it quick.

Miller frowned as Sherlock began speaking in Latin, only picking up two of the softly spoken words. He shook his head and responded swiftly to Mycroft. "I do not believe keeping him conscious will kill him."

Sherlock cried out at that, suddenly looking to his brother and speaking so fast the words were crashing in on each other, terror clear in his eyes. "I'm sorry, so s-sorry, quick, just please quick, oh g-god not conscious I c-can't...n-no more My please I can't make if f-fast please brother I'm sorry m-make it fast please, please," he begged, tears sliding down the sides of his face and dripping into his ears, teeth chattering as every inhalation caught behind his ribs.

"No, Sherlock, nobody is going to hurt you. I'm not going to kill you. I'm going to keep you safe." Mycroft had underestimated the pain of hearing someone you love beg you for death. He noted to give Greg more credit for holding out as long as he did.

"Sherlock, try and breathe with me." Mycroft set the rhythm for him to follow. "There will be no more hurting. Do you understand that? Say it for yourself. There will be no more hurting."

"I am i-in pain! I h-hurt!" Sherlock shouted, confused with this turn of events and utterly terrified. 
over what his brother and the doctor had been talking about. Mycroft wouldn't hurt him. Not like
that, not with...not...he wouldn't torture him. Surely. Not over...no he'd...but they'd been saying...and
while he was conscious..."Please, brother," he panted, turning his head and gagging suddenly, "I
can't...I c-can't...please just m-make it quick. I'm...please, please, I c-cannot endure...n-not again, god
not again. Please. Please," he was hyperventilating again as the stench of fear and blood filled his
nostrils and he tugged at the other arm, setting off a crackling wave of pain and finding the restraint.
"Oh pl-please, please...I c-can't, g-god just make it sw-swift, My please!"
"Sherlock, we aren't going to hurt you. We were only debating if it would help to give you a sedative
to help you sleep while you heal. Nobody wants to hurt you. You are not going to be hurt." Mycroft
chastised himself severely for not being clear in his words, and for letting Sherlock hear them in the
first place. "We were just talking about sedatives. Just sedatives. That's it.

Miller looked on, shaking his head at the scene. This would be such an easy thing, were Sherlock not
already so massively riddled with infection stemming from his lungs. It would be without question
that they would sedate him and breathe for him, likely for several weeks, were his lungs in any sort
of condition for that. He drew up another sedative, pushing just as much as he dared to not
compromise Sherlock's breathing. It was a difficult call at this point just how much, exactly,
Sherlock's body could handle.

Sherlock stared at his brother, trying to accept his words as he abruptly began breathing slower, the
sedative already grabbing him. "I don't w-want to s...sleep. He's there...he's there...." he slurred out,
blinking in open confusion, "wh....what...."

"If you sleep things will be easier. You'll have less pain. I know you're frightened, but sleeping on
your own without the sedative is what's best for you." Mycroft was still greatly relieved that the
catatonic state seemed to be over for the time being. Seeing his brother limp and unresponsive had
been frankly terrifying.

"My," Sherlock breathed, blinking slowly as the sedative Miller already pushed began to pull him
under, "My...wh-what...I don't want to sleep," he slurred heavily, his grip going lax despite himself,
terrified and drugged.

Dr. Miller looked over to Mycroft, "He's got enough on board to make him sleep for a while,
shouldn't compromise his breathing."

"Sleeping is what's best for you right now," Mycroft stated and pulled Sherlock into his arms. "I'll
stay here with you while you sleep and make sure nothing happens."

Sherlock groaned and shook his head, flexing the fingers he could move, quietly crying in fear as the
darkness roared in on him. "Please...please...I-" his breathing hitched terribly as he slid down into
drugged sleep.

Dr. Miller waited until Sherlock seemed truly out before speaking to Mycroft. "Mr. Holmes. We may
be better off properly medically inducing a coma for a week or so, at the least, and letting him ride
this out. There is a risk, a significant risk of exacerbating the infection....but I am concerned for him
to carry on like he is."

Mycroft kept hold of Sherlock and tried to speak with words that would not cause him panic were he
still listening. "It is dangerous for him to be in this much distress. If you think it is worth risking
infection, then we can go ahead and keep him sleeping for the week. I simply worry that his body
might be too taxed to properly handle the infection worsening."

Miller nodded. "It's a very real possibility. We can try and keep him sedated as he is now, if you'd
like to try that, though he still seems...incredibly distressed when he wakes. I think it likely he still
dreams when he's down like this. I regret that I cannot give you more solid options, each come with
their own marked negatives."

Sherlock was limp in his brother's arms, tears slowly drying in saline tracks on the sides of his face, his breathing slowly evening out.

Mycroft weighed the options. As it was, Sherlock didn't appear strong enough to fight off another serious bout of infection. But this terror was eating at him both mind and body. The risks associated with leaving him to suffer seemed greater, and Mycroft was worried his mind might snap like John's seemed to have done. "Let's sedate him, then. But keep him monitored. If there are signs that the infection is coming back, stop immediately."

Miller nodded, "Alright. I'm going to collect our team, and then you'll need to either step out or to the side so that we can manage him." He turned then, already writing out orders on Sherlock's chart as he swept out of the room to collect his staff, leaving Mycroft to his brother alone for a few minutes.

When he returned, there were several support staff at his back. He stood in the doorway. "Are you ready, Mr. Holmes?"

Mycroft stepped to the side reluctantly and let the medical staff at his brother. "If you can pull this off, you'll never need to work again," Mycroft told Miller, and meant it with every fiber of his being. Mycroft went to the back of the room to stand in the blank space that Sherlock frequently stared when upset. He wondered if there had been a door there where he had been kept.

It took the better part of an hour to knock Sherlock down where they wanted him, every step in the process painstaking and careful. When he stepped back to stand beside Mycroft, Sherlock had a tube down his trachea connected to a machine breathing for him just as before when they'd kept him down for his surgeries. His breathing, heart rate, body temperature, and oxygen saturation levels were all on screen next to him, and a quilt drawn up to his neck.

"Well, he's down. This will give his body a chance to heal. I will be checking his lung function several times a day and we are already being as vigorous as we can with that lung infection. Mr. Holmes, even without this sedation effort, it is unlikely that your brother will ever have a full restoration of lung function, though people do live very productive lives like that."

Mycroft listened to the doctor and catalogued every word in his mind. "I understand. Repair him as much as possible. Spare no expense. I have business to attend to, and would appreciate it if you updated me with any news or progress." He left then, heading to his living quarters and office in the back. Mycroft brushed his teeth, showered, and attended to his correspondences that he was now terribly late with.

Three days after Paul left Greg and John to themselves, he returned. It was mid-morning, and Greg had yet to offer juice chips to John yet. He had John in his chair, dressed for the day in case John wanted to go outside, and a movie playing on low in the background.

Paul knocked gently on the door, waiting to be invited inside. Greg looked to John with a warm smile, "Can Paul come talk to us today?"

John had been working on taking control of his own mind. In times of trauma and great stress, the mind will set up ways of thinking that protect it such as disconnecting, being overprotective or disassociating. Then, once the trauma is over, the mind is hesitant to let go. Children, abused young, run the risk of lacking progress past the age their mind was stuck in and John had learned that by offering his mind up to Moriarty for molding he could avoid some of the pain. It was thus very difficult for him to form opinions on his own that weren't based on the primal need to avoid pain. "Alright," he consented, "alright. He can come."
Greg reached forward and set a hand on John's knee, giving a gentle squeeze before walking over and inviting Paul inside. He returned right to John's side, hitching a hip on the arm of John's chair, allowing Paul to take the one opposite.

Paul looked over John with calm interest. "Good morning, John. Thank you for having me. How are you feeling today?"

"I panicked a few days ago. Or maybe it was this morning. I don't like it when Greg leaves. I feel sad. Broken." John spoke all the words in a rush. He was trying a new approach to Paul by answering all his questions and giving him everything he wanted.

Greg's eyebrows shot up in honest surprise at John's response, while Paul carried on looking at John as though he'd said nothing out of the ordinary. He gave John a small nod of understanding.

"That is perfectly understandable, John. Can you tell me what you did when you panicked?"

"I hid under the blankets and cried until he came back." John was curled away from Paul, but this new method seemed to be working. Just do what Paul says and he wouldn't be hurt. That was simple. Familiar. John sank into it.

Greg shifted, wrapping an arm around John's shoulders as he leaned down slightly, pulling John to lean against his hip. He kept a tight grip on John's shoulder, wanting him to have a physical reminder that he was safe. He shook his head after he got hold of John, speaking softly.

"That's true, he was in the bed, but he calmed himself down when I came back. It was incredible. He was so afraid, and he kept himself present. I've...yeah I was really proud of him."

Paul nodded, leaning back and making sure his personal body language was as non-threatening as possible. He let a minute of silence pass before speaking quietly. "What do you think about what Greg just said, John?"

John listened to Greg with a small smile on his face. "I just...I tried to not panic..I just stayed under my blankets. You're not going to leave again, are you?" He reached out and grabbed the bottom of Greg's shirt to anchor him in place. "I had to calm myself down because I didn't want the people to come in and tie me down."

Paul hummed at that, watching John closely. "John, do you feel safe right now, here in this moment, in this room?" John looked as though he was bordering a mindset that would get them nowhere. "Greg is not leaving."

Greg shook his head and flexed his hand on John, "Not leaving. I stepped out to shower that day."

John looked around the room and contemplated his safety. "Greg's here, so I guess I am. But I don't like you, and you scare me, but I don't think you're going to beat me while Greg is here. You're like Moriarty. You get in here." He tapped his temple and let out a small whimper. "I don't like showers."

Paul nodded at that. "That's fair enough, John. I do want to remind you that you are in total control of what we do here. If you don't want to talk, we don't talk. If you want me to leave, I leave."

Greg leaned down and whispered softly to John, "No one is going to use water, John. You're okay, nothing is going to happen."

John curled himself in Greg's lap and guarded himself from Paul. "I don't...I don't know what I'm supposed to say. What should I say? I-I don't... I don't know what I should say. I'll answer your questions, I swear I just..." He let out a pitiful whimper.
Paul slowly got to his feet, his palms out, "Okay, John, that's okay. I think we've had enough for right now. There is nothing I expect you to say. That's likely frightening, and I'm sorry for that, but you are alright."

Greg wrapped John up tight in his arms and nodded to Paul as he whispered softly to John. "Everything is alright, no one is upset with you."

"You-You have to have something you want me to say!" John exclaimed with great fear in his voice, "Please, you can't just..Greg, what should I say?"

Paul stopped his movement toward the door and turned back, watching John for just a moment before moving back in front of John's chair, out of arm's reach, and slowly lowered himself to sit on the floor.

"John," he said very calmly, much lower and smaller now that he was seated on the ground, "you are not in captivity. There is no punishment here."

Greg pulled John tight to his chest and began to run his fingers down John's back. "I've got you, John. You're safe. No one is going to tie you down or hurt you."

"I-I'm being good," he exclaimed and curled himself into a protective shell. John was shaking violently, as if the unstable structure of his mind was manifesting in his body. "I've been good. Just tell me what you want me to tell you. Ask me a question a-and I'll tell you. I'll tell you the truth."

Paul remained where he was, watching Greg as he slowly gathered John totally into his arms and lifted him, walking across the room, talking constantly to him in a gentle, quiet voice. "We are going to lie down, John, you and I."

He managed to get the covers back and kept John directly on top of him, wrapping his arms and the blankets over them. "Breathe, John, what you have to do right now is breathe." He kept John's ear over his heart, gently carding his fingers through John's hair as he waited.

John's hitching breath slowed when he was safe in Greg's arms, and he let the overwhelming relief wash over him like a narcotic. "Okay....Okay....Greg, I don't know what I'm supposed to talk about. What am I supposed to talk about?"

"Whatever you want, John. Paul is on your side, what did he tell you that you could do, do you remember?"

"He said I could make him leave," John responded, though he didn't think he needed to send the man away. Feeling a little bit braver, he sat up -though still close to Greg- and addressed Paul. "You said you are just trying to help me. You still scare me. Why is that?"

Paul nodded, still keeping to the floor, highly attuned to the behavior between John and Greg and the shift that John had undergone now believing himself safe.

"When you were being hurt, you were taught rules, and you learned the unspoken things, that would keep pain away. Those things, those beliefs you have, John, they make you feel safe. When I ask you about them, you start to question them, and that makes you experience fear." He looked to Greg and then back to John, "But you've a new set of data that keeps you safe, don't you, John? You know these things, they just frighten you. That's very understandable, and we can get you through it, get you feeling safe again."

John did not accept this train of thought. It was true, of course, and John's mind still had the same
principles at work even though he was safe, but fear has a way of corroding the mind to its very core and training behaviors so deep that they are challenging to remove. "I'm not safe! I'm only safe when I'm here," John sank back down into Greg's arms as if to demonstrate.

Paul nodded, "I know that is where you are starting from, John, and that's fine. For now, we will go with that. You are safe with Greg. And he has you now. So, if you are in Greg's arms, does it matter if you don't say the right thing?"

John gave him an uneasy look. "It...I don't think so..." His mind struggled to rationalize two conflicting realities in his mind; one that said he would always be hurt for doing what was wrong, and one that said he would always be safe in Greg's arms. "I don't...Greg?"

Greg had John in his lap, John's back to his chest, resting his chin on the top of John's head as he wrapped his arms around John tight and hugged him close. "I would never let anyone hurt you, John. Never. Especially while you are in my arms. You can say whatever you want to anyone you want, and no one will touch you."

He said it with such conviction that Paul made note to check on Greg's mental health later in the day as well. Greg's entire demeanor left him with no doubt that Greg would bodily harm someone for coming near John in that moment.

That conviction was exactly what John needed to hear. Since he was docking all his mental growth and trust on Greg's own reasoning, an uncertain 'I'll try' or 'I'll do my best' wouldn't have sufficed as much as the stone strong resolve he had portrayed. "Then..." He looked to Paul and tried once more. "Then I don't believe you." The second John had uttered the words every muscle in his body contracted and he jerked involuntarily. "No, NO! I'm sorry. I believe you. I believe you. I-Greg!"

Paul kept still and silent down on the floor as he was, knowing he could do very little to aid John in that moment outside of functioning as a non-threat.

Greg slid one hand up to John's face and splayed his palm across John's cheek, covering one ear as he pressed the other over his own heart. John would be able to hear him speak, hear his pulse, and feel the words thrum through his chest wall. "Safe, John, you are safe. Breathe for me. I have you. Breathe. You don't have to believe him. Breathe."

"N-No, Greg, h-he's...I'm s-supposed to b-believe him I-I-" John looked as though he might be sick and let out a long, frustrated scream. "Gregpleaseyou'vegottohelpme!" John shouted in a rush and pulled the covers up over them both. "H-he's-hes-" Unable to create rational thought, John burrowed under Greg's arm and tried to hide himself underneath him. "I-I-I have t-to believe h-him!"

Greg looked over to Paul in distress, lost, not sure what to do. Paul shook his head and held up a finger, indicating he should just wait. With a sharp nod, Greg turned to John, physically incapable of not responding to his fear. He covered John with himself, wrapping up around him as best as he could manage with the odd, frightened position John had worked himself into.

"John, breathe for me. Breathe. I've got you, I won't let anything happen. Breathe."

Paul watched the pair of them, or rather, the tangled lump under the blankets that was John and Greg, still keeping his position on the floor, waiting to see how well John was going to respond. They were pushing hard at some heavy walls, which had to be nothing short of agonizing for John as they cracked. It was for the better, but he imagine it was terrifying.
John screamed into his mattress and covered himself with shaking hands. He could feel Greg curled around him, and it helped, but it wasn't enough to stop him from spiraling out of control.

The first rule had always been to believe and obey Moriarty. It was simple. Logical, even. Believing Moriarty -and not pretending, he could always tell the difference- would keep him safe. Paul wasn't Moriarty, but saying I don't believe you seemed to have the same effect. "Greg! GREG!" John screamed, although he could feel the man already. "Help! HELP ME! I'M SORRY!"

Paul stood up then, taking John's pills off the counter and shaking two out. He didn't want the medication doing all the work, but it would help John to have a little chemical support. He tapped Greg, who looked over and took them, before returning back to his place on the floor.

Greg spoke loud and calm to John. "John, take these. Put them under your tongue. John, look at me, I need you to take these. You are safe. I have you."

John had grabbed two fistfuls of his hair in a death grip and held on tight, as if seeking something to anchor himself on. He couldn't release his grasp, and simply stared at Greg pleadingly.

Greg kept the tablets in his hand, reaching up and carefully making John let go of his hair with the use of light pressure on the tendons at the insides of his wrists, not enough to hurt, just enough to make his fingers give. "No, John. Don't hurt yourself. Hold on to me," he instructed calmly, though with an authoritative tone. "Open your mouth and let me put these under your tongue. Just your pills," he added, keeping a strict hold on John's wrists.

John gave a small nod. He could obey orders. He could do that. That was what he so desperately needed to do to make this all go away. Though he couldn't quite manage words, John reached out for the pills and managed, after dropping them twice, to get them under his tongue.

Greg nodded to John after he'd taken the pills. "Good, that's good. Now I want you to look at me. Keep looking at me, John, no where else." He carded his hand through John's hair, keeping hold of one of his wrists. "Breathe as slow as you can," he added, watching John trying to do as he was told. "In and out, follow me."

Greg set his breathing slow and deep, setting a pace for John.

It took John several minutes to finally match Greg's rhythm, and each mistake struck utter panic in him. "I-I'm sorry... So sorry... I believe him. I believe him. I do. I do. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." He dissolved into tears again and sought to bury himself deeper into the mattress. There was a small part of him that said Moriarty was dead, that he shouldn't be afraid, but the faint voice was lost, torn to shreds in the howling winds of fear.

Greg pulled John off the mattress, sitting up and moving John back into his lap so he could cradle him like a child against his chest. He dragged the blankets up around John and shook his head, "You don't have to believe him, John," he explained as he swept the tears away with one hand, the other tight around John's side.

Paul spoke up then, his voice calm and steady, "John, I'm very glad you told me that. I am. You are safe here, John."

John pressed himself against Greg's chest as if the space between them was the cause of his pain. "I do have to believe him," he whispered to avoid stuttering, "and I'll be hurt if I don't believe him. And it hurts when I say I don't because I know what's going to happen and-" he grit his teeth and his words screeched to a stop.
Greg held him tight and allowed John a few moments of silence, holding him tight and close. "That's not true, John. You know that's not true. It's okay to be scared, but you know that's not true. He'd already be hurting you if he was going to, wouldn't he?"

"Maybe he's just waiting until you leave," John commented suspiciously and poked his head up to glare at Paul. "But you don't leave, and he won't hurt me when you're here." It was the closest thing to reasoning that John could manage at the moment.

Greg internally groaned. On the one hand, John was starting to attempt new logic, and that had to be good. Surely it had to be good. On the other, if he began to build all his logic on the assumption that he wouldn't be hurt only because Greg was there...that would just be another set of truths he'd have to relearn.

"That's not true, John. Paul would never hurt you. No one here is going to hurt you. No one. It wouldn't matter if I was here or not."

John's eyes widened. "They would hurt me if you were gone!" Greg was like a light, like a flame that all the terrible things were afraid of. The closer he was to Greg, the safer he was. On the edges of the light, the monsters would start to claw at him. "They would. Everyone would. You keep me safe."

Greg looked to Paul and then back to John.

"That's not true, John. If I left right now, Paul wouldn't hurt you. He wouldn't hurt you." He eased back from John slightly, just enough to look at his face. "I would never let anyone in this room that would hurt you, John. Never."

To John, it sounded like Greg was preparing to leave. "NO!" He shrieked and clutched Greg. "He would hurt me. Please, don't leave. DON'T! Don't leave me. He would hurt me." John suddenly realized he was contradicting Greg and corrected himself. "No...NO! I mean he wouldn't. I'm sorry. Please don't leave me."

Greg pulled him back in close to comfort him, about to speak before Paul suddenly spoke up.

"John, would you like for me to leave?"

"Greg keeps bringing you back here," John stated with a glare. "So you must be something that can help me. But I don't see how you're supposed to be helping."

Paul nodded. "You sound very angry right now, John. Can you tell me why?"

Greg shifted slightly, still keeping John close to his chest, instantly feeling guilt for putting John through this. He had no idea what else to do.

"Because I don't like any of this!" John exclaimed loudly, sitting up and drilling Paul with an almost combative stare. "Because I don't want to even be alive!"

Greg was abundantly glad John could not see his face in that moment as he sucked in a sharp breath and closed his eyes. He composed himself in seconds, just sitting there, available to John if he needed him.

Paul did not back down, nor did he raise his voice. "So you are angry with Greg."

John shook his head vigorously and turned towards Greg. "No, I'm not angry with Greg," he stated as though it were a preposterous thing to imagine. "Greg's good to me. He's always good to me. You're being an ass."
Paul was pleased to hear John speaking frankly. He gave it a moment before poking at it again. "If you want to die, John, then why are you still alive?"

John whined and tossed up his hands. "Oh, I've been over this! Because I don't want to hurt Sherlock, or Greg. I want Greg to be happy, and he said he'll kill himself if I die. I don't want him to kill himself, and I don't want Sherlock to hurt because of me."

Paul nodded, glad that John still had the same foundation where that was concerned. "I asked why you are angry, and carrying on living was part of your answer. Does that not mean that you are angry with Greg, and I suppose we should add Sherlock to the list as well?"

Greg sat back with his heart in his throat, using all his energy in that moment to keep himself calm and steady as he could, at least outwardly. Presently, he wanted to beg John's forgiveness and bloody well hide.

John wanted to answer honestly. It was so programmed into him to answer with exactly what he was thinking - towards the end, lying had been punished so Moriarty knew where his mind stood - but he couldn't answer that. He didn't know who he was angry at, or what he was angry about. "It's not Greg's fault. Greg...I love Greg." Even repeating the name seemed to calm him. "I can't be angry at him because he wants me to live. That's a normal thing to want."

Paul nodded to him, "That's very fair of you, John. Very true. Now, you've every right to your anger. I simply want to help you find the source. If not Greg and Sherlock, then who?"

"Why do I have to be mad at someone? Can't I just be mad? I'm mad at you for asking questions and Moran for hurting me and Moriarty for hurting me and that doctor for hurting me and...and I suppose I'm mad because Sherlock never even looked for me, but I can't be because he didn't know." John crossed his arms over his chest and turned his back on Paul. There. He had answered as best he could without saying anything against Greg.

Greg reached out slowly and put his hand on John's arm, wanting to soothe him despite the way his own hands were shaking.

Paul derailed the subject, switching topics. "John, I think it would help you to be on a strict schedule. What do you think of that?"

John whimpered. "I don't think I like that. Greg, do I like that?" He looked up at his protection to see what he thought about it. "Is that a good thing?"

Paul put up his hand to still Greg for a moment.

"John, let me explain what I mean a little better. If you don't like it once I've explained, then we won't do it. Okay? I'm sorry my questions have upset you, they do have a purpose. As far as the schedule, my reasoning is that if you know what is going to happen at every stage of every day, in advance, that some of your fear will fade. I'd want you to help me set your schedule, and it can include any of the things you'd like, even time to sit at your tree. You are in control here, John. Not me."

"I'm not in control," John whispered and shook his head. "You decided I need a schedule. But if you think so, and Greg thinks so, I'll do it. But if I get I decide I'll just sit by the tree all day. I don't want to do this or eat ice or talk. I just want my tree and Greg."

Greg gently squeezed John's arm and looked to Paul with incredible sadness.

"Okay, John. Then what I will do is draft a few different schedules for you to look over tomorrow,
and you can pick one. How have the juice chips been going? After you are done eating them, does it help you feel physically better at all?"

John thought that perhaps it would be a good thing to know what was coming, but it would also stress him to have eating ice to dread all day. "Could you put the scary parts at the beginning?" He requested, "So I don't have to worry about it all day?"

Paul nodded to John, "Of course. Can you tell me what the scary parts are?"

"I don't want to think about what happened. That's a scary part. It's a scary part when Greg has to leave or when I have to eat ice or juice or applesauce. It hurts to say some things and to talk about it." John had a fistful of Greg's shirt in his hand and tried his best to stay calm.

"The ice still hurts, John," he asked softly, interested in that. "Do you know why it still hurts?"

"Because it's like water?" John offered, and found no other solution. "And it's like eating too and when I tried to drink I got hurt."

"But Greg is with you. Greg isn't going to hurt you, is he? You are not afraid to speak. Do you have any idea why you are clinging so desperately to your fear of drinking and eating? How does it differ from speaking?"

John scowled and his mind rebelled against him. It started to shut down, dragging him backwards in his logic. "I don't know! It hurts! Isn't that enough? You're the shrink. You tell me."

Paul shook his head, "Won't help if I tell you. You've got to tell yourself. Why is it different than speaking? You don't have to tell me, but I want you to think on that today. If you are safe with Greg, and you are safe speaking, and sleeping, then why is eating and drinking so terrifying for you?"

John's lower lip trembled and he began to cry. "I-I don't know," he stammered and tears wet Greg's shirt. "M-Maybe because I-I was never allowed t-to eat but he let me talk so I would repeat things for the first few months o-or because the p-p-punishment were different? A-And I-I w-was hurt f-for talking b-but I-I was hurt w-with water and...I don't know!" He was grasping at straws, desperately trying to come up with something to answer with.

"Paul," Greg spoke up in a protective tone, "let's let him rest, come back with the schedules tomorrow, yeah?"

Paul's eyebrows rose in slight surprise that Greg had called off the session, and not John. He nodded, getting to his feet. "Alright, we can do that. You've done really well, John, really well."

John wasn't paying attention anymore. He was weeping openly on Greg's chest, the trauma and injustice of what had happened forcing its way into his mind and consuming all rational thought. "I-I don't l-like thi-is," he stuttered and held on to Greg like he was drowning.

Paul hesitated, not wanting to leave John falling apart like that before he left himself. He picked up the wooden chair and brought it over to the bedside, sitting down beside John and Greg.

"John," he called out, trying to get his attention.

Greg had one hand in John's hair, the other across his back as he held him close, very slightly rocking him.

The rocking helped, but John was still in tears when he looked up to Paul. "What is it? What else could you possibly want?" He sniffed and stared at Paul with as much defiance as he could manage.

Paul kept his tone gentle as he addressed him, "Let's bring you down a bit, okay? You are very understandably upset, I don't want you to tell me anything else, or answer any questions. I just want
you to rest against Greg here and remind yourself where you are, and who you are with. Greg is going to breathe the same way you should, okay? Let's get you down a bit."

He looked over to Greg, who began to breathe slow and deep, keeping with the rocking and dragging the blankets up so that they partially covered John's head.

John's shuddering breath took several minutes to calm to Greg’s even level, and even then it hitched occasionally. John forced himself to stay calm because this was what he was supposed to do. He told himself to obey the rules and do what everyone said, and found comfort in doing so. "Greg, I'm tired."

Paul nodded then, glad to see John settled down. He got up and quietly excused himself from the room.

Greg shifted slowly, easing them down into the bed. "Let's let you sleep, yeah? I'll be right here and you can rest."

John curled up next to Greg and tried to calm himself down. "I'm sorry I couldn't answer all of them. I tried. I really tried."

"You did fine, John, just fine. It's okay...it really is. Everything is alright. I'm sorry that was so hard. It's okay."

"I don't like it when Paul comes," John muttered and put his hands over his face. "Can we go to the tree? He doesn't go out to the tree."

Greg held his breath and paused for a moment, giving himself time to settle down. "Yeah, John, we...sure, that's fine. I've got to get your things, okay? But we...yeah we can go outside. I'm...god I'm sorry, John. I'm sorry."

"Please don't be sorry. I wish I didn't make you sad. I know it hurts you when I'm sad. I try not to be. I really don't want to hurt you." He gave Greg his best attempt at an exhausted smile.

Greg pulled John in close and closed his eyes for a moment. "Let's...we can meet Paul in a different room if you want. I thought that you might feel safer in here, but that...I made a mistake. I...I don't know how to help, John. I'm trying, I just don't know how to help you and he's my friend, he's very good in the field and..." he took a slow breath and swallowed hard. "Are you sure you don't want to sleep? You're so tired."

"No, no, this room does make me happy. I love having my bed and my chair. You're wonderful."

John nuzzled up against him and placed his head in the crook of Greg's neck. "He asked if I was angry at you for making me stay alive. I don't want him to make you sad. I'm not angry about it. I get it. I get that you'll kill yourself if I leave, so I'm not leaving. I'm not mad at you for it."

Greg tipped his face down to John's head and kept his eyes closed. He thought of Sherlock, even aware as he was, in such intense agony. John had lived nearly a year like that. He still couldn't touch water, or food, and he was still this childlike shadow of himself. He grit his teeth and swallowed hard, John's words shredding through him.

"I feel like I'm hurting you, like I'm being incredibly selfish asking you to stay...I..." Greg started to see the picture for what it might actually be, that this might be all they ever got back of John. Even Mycroft had wondered if they were doing the wrong thing, keeping these men alive. "I'm...I-" he shook his head and took a deep breath, trying to keep himself steady.

John refused to accept the idea that he was angry with Greg. If he was angry with Greg, his one
protection, he would have nothing. Something in him did wish to protest that being pressured into staying by the death of someone he loved wasn't quite fair, but he quickly ignored it. "You aren't being selfish. You're staying with me. You had a life and now you spend all your time with me. You don’t hurt me."

Greg eased back enough to look at John's face. He carefully schooled his own as he spoke softly. "You're hedging. That's not...I do hurt you though, don't I? I...every day I ask you to wake up I'm hurting you. John..if I...if I offered you..." he trailed off, his heart racing hard in his chest, his mind screaming at him to shut up, "What if I told you I wouldn't do anything to myself? I- god, John, I wanted." he pulled John back to him, sliding his fingers through John's hair. He closed his eyes and imagined what it would feel like to hold John like this as he took his last breaths, what it would feel like to carry him, lifeless, down to the morgue. How his head would loll back, how his eyes would grow dull and his body cold. Greg held John and imagined what it would feel like to lower John’s dead body onto a metal table, knowing he was the one to stop the brave man’s bruised heart. He pulled in a sharp breath and held him tighter, tipping his cheek to the top of John's head.

Chapter End Notes

Hello, lovelies.

It got sad again. Terribly sorry.

Does anyone have any ideas, art, comments, suggestions, questions, or philosophical inquiries about the phaneron of man?

If you have art, contact me on tumblr at helloworlditsvictoria

Something big is about to happen.
Only This and Nothing More

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

John's broken body drank in the affection like a man starved half to death. He had been in constant contact with Greg for months and yet he was still greedy for the gentleness of it. "I wouldn't believe you," John whispered and shook his head. "You love me. You don't want me to die and you've made it clear that it would kill you to let me go. I don't want to hurt you like that. I don't want you to be hurting. I can't ask you to stay alive when I get to sleep." To die, to sleep. No more; and by a sleep to say we end the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished. "It would hurt you and I don't want you to be hurt. There's been too much hurting."

Greg traced his fingers down John's back, through his hair and down the nape of his neck. He was nearly in tears as he listened to him speak. "I'm so sorry, John. I...I wanted to help you. I wanted...everything I do ends up hurting you. I don't know how to help, Paul does, but help is going to hurt, and I don't want you hurting. I'll do it, John, if you still want...if you still need that, I'll..." he pulled him in tight, burying his face down to John's hair and physically trying to soothe him with his hands. "But if you don't want that, then you've...you've got to work with Paul. We have to get you better. It can't carry on like this."

Working with Paul dug at the walls and protective habits that John had installed over the past year, and with each chip at those walls came extreme pain. John did not like the options he was faced with, and he looked to Greg for help. "What you're asking of me is to choose then...between leaving, the easy choice, and hurting you terribly...or staying alive and doing something that hurts myself." He had been through enough pain and discomfort. John trembled in Greg's arms and shook his head, the gesture he had adopted when he wasn't allowed to speak in order to beg for mercy.

Greg stayed quiet for a few minutes, just holding John to him, sliding his fingers through John's hair and doing his best to soothe him. Finally he spoke softly, careful with him. "I know it hurts to work with Paul, but on the other side of that hurt is a life you can enjoy. It's pain to heal, not pain to destroy. That's the difference. I...I wish I could take this from you, John. I'd carry it myself if I could. I'm so sorry."

"It's all just hurting! Who cares what the point of it is? I don't care if it's hurting to train, to scare, to help or just simply to hurt, because it's all the same. You're asking me to choose between staying alive through all this hell, or hurting you by leaving." John's voice had risen, but he couldn't be angry at Greg. No, John wouldn't allow that. Paul, he could be angry at, so he blamed him for the terrible choice instead.

Greg closed his eyes and let John's words wash over him, accepting them for what they were. When he finally spoke again, his voice was rough and heavy. "I don't know any other option to give, John. I don't want to put you through hell. I'm doing literally everything I can to keep you feeling as safe and comfortable as possible. I don't want you to hurt. I don't know any other option to give."

John could feel himself shutting down in response to the terrible position he was stuck in. He shook his head and rocked himself in Greg's arms, unwilling to think about the terrible consequences of each choice. "Can I just go to bed now? Can I have a sedative? Please?"

Greg debated, for a moment, handing John too many pills. Perhaps the kindest thing would be to simply overdose him without letting him know, not forcing the choice on him. He drew back from
John and crawled out of the bed, utterly defeated, snatching the bottle of sedatives from the dresser and walking back over to him with it. He sat on the edge of the bed and stared at the pills, tipping a few into his hand, rolling his thumb over them. His breathing caught as the burn of tears pressed at his eyes, and he shook them all back into the bottle save the one.

"Here, John," he whispered, holding out his hand.

John watched the action but didn't seem to make sense of it. "If you want to take one and sleep too, that's alright. We can both sleep." His faith in Greg's presence had grown so strong that Greg didn't seem to even need to be awake to ward off the evils in the halls. "You seem tired. It would be good for you to sleep." John took his pull and let the tablet dissolve under his tongue.

Greg shook his head, "I'm alright, thank you John. You just rest." He ran a hand through his hair and looked out the window, still perched on the bedside. He debated calling Molly later, or maybe texting Paul. Anyone outside of his situation that could bolster him. He was so low on reserves he was drowning, the weight of guilt crushing him like Atlas.

John scooted closer to Greg and put his head down in his lap. "If you want to go somewhere, we can. Or..." John's eyes darted to Greg. "If you want to go do something...I..." The sedative was pulling at the unguarded recesses of his mind and dragging him under, but he was still worried. "If you want to leave, take me with you, alright?"

Greg sank his fingers into John's hair, gently rubbing at his scalp. "I'm not going to go anywhere, John. Not without you." He still had to give John his feedings, two now that he'd been so lenient on the first one, and they had to give him fluids. He needed bathing as well, but he didn't know if he could stand the nursing staff coming in and handling that. Greg would likely do it himself once John was down.

Or, he could slip him more drugs, and send John off in peace. "Just...just rest, John."

Comforted by the words and the fingers on his scalp, John hummed in contentment and drifted off to sleep. His eyes slid shut and his breathing became calmer than it ever possibly could when he was awake. His hands, with vulnerable and sensitive fingers curled into protective fists, relaxed from their place across his chest and for a while his mind was allowed repose from the torment.

Greg watched John sleep for the better part of half an hour before he finally eased him to the side, setting about caring for him. He gave him a feeding and hung a bag of fluids to his ever-present drip port, and then took to painstakingly washing John down with cloths and a bowl of warm water. only removing the article of clothing necessary for what he was washing, and carefully dressing him again. He was exceedingly careful as he washed John's hair, only using just as much water was necessary.

When he'd cared for John, he used the lav attached to John's room to swiftly shower himself, changing and taking care of his own needs. Finally, he'd taken care of everything, walking back and settling down in John's chair, staring out the window. He finally took his mobile out and texted Mycroft.

Are we being cruel keeping them here?

Mycroft was in his small office working on his laptop when he received the text. It took him several minutes to respond, as the very question had been plaguing him for quite some time. Was it selfish to force them to live? John obviously wanted to die, and it seemed Sherlock would prefer to follow him to the grave than live on without him. The only thing that convinced Mycroft not to push far too much morphine into Sherlock's system and let him float off was the idea of a good life for him and John someday.
At the moment it would seem so. However when the two are able to live functioning lives I believe it will be clear that helping them live on was the right choice.

I don't know that it's a possibility anymore, to be frank.

Sherlock will recover physically, which should help him mentally. John is at least functioning on a basic level. We can work on the details later. It's still a possibility.

Greg set the phone down on the armrest, not set at ease in the slightest. He stared at John and debated contacting Paul before thinking better of it. If Paul knew there was any risk of him doing anything like that to John, he might remove him. Greg ran his hand over his face, his shoulders rounding with the weight of guilt and responsibility. His eyes slid around the room and he cracked an empty laugh at the gesture that had done so little good. He could haul in all of Baker Street and it wouldn't make the slightest difference. He'd put John in a horrible position, and it made him sick to think on.

John opened his eyes as the sedative wore off and looked around the room. The first thing he noticed was that he was alone, and second; it seemed colder than he had remembered. "Greg?" He called and tried to sit up, only to find that his arms were restrained at the wrists by metal cuffs. Frantically, John tried to wiggle free, but his entire body stiffened when he heard that voice. It was playing over some omnipresent source and the words were terrible to hear. "I'm going to cut you, John. I'm going to carve into you and beat you until you can't breathe." John screamed for Greg, his protection, and the voice laughed. And God, that laughter. It drove John into hysterics and sent him thrashed wildly on the bed. In his movement his head turned to the side and he saw, lying on the floor in a pool of blood, his love. Greg was on his back with his abdomen carved to a bloody pulp. Blood poured from his mouth, ears, nose and the corners of his wide, unseeing, dead eyes. "Greg!" John cried in anguish and tore at the cuffs. His wrists were already bleeding profusely as if he had been there for days. The Greg that laid on the floor looked up to him and snarled. "This is your fault," he claimed. "You drove me to kill myself. You did this! YOU DID THIS AND YOU'LL BE PUNISHED!"

John startled awake with a clipped scream and immediately dissolved into petrified, frantic sobbing.

Greg had pushed himself to his feet, moving over to John even before he screamed and shied away. "John, John," he called out as he sat on the side of the bed and reached for him, pulling the blanket down, "John, it's okay, John you were dreaming." He took hold of John's wrists with his throat in his heart, hating himself in that moment for not just letting him go. He could have spared John this, he could have. "John, look at me, look at me John."

John's vision wavered between the nightmare and real life, and for a brief moment Greg appeared to be covered in blood. "No! NO! I'm sorry, G-Greg, please!" He reached out and latched himself go the man, howling in grief and fear. "I-I'm so so sorry! I didn't mean it. Please, please don't kill yourself! Please!" John's stomach churned and his mouth filled with saliva in preparation to vomit. "Please don't! Please d-don't k-kill yourself I-I!" John turned a sickly shade of ashen grey and his stomach churned.

Greg swore and grabbed the bin at the bedside, dragging John to the edge of the bed in case he did sick-up. "John, John! Everything is okay, you've only had a dream. I'm not leaving you, I'm not! Breathe, John," he swept his fingers through John's hair, still slightly damp from washing, and held him tight. "I'm okay, John, breathe, please breathe."
"I don't want you to leave me!" John cried and pulled himself into Greg's lap. "I-I c-can't l-lose y-y-you-u.." He turned and heaved violently off the edge of the bed. It stung his throat and dry mouth, which further added to his hysteria. "P-Please d-don't!"

Greg held him over the side of the bed, keeping a tight grip on him. "John, I'm not leaving you! I'm not leaving, I swear it, John," he swept his palm over John's forehead, keeping him in a tight grip, scared that he was going to dislodge the feeding tube with the force of his vomiting. "Slow down, I am not leaving you, please John slow down," he was going to have to call in the doctors to help if John couldn't slow himself down, there was no way to get a fast enough sedative in without sticking a needle in John's drip port. "I'm right here, I have you."

John had been doing so well that there was no call button in the room. Greg gathered John into his arms after he stopped retching and stood up, rushing to the door and using his foot to open it. "HELP!" he shouted down the hall, leaving the door open as John screamed. He waited until he heard the footfalls of the medical staff before moving back inside and dropping into John's chair with John cradled across his lap.

Two doctors came in, one already drawing up a sedative. Greg spoke over John's panic, "Don't put him to sleep, he's scared of it, don't knock him out!"

In the next minute, he was speaking softly to John as John's arm was pulled away from his body, held out so that the needle could be pushed into the port where they gave fluids. There would be no pain, but Greg knew the act of holding his arm out would be frightening. He kept talking to John, doing his best to hold him still. "It's okay, It's okay John, I've got you, it's okay John."

Had John known it was Greg restraining him, he likely would have responded positively, or at least tried to center himself. As it was, he could only identify the fact that he was restrained, which he equated to coming pain. When the arm was pulled away, John screamed in such an agonized, broken way that the trained doctors gave him looks of pity. His eyes rolled back in his head and he sobbed as his mind crumbled into chaos.

He went limp, then stiffened, went limp again, then jerked. His body seemed unable to decide how best to defend itself in absence of a clear command and he twitched randomly.

"Oh, Christ," Greg groaned, holding on to John and nearly blacking out himself in the face of this. "John, look at me! Look at me, John," he shouted, tears sliding down his cheeks that he was totally unaware of. He pulled John's arm back to his chest as the doctors backed off, medication already pushed. "John, open your eyes and look at me!"

Greg's voice floated to John through the mess of his charred mind, sounding as if it had been shouted through a tunnel. He opened his eyes, but they saw only flashes of images and indistinguishable shapes of the actual room around him. The medication had started to take effect and his thrashing started to weaken.

"Blanket," Greg gasped to one of the doctors, pointing to John's favorite quilt. He reached out, taking it from the man and wrapping John into the familiar material as he sobbed, completely wrecked. "He's going to need morphine after that," he added, knowing John would be in physical pain after all that panicked movement. He bundled John up while the doctor went to get his medication, tipping his forehead to the crown of John's head and speaking slowly to him. "I'm so sorry, you are safe, John, I'm so sorry, god I'm so sorry."

John was limp in Greg's arms, his eyes open but unseeing. He sobbed in a pathetic, exhausted way
brought on by the medication and his own sudden physical exhaustion. "Greg," he muttered, seeming to see him for the first time. "Help me, Greg." John was oblivious to what was happening, but with the amount of pain and terror he guessed someone was hurting him. "Help me, please."

Greg shifted John so that he could press his cheek against his, both of them in tears, John wrapped up in the fabric. "John, it's Greg. I'm Greg," he assured, reaching into the cocoon of fabric and threading his fingers through John's. "Greg has you. I've got you, John. I'm going to take your arm out just for a moment, give you pain medication. You won't hurt, nothing is going to hurt." He watched the doctor approach with the morphine and he slowly drew John's arm out, just enough so that the doc could reach the port, not at all extending John's arm out again. He kept his face pressed right to John's, speaking slowly, "Going to feel the morphine, alright? We are not putting you to sleep. Greg has you, you're safe."

John whimpered and let out a series of babbled, incoherent pleas before his eyes focused enough to allow him to see. "Greg??" He cried in obvious surprise, fresh tears spilling down his cheeks. "Greg, I don't want this. I don't want this. I want to leave. I want to just leave. I want to leave. NO!" John suddenly remembered his dream, of what he had done to Greg, who had been lying in a puddle of blood, clearly dead but speaking of punishment. "No, I don't want to leave! I'm sorry! I'm so so sorry! Please d-don't leave me. Please, Greg, please." John broke down again and his body seemed to seize up briefly.

Greg pulled John in as tight to his chest as he could manage, waving off the doctors, one of whom took away the basket of sick. He held John to him in the blanket, his face tipped down to the crown of John's head, rocking him slightly as he fell apart. He slid his fingers through John's hair as he held him tight, trying to ease his pain.

"Okay, John...okay," he said gently, his voice soaked in grief, "Okay. Okay. You don't have to stay, John, it's okay. I'm so sorry, it's okay." He could manage it, crush John's sedatives and give them through the feeding tube, hold him until his breathing faded out and he gently slipped away. "I'm so sorry. You don't have to stay."

"N-no, Greg, I'm sorry. I don't want to leave. I don't want to hurt you. You'll bleed and I don't want that. Please just don't leave me." John was whimpering like a lost child, his eyes red and swollen, every muscle aching from the sudden and extreme exertion. The morphine had slid into his system and cooled his burned mind, but he still couldn't escape that nagging terror that gripped him. "I-I...I'm so sorry... I don't...please, I want to stay with you. I can't leave you because you'll die. Please."

Greg knew the truth of it, though, and it was killing him. He shook his head as he cried, pulling John closer still, bringing one heel up onto the seat of John's chair to help hold him in closer. "L-Look what I'm doing to you. I can't do this, John. I can't keep doing this. It's...god it's worse than anything I've ever...I'm hurting you so terribly...I-" his voice hitched as it cracked over a sob, breaking down hard, clutching at John as guilt broke over him relentlessly. "I wanted to give you a l-life, John, and all I'm doing is terrifying you. I can't do this. I don't...I won't die," he lied, "I'll t-take care of Sherlock and- I won't...you don't have to do this for me I-" he had no control over his voice, crumbling apart, helpless in the face of all of this.

John fed off of Greg's negative energy and let out mournful sobs. "P-P-Please d-don't-" he ventured to move his tightly held arms to wrap around Greg's neck. "D-Don't send me away. I-I don't w-want to h-hurt y-y-y-" John could picture himself helpless and cold, unable to do a thing as Greg took his own life out of grief for something John had insisted he do. "I-I love y-you," John whispered and collapsed into weeping once more.
John's arms around his neck helped, some sign of life from him. Greg nodded, threading his fingers in John's hair and gently rubbing at the base of his scalp. "I won't. Not if you don't want me to, I won't. I'm sorry, John I-" he dragged in deep breaths as he tried to get a grip on himself, not sure if he was relieved or further pained at John's instance that he not go through with it. He dropped his foot and shifted in John's chair so that he could rock him more effectively, wanting to do literally anything to help settle the man.

John didn't seem to have the energy to sob any more, and his tears rolled down his face silently as he lay in Greg's arms. Waves of aftershock washed over him and he occasionally shuddered along with his hitching breath. "P-Promise m-me that you'll st-stay. Promise me. Please." John nuzzled his face into Greg's neck, seeking the warmth that meant his friend was still alive.

Greg slowly stood up with John in his arms, walking back over to the bed and easing down onto it. "I promise I'll stay," he said softly as he laid them down, resting John, who was still bundled tight in the blanket, over his own chest. "I will not leave you, John. I will not leave you." He sank his fingers into John's hair and held him tight.

John continued to whimper on Greg's chest as the crushing weight of his own failure threatened to suffocate him. Muttered apologies and tears composed his only signs of life as his exhausted body seemed to give up the struggle all at once. "M'sorry...sorry...I love you..."

Chapter End Notes

Talk to me, readers.
Talk to me.
Greg stroked John's back and carded fingers through his hair, constantly whispering assurances to John that it was okay, that everything was okay and he wasn't upset. He turned them on their sides eventually, his own breath hitching from time to time, heart aching and mind screaming at him to damned well do something to make John's pain stop. Eventually he could take it no longer and left John lying on his side on the bed as he personally got up, swiftly stumbling through the room, shoving things in a bag and toeing on his shoes. He threw his jacket on and moved back to John, whispering, "It's okay, John, I'm going to make it stop," before picking him up in his blanket and holding him to his chest.

He clutched John tight to him, ignoring John's words, ignoring the stares he was getting as he moved them out of the room and down the hall, through the glass double doors and out onto the courtyard grass. The cold air was welcome on his tear-stained, swollen face, making him shiver as he walked them over to John's tree and slowly sat down, pack still on, resting against the bark.

John whimpered when he was moved, but he trusted Greg and clung to him as they walked down the halls. He tried to imagine that he was going somewhere safe, somewhere where there would be no pain or panic.

When they reached the tree, John leaned his head down on Greg's shoulder. He managed an exhausted "Thank you," before the heavy medications and his own depression caused him to drop back under.

Gerg held John in his arms and dutifully held him against his chest, keeping him warm and secured, paying no mind to his own discomfort as he allowed John to rest. He occasionally broke down, tipping his face to John's head and silently crying, clutching hard at the blanket. At one point he dozed off, only to snap awake when his grip loosened, suddenly tightening back. Time ticked by and he did not move, shivering against the frigid ground and resting his head back against the bark.

A few of the doctors watched curiously with worried looks on their faces. They debated asking the two to come back inside, but it had been made clear that Greg was the best thing for John's mental health.

The broken, thin shell of John Watson slept soundly for several hours, and when he woke refused to stir and destroy a moment of peace.

Greg dragged his face across his shoulder to dry it, his eyes bloodshot and swollen, face waxen-white from far too long out of doors in improper dress, immobile and without insulation from the ground. He'd nearly stopped shivering by the time John's breathing altered, letting him know John was awake. He shifted John slightly in his arms, easing the blanket down just enough that he'd feel the slight breeze on his face. Hopefully it would be better than waking inside, would calm him to know they had gone out, that he was safe.

"I-it's ok-kay John," he chattered, adjusting his grip, "s-safe."

John opened his eyes and blinked into the faint wind. When he saw Greg's distraught face, his own
mirrored the expression. "Whats wrong?" He asked and memories of the dream came to him. "Am I hurting you? I don't want to hurt you. Please, what's wrong?"

Greg gave him as much of a smile as he was capable of, shaking his head and pulling John in closer as a violent shiver ran down his spine. "No, John, you're not hurting me. I'm just sad that you were hurting so badly. You aren't hurting me," he tried to assure him, looking up and then back to John. "I thought the tree would help. You like it out here, yeah? I thought it would help."

John looked up at the branches and followed one from the trunk to where it tapered off into a tiny twig. He appeared vacant for several moments before he remembered where he was, and who he was with. "I don't want you to be sad. If I make you sad-" John cut himself off and shook his head violently.

"What, John?" Greg pushed, giving John a bit of a squeeze, "if you make me sad then what?" His gut was twisting up on him at John's detached state, he could feel the scream under his chin begging to be let loose. He wanted to howl his anguish to the goddamn sky and let the absent gods do what they would with it. He was constantly losing John, no matter what he did, what he tired. "Please, John," he breathed, giving John a very gentle shake, "please...it's okay. Nothing...nothing happened...you just got scared. It was a dream you had earlier, was just a dream. Please...look we are at your tree, and I have you and you are safe. Please, John."

John whimpered and put his hands over his face. He was so very attached to Greg, and so very wanted him to be free of pain. "If I make you sad, why are you staying?" If something caused John pain, he knew that he would go to great lengths to avoid it. "You weren't like this before," John explained and touched Greg's face, which was wet with tears. "You weren't this sad before."

Greg leaned into John's fingers at his cheek, his heart aching, sure that he could feel it hemorrhaging into his chest cavity. "I won't leave you, John. Whatever I'm feeling, I know you are suffering worse. I love you, John, I'm not leaving you. I will never leave you." He leaned in, resting his forehead against John's. When he spoke again, it was just a shaking whisper, hardly any sound to it. "I'll do anything to fix this. Anything. I cannot bear your suffering. I'm so sorry, John. So sorry."

John sighed and placed a kiss on Greg's cheek. He lingered there for a few moments, eyes closed, and wished there was some way he could end his suffering for Greg's sake if not his own. "You can't fix this. I'm broken and there's nothing you can do about it. I'm sorry. If I could not be broken I would...I would be alright so you aren't sad. I should be better by now."

Greg closed his eyes against John's forehead and slowly shook his head as another silent, wracking sob tore through him. He heaved in a deep breath, only to lose it again in his misery. He should have listened before, should have taken John at his word instead of pushing his foolish, ignorant hope onto a suffering man. "I'm sorry," he breathed as tears streamed down his face anew, "I'm so sorry, I'm..." his voice cracked and he dragged in a desperate, shaking breath, "I didn't mean to do this to you. I wanted...I'm such a damned fool..." he could not speak, grief robbing him of his words as he clutched John to his chest and wept, despising himself.

When Greg cried, John cried. John had been basing his calm off of Greg's calm, mimicking his breathing and his tone whenever possible, and it only seemed natural to mimic this too. John placed his hands on either side of Greg's face and his lip trembled. "Don't be sorry for this. You didn't do this. You didn't know. You didn't know what he was doing to me. Not your fault. Please, Greg, don't be sad. I'm trying."

Greg nodded, slowly coming down out of it. Paul's words had been hard for him to personally hear and John's constant hedging had brought to light things Greg had preferred stayed in the darkness.
He'd known that some of this would hurt John, some of the healing, but it had only just been revealed how brilliantly agonizing it would be. "You've hurt so much. I w-want to save you from it. I want to k-keep you from pain," he whispered, shivering once more. He was going to black out if he didn't warm up soon. "You are not r-ruined, I know you can h-heal, I know you can. You are the s-strongest man I know. I j-just...god, John, I d-don't want you to hurt. I'm s-so sorry I've f-forced this on you. I am the worst sort of man t-to have m-made you stay. I want to f-fix it and..." he dragged in a deep breath and shuddered, thinking suddenly of the agony Sherlock had been in before he'd been captured. "God, John, I...I...

"Do you really think that?" John asked and gave him a hard look. He didn't believe himself capable of being saved. It simply wasn't worth the effort. John planned on staying alive as long as he needed to in order to help the people around him so when he did leave they wouldn't be destroyed. He needed to help Sherlock, and make sure Greg was alright. "Do you really think I'm going to be alright? That I'll be normal? Or happy?"

Greg's response came without hesitation. "Yes. Yes, I absolutely do. I know y-you can, I'd never...n-never have asked you to stay...John I a-asked you to s-s-stay for you. N-not as some s-security blanket for Sherlock o-or me. I.e-even if you heal and w-walk away from us forever, th-that's okay. I...all of this i-is for you. Even if Sherlock had been k-killed I would still be h-here with you, doing this. It's...y-yes, you can heal, you can be h-happy, you can live a g-good life." He shifted, trying to curl tighter under John's warmth now that he was awake and shifting him wouldn't hurt him.

John felt very small. He nuzzled down on Greg's chest and shook lightly. When he spoke, his voice was hardly a whisper. "I d-don't believe you, Greg." John didn't believe he would recover, heal, be happy, or do anything for himself ever again.

Greg's brow knit as John's words knifed through him. He swallowed hard and nodded, taking a few minutes to breathe and collect himself. His head ached with cold and the constant flux of tears and grief over many hours. "Okay, John," he whispered back, struggling not to break down again. Some distant part of his mind knew it was a good thing that John was holding his own ground without backpedaling. He couldn't be happy in it, not today, not in that moment. If John didn't believe him, that meant John believed Greg was keeping him alive as some sort of tool for Sherlock and nothing more, and ohgod was that painful.

"I'm supposed to help Sherlock. And I'm supposed to help you. And then I get to leave. I need to have a purpose, Greg. I need to have a reason to be alive other than myself. I'm not going to just live through this for the sake of being alive. I need something else." He felt tiny and exhausted, his purpose for living despite his personal desires seemed a futile effort.

Greg's stomach turned as he listened to John. He drew back slowly, tipping his head back against the bark, eyes closed and face pointed to the sky. He swallowed as his mouth watered, exhaling through pursed lips, the world rocking and spinning in a dizzying dance around him. His mind was suddenly calm, slowed down and detached. It was clear what had to happen, what he had to do. He nodded very gently to himself, a numb sense of calm washing over him. He was going to give John a calm day tomorrow, full of his favorite music and time outside, free of Paul or ice or any of the things that scared him, and then, tomorrow night, he was going to give him the full bottle of sedatives in a feeding. He could picture it in his mind, tucking John down against him, Sherlock's music wrapping around them as John closed his eyes, peaceful and curled up, and slowly faded out.

A heavy tear rolled down his cheek, falling off the angle of his jaw and breaking to bits on his jacket. He'd figure out some way to dispatch himself before he could see the disappointment...the anger on Mycroft's face. Perhaps he'd hang himself in the shower. It didn't matter. What mattered was John, and fixing what he'd done to him. Mycroft saw him as a tool and would force John to stay alive for
Sherlock's sake, but he failed to see that this would never be what Sherlock wanted, this would kill Sherlock in the end, if John refused to heal, refused to go through this, and how could he blame him.

He shivered hard again, his fingers numb, toes long ago gone silent. "Okay," he breathed, the word turning to fog above his ashen lips, "I'm sorry, John."

John pulled at the corner of his blanket that he habitually rubbed between his fingers and wrapped it around Greg's shoulders. "We can help Sherlock soon," John said quietly and pressed his face into the side of Greg's neck. "And I'll get better and you'll be happy. Maybe you can live at Baker Street when Sherlock is recovering. He'll need you once I get to leave. He won't say it, but he gets lonely." John spoke in a dreamy, detached way and flitted from subject to subject. "How do trees get water to the top? They have tubes, but how do they pull the water up?"

Greg did not answer as slow, quiet tears slid down his cheeks. He savored the warmth of John, the way his words puffed against the side of his neck. His chin wobbled on him and he ached so desperately it was difficult to breathe. Sherlock would be ruined. There was no way he'd ever make it without John. John, who still knew that Sherlock was desperately lonely. John, who had endured and endured and endured, who could snap the detective back into line with a single glance where all their efforts had failed. Greg held a massive piece of Sherlock's heart in his arms, and tomorrow he was going to stop it beating.

His breathing caught and he had to breathe through parted lips to catch himself back from sobbing. "It's been-" his words snapped back in a sudden, hitched breath, forcing himself to press forward anyhow, "a great honor to know y-you, John Watson."

*Has been?* John gave Greg a confused look. "Don't talk about it like this is so final. I can still help him before I go. I'll stay for as long as that takes, I think. I'll get him settled first. Will you promise me something?" He took Greg's frozen hands and tucked them close to his chest inside the blanket to keep them warm. "You'll look after Sherlock, won't you? You'll keep him from hurting himself?"

Greg did not look down from the sky, breathing slow and controlled as John spoke to him. A moment later his head was rolling on the rough bark in a sluggish 'no,' licking his lip and struggling to find the strength to speak.

"There won't be a m-man alive capable o-of stopping him. I c-can't make that promise. I've m-made you one, that's a-all I can do." His voice sounded incredibly far away from him, at the other end of the tunnel while tears slowly fell off the angle of his jaw. ‘He lives f-for you. Has done s-since you met him. He is...there is n-no way he'll come back from p-putting you in the ground. No, I w-won't make that p-promise.’

Greg and his promises always hurt more than they helped. His tongue was heavy in his mouth, words slurred and almost meaningless. The weight of stress and biting cold was proving too heavy for him. He dragged in slow breaths through his nose, out through his mouth, utterly sick with what he had to do.

John was a bit disturbed at the idea of Sherlock depending on him so much. It didn't seem to connect in his mind that the independent, isolated almost standoffish detective was actually emotionally dependent on him. "I don't want to drive anyone to their grave. I don't want that. I don't want to kill
anyone. Greg, we have to make sure he's alright before I leave."

Greg sniffed hard and cracked a broken smile to the sky as tears slid down his face. "Okay, John," he whispered, freezing fingers seeking out John's hairline, shaking as they slid through his hair. He could spare John all this hurt, and now he was going to. It had long since grown dark and there was a break in the clouds. Greg's voice cracked as he stared up at the sky, rough and grief laden. "Look, J-John, your s-stars are out." This would likely be John's last chance to see them.

John's face filled with serene wonder as he stared up into the stars. His wide, glassy eyes reflected the night sky and he was reminded how small his troubles really were in view of the entire universe. John's mind fled his scarred, battered body and flew free in the inky sky, blissfully involved in something that didn't involve pain.

When he came back down to Earth several minutes later, John noticed Greg's pain. "It makes you sad when I panic, doesn't it?"

Greg had been watching John watching the sky, trying to take in the details of the man he'd come to deeply care about. He'd loved John before as a wonderful friend and a godsend to Sherlock, but now he'd attached to him as a protector and provider, and it was deeper than he'd felt for anyone outside of his children. It was such a gift to see peace settle over John, making him, in that moment, look as the man he was before his life was so horrifically torn away from him. His gut twisted with the loss of John Watson, and his mind went to Sherlock. It was going to be...unbearable for him once John was gone, a fact Greg deeply regretted.

John was suddenly speaking to him, calling Greg back to himself. He licked his pale lip and shook his head. "It's not that you panic. I m-mean...yes, it m-makes me sad to see you hurt. That's n-not why...n-not what this is." He tried to give him a smile, his lips wavering in grief and not quite managing it.

John's gaze floated up to the sky once more and he watched a small cloud blot out the moon. "You're in so much pain. I can see it. You've not smiled for real in weeks. I know I'm the cause of it, and don't try and tell me different. It may not be my fault, but it's because of me. If the thing today didn't cause this, what did? Why do you look so broken?" John reached up and kissed Greg on the cheek once more. John would miss him once he left, he thought, if he were capable of missing someone once dead.

Greg closed his eyes as John spoke to him, sounding so very much like himself. Guilt ripped through him, knowing he was going to take that man from the world. He shivered hard and dragged in a shaking breath and debating whether or not to speak. John was so present, so grounded, that he was terrified to damage that for him. He leaned into John's hand, a sob cracking free from his chest. Oh, how he desperately did not want to do this. He wanted John to live. He had no idea how he was going to bear watching him die, watching the life drain out of the best man he knew. The thought made him all but whimper as a child, sadness crushing over him in merciless waves. He shook his head, regretting his display, knowing his instability often upset John.

"I'm s-sorry," he breathed, fogging the air around them in the moonlight, "I don't m-mean for you to see. I-" he dragged in a pained breath, not sure what to say. "I f-failed you. You're in a-all this a-a-agon... because I wouldn't listen, because I refused to see, because I was too small to see it for what it was, because I love you and Sherlock and I failed you both. "I'm sorry, J-John."

John shook his head and wrapped his arms around Greg's neck so they were closer still. "You never failed me, Greg. Not you. You've always been there for me, even when you had your own life to deal with. I don't know what I would do without you. I can't even let you go to the bathroom without
worrying." John let out a short laugh, but it was more of a scoff. He felt pathetic and childish, unable to even look away from Greg if he wasn't touching him. "And you're so strong. You've carried me through the worst of it, even when I was afraid of you, and you helped me not be afraid of sleeping, and I can have ice now sometimes." John didn't bother to blink away his tears. They fell so regularly now and any small reason to cry had him going without reserve. "Don't hate yourself. I love you." Greg leaned into John, shivering now that he was warming slightly. He wondered absently if this was what it felt like to watch a dying loved one have that moment of clarity before death, that gift when a pain-ridden patient was, for a few hours, themselves before they passed away. He'd never heard John so lucid, not even in the rare moments it had happened before. He was helpless in the face of it, missing his friend so desperately he could not help but speak.

"And y-you hate me for it. I w-would too. Y-you don't want a-any of it and I've m-made you suffer through it with hope you-u don't share, don't w-want. I'm just h-hurting you trying to h-help you through it. You a-are still going to leave m-me, in the end, I-I-" he was sobbing like a lost child, helpless to stop, shuddering with cold as he clutched John to him under the stars. "I c-can't do this to you a-anymore, I can't keep...I can't keep w-watching you s-suffer like th-this."

"I don't hate you for it," John said quietly. The combination of painkillers and the peace outdoors was helping him mentally, and he was more aware of his situation than before. Nevertheless he was still functioning on a very basic level.

When Greg broke down, so did John. Tears streamed down his face and soft whimpers left his throat which was tired from screaming. He liked being held close, and the way Greg was desperately clinging to him helped remind John that he wouldn't be hurt with his Greg around. "If you can't watch me suffer any more, what are you going to do? This is all I have. I have suffering. I am suffering. I'm sorry it upsets you. I don't want that. I don't want to...to grieve you." John was making a valiant effort not to just use the word 'hurt'. The protective blanket term was sufficient most of the time, but now he wanted to be clear. "But this is all I have. No, maybe not. I'm going to help Sherlock. I've that as well."

Greg slowed down then. John's words helped his resolve.

*I have suffering. I am suffering.*

He did not speak until his breathing calmed, gently pressing his face to the side of John's. He was calmer than he'd been since John went to sleep the first time that day. "I'm going to s-stop it," he whispered, nuzzling softly against John as he held him desperately close, "I'm going t-to fix it, f-fix what I've done. I love you, J-John...I'm s-so sorry this h-happened to you, that I m-made it worse. I'm s-so sorry, g-going to make it s-stop."

"You can't just fix it," John lamented and a shudder ran through him. He had intended to say something almost sarcastic and give the severity of the situation, but that would require actually thinking about what had happened to him, which he mentally declined. "How can you make it-" John seemed to understand suddenly what he meant and looked up at him with wide eyes. "Greg, I..." He was torn between two options, one that told him to say *oh, dear God, yes, end this,* and one that told him to think of Sherlock and what would happen to him. John let out a clipped sob and curled in on himself, arms leaving Greg's neck and pulling tight to his chest.

Greg's face crumpled as John drew away from him. Just as always, his words had ruined the beautiful moment he'd had with John. He tipped his head back against the tree, letting it bounce against the hard bark several times, eyes pinched closed and heart breaking. His chest hitched on a sob and he nearly vomited right where they sat. "John," he cried out, his voice breaking over his name, "God I'm s-sorry I don't know h-how to stop h-hurting you," he dragged in a deep breath and
very nearly gave voice to the shout kicking desperately for freedom at the base of his chin. He was so cold, it was affecting his ability to clearly think, his mind only to stopping John's pain.

John made himself as small as he could. It was a very rare thing for him to make a decision on his own. With Moriarty he had been given a sick illusion of freedom, being forced into horrible choices that left him in pain either way. He hadn't had the power to stop it, and the sheer lack of control had overwhelmed him.

"I get to choose," John said quietly. "I get to choose when I leave. That was the deal, right? I'm leaving after I fix Sherlock. You're going to help me leave then. I don't want to wait that long, but I will because... I don't know why."

"O-Okay," Greg gasped, broken and ashamed of himself, "I'm s-sorry, I'm so. s-so sorry I was t-trying to h-help you, I-" he could not seem to catch his breath, choking on his endless failure, easing his hold on John who was obviously trying to retreat from him. "I- y-your choice, y-you t-tell me when I h-have to-" he swallowed down a harsh breath, shifting his numb limbs and blinking up at the sky, wishing something would crash to the earth in that moment and take him down. "S-Sorry, I'm s-sorry, J-John."

John put his hands over the back of his head and clamped his elbows over the vulnerable parts of his neck. "I want to leave so badly," he said in a whisper. "I want to leave more than anything. But I don't want to leave you, and I can't just 'toss Sherlock away'. I can't do that to you because I'm a doctor and I don't hurt people like Moriarty does. I don't hurt people like he said I would. I don't."

Greg forced himself to move, gently reaching into the warmth of the blanket and touching the side of John's head with shaking fingers. "Please," he whispered, unable to bear it, "you...y-you don't have to do this J-John. It...oh, god, p-please don't h-hide from me. Please. J-John, please." He pulled away, dragging his quaking palm over his face, his vision tunneling as he became more and more overwhelmed, "I...I d-didn't mean to h-hurt you again. I know you w-want to leave and I w-as trying to m-make it easier. I- please I-John please I-" he closed his eyes, swaying suddenly, dragging in a breath and splaying a palm on the ground at his side to keep upright. He leaned hard to the side and was abruptly, violently ill, sicking up so hard he nearly lost his grip on John, doubling over, sobbing as he gasped at the air.

John was shaken from his subdued, calm state by Greg's grieved, panicked one and wrapped his arms around Greg's waist. "Greg? Greg, it's alright, you didn't hurt me, please," he looked around frantically, clearly not understanding what was happening. "HELP!" He cried towards the door. "HELP US! Something's wrong!" John took Greg's face in his hands and stared at him with wide, fearful eyes. "What's wrong? Please, I'm sorry, whatever happened I can fix it, I-" John let go of Greg’s face and sank his fingertips into his own. He looked around wildly for a moment and let out a long scream. Something was happening to Greg, and he simply couldn't understand what.

At his shout for help, several of Mycroft's personal guard, followed closely by a team of doctors, rushed into the courtyard and over to Greg and John. Once the situation was deemed more psychological and medical than an actual threat, the doctors stepped forward.

Greg's stomach dropped in fear and he clutched John to him in one arm, still gagging as he held the other up to stay them, afraid they'd take John out of his arms and terrify the man. He gasped between painful spasms of his gut, "m o-kay," shaking his head, "d-don't...don't n-need help I'm-" he doubled over again, violently heaving though his stomach was empty, crying out with the pain of it. He was frozen to his core, shivering visibly from hours of exposure. He forcibly mastered himself enough to try and speak to John, "I'm o-okay, please...J-John you're s-safe, you're s-safe, please st-
stop screaming. P-Please, J-John, you're s-safe." He was hearing himself through cotton, his pulse slow and thunderous in his ears, pushed right up to the edge of passing out.

To the doctors, it was clear that Greg was not in stable condition. John had stopped the blood boiling screams of before but continued to cry out in fear and confusion when the doctors approached. "Sir, I need you to let go of the patient," one of them said and tried to take hold of John. In doing so he felt Greg's hand, frozen and pale. "Sir, if you could let us take John, we'll get you both inside and settle this."

John could feel himself being pulled away from Greg and shrieked in protest. In his mind he was being ripped away from his protection for some dreadful purpose, and the notion made him cling even tighter. His emotional state sent him back to his previous one, the one he'd learned while with Morairty, and he knew how wretched doctors could be.

"Sedate him," John heard one of the doctors say, and he kicked at them through the blanket.

"Y-You're frightening h-him," Greg snapped as they handled him, "k-kid gloves, b-b-bloody k-kid gloves h-he's a t-torture victim!" He dropped the universal term for 'be exceedingly gentle and nice,' among police, fire, and medical personnel. Surely Mycroft had given instruction not to separate them, surely. "Pl-Please, y-you're scaring him."

He tried to push to his feet, his numb legs failing him as he slid back down, calling out to John, "John! It's o-okay, I'm r-right here it's o-kay, you're s-s-safe, I'm here!" He gave the medical team a deploring look, "p-please be c-careful, he's s-so scared."

John was handled with the utmost care, but was still lifted away from Greg into the arms of the doctor. They tried to speak soothingly to him, but he wasn't able to hear a thing except Greg's cries and his own voice. "N-NO! NO, DON'T! I C-CAN'T GO BACK! GREG, PLEASE!" He struck at the doctor who cradled him and tried to force his way back to Greg. He was thrashing so wildly that he had a second doctor holding his legs still as he was carried.

One of the female doctors helped Greg to his feet. "Sir, we're being very careful with him. Try to remain calm. He's in good hands. Come inside and we can sort this all out."

"John! I-It's okay!" He leaned hard on the woman and shook his head, "Y-you c-c-can't separate him fr-from me h-he th-thinks-" he stumbled, hitting his knees and hanging his head, "Y-You h-have to put us i-in the same room, p-please, g-g-god please, don't s-seperate us. C-call My-Mycroft he'll t-tell you," his head was swimming, instinctive need to get to John nearly taking him down as he knelt there in the courtyard, shaking so hard it was painful.

John was administered a mild sedative through the port. He thrashed violently when his arm was pulled away and it took half the team to keep him still enough. "Greg! GREG!" John cried in confusion and agony. It only further sealed in his mind the supposed fact that when he was taken from Greg, terrible things happened. "Pleasegodno..." He cried groggily as he was carried towards the door. Wrecked sobs vibrated his chest as hestrove to mentally prepare himself for what was about to happen. He could already feel the whips, the knives, or worse still the weeks of recovery during which different areas of his body were worked or starvation was used instead. The sedative had weakened, but not calmed him. In his blind horror every muscle in his body contracted and relaxed at random, giving him the appearance of a puppet with a child at the strings.

The doctor at Greg's side walked along with him to the door as well. "We'll go in right behind him. You won't be away from him for long. Don't worry."

Greg listened to John with his heart in his frozen feet, trying to catch up to him, anguished by his
failure. He'd created this entire situation without intent, his whole goal for the day to keep John relaxed and calm. In the end he'd subjected him to unspeakable terror. He allowed the woman at his side to lead him in, wanting to call out to John, lacking the strength to do so. He was overly slow, heavy with mental anguish and frigid cold.

John was still terribly combative towards those around him. The doors to the building seem to look up ominously around him, and the sight that used to mean the end of a nice day outside now triggered fear and pain. "NO! NO! I CAN'T GO BACK!" John tried to claw at the eyes of the man carrying him but his hands were gently held back by the woman next to him. They were thoughtful enough to hold his arms to his chest and not pull them out, but it still worried him. "Greg, PLEASE KILL ME!" He screamed, unable to fathom the idea of being tortured again. "SOMEONE PLEASE KILL ME! I CAN'T GO BACK! NO! NO!"

Greg swore and stumbled forward, leaving the doctor at his side and moving in a mix of running and controlled falling, catching up to the team as they struggled with John. He grabbed the shoulder of the woman at John's side, gently moving her out of his way as here ached down with freezing hands, "W-Wait," he managed to the medical team, taking John's face in his hands. His icy fingers would hopefully be enough of a shock to catch John's attention. "J-John!" he shouted, bringing his face in closer, "John I-I'm r-r-right here. You're s-safe, please John, I-I'm with you," he had to lean his shoulder on one of the men struggling with John as his strength rapidly bled out of him, spots erupting across his vision. He found one of John's hands at his chest and wrapped his fingers around John's, holding as tight as he could. "I'm h-here, John, I'm h-here."

John saw Greg suddenly looking down at him and let out a broken cry. He reached out both arms to his protection like a child wanting to be held. The doctor did not release him into Greg's care, as the man looked physically unstable at best. John managed to grab hold of Greg's arm and clung on as if his life depended on it, and in his mind, it did. The doctor moved slowly and slightly awkwardly to allow Greg to keep up while they walked.

By the time they finally reached John's room, and oh god was he glad they'd taken them to John's room, Greg was hardly supporting himself. He let John have his arm as the team put John in the bed closest to the wall. Greg dropped in after him, shaking violently, his teeth audibly chattering as his shoes and jacket were stripped from him. It took a bit of maneuvering with John so plastered to his side, but they managed it. Heated blankets were piled on top of Greg as he was given a jab to calm his heaving stomach. He turned on his side, ignoring the doctors as he pulled John to his chest, shivering violently, wrapping him up tight to try and calm him. "I-I h-h-have you, 'm h-here, 's o-okay, I h-h-have you."

He was going to black out, the stress of it all too much. He turned his head to the nearest doctor, slurring heavily, "D-don't take h-him f-f-rom me, he's afraid. L-let h-him s-stay with-" his words faded down as the roaring darkness reached up and dragged him unconscious mid-sentence.

John was somewhat alert to the fact that he was brought into his room, but medication and fear had effectively killed his mind, the effect of which was him being left only with the basic ability to react to the things directly around him. When he was placed in bed and Greg held him, he clung to him desperately with his arms and wrapped his legs around Greg's. "G-G-Greg, h-hurts," he stammered and tried to focus on what Greg was saying. When the man suddenly dropped from consciousness, John screamed and shook him. "Greg? Greg, p-please, th-they're g-going t-to g-g-get m-me!" John didn't know what the doctors were doing by Greg side or who he kicked when he thrashed at them, but soon he could feel an artificial sleep pulling at him and, praying through some miracle it was death, John greeted it with open arms.
When Greg woke, he had a drip line in his arm and an electronically heated blanket over him. The sun was well up, and John was wrapped tight around him, softly breathing under the same warmth, a bag hanging above him that had been administering high-calorie feedings continuously over the last twelve hours, as well as a solution of saline and various vitamins along the B spectrum to bolster him up. Greg's mouth felt much fresher and he ran his tongue along his teeth, finding them clean. They'd both been cared for while sedated, it would seem.

He shifted slightly, only to catch sight of Paul sitting next to John's chair, typing away on a laptop. He flinched and turned his face to John, breathing deep and lingering there for a moment. Finally he faced the man, whispering as he spoke. "I know, Paul. I know. I'm doing my best, I swear."

Paul looked up, giving Greg a sad smile. "I know," he whispered back, nodding his head. "I know you are, Greg." He turned back to the laptop, making it clear they did not have to speak just then. Greg turned back to John, carefully arranging him in his arms so that as soon as he opened his eyes, he'd easily be able to see Greg.

John was groggy when he came out of his artificial sleep. As consciousness filtered to him he became aware of what had happened. Greg had been sick, John had been ripped away, then Greg blacked out. John's eyes flew open and he scanned the room. He wasn't surprised - or pleased - to see Paul, but the presence of Greg removed all thought of it. "Greg!" He exclaimed and suddenly needed to be as close to him as possible. "Greg, they tried to take me and you-" he remembered the feeling of Greg going limp and a whimper escaped him.

Greg shifted slowly, sluggish and heavy from the stress of the day before and whatever medications he'd been given. He dropped an arm over John, closing his eyes and breathing for a moment. "No," he managed, his voice less than strong, heavy and weighed down, "they were not taking you. I collapsed and they were helping us inside. No one was taking you. No one was going to...going to...hurt you." He groaned and licked his lip as his head throbbed suddenly, turning his stomach and leeching away the color on his face. Paul spoke up then, his brows drawn with worry, "Greg? You okay?"

Greg tipped his forehead down to the side of John's face. "Please..." he whispered, swallowing hard as his stomach turned, "please be calm, John. Safe...safe." The effort of speaking was proving too much, lancing pain across his head and stealing his voice.

John saw Greg, his protection, his only source of security, in pain and looking almost frightened. It disturbed him to his very core. If Greg was worried, there must be something to be worried about. Just as children often look to adults to learn how to respond to a situation, John looked to Greg and mirrored his pain. "I won't panic," he said hastily even though he very well might, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I really, really won't. I'll do better. It'll be alright." John looked to Paul, the only other one in the building who could be trusted, and gave him an imploring look. "Something's wrong with Greg."

Paul looked over to John, calm and steady, speaking softly to him as he nodded, "Greg is going to be okay, John," he assured, keeping just where he was for now. "I spoke with your doctors, they believe he's just managed to fatigue himself. His body is tired, but he will be alright."

Greg shifted his hold on John, speaking as loudly as he could manage, which turned to be just louder than a whisper. "Don't be sorry," he breathed against John's head, "I know you're scared...it's okay, John, it's okay. We're safe...Paul...Paul is safe." His stomach clenched and he shivered, nuzzling against John.

Paul stood up slowly and walked over to Greg, reaching down and pressing two fingers to the side
of Greg's neck and feeling his racing pulse. "John," he said quietly, "I need a doctor to come look at Greg. If I sit here beside you, will that be alright? They won't take you from him, or him from you. Everything is going to be okay."

John mimicked Paul's actions and felt Greg's pulse. "Greg," he said, taking the man's face between his hands. "Please be alright. Please. I need you to be alright." Memories of the dream came back to him and he kept his hand on Greg's carotid, terribly worried he might deal a ceasing of the rapid beat.

Paul offered no comfort to John, but was less of a threat than the doctors. "Don't let them take him away. I'm going to hold on to him and I will hurt anyone who tries to take him." John was quite certain he would cause bodily harm to anyone who attempted to part them, despite his weakened state. "I'll kill them if they try." John held onto Greg and buried his face down on him.

Greg did not open his eyes or speak, only able to raise his hand and sink it in John's hair, fingers lightly rubbing over John's temple as he draped a leg over John, doing his best to blanket John with his body, his last-ditch effort at soothing him, making him feel safe. His head throbbed brilliantly, a cause who’s effect was brilliant bright light knifing across his vision every time he flexed a muscle or held his breath, responding sharply to any increase in his blood pressure. The longer he was awake, the more his body let him know how not okay he was.

Paul looked to John after staring at Greg's rapidly diminishing state. "John, that's fine, you can hold on to Greg, but if you become violent they cannot help him. Can you promise me that you will do your best to listen and stay calm? Greg is not afraid of them, John. These are Mycroft's doctors and they are safe. No one wants to separate you, but Greg needs their help and you are going to have to follow instructions if they need to look at him, you may be asked to shift out of the way. You can always keep hold of his hand. Can you do that?" He reached down and wrapped his hand around Greg's shoulder as the man began to shiver, trying to assure Greg that he had help.

Greg squeezed John's hand, trying to reassure him as his heart raced and a thin sheen of sweat broke along his brow.

John clung to Greg and burrowed underneath him. He tangled his legs up with Greg's and tried everything he could to stay calm. Greg's condition was obviously getting worse, which worried John, but the idea of separating them hurt worse. "I'll try. I'll try so hard. I'll be good and not panic if I can, but I don't trust them. Even the ones I do trust I fear." John resolved to bite his own tongue in half before he screamed. Screaming always seemed to call the doctors, and he would be put under if they came. "I won't hurt them unless they take Greg."

John stared the doctors down as they entered and entangled himself with Greg. The way he was latched on would make it very difficult to separate them. John's feet were flexed and ready to kick.

Greg was gently eased onto his back, though he kept his face to John, swallowing hard and forcing himself to speak. "Isokay," he slurred, nearly panting, "isokay, John, 'sokay, I'm 'ere, 'mhere."

Paul kept close, taking from one of the medical team a syringe to sedate John if necessary. He'd be the only one putting hands on John if needed. He watched him very closely, quietly telling John what the team was doing with Greg as they moved, his voice calm and low.

Greg grit his teeth as his eyelid was raised and a penlight flicked across it, gasping in pain. His grip tightened on John in that moment, nearly sicking up, incredibly photophobic with the agony in his head. One of the doctors spoke gently, "Migraine, complex."

A physician was trying to get a listen to Greg's chest, which John was too wrapped around to do properly. Paul spoke softly to him, "John, you've got to let go of his chest for a minute, alright? Let
them help Greg. Deep breath and just hold his hand, give them some space."

John had his arms snaked around Greg's torso with one of the man's arms trapped inside and the other lying near John's head. John was reluctant to let go, but he told himself that Greg was in pain, and these doctors would stop his hurting.

John shifted awkwardly and scooted lower on Greg's torso so his arms were low on his waist and his head tucked near his hip on the opposite side. He had one hand grabbing his wrist in a grip he had learned ages ago, and utterly refused to move any further.

"Don't hurt him," he begged, "please don't hurt him. Greg doesn't deserve it. Please," John had tears in his eyes and clenched his jaw. "Y-you can h-hurt m-me but not him."

Greg could not stop away the sound of pitiful heartbreak at John's words. John was afraid, so completely to his core afraid, and yet offering himself for abuse instead of Greg. His one free hand slid down, shaking and cold, to rest on the back of John's neck. His fingertips scratched lightly at his nape in a way John liked in an effort to soothe him and help him feel better protected. John's grip on his wrist would be wildly difficult to break, they'd have to physically hurt John to detach him without sedation.

Paul was pleased with this development, though, as John complied without dissolving into panic. The doctors had plenty of room to work, checking Greg over and hanging a fresh bag of fluids for him. He was chronically dehydrated from avoiding water around John, drinking only when John was asleep, or when truly desperate, when John looked the other way he'd steal small sips from a hidden bottle. The stress, dehydration, and poor nutrition had finally caught up to him when he'd allowed his body temperature to dip so desperately low.

His head was turned, which rocketed a shock of pain down Greg's spine, making him cry out before he could stop himself and arch his back. He squeezed down on the back of John's neck, panting as he grit his teeth. One of the physician's stepped back to draw up medication for him as he bent his leg up in an effort to deal with the pain, foot flat on the mattress, knee in the air.

"He's okay, John," Paul whispered, watching the team as they dimmed the lights for Greg and prepared to treat him.

Greg's scream bounced around inside John's mind and rattled away his rational thought. He could feel the man arching off the bed, an action all too familiar to him. "No! NO!" John cried and locked furious eyes on the doctor who had moved Greg's head.

It is often said that fear is the root of all negative emotions. Jealousy is the fear of losing someone or being inadequate, hatred is fear of the unknown, and depression is fear turned inward. Fear is the basic survival instinct that drives humans to avoid potentially dangerous situations, and as it is so deeply programmed has a tendency to override logical thought.

If depression is fear turned inward, anger is fear turned outward. John tucked his legs up underneath himself and crouched over Greg like a coiled spring. "Don't hurt him!" He shrieked and swatted one of the doctor's hands away. Raw terror turned to aggression and John crawled back up to drape himself over Greg like a blanket. "GET AWAY!"

Paul held his hand out to them in a move to make the team step back, "All of you," he said calmly, watching as they all retreated outside of arm's reach. John was terrified and channeling that energy to offense, where typically he would wrap into a protective ball and shy away. This...this was remarkable. He was taking action to protect, to go against his perceived aggressors and assert his will. Psychologically huge. Greg's illness was no good for Greg, but it might serve the launch point.
John's return to himself if handled correctly.

"Okay, John," he said quietly after a moment, waiting for John's voice to fade down around them, "look, no one is touching either of you." He waited a moment to allow John to see that his words held power, and everyone had retreated. The only sound in the room was Greg's pained breathing, as the man had his lips drawn back, one hand gripped tight in his own hair to ease the pain, breathing harshly through clenched teeth.

"John, can one doctor come close enough to give him pain medication?"

John covered Greg with his body, thin as it was, and snarled at Paul. "I'll fucking kill you," he said in a low snarl. There was absolutely no restraint in his eyes, no hint of logic and hardly any understanding of the situation.

When his attention turned back to Greg, John's fury melted into anguish. The clenched teeth, curled lips and rapid breath were signs of pain, actions that John was so terribly familiar with. "Greg, it's alright. It's alright. You're going to be alright." He brushed his lips across Greg's forehead in a tender, gentle kiss.

Storm cloud eyes snapped back to the doctors. Yes, Greg needed a painkiller. John looked at his hands and knew that with his shaking he couldn't possibly administer it. Back with Moriarty, he had been given morphine on rare occasions to instill that submissive behavior was to be associated with comfort, and he knew the value well. "Give him the painkiller. Help him. But if you fucking hurt him I'll break the needle off in your trachea."

Paul had his entire focus on John. He held a hand out to the physician who stepped forward, shaking his head without taking his eyes off John, making the man go still again. John was running on base instinct to protect, but there was an odd undercurrent about him. His grip on Greg, the defensive stance he'd taken even from a prone angle, the way he held his body weight so that it could shift to defend or attack without hinderance all spoke to the military training he had. John had swept his eyes over Greg in a nearly clinical manner, harkening to his intensive medical training. John, not the shell he'd been made into but Captain John Watson, M.D, was there under the surface, shades of that man filtering through the animal instinct to keep his source of protection from harm.

He was also verifiably dangerous. Paul motioned again for the team to further retreat. He had no doubt that John would come bodily off the bed, mindless to the feeding tube in his nose and the drip line in his hand. Paul carried a medical license as the base of his psychology degree and was more than capable of pushing morphine properly. He moved slowly, well within John's view, palms exposed as he took the syringe from the doctor and held it so John could see.

"John, I'm going to put this in Greg's drip line, okay? You remember that morphine must be pushed slowly, so I'll be close for one hundred and twenty seconds. I am not going to hurt him." He slowly moved forward, keeping each of his movements predictable and calm. He reached for Greg's drip and uncapped the needle, slipping it in the hub and showing John that he was going to look at his watch. Slowly he began to depress the plunger, talking softly to Greg.

"Greg, you've a complex migraine and severe dehydration. Giving you pain medication now, just breathe slow. Bin at your left if you need it." Greg was lost to him though, the clustering headache nearly taking his hearing from him as he pulled at his hair, panting while a tear rolled down the side of his face. He was hardly aware of John at all at that point, so overpowered with the blinding pain of it.

John shifted so he was practically standing on the bed, legs tucked underneath him like a wrestler and Greg close to his shins. His eyes darted from doctor to doctor, assigning each of them threat
levels and sculpting a quick attack strategy for each. The needle wasn't much of a weapon, but he knew if he got it in someone's throat it would put them out of action. John's hands were open in preparation to grapple and take the meager weapon, but were held high for defensive purposes. He felt it then. The stirring in his chest, the feeling of a fight boiling in his hands. He wanted to hit someone. Anyone who hurt Greg, he would physically dismantle.

With his eyes still flicking back and forth, John stepped behind Greg slowly put one arm down in front of him as a shield, forsaking his personal defense to guard his only source of protection. "Fine. Help him. But if you hurt him, I will kill you. I will cut you. I'll tear you open and rip out what's inside."

John was prepared to tear into this man with his teeth if necessary. The sight of Sherlock's blood had terrified him, and he had no idea how he would handle it if Paul or the doctors began to bleed, but he knew he wanted them to.

Paul kept his eyes on John, speaking slow and quiet to the rest of the team, "Back out slowly, everyone leave. Slowly." John was swiftly becoming an uncontrolled threat, and while his move to aggression in lieu of submission was promising, this feral behavior was dangerous. He stood there, slowly giving Greg his medication as the doctors slowly filed out.

When the last had left, leaving Paul dangerously alone with John who's physical skills far outweighed his own, Paul spoke softly to him again. "John, you're scaring me. I am Greg's friend. I am helping Greg. Would you please relax your posture, it is difficult to treat him when I'm worried you are going to hurt me." He cast his eyes down, dropping his posture as he looked down to his watch, making sure he was not pushing the morphine too fast.

Greg blindly reached up for John, hand wavering and shaking in the air until he found John's side, catching hold of his shirt and tugging gently. "J-" he managed before his stomach rolled, the act of speaking making him nauseated, whimpering in pain. "John, 'sokay."

John growled at Paul. "I would have no problems killing you," he snarled and bent over to crouch protectively over Greg. "You hurt me in my mind, and now Greg is hurting. If you harm him, even just a little, I will kill you." He bared his teeth. John would bite out this man's God damned throat if he needed to. Greg would be protected.

There was a fire in his eyes, a tension in his being that he hadn’t had for over a year. John was prepared to fight to protect both himself and others. He wasn’t lying down and begging, he was standing up and fighting. Even if it was the wrong people, he wasn’t cowering any more. Captain John Watson was taking a stand.

Chapter End Notes

Did I hear someone say they wanted tangible progress?

Did I also hear people saying they wanted realistic recovery?

BOOM. Made it happen.
“John, I want to help Greg. Isn’t that what you want?” Paul kept his tone calm and his hands low. John’s aggressive posture was worrying him, as he had absolutely no doubt in his mind that the former soldier would lunge at him if he thought Greg was in danger.

“You don’t help people,” John snapped, but knew Greg needed medication. He sat back on his heels and bent over in a position that was almost submissive, were his legs not tense and ready to explode with motion. He wanted this to be over, but he also wanted to rip the man's throat out. It was an unexplainable, directionless fury that he was prepare to vent on anyone he deemed a threat to Greg. "I won't hurt you if you don't hurt him."

Greg's attempt at speaking pained John and his tense shoulders sagged forward in sadness. "It's alright. I'm calm. I am so calm. I'm going to keep you safe. Nobody is going to hurt you, or I'll hurt them. Come back to me, John."

John retreated further, but his face lost none of it’s hostility. He crouched over Greg and glared at Paul with an awful snarl on his face. His attitude was incredibly feral, with his lips curled back and eyes narrowed.

Paul finished pushing the medication and slowly withdrew the needle, walking in reverse with it until he was out of John's reach. Greg was slowly relaxing as the medication worked, his hands going limp, slowly dropping to the bed as his expression gentled, not as strained as before. Paul threw the needle away and sat down slowly in the same chair he'd been in. "You are a very effective protector, John. I'm sure Greg will be grateful for your efforts when he is able to speak again."

Greg, with great effort, reached up and tugged at John's sleeve, licking his lip as he tried to open his heavy eyes. "Sorry," he breathed, having to work very hard to generate any sound, "'m sorry, s-sorry." His color was terrible, sheet white with dusky lips and a thin covering of sweat, hands trembling as he tried to speak to John.

Paul was cataloging every behavior from John down to his smallest movements. "John, can you explain to Greg what the current situation is? He looks confused." Perhaps if John could relay what was happening, he'd reach some part of him beyond the fear, touch on a bit of logic if they were very lucky.

John's glare softened when Greg relaxed, forever mimicking him and adopting his emotions. With a tender, affectionate touch John brushed his fingers over Greg's cheek and spoke softly to him. "It's alright, Greg. They're gone. They're gone. You're going to be alright."

John changed his posture so he was sitting on his heels by Greg's side. It was slightly less combative, but would still him to cover Greg with his body if needed. The idea of explaining what had happened repulsed him, as he knew that the situation wasn't quite clear to him despite how firmly his phaneron told him he had been attacked.

"Greg...the doctors came and...you were hurting." He leaned forward and laid his head down on Greg's chest. "And they hurt you, so I protected you, but I let Paul through so you could get your morphine. You always deserve morphine." For John, who had only been 'good' enough to earn morphine a handful of times, it was an honest compliment.
Paul watched as Greg attempted to speak, his hands moving to heavily rest on John's back and the crown of his head. He slurred something unintelligible, the migraine obviously attacking his speech centers. Paul would have to pull up Greg's medical history, but he had no memory of the man suffering these in the past.

Greg shook his head, wincing and stuttering over his own breathing, pulling hard at John in an effort to communicate. His foot dragged along the mattress and he slowly curled over on his side, shifting John as he reached up and fisted a shaking hand in his hair. All the while his breathing remained tight and erratic. Paul narrowed his eyes, wondering what was happening. The morphine should have knocked the pain out at this point.

"John," Paul asked softly, wondering if he could push at the physician and not the soldier, "is he okay?"

John moved out of Greg's way and allowed him to curl up. He draped himself over the man again, kneeling at his back, ready to attack anyone who came in his striking range but at the moment more worried about the suffering of his protection.

"Greg?" John whispered as to not pain his migraine, "Greg, its alright. I'm here. Could you tell me what's wrong?" The incident with the doctors, however terrifying, had bolstered his confidence. He could defend Greg, and didn't need to fear whatever was bothering him. Still, the man's pain disturbed him. "The morphine should have made his hurting stop. It could be he's hurting inside," John said and tapped Greg's temple lightly in the way he had taken to doing when he wanted to signal that he meant psychological, not physical pain. "Help him. Help him, please."

Paul leaned forward in his chair, lacking his fingers together between his knees. He quite agreed with John's words, though made no move to step in. "How are his vitals, can you assess him for me?" He was keen to see how much John remembered, if he would just take a pulse or if he would assess breathing, breath sounds, skin tone and turgor, strength in Greg's hands and ability to track and focus. "He trusts you, John, you set him at ease more than anyone."

John tried very hard to access a part of him that he believed had died long ago. He put his fingers to Greg's pulse point and watched the clock on the wall. "His heart rate is elevated. He's displaying clear signs of pain but he's been given morphine. It could be psychological?"

John laid himself down over Greg and let out a small whimper as the traumatic dream came back to him once more. "Please, please help him. I don't know what to do."

Paul spoke softly, "okay, John, it's going to be alright. Can you see if he has equal strength in both sides? Do you remember? See if he will squeeze your hands, should be even pressure on both sides." Greg was obviously in distress, though not in danger. This moment was too invaluable not to utilize.

"Greg?" John whispered, starting to remember himself a bit. He slipped his hands under Greg's and gently coaxed them out of his hair. "Its alright, Greg. Could you squeeze my hands? It would help me if you did." He bent down and kissed the top of Greg's head softly and gave his hands a squeeze to demonstrate what he wanted.

Greg complied sluggishly, squeezing weakly with more pressure on the right than left, though not drastically so. He gave a soft sound that could have been sadness or pain, eyes pinched tight. "John," Paul asked in question.

"Almost, but favoring the right." John held Greg's face in his hands and studied him. "He's ashen. Lips pale. I-" He shook and his lip quivered. "I can't. I don't know. I-I-I-" The anger was slowly bleeding out of him and taking with it the energy it had granted him.
Paul nodded and stood up, moving over to John's side and touching his shoulder lightly. "Greg," he called out gently, reaching down and giving his shoulder a small shake, though Greg did not respond at all. He took one of Greg's hands out of John's and held it up so that John could see, verbally walking through what he was doing. It had been a very long time since he medically examined anyone.

He pinched a bit of skin from the back of Greg's hand between the pads of his thumb and pointer, watching as it held its shape. "Turgor is poor, he's tenting. That's the dehydration," he shifted Greg's limp hand, taking up a finger, "let's check his capillary refill," he whispered as he pressed down on the nail, counting as the flesh took time to fill back with color.

He put Greg's hand back down and touched the tense line of Greg's shoulders, the muscles quivering in their effort to hold solid. Greg jerked away from him then, shaking his head and slurring something unintelligible again. Paul looked to John, "I think you are right," he whispered softly, touching his temple as John had.

John crouched over Greg as Paul advanced and caged his chest with his arms. John had the posture of an animal crouching over its young or its food, and while he was coming back to his medical days fairly quickly, he was still distracted by the man's proximity to Greg.

He let out an inhuman snarl when Paul touched Greg, but kept his hands still. "Its in his mind. I hurt him. I think it was me. It was me, wasn't it?" John's anger dissolved into despair and he pressed his lips to Greg's forehead. "Please be alright," he murmured near his hairline. "Please. If you go away I'll not make it. Please, I love you. Please."

Once the diagnosis was complete John made it clear that Paul was not allowed anywhere near Greg by placing himself between the two and curling around the man who usually protected him.

Paul backed off, going to sit back down in his chair. John was posing a massive danger, to himself and those around him, and Paul took his time to choose his words. "John, do you remember how to unhook the line from your NG tube? You are moving quite a bit, and I'm afraid you're going to pull it. That would be very, very painful. Can you unhook the line and cap off the end of the tube at your nose for me, please? And then disconnect your drip from the port? It's fine if you need to be mobile, but I'm worried for you right now." He watched him closely, knowing he was in very legitimate danger of being physically attacked if he made the wrong move.

John scowled, but was more than grateful to have mobility. His hands were shaking, which infuriated him, but he worked past it and capped the tube that ran down his nose.

He had a difficult time with the drip port, and his vision seemed to be fading and strangely blurry up close. "C-could you..." John gave an irritated huff as his fingers slipped again. "Could you help me?"

Paul nodded and slowly got to his feet, keeping as much physical space between himself and Greg, really, as possible. He deftly removed the line from the port and capped off the hanging line for later use. Then he moved away, going back to his chair.

Greg shifted then, reaching out with one hand as the other fist back in his hair, cold fingers wrapping around John's wrist. "mhere," he mumbled, obviously trying to comfort John as though he were screaming, "p-please...John 'mhere, 'sokay, p-please...I...I'm sorry, g-god I...I'm sssorry, John I...p-please," he anguish, a tear sliding down his face as he held

John sat down and pulled Greg onto his lap gently, like one would move an elderly or a young child. "I'm okay, Greg. I'm okay. See?" He attempted at a smile, "Not screaming, not hurting. I didn't let them hurt you. Nobody hurt you. I love you. Do you love me?" John was sure that Greg did, as he
had devoted countless hours to his recovery, but wished to engage him in conversation.

"Could you tell me about...about the first case you and Sherlock worked on? I'd like to hear about that." He took Greg's hands in his and tried to make as much contact with him as possible.

Greg's kneejerk reaction under heavy medication gave Paul a much better picture of what had happened. It was interesting to see John handle him. John's phrasing had gone from 'they hurt you,' to 'no one hurt you,' a bit of clarity as he cared for the man.

Greg appeared to be sleeping, for all intents and purposes. He rest his head against John's chest, suddenly mumbling, not quite responding to John. Paul cleared his throat, not wanting John to react with fear.

"John, I think he's mostly asleep at the moment. Can you tell me what happened yesterday? Greg had hypothermia. Why were you outside so long?" His tone remained inquisitive, no accusation to it at all. He was highly interested in what had transpired between them before all of this came to be.

Guilt crashed down on John like torrents of icy water and stole his breath away. "Yesterday...I..." John dropped his forehead down to Greg's and stayed in that position for quite some time.

"I was hurting at night and I scared him," John began in a dejected, despairing voice. "I was screaming and it made him sad. We sat outside because I... I don't remember...I've hurt him. I did this. I'm awful. I'm terrible. I deserve-" John cut himself off and swallowed hard. "I deserve to be punished for this. I deserve it. I wasn't good. I hurt him. I didn't mean to scare him, I wasn't controlling it and I couldn't think and-and-" John fisted his hands in his hair and shook his head.

"John," Paul called out sharply, wanting to swiftly grab his attention, "John, you will look at me, please." He kept his tone commanding, though added the 'please' to keep him from fear. "You do not deserve to be punished. Greg does not deserve to be punished. Now, you've not walked me through what happened. You are not to blame for this. I cannot help Greg if you do not tell me what happened. Take a deep breath, John, and relax your body. Then tell me what you can remember."

John had his forehead pressed against Greg's and was rocking himself back and forth. "No, no no..." he muttered under his breath and dug his fingernails into his scalp. "No...no...no..." With eyes tightly shut and breaths becoming panicked, John tried to continue speaking. Without Greg there to reassure him, speaking to Paul was more difficult. "I was bad...I panicked and I was hurting and I told him that I am only staying alive so that I can help him and Sherlock. It...It hurt him and I think he wanted to let me go. But I said I would stay to help Sherlock and then we stayed outside for a long time."

Greg shifted under John, dragging in a deep breath and blindly reaching for him. The sedatives from earlier were obviously keeping him down. Paul's brows knit in confusion. "John...what do you mean when you say Greg wanted to let you go. You are not a captive here, what do you mean?"

Greg's fingers curled in John's clothes and he gave a pathetic sound, akin to a whimper, at John's distress.

"No, he..." John hushed Greg and moved once more so he was curled up beside him, cradling him to his chest as Greg always did for him. "He was going to help me leave. As in with morphine or something. I wanted to, I really did, but I've got to help Sherlock, don't I?"

Paul angled his chin up for a moment to absorb the shock of that. Things had gotten far more out of
hand than he'd ever considered. For Greg Lestrade to entertain killing a man, even for mercy, meant that things would have to be different than they had been. Greg was obviously deeply overwhelmed with the role he was assigned.

"John," he said quietly at length, studying him carefully. He shifted in his chair, debating which tactic to try. "Why do you say you were 'bad,' when you panicked? That's an interesting choice of word."

"Because I wasn't good," John snapped as though it were obvious, then shrank away. His aggression still lingered in small amounts, but was rapidly giving away to fear now that he no longer felt that Greg was in danger.

"I did this. This is my fault. I'm supposed to be helping him and I didn't. I...I deserve to be punished."

John’s breath caught terribly and tears dropped down on to Greg’s shirt. John curled in on himself and rounded his back. In this position his diaphragm was smaller and the floating ribs more supported, though he didn't tuck his arms in as they were wrapped around Greg.

Paul leaned back, watching him closely. "Oh. I see. Well then, can you tell me what makes you 'good,' John. I don't understand the rules you are trying to follow. Perhaps if you could explain them to me, I'd be able to understand. I want to understand, John."

Greg shifted under John, shivering suddenly and taking in several deep breaths, one after the other. Paul would have liked him to be on some sort of monitor, not entirely sure what was happening.

"Can you keep an eye on him while you tell me, I'm a little worried about Greg and I can't see him."

John tried to get Greg's attention with a few soft prompts and gentle nudges, but quickly turned his attention back to Paul. "I didn't do what I was supposed to do. Leave me alone. I'm not in the mood for this. I need Greg." His voice broke at the last sentence and his shoulders shook. "I want Greg." John began to cry again and held Greg's face just a few inches from his own. "Please, Greg, please. Please!" Desperation was starting to swallow him.

Greg dragged in another shaking breath, his hands fumbling forward with one successfully catching in John's shirt. "John," he managed, his eyes fluttering and managing to open, bloodshot and glassy, before swiftly falling closed again. He tightened his grip in John's shirt. "righ here, 'righ here, John," he slurred.

John almost broke down in tears at the sound of Greg's voice. "Alright, alright. You can sleep. I'm sorry. I didn't know. I didn't know. Just sleep. I'm sorry." He kissed Greg's cheek and settled next to him with the covers drawn tightly around their shoulders.

"Could you leave us alone?" John asked Paul in a pleading voice. "I don't like it when you are here. I want it to just be Greg."

Paul hesitated. Greg was drugged and John was unstable, but he'd never been hostile toward Greg, and Greg was no in any condition to dispatch John. "Alright, John, I'll leave the room. I'll have to
come check on him every now and again, but I'll knock to let you know it's me, and I won't talk to you unless I have to." He stood up, walking over, "If you are going to sleep, please let me hook you back up. You can detach your lines when you wake up if you want."

"No. Leave." John left no room for arguing in his voice and pulled the covers up to his chin. "Just go away. I'm done."

Without looking back at Paul, though John was listening to his footfalls intently, John held Greg to him and attempted to sleep. He began to weep silently out of stress and fear of what could have happened. In his mind, he had narrowly escaped.

Paul frowned and backed away, leaving the room after a moment. He moved down the hall and settled in at a work station with his notes.

Greg was down hard for nearly an hour and a half before he physically jumped, his whole body jerking hard as he snapped out of a dream. His grip on John suddenly tightened as his eyes shot open. He stared at John, assuring himself he was right there, before slowly closing his eyes, breathing harshly.

John stayed in a restful state, though he didn't quite sleep. He didn't trust the world with his Greg, and thus stayed as awake as he could. When Greg jerked he was there, stroking his fingers back through his hair and speaking softly. "Its alright, I'm here. You're alright. Everything is fine."

Greg listened to John, his expression falling for a moment before he opened his eyes again. He stared at John, his breathing slowing as he nearly dropped back off to sleep. His grip on John eased, hugging him closer without clutching at him. Just before he dropped off, he mumbled roughly, "How'm I gonna make it w-out you?"

He tipped his forehead to the side of John's head and was soon down hard again, breathing steadily, limp and wrapped around John.

John thought harder than he should about the question. If Greg needed him the same way he needed Greg, then there would be no way he could simply live on. John wondered if it was cruel to ask of him, if they should just go together and be done with it. But then, of course, Sherlock would have to come to. It could be a group suicide. They could all drink the Kool Aid and be done with this incessant pain.

John dropped off to sleep some time later out of pure exhaustion and remained curled up in Greg's arms. From the outside, if John were to appear healthy, they might appear to have normal lives in these few hours of peace.

Greg managed to sleep the remainder of the night without startling awake. The light was orange behind his eyelids as he slowly came back to himself, wrapped under tight blankets that smelled of John. His head ached, but it was not the blinding agony of the previous day. He inhaled deeply and the held his breath, his heart suddenly racing as he wondered what he would find. Before he could even make himself look, his eyes were watering, tears sliding down the sides of his face. He'd dreamt he'd done it, pushed morphine for John to end his horror, end his suffering. In that moment, he could not recall the validity of the memory.

"J-John?" he breathed, too afraid to force himself to look.

John shifted and his arms curled around Greg just a bit tighter. Waking up after a dreamless sleep was different for John this time. He opened his eyes and saw Greg, felt him, smelled him, and was
reminded that Greg was still very much alive and well. He was ignorant of Greg's pain and for a small moment allowed himself to think that doing this, waking up like this, wouldn't be that bad to continue on with.

The events of the previous two days came back to him slowly, though, and he decided he needed to help Greg. "I'm here," he said softly, and kissed the top of his head. "Are you alright?"

Greg instantly relaxed, shifting so that he could move out from under the blankets. He looked over John, gently smiling as he reached out and touched his face. "I'm okay," he said quietly, drinking in John's face as though he'd never see it again. His heart pounded, but otherwise he was calm. He looked around the room and then rest his head on the pillow, letting his eyes close as he calmed down.

"I'm glad you're here," he whispered, blindly reaching out and gently touching John's face.

"I had a bad day yesterday," John muttered and buried his face in Greg's chest, as was his custom. It seemed so normal, to just admit to having a poor day and need comfort. "Really bad. I almost hurt people. I would have killed them. They were going to hurt you and I would have torn them apart if they got too close. I think that might have been wrong."

Greg wrapped his arms around John, confused at his words. "Yesterday? We were at your tree yesterday..." his head ached and he closed his eyes, trying to remember exactly what happened. They'd gone out to the tree...John had been very, deeply upset and so he'd taken them to the tree...

_Greg! Kill me please!_

He sucked in a sharp breath, pushing John back suddenly so that he could properly look at him. "Are you...what...." he swallowed down the rolling nausea, confused and shaken. "What happened?" He pulled John back tight to his chest, holding him tight.

"You got sick and then fell over and I called for help but they attacked us and tried to take you away from me." It was, as far as John knew, exactly what had happened. "And then Paul was here and you weren't moving and the doctors hurt you so I protected you but I let one help you because you were hurting and Paul said I was scaring him but I wanted to kill him so I didn't care much about what he was saying." John spoke in a rush with his words muffled by Greg's shirt. "It was awful." Greg's brow knit, trying to put any of that to what he remembered. He ran a shaking hand through John's hair, noticing that he had a drip line attached to himself. "I'm sorry," he whispered, "I don't know what happened. Are you alright?"

John shook his head. "I'm not alright at all." He had been strong because he needed to, because Greg wasn't responding and the doctors were attacking him. He had stood proud and defended Greg, even though most of it was a blurr. "I'm tired and confused and I didn't like any of that. I scared the doctors away and made Paul leave. I would have stabbed him if I got ahold of that needle."

Greg began to sweat as John spoke, but he carried on running his trembling fingers through John's hair. He pinched his eyes closed as the sting of tears warned him of their threat. He tightly controlled his breathing, nodding against the top of John's head. Everything he was doing was hurting John. Every single thing. Acting, not acting, speaking, not speaking, being there, leaving, none of it mattered. All that happened at the end was more pain and fear for John. That was it.

"I...I'm sorry," Greg breathed again, wishing he could do more than just carry on being an idiot. "I..."

he shook his head, desperately trying to keep a grip on himself.

"I've said you don't have to be sorry. I won. I beat them and the doctors left. I'm so sore though, and tired. I don't like it when you're not moving. I like it when we sleep, but I don't like it when you're in
pain. Do you remember being in pain? You screamed and I made the person who tried to hurt you leave." John's voice was disconnected, as if recounting a dream he had or a movie he had seen, not telling an actual event in his life.

"John," Greg whispered in an unsteady voice, "the doctors here do not hurt us. They are good here, not bad. I...I didn't mean to leave you like that, I was...we went to the tree, I was trying to help. No one here would hurt us, John, or I'd have taken you away from here a long time ago."

John's face clouded and he held tightly to Greg, though the threat of separating them had long past. "You screamed. They touched you and you screamed, so I made them stop. Paul gave you morphine. You were okay after that, but you were shaking. Paul helped me evaluate you, but you were hurting in here," he tapped Greg's temple and tangled their legs together again. "And I was worried it was because of me."

Greg’s head throbbed and his heart screamed at him each time it contracted, forcing blood through his body. He held John and tried to think, but he could not. "I don't...John they wouldn't...I promise none of them would hurt us. Paul is safe, all the doctors here are safe. Don't you trust that I would take you from here if it wasn't safe?"

Shame suddenly welled up inside him and John seemed to shrink in size. "I'm sorry. I won't do it again. I won't scare them anymore." He whimpered and looked up at Greg with large, sad eyes, much like a chastised child. "I was...I was just trying to protect you. I'll not be scared of them anymore. I'm sorry. I'll not do it again."

Greg looked down at John and bit down on the inside of his lip, reaching with shaking fingers to carefully cradle each side of John's face, tipping their foreheads together. He closed his eyes as he slid his thumbs along John's cheeks. "Thank you for protecting me, John. I'm sure that was very frightening for you, and I really...I don't know how to thank you for helping me. I'm not cross with you. It's okay that you were scared. It's okay that you scared them, okay? I love you, I'm sorry it was a hard day."

This was comfortable to John. He remarked that this was about as good as his life could get, staying in bed with someone who protected him speaking of things that didn't hurt him. "Alright. Thank you."

John was still for another twenty minutes of uneasy silence, then spoke abruptly. "You asked me how you were going to manage without me once I was gone. I don't think you will. You lied when you said you would stay to look after Sherlock." It was an abrupt change in subject, but the subject had drilled a hole into John's mind and barbed deep.

Greg went very still before slowly letting his hands fall away from John's face, easing back enough to look at him. His eyes watered as he gave John a slow, sad smile, looking John in the eye for a split second before looking away. "John...you're the only person alive who would give a damn if I was here or not. Sherlock...he loves you, not me. He wouldn't care for a moment if I was with him. It's you that he...you should have seen how he was while you were too scared to see him. Oh, god, John...he was...just falling apart. I...I didn't want you to worry about me."

He closed his eyes then, forcing a tear without meaning to. He couldn't stop doing this to John no matter what he tried. "I-" he sucked in a sharp breath as his head throbbed, "I just keep hurting you. I...no matter what I do..."

John's expression drew clouded and gloomy. His Greg, his _perfect_ and _infallible_ Greg could not be
hurting him. It was always something else that was hurting him. "No, no, I've said it...I've told you that you aren't hurting me and that I love you."

John was utterly exhausted with Greg's constant apologies and the way he obviously didn't see how perfect and wonderful he was and how much John needed him. He leaned forward to close the few inches between them and brushed his lips softly against Greg's. He'd said it in every other way. "You don't hurt me. You're the one who helps me."

Greg blinked at him, taken aback by the action. He exhaled a trembling breath and pulled John to his chest, tucking his face down against the side of John's head. He took a few minutes to linger there, soaking in the ability to do so. Weeks ago he was sure he'd lost John to him forever. This was a gift, one he'd not overlook.

"Okay," he whispered, though the facts spoke against everything John was saying. He constantly turned John into a trembling, screaming pile of nerves. It was likely a matter of minutes before he managed it again. "What can I do to help you, John? Can I do anything to make you feel better?"

"Can we talk about something that isn't happening in these walls? Something that normal people talk about? I don't even care what. Just something that doesn't involve torture, rape, death, illness, doctors, water, food, or Paul." He turned over on his back so he could watch Greg speak, which he found comforting regardless of what they spoke of.

Greg started off on one of their stories, which he told vibrantly and happily.

John's brow knit in an almost comical way at mention of the chip and pin."It's that voice! Its one thing for me to be having troubles with the machine, but then that robot lady has to go announce it to the entire store. It's humiliating."

Greg smiled at him, resting his head back down on the pillow as stars cracked along the edges of his vision. "Set those damned things for the hard of hearing, I think. It's rubbish." He ran his fingers through his own hair, pressing the pad of his thumb in around his temple in an effort to soothe the pulsing in his head. John's list had rattled him and he'd very much hoped it was simply a laundry list of crime and not all things that he'd personally experienced.

"I got a text from Mrs. Hudson the other day. She wanted me to assure you that she'd cleaned out the fridge for whenever you get back home. Stocked up on your favorite tea as well. It's a small thing, but she tries. Bless that woman, she loves the pair of you."

John smiled and rolled over again so he was on Greg's chest. He enjoyed finding new, comfortable ways to stay, especially now that the tubes sticking out of him weren't attached to anything. "I loved her. She was a nice housekeeper, though she'd deny being one. I miss her, I think."

John proceeded to ramble on about mostly meaningless things, about movies he had seen before he was abducted and events that had been current at the time. It was difficult, but he was slowly remembering having a life that wasn't torment or hospitals.

Greg closed his eyes, trying to listen to John and take comfort in his words. There was little to be had though, as John was constantly in past tense and he still had to address water, for god's sake. Sherlock was...he had no idea. He knew Sherlock was very unwell, that he'd been in screaming agony, both mental and physical, and that his only hope was a semi-lucid John, at the very least. That was Greg's responsibility, and he had no idea how to managing, having failed so terribly already. He was incapable of seeing the benchmark this was, with John willingly and happily recalling bits of his life from before.
His head ached terribly and his stomach clenched up tight, but he kept his focus to John and his words, commenting from time to time on movies he’d particularly enjoyed or, much to his surprise, a book that both he and John had carved out time to read. All the while he lay there, pale and slightly sweating, a faint tremor through his entire body. His smile for John was easy though, easy and heartfelt, and he was glad he could give it.

John made inane but pleasant conversation with Greg for a few hours before silence took over. It wasn't an uncomfortable silence, but the silence of two people who have grown content and secure with each other's presence and felt no need to speak.

"I could do this, Greg." John muttered while curled up against him. "I could do this. Not the talking with Paul, or the water, or all the doctors, but I could do this for a while. I don't need to leave this just yet."

Greg chewed the inside of his cheek as he shifted to better look at John. The 'water' was a vital and unavoidable part of this, as were the doctors and Paul. If only he could just give John this and nothing else, he would, oh how he would.

"I'm glad it makes you...I'm glad it's good...John. I'm glad it's good." He closed his eyes and tried to assure himself with that, tried to tell himself that it was promising that John felt this way. "I- that makes me happy."

John looked up in surprise and genuine delight shone in his eyes for the first time since he got back. "I thought you stopped being happy when you started taking care of me. I'm glad. I want you to be happy. Thank you." John nestled back down, contented now despite the trials of the past few days.

Overwhelming relief rushed through Greg’s body, letting him relax and sink down into the bedding, the tension bleeding out of him almost completely as he wrapped his arms around John and allowed himself the chance to properly breathe. He closed his eyes as he floated in the rare bliss of the moment. He’d not hurt him. It seemed utterly impossible, but he’d not hurt John or sent him into a panic. His fingers lazily traced over John's back in the early afternoon sunlight and he just allowed time to tick by slow and easy. "You...being with you makes me happy, John. Even when it's not easy, it makes me happy."

John gave Greg a light squeeze and marveled at how wonderful it felt to succeed and be happy. It was so foreign to his pain ridden mind that it was nearly euphoric, and John was left with an open mouthed grin and eyes squinted from happiness. "Thats good. I'm glad. That is a good thing, and I'll be happy about it. I’m happy. Happy." John rolled the word around in his mouth as if trying to decide if such an alien word could be used to describe him. "Yes, that makes me happy."

Greg's happiness fed John's, and the two spiraled upwards on each other's energy. "That," he whispered, his voice weighed with emotion, eyes overly bright as he gave John an honest smile, that reflected even in his eyes, "god, John, that's the most wonderful- that makes me so- Jesus, so happy to hear. I- you're beautiful, you know that? Just- Christ I'm glad to see you smile."

"I wouldn't say beautiful," John said and looked down, but his smile held. "I love it when you're happy."

Tears sprang to John's eyes, but not ones of sadness. It felt so overwhelmingly good not to feel bad, and John hadn't thought he would ever get to feel it again. He thought that Moriarty had somehow
reached inside him and stripped him of it, but here he was, smiling and hugging someone despite it all. John laughed in his old, cheerful way that tilted his head back and caused happy wrinkles to form around his eyes.

Greg reached down with warming hands and cupped John's face, leaning in and pressing a kiss to the wrinkled corner of his eye before leaning back, beaming at him. "Oh, I've missed that sound. You've a wonderful laugh, John Watson." He could hardly believe what he was hearing, what he was seeing. It was so far from his world days ago. John...he'd thought he'd been lost. And here he was, nearly like a lifeline. Don't quit. I'm here. I'm still in here. Greg had so very desperately needed some sort of confirmation that the pain he was subjecting John to was worth it. He breathed in deep, savoring the ability to do so without stress binding up his ribs. "Have to get a joke book or a banana peal, see if I can't make you do that more often."

John laughed and hummed at the kiss. The gesture was sweet, happy and full of love, exactly what he needed to recover from the meanness, depression and hatred he had faced with Moriarty. John laughed because he was happy, because he hasn't done so in ages, and because it made Greg happy. "I remember we used to laugh so hard we'd fall off our chairs at the pub. You were always a good one to have around for a fun time." The corners of John's lips were pulled up and his mouth was open, clearly enjoying Greg's happiness as much as he was his own. "If I stay for a while, would you stay with me like this? Could we be happy?"

"This is all I've wanted, just this, John, this. Of course we'd be happy, you and I are happy all the time together, why would we stop? Yes, John, this is what I had always had in mind for you. You can get me laughing without even trying most of the time. I love it." He rumpled John's hair for a moment before stretching and adjusting more comfortably. "God, John, yeah this. This is...if I never had another thing in the world besides this, I'd be chuffed." He squeezed John to him once more, incredulous at the turn of events.

John wondered if Sherlock would ever be happy with them, but remembered that even in the best of times Sherlock hadn't wanted to go to pubs with him and Greg. Maybe he would like to laugh, though. "I didn't know," John admitted and propped himself up on his elbows so he could watch Greg. He had believed that the man was simply prolonging his suffering to help Sherlock by keeping him alive, or that he supply didn't want to lose him. John had never imagined would be laughing again. "This is good. We should stay like this. I want this forever."

Greg closed his eyes and pulled John to him, wrapping him up close and tipping his head down to John's. After a few minutes he dared to speak, not wanting to endanger the moment, but John had to understand. "This...this is life, John. Not...not what you've been feeling for the last...not all that fear and pain. And this is just the beginning, just a small part of happy. There is so, so much more happy out there, John. So much more, and I want all of it for you."

Chapter End Notes

I thought you guys could use some happy before the next three chapters go up. Believe me, you'll need it.
Greg cleared his throat, trying to get his head around the fact that John believed he'd just wanted him to suffer endlessly. That wasn't John's fault, it wasn't. He wasn't capable of thinking properly, and Greg could not fault him. "John, to get there though, to go home with me and put this behind you, we've got to work on water and food. We have to, there is no way around it. I will do everything I can to help you, but it has to happen. You can't carry on like this."

John listened to Greg with a sinking heart. "But this is good!" John exclaimed, and nuzzled down onto Greg's chest. "This is something I can do. I want this. Can't this be enough?" The mention of food and water, which had brought him torture and suffering for months on end, threatened to set him on edge again.

"I'm not always going to be happy, though. I'm going to be sad again, and I'll not remember being happy. I'll think I can't ever be happy." Fear of pain, suffering and fear itself was crawling back to him. "Why do I need to do the water? Why can't I just keep my tubes? They don't hurt me like the water does. Did."

Greg ignored the question and pushed John back enough so that he could see him. "Do you remember the ear hat Sherlock was photographed in?" He asked as he dug out his mobile and set it quietly to the side where it would record their conversation. He tried to again divert the subject away from food and water, carrying on over how much glee John had when Sherlock grumbled his way about London with the 'Sherlock Hat.'

Greg walked John through the memory of it, through that night when he and John had a few pints and incredible laughter, where John had made a pass at a bird and she'd come to sit and joke with them for long hours. It had been a good night, full of jokes easy enough to tell John again. His entire goal was to get him happy, get him laughing. He wanted to catch, in John's own voice, his thoughts on 'happy.'

John remembered the deerstalker quite clearly, and the irate face Sherlock had made just as easily. "He hated that thing. Called it a 'death Frisbee'. I don't think it was that bad, though it wasn't his usual style."

John laughed at the stories, occasionally throwing in details he remembered or recounting his own reactions to Greg's flirting. "If you hadn't had a pint too many you would have had a chance with her." They had never been competitive about picking up women, as it was more of a fun way to spend the night and had always been in good humor. He chatted away, the conversation inane and never very intellectual, but proving to be exactly what John needed.

Greg accidentally stumbled on another of their stories. This was a bit more gallows humor, so he treaded lightly. He and John had come to Molly's aid once. She'd a very...large body in her morgue who'd managed to slide off the table. He and John had just arrived to collect a file for Sherlock when
they heard the poor woman squeak and then the crash. They'd dashed in, expecting something terrible, only to find her in collapsed laughter, begging their help before her superiors discovered her rare mistake. It had taken the three of them, and hilarious suggestions from John involving makeshift levers and pulleys, and remarkably a Harry Potter joke or two, before they'd managed to get the body back where it was supposed to be. Even just retelling the story had Greg in tears, he was laughing so hard.

John threw his head back and laughed, the sound as gleeful as it had been before he left. "Well it's hard to get a good grip on a man whose waistline is bigger than our arms! I'm just surprised we didn't think of bringing the gurney in sooner. Felt bad rolling the poor bastard on his face, but honestly, there's a point where the chips just can't be worth it." John was speaking like his old self, brought back to that state by the memories of what he had once been. "God, I'm glad I'm not obese." He looked at his tiny wrists and for once wasn't repulsed. They would be good for choking, he noted. The small wrist would cut into the windpipe or pinch the carotid quite easily. At least some things could be positive.

"Too right there, John, too right," Greg added as he wiped a tear away, still picturing John and Molly wrestling with all that girth. "Poor Molls, I don't think I've ever seen her so worried. Not like her to slip up in the lab, cor, what a sight." The laughter slowly faded down and Greg gave him a warm, easy smile. It helped to see John again, even if the flashes were only seconds at a time. Anything outside of the infantile way he spoke and reasoned in his trauma, anything to assure Greg that John, as he used to be, was still in there.

He ended the recording on the sound of John still laughing and carefully sat himself up. He and John were sitting with their legs crossed, knee to knee. "Look at me, John," he said warmly, riding on the coat tails of the mirth he was surely about to stamp out. "Do you trust me?"

John's stomach was starting to ache from laughter and he relished the light headed feeling of mirth. When Greg spoke, John almost scoffed. "Course I trust you. You're my Greg. I love you." John put his hand on Greg's knee and noted that their position was so fantastically normal, with neither crying or being held, neither screaming or being sedated. "What is it?"

Greg looked up at him, keeping the smile, praying to every god man had ever invented that John would hear him. "I love you too, John. I need you to hear me, okay? Please hear me. I would never ask you to do anything that would get you hurt. Do you believe that?"

The question made John nervous, as it was generally what came before something terrifying. "Greg, I trust you. I really do. But if something scares me I can't just stop being afraid. If there was a knife, I'd panic even if you were the one holding it. I don't try to be afraid. It just happens. It's not that I don't trust you."

Greg reached forward and took John's hands in his, letting one go to turn the recorder on his phone back on, just so they had this. "John, listen to me, we need to be clear on this. Remember what happens when we are not clear?" He took a moment with a wide grin to call up a night they'd both been hitting on the same twin, each lighter in the wallet, neither having a chance, laughing their arses off when they'd realized what they'd done. He let the laughter fade before talking again. "I don't mind that you get scared, mate, I don't. Please hear that. You can't help getting scared, and that's not bad. It's okay. I just...I need to know, that you know, that I'd never ask you to do something that would get you hurt. Do you know that?"

John had people in his life who he had hated. When he was younger it was the rugby coach who constantly yelled at him to do better no matter how hard he tried or how exhausted he was. John had hated that man, and always wondered why he was picked on, but eventually John became captain of
the team and he realized he wasn't hated, but a favorite. His superiors in the army had been the same, always pushing him, making him become the best he could possibly be. It was only looking back could he see that it was for his own improvement. "You make me do things that hurt, but they aren't supposed to hurt, and eventually the hurting goes away..." The repetitive use of the word 'hurt' was becoming noticeable, and John tried again. "You push me to do things that scare me, things that don't scare normal people, and eventually I stop being afraid." The self aware sentence was incredibly difficult to construct and John's face hardened in concentration.

Greg nodded and gave John a moment with his thoughts, reaching out and taking his hand. He slowly began to work his thumb into some of the better healed muscle, lightly pressing in soft, rhythmic circles in the meat of his palm in an effort to soothe, gently tending to the scar tissue there without hurting him. Eventually he spoke, "I'd really like to have another pint with my best mate sometime in future, you know? It's not...not to see what I can get you to do...it's to get the fear out of the way so you can have the things back that make you happy."

With a slight flinch, John turned his head away. Most of Greg and John's time together, if not at crime scenes, was spent over a pint in a happy atmosphere with stories and jokes and laughter. The idea of having a pint with him again wasn't terrifying, but when he imagined bringing the glass to his lips and actually drinking it he shuddered. John grew angry then, and curled his hands into fists. Moriarty had even managed to take his nights out with Greg away. "I want to. I really want to. But I can't."

Greg watched as the hand he was working balled up in anger. "You can. Maybe not right now, but there was a time you could not sleep, a time you could not speak. You started with Sherlock's tapping, Morse code between you both. We are already there, yeah? The ice, that's the tapping. Maybe we try with a straw, and a container that doesn't let you see the liquid? We move on slow, yeah? But you've gotten stuck at the tapping, stuck at the ice. If I love you, and you love me, and you trust me. Then let me...let me help you through it?"

John looked like he might be ready to run. His weight shifted and he was tempted to revert back into his protected, inarticulate state. This self awareness was far too painful. Nosce te ipsum. A sudden thought came to him just before he retreated inward and John inhaled sharply. "I had fun with talking today."

The small sentence held much meaning for him. John was aware that if he went a few months back and told himself that he would enjoy talking someday, he wouldn't have been believed. When simply tapping had been terrifying, it was difficult to see that talking might be fun. In a moment of clarity, John wondered if he would ever wish to go back to his current self and assure him that drinking wasn't bad.

John began to cry, sniffling and whimpering with his hands over his face. It had been so utterly terrible overcoming his fear of speech, and water was clearly worse. If he accepted the need to recover, there would be unavoidable agony ahead of him. "M-Maybe we're m-missing a step," John offered and felt as if he were willingly walking up to a whipping block. "Water near my face is the w-worst. It hurts the m-most. Could we just...I don't know...maybe I could try washing my hands or something before I actually get water near my face?"

Greg nodded swiftly, crushed to have pulled John to tears, though he was stunned with John's continued grip on himself. "Okay, John, that's fine. Absolutely, any way you want to start doing this, just so long as we start, yeah? Whatever you want to try, that's how we will do it. That's...it's okay, John. I'm with you. I'm here. You don't have to be alone, okay? I'm so sorry this hurts, but I...I will do anything I can to help."
He reached out and gently took John's hands from his face, holding them in his own. "You're the bravest man I know, John."

John nodded and his eyes slid shut. "I don't think ice is tapping. I think ice is writing. Something like...like touching water or just being near it would be tapping. Actually..." He gestured vaguely to his mouth and made a pained face. "We can just put a bottle somewhere or I can hold it or something that doesn't put it near my face." John was entirely unused to taking command of his own rehabilitation, and it gave him a terrible sense of responsibility, as the discomfort would be self inflicted.

Greg cleared his throat and nodded, whispering softly. "Okay, John, that's a good idea. I've...I've got a few bottles on hand, always do, I've had to try and keep myself hydrated and I didn't want to scare you. I can put one there at the foot of the bed and you can decide what you want to do with it?"

"Let's start with water that isn't on my face." John closed his eyes and his shoulders sagged. Taking command of his recovery, while empowering, was psychologically exhausting. He flopped over on his side and pulled Greg down with him. "M tired."

Greg nodded, reaching down into his bag and fishing out a bottle of water. He put it at the end of John's bed and then slid his fingers through John's hair. "I know you are, I'm sure this is a lot of work. You're...it's been so good to laugh with you. I've missed laughing with you."

John’s focus was not on Greg, though. He stared at the bottle. It didn't appear too threatening, but he sat up a bit anyway and tucked his chin down. His lips were in a thin line and one hand crept up to cover his nose and mouth. "Yeah...been good to laugh," he remarked but kept his eyes on the bottle.

Greg carried on running his fingers through John's hair. He watched John consider the water, glad he'd not started screaming again. "Maybe...maybe if you try to think back to good things about water? From before? I...I won't list off suggestions, I don't want to overwhelm you. Just...might help." He shrugged, feeling useless and out of his depth.

"I can't," John breathed and closed his eyes. It was too much for one day, and he couldn't force his mind back any further. "I'm tired. Tomorrow, alright. Tomorrow. I'll think about good things tomorrow."

Greg nodded and slipped the bottle of water back into the bag. There was a gentle knock at the door, a muffled, "It's Paul," from the other side before it pushed open. Paul stood there, stepping in just enough to close the door behind himself, looking over Greg and John. He cleared his throat and spoke softly. "Sorry to disturb. There are a few medical matters to attend to, and I'm sure Greg could use a trip to the lav."

John whimpered as he always did when Greg had to leave. "I don't like him," John whispered to Greg, though it was still quite audible. "What medical matters?" He demanded in a louder voice, more confident than he had sounded in months.

"Well," Paul said gently, not moving deeper into the room yet. "You didn't want to hook your lines back up last night, and it's been twelve hours. Greg needs to be looked at and his fluids are hanging empty. How are you doing today, Greg?" He asked softly, looking him over. Greg swallowed and nodded, "Better, yeah, better. I don't ah, don't remember yesterday and my head aches, but...better I think."

He looked over to John and touched his shoulder. "I do need at the lav, but I won't leave the room, I'll use the one in here okay?"
John was a bit more secure in his ability to handle himself now after his bout of violence, and got to his feet off the edge of the bed. "Alright. You go. I'll hook myself back up, and Paul can attach a new bag for you. You probably need food too." John tried his best to sound rational and in control, despite his mental and physical exhaustion.

Paul kept right at the door and watched as Greg got out of the bed, carefully unhooking himself. Greg nearly fell as he got to his feet, suddenly dizzy and weak in the knees. He took a few faltering steps and then crashed down hard on his knees. Paul moved swiftly, getting to his side and putting one hand on his shoulders to steady him, the other he used to press against Greg's pulse.

Greg leaned into Paul's leg and closed his eyes as the room spun. "Was feeling okay...I...I was feeling okay."

Paul nodded and slid an arm under his shoulders. "Come on up, let's go, to the lav. Can you hold your feet?"

He helped Greg to the small, attached room and closed the door, giving the man his privacy.

John stood nervously by, drawing in a sharp breath when Paul touched Greg. They were friends, and he reminded himself of the fact, but it still bothered him. John sat down on the floor beside the lav and waited for Greg. "You're his friend," he said to Paul. "You're not my friend, though. You help him, so I have to like you a little, but I don't have to trust you."

"Nor do you have to like me, John, though I am sorry you don't." Paul kept an ear for Greg, looking to John and crouching out of arm's reach. "He isn't well," he whispered low, nodding to the lav, "He needs medical attention, John. You know that, somewhere deep down. You're a doctor. He isn't well."

There was a sudden, uncomfortable retching sound from the lav where Greg was, followed soon by running water and the sound of teeth being brushed. Paul looked to John and shook his head. "He's run himself down, I think."

John looked at the bathroom door and his heart gave a painful twinge. He loved Greg fiercely, and wished him to be free of pain. "He hasn't been eating enough, or drinking enough, he hasn't been physically active except carrying me, and he's been staying up to make sure I don't have nightmares. He's hurting himself to help me. He needs rest."

John was greatly dismayed when faced with the knowledge that he was, even if unintentionally and indirectly, hurting Greg. "Could you ask him to take care of himself? It worries me."

Paul nodded, keeping his focus on John. "I have done. He doesn't...it's not that he isn't willing to care for himself, he just needs to eat and drink and those things are scary to you, so he hadn't been doing so enough. It worries me too, John. It's not your fault though, okay? Greg is a grown man, he knows how to take care of himself. We'll get him set right."

A few moments later, Greg opened the door. His face was clean and he'd shaved, though he looked far too pale and unsteady. His hands shook and he wasn't to his full height, "I...I need to sit down," he whispered as Paul got to his feet, reaching out for him. "Let's get you on your back, Greg, that's where you belong right now."

John took Greg's arm and helped him to his bed. "You've got to eat and drink," he observed and sat down next to the weakened man. "I'm doing fine right now, and I'll be alright if you have things that scare me." John reached out and brushed his fingers lightly over Greg's cheek, the color of which was far too pale. "If you get better then we can start working on touching water."
Paul's brows rose in surprise, though he said nothing of it. He watched as Greg nodded to John without speaking, letting his eyes fall closed and taking a few slow, deep breaths. "I was doing better," he repeated, making Paul move. "Okay, John, you hook yourself back up and I'm going to bring a doctor in here, okay? Greg needs a little help."

"I'll not be hooked up while there are doctors in here," John responded in the same unwavering voice that he had just recently adopted. "Call them in, and I'll hook up after. I'll be fine without fluids for a little while longer. I can manage."

Greg wrapped his hand around John's waist and pulled him close, tucking his forehead against John's hip. "It's okay, John. It is. They are safe, I promise they are safe."

Paul nodded to John and moved to the door, calling a doctor in to come take a look at Greg. Paul kept his eyes on John, watchful to ensure John did not pose a threat to him.

John bristled when the doctor came in. While Greg was not his protection, he was quickly becoming like a chained dog. Typically, when an animal is tied, they become hyper aggressive to compensate for the lack of flight in the fight/flight option tree. "I know they're safe. I just don't trust them."

The doctor got to work, looking Greg over swiftly and hanging a new bag of fluids for him. Greg kept on his back, trying his best to soothe John. Paul moved forward to keep closer to John, "Relax, John," he said gently, right as Greg's mouth was pulled open so that the doctor could look at his throat, holding Greg's chin down with thumb and forefinger. "Open for me, show me your tongue," the doctor said softly as Greg shifted, not at all liking that. It made the base of his neck hurt to hold his jaw in such a way.

John practically growled at the doctor. He didn't see a pair of pliers, but the position still upset him. "Don't hurt him," John warned with a flicker of the former violence in his voice. He positioned himself back behind Greg, sitting on his heels and crouched low. "I'll kill you if you hurt him." He knew he wasn't supposed to hate these doctors, wasn't supposed to want them dead, but it was difficult not to despise the doctor when men with that occupation had become such a terror to him.

Greg reached back behind him, wrapping his hand around John's ankle. The doctor did not pay any attention to John, not sure how to go about handling him. Paul kept close watch as a long swab was cracked open. "Might make you gag," Greg was warned before the long swab was inserted into his mouth, swiping across the back of his throat. Greg gagged and turned his head sharply away, rolling to his side and coughing as the doctor set things away in the tubes for testing.

Paul kept ready to intercept John if necessary. "John," he warned, shaking his head, "slow down."

John's legs tensed underneath him and he almost lunged at the doctor. This position, with Greg on his back, the doctor standing over him, it was too much. It dragged back terrible memories, begging doctors to stop or begging them to let him die. "I said don't hurt him!" John wrapped one arm around Greg's neck under his head and held the other up, ready to snatch anything to be used as a weapon. His mind was muddled and confused, the logic of the day starting to bleed away and step down in favor of fear driven aggression.

Greg was shaking his head, bringing his hands up to help support himself as they wrapped around John's forearm. "John," he managed, using his feet to pedal back against the bed, helping him to more properly sit up.

John's breathing had become rabid, his eyes were wide and his heart rate soared in preparation for a fight. Slowly he put Greg back down and removed all contact except holding tightly to his wrist.

"Fine," he clipped, "But if anyone hurts him, I'll pull out their tendons." John crouched back and knelt behind Greg to allow the doctor to work, but kept direct and threatening eye contact with the man the entire time.

Greg turned his hand in John's grip, wrapping his fingers around John's wrist as well. "John," he called out, tugging at him, "John, please look at me, I'm okay. John." Paul kept close, deeply worried there'd be an issue here. The doctor looked up at John and froze.

Greg closed his eyes, still tugging at John. "Please," he whispered, trying to get a better grip on him, "John please, I need help." Stars were cracking along his vision and he was having a hard time keeping himself present.

Paul reached down and got a hold of Greg, easing him up and motioning for the doctor to come in closer again. Greg groaned from being moved, his belly upset, and he rolled to the side, sicking up abruptly again.

"Easy," the physician said quietly, putting his hand between Greg's shoulder blades. He waited for Greg to stop sicking up before pushing him down on his stomach to the bedding. Greg's hands were up near his face, one balled to a fist, pressed against this lips, the other gripping the bedding tight enough to blanch his knuckles. "I...I don't like this," he breathed to Paul, loathing how the room pitched and swayed. The doctor leaned over him, taking Greg gently by a hip and nudging him over so he wouldn't fall.

Greg's words seemed to physically hurt John and he tensed all over. He looked around the room for some sort of weapon. There was surely a sedative in the cart just outside the door, perhaps a scalpel, needles, maybe he could break something off the cart itself, like a metal handle or bar. John looked back to the doctor and his head tilted to the side. He decided to wait until Greg asked for help to attack. "Greg," he whispered, leaning down by his ear, "If he's hurting you, say something and I'll help."

Greg nodded, trying to speak to John as his stomach turned. The physician walked back to the door and slipped out for a moment, returning with a few syringes. Greg pressed his face down into the pillow as Paul spoke to John, "He's really dehydrated, John, it's making him nauseated, and it looks like he may have an infection. Doctor is going to give him a few jabs to help with all of it, okay?"

The physician was working at Greg's trousers, easing them down slightly to expose part of his hip. Greg moved, shifting up and seemingly away, though he was simply trying to loose the fabric for the man. He shook his head as his head spun and the doctor uncapped the needle.

John had to remind himself that needles weren't only used for torture. He thought of medical school, of doctors drawing up syringes of medicine to help smiling people, and of little old ladies sewing. Anything but what they had been used for on him.

"You'll be alright," John muttered and took Greg's hand. "Just say the word and I'll stop them."

The injections were given and Greg just lay on his stomach, breathing slow and deep. "'m okay, John," he whispered, squeezing his hand, growing drowsy. The doctor left them alone then, leaving the room. Paul spoke softly to John, "He's just going to be tired, I think. Can you hook yourself back up? I'll leave you and Greg alone, maybe try and get him some food later today."

Greg tried to tug John down next to him, holding tight to his hand.
John took Greg’s hand in return and gave it a quick squeeze. "Yeah, I can. Leave first, then I will." John sank back down into the bed beside Greg and kissed the top of his head. "You'll be alright. You'll be fine. It's going to be okay in a bit."

Paul moved silently out of the room and shut the door so John would be able to hear him. He pulled out his mobile and texted Mycroft.

*John's had an interesting few days, but he seems to be making some major headway. Greg is quite ill, unfortunately.*

Greg curled on his belly, watching John. "I'm sorry, John, I don't know what's wrong with me. I'm trying, I was better."

"You're dehydrated, recovering from what seemed to be some sort of psychological episode, you almost froze to death and might have an infection." John quickly summed up what was wrong with him and layed his head down next to Greg's. "You'll be alright."

Mycroft jumped. He had been waiting for the doctor's texts on pins and needles, but this news was just as unsettling as the uncertainty.

*I'm confident he is being cared to. What is the nature of his illness? Is he still capable of caring for John, or does he require assistance?*

Paul's reply was swift.

*Hypothermia, an infection of some nature, and he had bit of an episode. It has pushed John to...new behaviors. I am assisting at a distance, as it is now, he doesn't need any further help. How is Sherlock faring?*

Mycroft responded after just a moment.

*The risk of Sherlock's infection coming back while he is under is still at 1/1. What new behaviors has John adopted? Is it constructive to Sherlock's development?*

Mycroft generally preferred to call, but he was already on a video call that he couldn't put on hold. Paul hummed and read the text a few times, trying to decide how best to answer.

He has stopped cowering. He exhibited signs of his former military and medical skills. He is willing to work with water. All of these are major steps. Do you require any assistance? I am available to you should you want or need me.

Again Mycroft responded quickly.

*I do not require any assistance. You will be compensated for your time here and a room will be made if you decide to stay full time. The more of the old John you can bring back, the better.*

Mycroft sincerely hoped that John would be recognisable to Sherlock when he got back. Perhaps if the old John was at least somewhat present, Sherlock wouldn't be as hopeless as he had seemed before. Mycroft sent another text, this time to the doctor in charge of Sherlock's recovery.

*Update.*

Miller was presently attending Sherlock when his phone buzzed. He stepped back from Sherlock and regarded him carefully.
Six days is brushing up on the limit of what I want to expose him to. He is holding steady and his infection has not intensified. He has healed well from the surgery and will be ready next week, I believe, for his second wave. I am not going to administer another sedative tonight. Estimate he will regain consciousness in the next three hours.

Mycroft didn't respond. He ended his video conference and leaned back in his chair, hands folded on his lap. Sherlock's bruises had faded to a sickly green-yellow, but had lost the angry blues and purples. The cuts and burns were healing, but the corrective surgeries needed to fix the damage were still ongoing, and he was nowhere near out of the pain.

Mycroft ended up leaving his room and going to sit in the slightly stiff chair that had been put in Sherlock's room, though logically there was nothing he could do to help.

Miller kept to Sherlock's room as he had been doing the last week. He spoke to Mycroft quietly, listing off Sherlock's status. "He's fought the sedatives for the last three days, very nearly woke himself up last night. His white counts have remained at or below their original levels, so there is that to be going on with. His vitals have held without aid, and overall I've been pleased with his progress."

Mycroft watched Sherlock's expressionless face intently. "Thank you. I'll stay here with him. Three hours, you said?"

Another thing that pulled tension into Mycroft's mind was the fact that the man who had done this was still very much alive. He wasn't as good at psychological conditioning, which was clear, but he had proven his capability to be incredibly mentally scarring. Mycroft had half the world's eyes open to look for him, but it was returning without result.

Miller nodded, "Within the next three hours, as I've said, he's been fighting his sedatives so it may be much sooner than that."

Sherlock's fingers slowly began to twitch just after the two hour mark. His finger tapped against the side of his leg twice before going still for another fifteen minutes. His monitor blipped as he began to breathe against the respirator, first with a single breath per minute, slowly increasing.

He pinched his brows together as he began to surface, frowning and biting down hard on the tube between his teeth. His heart rate skyrocketed as his chest worked against the mechanical breaths he was being given. Miller moved over and disconnected the ventilator, though left the tube to see how well he'd manage his own breathing. "Sherlock, you're in hospital," it was the closest way to describe what was happening to a combative patient.

Sherlock tried lifting his hands long before he opened his eyes, already trying to pull at his lines, though his wrists were securely bound. His breathing was harsh and panicked through the tube, leg dragging along the bed as he tried to come up out of it.

Mycroft stood and put his hands on each of Sherlock's shoulders. "Mycroft is here," he said before Sherlock even opened his eyes. "It's Mycroft. Sherlock, you are in a facility of the utmost security. All the medical staff are my own." He didn't want to risk the traumatized man not understanding, as it was a possibility he wouldn't remember being rescued, as had happened several times before.

Mycroft spoke as he would to an adult with full reasoning capabilities, but he washed away any trace of harshness in his voice. "John Watson is safe, and you are safe. If you could take deep, slow breaths I would appreciate it."

Sherlock almost instantly settled, following instruction to the best of his ability. Miller nodded then,
moving to Sherlock's head and starting to take the secure fastenings off the tube in his mouth. "Sherlock, going to take the tube out. I need you to cough for me when you can. Deep breath in-" he waited for Sherlock to comply, deftly pulling the tube after a moment. Sherlock coughed and sputtered, dragging in deep lungfuls of air before finally opening his eyes and blinking them clear.

He looked over to Mycroft and stared at him for a long moment before trying to form words, failing miserably. He turned his focus to the rest of the room, assuring himself that he was indeed safe, that Moran was not there. Miller had his attention to the monitors, pleased to see him holding stable.

Mycroft was more than pleased that Sherlock was breathing, complying, and not panicking. The sheer relief of it made his knees weak and his eyes fluttered shut for a moment while he composed himself. "You have been under for six days for recovery. During that time you have healed nicely and John has been recovering as well. The area is safe, and I can untie your arms if you prove that you won't accidentally hurt yourself."

Mycroft hoped that by not coddling him completely and speaking rationally he could give Sherlock the impression that the situation was calm, stable, and controlled.

Sherlock swallowed hard and winced, closing his eyes and calmly raising his hands up in the air. He opened his eyes back up and looked to his brother. "If y-you would," he rasped, watching him before his eyes slid closed again. A single trapped tear rolled down the side of his face as he tried to pull in a few deep breaths.

Miller lingered closely, watching the pair of them with one eye to Sherlock's vitals. "He's doing well thus far," he said quietly.

Mycroft unclasped Sherlock's wrists slowly. He took the arm that hadn't been broken and gently placed it across Sherlock's chest, as John had always done. Remembering Greg's advice but fearing it would no longer help, Mycroft sat down beside Sherlock on the bed and tentatively put one arm around his shoulders.

"Do you need anything?"

Sherlock's voice was tight and wrecked, unrecognizable, too strained and raw as he tried to speak. "Water," he said first and foremost, followed swiftly with "Cape Town." He cut his eyes to his brother as he brought the less injured hand to his throat.

Mycroft gestured for one of the lesser doctors to bring in water, and poured a small amount into a brightly colored paper cup. "You're recovering nicely. I'm impressed. John's been worried sick about you, as always."

Sherlock drank greedily at the water until Miller stepped forward and eased it away. "Been days, you will make yourself sick. Go slow." Sherlock glared at the man and rolled his eyes to the ceiling before looking to his brother, "Has your hearing been affected," he croaked, shifting so that he could better hear him, "M-Moran is in Cape Town. I- he m-must be caught. Do not lie to me where J-John is concerned." His voice had faded to narrowly above a whisper, taxing him incredibly to speak.

"Cape Town?" Mycroft had dismissed it, and was still unsure of the man's information. "Why didn't you tell us this when you first arrived, and how do you know?" He gave Sherlock a scolding look, but the eye roll had raised his spirits more than Sherlock being polite ever could. "And John does worry about you. I am not lying."

"V-Van Ryn's b-brandy. He r-reeked of it. Only 'n Cape Town and h-he," Sherlock closed his eyes, dragging in another breath, working hard to explain himself. "W-Was unable t-to think," he said to
his brother of his delay, "s-so sorry to keep you waiting, b-brother I'll try and do b-better next time I'm u-under torture." He turned his face away as his eyes burned, ashamed of himself, humiliated with Mycroft's comment. "Had bills in h-high amounts in his pockets. M-months after. So...planned r-return." His explanation was breathy and hardly audible. He blinked down at his lap as pain slowly snaked around him, more muted than it had ever been.

"John would be r-relieved were I dead. P-please don't tell him I've w-woken, it will upset him."

Mycroft immediately regretted his harshness when Sherlock struggled to explain. "Alright, I believe you. Thank you. We'll have him dead by the end of the month." Mycroft wasn't sure if holding his brother would be effective now that the old Sherlock was seemingly awake inside the battered shell.

"You're doing brilliantly. I'm just as impatient as always. That's a brilliant deduction, Sherlock. You've done well." Mycroft wasn't sure if he had complimented Sherlock within the past ten years, but it seemed appropriate given the circumstances.

"John got up out of bed and tried to go get you when you last tried to end your life. It upset him horribly. He will be relieved to know that you are alive and well. He is still easily stressed and Greg is currently ill, so you are most likely going to communicate with him via text before you get to see him next. I'm told he is recovering nicely."

Sherlock stared at the monitor reading out his vitals, tracking his heart. His eyes cut to Miller and he scowled. "I was a-attempting to resist the sedative and s-still you gave it. I want you out, l-leave me alone." He was doing his best to mask his fear, asserting what he wanted harshly. Miller did not give ground.

Sherlock's shoulders drooped slightly and he closed his eyes. "I'll n-not be doing that to J-John. No doubt you've b-been keeping him here as a tool. He- no man should ever- h-he's suffered enough, I'll not add to it." He'd had time while under, despite patients normal inclination to not dream, walk through scene after endless scene, taking in what was being done to John, what had been done to himself. He had a whole other level of understanding at this point, having screamed himself deaf in his own mind for days on end.

"Had I heeded the c-counsel of my brother, that brilliant d-deduction would have been much sooner coming. I should have b-been able to give such pressing i-information." He stared at the hateful line tracking his heart, glaring at it in bitter anger, willing the line to still.

"If you could wait outside, that would be lovely," Mycroft requested of Miller and stepped between him and Sherlock. "Just for a bit. If we need you again, I'll call. Thank you for everything."

Mycroft glared at Sherlock for a moment. "No, now you're sounding like an idiot. John wants to help you. He always wants to help you. He was terribly worried when you were taken, and has made monumental progress since then. His current therapist, Greg's friend Paul, said that he was remembering his days as a soldier and doctor."

Mycroft took out his phone and sent a quick text to both Greg and Paul, hoping one of them would answer.

Sherlock is awake. If John could say something to him -censor it- and send it here, either a text, recording, or video, it might help. He is worried John will be upset he has woken.

Miller left them with a nod and gently closed the door behind him, leaving Sherlock to his brother.

"Stop it, M-Mycroft," Sherlock all but hissed. "Y-you have no idea wh-what they've done to him,
what they've m-made him associate with me. Smell is the s-strongest of the mental re-recall senses, and to him I em-embody unspeakable agony." His voice broke over the words at the end, cracking apart like brittle glass, his composure nearly crumbling. He had to look away sharply, raking pain down his back.

He closed his eyes as he tried to shift, swearing softly. "My s-scarring," he breathed as a tear slid down his cheek, "it's healing t-to tight." His motion was already limited, normal movements stretching horribly at skin stitching itself back together and locking into place.

"Then we can have the two of you bond again without smelling each other." Mycroft explained and watched his phone. "He was so very attached to you. He's getting over the idea of speaking with you. We just threw him in too soon. Remember the tapes? He couldn't watch them for more than a second at a time without panicking, and now he can see you in person with manageable stress levels."

Down the hall, Greg woke with the buzz of his mobile.

Greg read the text with blurry eyes and frowned. Carefully he shifted to better see John, blinking the sleep away. "Sherlock's awake," he managed, coughing to clear his throat. 'I think he might be sad. Do you want to send him a message? You don't have to, John."

John looked up to Greg and gave a small smile. "Good, I'm glad he's awake. I don't want him to be sad. I'll send him something." John took the phone and noticed for the first time that two of his fingers on the left side and one on the right were rather stiff and awkward. He typed the message slowly, his tongue sticking out of the corner of his mouth.

*Are you alright? I'm doing good. Greg is sick. Are you sad? I don't want you to be sad. Can I help you?*

Greg read the text and decided there really wasn't anything to sensor. He sent it along to Mycroft, hoping it would help.

"His being f-free of me is the greatest gift I'm capable of offering. Th-this was done to him because of his association w-with me. You yourself h-have taken the time to numerous remind how c-considerable of a fool I was to a-attach. He is..."he closed his eyes and stopped talking, taking a few measured, tight breaths to calm himself back down, desperately trying to throw his logic over his heart and shut the damned thing off. It hurt. When he carried on, sadness weighed his raw voice down to just above a whisper. "Greg m-makes him happy. I remember. They...h-he has no need of me any longer, Mycroft. Do n-not force it on him again. This...this is better f-for him."

He turned his face away as his eyes burned behind the lids, not wanting Mycroft to take a shot at him.

Mycroft read the text and decided it would be the right thing at the moment. He placed it in Sherlock's hand and sat back down in his chair, beginning to deal with his old brother again, and not the traumatized mess he had been before.

"Currently, you are the only reason he is deciding to live. I've got cameras in his room and I watch them occasionally. Its quite clear he intends on helping you. Actually, he never shuts up about it. If you had died, I am quite sure he would be dead right now. Staying alive for your sake has give him time to recover, and if you deprive him of his one goal, then I'll be forced to assume you never cared for him in the first place."
It was cruel to say, but he wanted Sherlock to be clear where everyone stood.

Sherlock shifted painfully on the bed, keeping his face away from Mycroft as he read the text, trying to hear those child-like words in John's voice. He set the phone down on the side closest to Mycroft and pressed his cheek into the pillow, breathing through the maelstrom his brother's words had set in motion in his gut.

He remained silent for many minutes, his physical pain settling in at a low shout, his mind deafening as it carried on trying to pull itself apart. Eventually he turned to face his brother, eyes heavily hooded with exhaustion, red-rimmed and overly bright. "Please," he breathed, cutting away from his brother's eyes, "not the games. Not today. I a-am out of my depth and I c-cannot..." his words broke and he sharply looked away, trying to hide his face once again. "T-tell him he helped and put him at ease.

Mycroft was tempted to press on for the purpose of progress, but Sherlock had only just woken up, and Mycroft sat back instead. "Alright. Get some sleep if you can. I'll tell him it helped you, and he'll be pleased."

_Tell John that his message was very helpful for Sherlock, but he is too tired to respond._

---

Greg read the text and relayed to John what Mycroft had said. "There you go...helping already."

John beamed up at Greg and began to see his purpose for living. "Oh, I'm glad. I hate it when he's sad. I've never seen him sad before. Well, other than last time...but that was my fault."

Greg smiled at John and wrapped his arm around him tighter, wanting him close. "I'm still very tired, going to sleep again if you don't mind."

John curled back up against him like a happy cat and hummed softly. "Yes, sorry. We'll talk later."

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Mycroft didn't wish to lie to Greg or John, though he certainly would if needed, and instead phrased it as an order so as not to directly lie nor have to disclose the truth. It was a useful little trick he developed for getting around those who could read lies and lie detectors.

"Sherlock, I want you to know that while, yes, Greg does make John happy, it's nothing like what it was with you." Another truth. John was obviously far more dependent on Greg than he ever was on Sherlock.

Sherlock stared at his brother, another tear sliding down the side of his face. "No, it isn't. We b-both know I never d-deserved a man of J-John's caliber." He gave his brother an empty, broken smile and settled back against the bed, aching deeply, his breathing far less even than it had been.

"And Greg does?" Mycroft responded almost indignantly. "You deserve John, and if this hadn't have happened, I'm sure the two of you would be quite close by now. Really, Sherlock, he's suffering. But he's experiencing peace too. He walks in the courtyard and smiles. I'm sure he would be glad to have you join him."

Sherlock studied Mycroft for a moment, his eyes touching over his brother's face. "Greg...y-you truly don't understand th-this, do you? G-Greg is the sort of m-man who will give up his life f-for John,
who considers his friends above himself. Greg Lestrade is a good man. A good man. John is a good man as well. It,” he waved his better hand and then stopped, looking at his fingers sadly. They were just wrecked, healed at odd angles, the scar tissue slightly curling them.

"Oh," he breathed, then looking down at his shattered arm. He froze for a full minute, staring at the parts of his body he could see, absorbing what he already knew to be true. "I...a-am glad I r-recorded h-his song before...it's..."

*I'm going to break your arm now.*

He pinched his eyes closed, breathing swiftly as panic swelled in his gut, icy claw wrapping around his heart.

Tell me what you did or I'll drive this into your eye.

He turned his face sharply away, clipping out a stuttered cry.

"No, no, Greg and John... Just no. Sherlock, Greg and John are very close. John has hinged his recovery on Greg's comfort and it's very helpful for him to have someone who cares about him. But I still believe you hold a very important piece of his heart."

Mycroft wanted desperately for Sherlock to count himself as important to John. Yes, it was clear that there was some sort of Florence Nightingale syndrome between the friends, at least it appeared that was, but Mycroft believed he could transfer John's affections back to Sherlock given time. Hearts were such fickle things anyway.

When Sherlock began to panic, Mycroft took hold of his shoulders and stood over him. "Sherlock, remember where you are. Speak to me and tell me who is with you."

Sherlock reached forward and snagged Mycroft's shirt in his fingers, holding tight, shaking his head and trying to push though it. "I-invasive, the m-memories and his...g-god his voice..." his hand was trembling violently on Mycroft's shirt. "Hew-wanted...oh god he w-wanted to convince m-me that I'd raped him...th-that I'd...h-h-he wanted," Sherlock swallowed as his stomach turned, openly panting in his effort to breathe, "b-bring John back and m-make me- My-Mycroft I don't w-want to remember. I- n-no more of this I-

He grit his teeth, shaking his head and pathetically whimpering under the barrage of recall he'd no control over.

"You would never hurt John Watson. He failed. You still love him and know that everything you've done was to protect him." Mycroft kept himself grounded and put one hip up on the bed next to Sherlock. What his brother was recounting was horrifying. To make Sherlock believe that he had raped John would be astronomically devastating, and difficult. It was so contrary to everything Sherlock was that it would have taken Moriarty to get the job done. Mycroft prayed a silent 'thank you' to every deity he knew of, which was quite an extensive list, that Moriarty was safely dead.

"I know I d-didn't hurt him...n-never John...n-n-never John. I-" he dragged in a deep breath and tried to open his eyes, blinking at his brother for a moment before sweeping his eyes over the room and slamming them shut again, shaking his head and whispering to himself. His grip was as tight as he could manage on Mycroft's shirt.

"It h-hasn't stopped. I r-remembered and I could n-not wake up I j-just wanted to wake up. Th-they wouldn't l-let me wake up!"

The situation was deteriorating swiftly and slipped through Mycroft's control. He ran his fingers back
through Sherlock's hair, spoke softly, and did his best to remain unaffected by his brother's pain. "They didn't let you wake up to keep you free of pain. You were in so much physical and mental pain at the time. We decided that removing one of the aspects would be a good thing for you. From now on, I'll consult you about the options before deciding."

Sherlock nodded and made his best attempt at calming himself. "H-he wants us back. He w-wants it h-horribly, My, he w-will stop at nothing..." he pressed a hand over the scarring at his throat, hardly able to believe how calm he was while being taken, having such complete faith his brother would rescue him sooner. "P-Paul...do you know him? I-I-is he...has h-he been sc-screened? W-Who else is n-new? He wants...he wants..." he was sweating now, a thin sheen across his forehead as he began to shake.

*I'm going to break your arm now.*

*Don't pass out.*

*I'm going to hold it for thirty seconds next time.*

*Careful, don't burn yourself.*

He cried out, long and low, shaking his head and leaned forward as much as he could manage to be closer to his brother. "Help, M-My, help."

Chapter End Notes

Very sorry for the delay, Dem has been posting chapters like madness and Amphi has been a massive slacker.
A Nocturnal Reverie

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mycroft had ordered several separate agents to tail Paul endlessly. Nobody, not Miller, not Paul, not a single one of the guards, nobody was trusted unconditionally. Not even Greg, though Mycroft had complete faith in his intentions.

"He won't get you back. He won't. You are safe here with me, and won't have anything to do with him ever again." Mycroft pulled Sherlock gently into his arms and held him close, abandoning all pretenses of adulthood and reverting back to Sherlock's first week of school when he first discovered that other children, while dull, could be immensely hurtful. "It's alright, brother."

Sherlock leaned into his brother, breathing deeply. It was all so incredibly overwhelming, the loss of control in his mind. He'd always been able to control his thoughts, his recall. This was nothing short of terrifying for him, the bombardment of memories not at all wanted. He groaned and pressed his eyes to Mycroft's shoulder, waiting there until the trembling slowly edged away.

Carefully he tired lying back, his arms and legs terribly pained, his heart beating with shards of fibreglass. "I miss John," he breathed, knowing it was pathetic and embracing it still. He'd missed John for so very long, and now he knew he'd never have him back. There was nothing in Sherlock's future but a yawning darkness, a cold, lonely void. He shivered and closed his eyes, soaking in the loss of it all.

Mycroft held Sherlock's head close to him and massaged his fingers into the nape of his neck. "I know you do, Sherlock. It was awful of him to take that away from you." Sherlock had gotten as close to a relationship as either of them had ever had, and to see it end so terribly was discouraging at best.

"You'll not have to live without him. I know that sounds illogical, but remember, you're emotionally compromised, and I'm not. Try to mark as truth what I say." He ran one hand up and down Sherlock's shoulder and felt the puckered scars that formed there. "You won't have to live without him. He loves you. Would it help to hear him say it? I'm sure he would." Mycroft prayed he would.

Sherlock slowly grew lax against his brother, resting his weight onto him. "He might h-have d-done," That's brilliant! "but n-n-not...he, " if you'd told me I might never have left! "oh...g-god how he b-blames m-m-m-me ff-f-for," he pinched his eyes closed, turning his face to Mycroft's neck and dragging in a deep breath before giving voice to a deep, agonized wail, muffled in the expensive material of Mycroft's shirt. He could hardly stand to remember the betrayal painted across John's face as Sherlock told him he loved him. Oh, how it had burned worse than any flame Moran had put him to. He dissolved as sugar in water, caving suddenly in his agonized rage, sobbing as unrestrained as a child into Mycroft's shoulder.

Mycroft laid beside Sherlock and held his head to his chest as he had seen Greg do on camera. "He was confused. If you want to hear him say it, if you wanted to hear John say 'I love you, Sherlock', I'm sure he would. I think he was just worried you wouldn't react well."

Mycroft held his brother as he cried as carded his fingers back through his hair. "It's alright, Sherlock. John still loves you. You are loved by a great many people. Greg loves you, Mrs. Hudson loves you, I love you, John loves you, Molly, mum, dad, the whole lot of us."

Sherlock came down slowly, as much as he was able, "I'm sorry, I'm s-sorry I-" he shook his head...
and clung to his brother, his breathing hitching hard and burning through his chest. "D-d-don't t-teach him to say it. H-He's so vulnerable to t-t-t-training I- don't e-ever teach him to s-say that."

He shook his head and clutched at his brother, "I c-cannot control...I...i-it is so loud...I...J-John c-could always q-quiet the ch-ch-chaos."

"I won't train him to do anything. His mind is very vulnerable to training. I won't ever. I was simply going to ask him if he would put how he feels about you in to words." Mycroft's fingers worked over Sherlock's scalp. "And John will be here to quiet it again. He'll get you into shape like he always did." He avoided the phrase 'whip you into shape' as the lashes on Sherlock's back told him he had already had enough whipping.

"Is there anything that would help you right now? Anything at all?"

*John.*

He leaned his head into his brother's shoulder, appreciating the lies. He tried to imagine John there with him, talking him down, helping him even out. John, with his steady calm and his unwillingness to look away where others would. Steady, beautiful, John.

*Screaming, bleeding, betrayed John.*

He whimpered softly as his mind abused him, trying hard to keep himself steady for his brother. "I..." he closed his eyes tight and thought of home. "Oh...g-god is Mrs. Hudson...I...c-could she..." why on earth he suddenly wanted her was beyond him. And then it very suddenly wasn't. She was always there when he was ill, or struggling with John, was there when he was lonely and John was on a date, made him perfect tea and pet his hair and mothered him in all the ways he'd always wanted and pretended very much that he did not.

"A c-call or? C-Could I j-just speak with her?"

Mycroft was briefly surprised at the sudden request, but dialed the number without delay. The aging woman answered in the same motherly tone as she always used, chastising him for not keeping her better updated. His position in the government be damned. When it came to Mrs. Hudson, nobody was beyond a motherly talk to set things straight.

"Yes, yes," he said and pinched the bridge of his nose. "I'm sorry I didn't call sooner. Yes. Yes. I know. Listen, Sherlock would like to speak with you. He's just woken up from surgery. Would you mind?"

The woman made an excited, if not a bit fretful, sound and insisted he put Sherlock on the phone.

Sherlock reached out with a trembling hand, his face pressed to his brother's chest, muffling his already wrecked voice. He narrowly managed to bend his arm enough to allow his hand to his ear, instantly smiling as he still heard her tutting at his brother and fussing over him.

"M-Mrs. Hudson," he breathed, his chin already wavering on him. Her voice brought forth explosive sensory input from home, the smell of it, the texture of the numerous papers on the wall, the quality of the dust, the step that squeaked and the doorknocker that would not stay put properly. He could smell John's favored tea and the resin on his bow, the draught from the windows as he curled up in his chair. His body sagged against Mycroft in acute relief, trying to put his attention to her.

"Oh, Sherlock, dear!" She exclaimed in a slightly high pitched voice, full of relief and worry. "I'm so glad to hear from you. It's been far too long! That brother of yours simply refused to give me more than the barest of details." Her voice came through clearly and in the background Mycroft could hear
a slight clanking as she put the pots from her washing down. "Are you alright? How's John? You sound exhausted."

He nearly laughed, taking in the details. She'd seen the mess John was all those months ago, though it was clear she was unaware of his own condition. "H-he's on th-the m-mend," he explained as steady as he could. "I...I've b-been keeping my d-dear brother f-far too occupied, I b-believe." He did not pick his face up from Mycroft's chest as tears leaked down his cheeks, touched to speak with someone he knew so completely, that did not hate him, that wanted him well purely for wanting him well, and nothing else.

"H-How've you b-been?"

"Well he could have given a simple phone call," Mrs. Hudson tusked and a kettle whistled in the background. "I've been fine, dear. Been worried sick about you boys! You always manage to get yourselves into trouble. Two peas in a pod, you two."

Her teacup clinked against the saucer and she paused for a moment. "Perhaps you'll find a more reasonable way to pass time once you come back."

Heavy tears slid down his cheeks and he nodded silently, "I d-don't believe I'll h-have m-much of a ch-choice in that, Mrs. H-Hudson."

He doubted very much that he'd have the use of his legs. After all that had been done...he nodded again as his shoulders caught, the scars at his back burning.

"I sh-should let you go n-now. V-very tired. Thank you f-for t-talking to me," he managed before pressing the phone to his brother's chest and breaking apart. It would never be the same. He would return, John would not. The work would be there, but not for him. The room upstairs would collect dust, until the day he couldn't take it any longer and went to sleep among the faded smell of John. Alone. Brittle and forgotten. Home had been such an instant comfort, until he remembered that he'd never quite have it again.

Mycroft swiftly thanked Mrs. Hudson and hung up the phone. Sherlock's mental state, while better than hysteria, was deeply disturbing for Mycroft. He knew how sentimental Sherlock could be and how deeply he resented change. "You'll have the work again. You'll have John and you'll have home. It might not be for a while, but you'll have it." With a slow, silent breath and a dejected expression, Mycroft put his phone on silent and slipped it into his pocket.

"Greg will get you cases, and John will nag you about eating, and Mrs. Hudson will vehemently protest being your housekeeper."

Sherlock held on to Mycroft's shirt and cried himself right down to sleep. He'd been up far longer than Miller expected right after days and days of sedation, and the emotionally taxing nature of his awareness just dragged him under. Slowly he went limp against his brother, tear-streaked and still breathing in as a child just stopped at the tears. He twitched even in shallow sleep, dropped right down into a slurry of imagery, innocuous and horrific both, though his vitals hung steady.

Miller tapped on the door when it was clear Sherlock was down. "I would just prefer he sleep with oxygen, and then I will leave you if there is nothing else I can help with."

Mycroft had done everything in his power to protect Sherlock from the time they were kids to adulthood. Granted, it had been easier when a mob of seventh graders were all he had to worry about, but Sherlock was an adult now, and seemed to attract danger in amounts even Mycroft couldn't shield him from fully. "I tried to get you sooner," Mycroft murmured quietly, his voice faint
and pained.

"Yes, Dr. Miller, come in. He's just frightened of doctors." Mycroft didn't feel the need for privacy, and held his little brother tight despite the company.

Miller walked in quietly and pulled from the wall a length of tubing attached to oxygen and brought it to Sherlock, very delicately sliding the nasal cannula under his nose and taping it down to the sides of his cheeks. "This will be less obstructive than a mask for him."

He stepped back and swiftly charted vital signs on the working tablet and then went to a medication box, drawing up pain medicine for Sherlock and slowly giving it. He left the room, only to return a few minutes later with a heated container of food and a thermos of tea for Mycroft, setting it at the small table to Mycroft's side where he would not have to leave the bed to get to it, should he want it.

"Anything else I can get for you?"

Mycroft was increasingly grateful to Dr. Miller and accepted the tea with both hands. "I appreciate your work with him, and for doing above and beyond what your services would usually entail. When this is over, we will be in your debt."

Diets had never been very successful for Mycroft, but he had dropped an incredible amount of weight during this ordeal. He had to buy new clothes and have his old clothes refitted, and he saw his younger brother's features appearing in his own body. "You'll be alright," he whispered, more for his own comfort than Sherlock's.

Miller nodded to them and left the pair alone, hopeful that Mycroft would feed himself and then perhaps sleep. The next few hours passed in relative calm, with Miller monitoring Sherlock's vitals closely from outside the room.

Sherlock slowly began to stir, whispering under his breath as his body woke before his mind, blooming with pain, his heart locking up in fear. Before his eyes opened, or any awareness returned to him, he began to plead for his brother as he had done in the final days under Moran's care, brittle French shaking hard off his lips as he pleaded his brother's forgiveness and begged his mercy. The constant backdrop of John wailing out in agony and begging for death wrapped around his mind and quite abruptly he was shoved down hard, the dank cloth and freezing water flooding over his nose and mouth.

His monitors began to blare as Sherlock bucked hard on the bed, back arching as he tried to twist away from Mycroft, gagging and choking in a legitimate struggle for air.

Mycroft ate the meal he had been offered, but didn't dare fall asleep with Sherlock so on edge. He kept himself mentally occupied in the peace until Sherlock began to wake violently.

"Sherlock, it's Mycroft. Mycroft is here. You're in a secure facility under medical treatment and heavy protection." Mycroft pulled Sherlock more fully onto his chest and pushed sweaty curls off his brow. "Deep breathes for me, alright?"

Sherlock shoved back hard against the hands pinning him, trying to shout, his ribs caving in with his efforts to breathe. At his brother's voice his eyes flew open, horrified and panicked, the tendons of his throat straining as he gaped like a fish, his monitors blaring. Miller came rushing in, pushing Sherlock to his back and calling for a nurse as tears flowed down Sherlock's face and he tried to thrash away from him.

"Silence that," he said calmly over the blare of the monitor when his nurse came in, speaking swiftly
to Mycroft as he easily pinned Sherlock down to his back. "He has an obstruction."

Sherlock turned his face away from the doctor as he scrabbled to free himself of the man's grip, his bandaged arm flailing desperately, lighting pain through him in brilliant waves. He tried to move his newly casted legs, hips twisting in a desperate attempt to flee. A flooding overhead was turned on, drowning out his sight. Instantly he was back, Mycroft gone from his as the rushing flow of water drowned out his hearing. They slid a bite block between his teeth, making his sob hystERICALLY, soundless as he battled for air, nearly blacking out with the fear of it.

Soon Miller was able to slide the suction tube between Sherlock's teeth, making him gag as he slid it down his throat. A harsh sound from the machine and a moment later the blockage was removed. Sherlock dragged in a desperate breath as the tube was pulled away, followed swiftly by another. There was never enough time to breathe between sessions with Moran. When the block was pulled away he cursed loudly, bellowing to the best of his horrified ability, "I DID N-NOT HURT J-J-JOHN YOU F-F-F-FUCKING BASTARD!"

Mycroft stood a few feet away, though he couldn't remember getting up. Sherlock had shoved him, he remembered that much, but tunnel vision had set in and he was beginning to be affected. He could hear the machines, Sherlock's awful, terrified breathing and his own heart hammering in his ears. Mycroft's posture was far from dignified. He had one arm reached out to his brother and his other hand gripping his hair.

Mycroft stumbled forward on legs that were far too weak yet terribly stiff at the same time and knelt by Sherlock's bed. "Sherlock!" He called loudly, "It's Mycroft! Mycroft is here to help you!"

Perhaps something else could be used to bring him down. They could record John saying something nice and pleasant, talking about how happy he was or how he wasn't in danger. They could bring in something that smelled like home such as Mrs. Hudson's vanilla spice candles that Mycroft had never cared for but were always burning, or her cooking or something.

Miller kept a hand on Sherlock's chest as Sherlock tried to wrench away from him and called out to the nurse to bring down the lights, killing the flooding overhead. He dared not let Sherlock go, not while he was thrashing like that. The lights dimmed and Mycroft's voice was suddenly the loudest sound in the room as Sherlock dragged in another deep breath, turning to face his brother and going incredibly still.

"No," Sherlock breathed, staring at Mycroft in panic, "No, oh god p-please n-n-no." He turned back to face Miller, clearly not recognizing him. "Okay, o-o-okay, any-anything. W-w-what do you want f-f-from me. Anything, M-Moran p-p-please I'll- d-don't hurt him, g-god not M-My, n-not My."

Miller pointed to a few pre-drawn syringes on the counter, looking at his nurse, "Diazepam, now please," he instructed, speaking softly to Sherlock. "Doctor Miller, Sherlock. I'm Doctor Miller. Can you look at me for a moment, please? Everything is alright. If you are in pain, I will give you something for it."

"I-It's okay My...I'll m-make him s-s-stop, it's a-alright brother."

Sherlock stared at him before looking back at his distraught brother, sobbing at the state of him, sharp eyes clearly looking for injury. "M-My what d-did they do to you," he breathed in panicked French, praying Moran was not fluent, "I-It's okay My...I'll m-make him s-s-stop, it's a-alright brother."

Mycroft's heart, if he indeed did have one, seemed to shatter and crumble into dust, settling somewhere at the base of his abdomen. Sherlock, his little brother, the one who he was supposed to protect, was offering himself to the tormentor to save him. Mycroft dropped his head to Sherlock's shoulder and drew in a shuddering breath.
"I'll protect you, Sherlock. They haven't done anything to me. You were rescued. You were taken away from Moran. You are in a secure facility and nothing is being done to you." He took hold of his brother's shoulders. "The coast is clear. Gloves off. You're going to be alright."

Sherlock defending him to Moran, knowing full well what would happened, was devastating. "Morgan isn't hurting me. Morgan is gone."

Miller slowly pushed the anti-anxiety medication, quiet at Sherlock's side, glad that Mycroft had moved back in closer. The man looked ready to faint.

Sherlock kept his eyes to his brother, obviously trying to sort out his own mind. It reeked of blood and fear and he'd just been doused in freezing water, shivering hard now from the cold. God how he loathed being cold. It had never bothered him before, but now it meant pain and misery, meant his body would lock up and jostle his wounds to try and keep him warm as he shivered. The sedative slid though his veins and slowly began to lower his heart rate, calming him down artificially.

Sherlock slowly pushed the anti-anxiety medication, quiet at Sherlock's side, glad that Mycroft had moved back in closer. The man looked ready to faint.

He looked sluggishly to Miller as he reached up, slinging a defensive arm across Mycroft as best he could, two fingers wrapping in the material over Mycroft's shoulder.

"Sherlock, I'm Doctor Miller. You've met me before. Can you tell me where you are?"

Mycroft wanted to demonstrate that he had control over the situation. If Sherlock had felt the need to protect Mycroft, then it might help to show him that he was in control. "Miller, if you would step outside for a moment, I think it would calm him. If anything happens, you may come back in. Thank you for your help."

Mycroft took hold of Sherlock's wrist and put his own in Sherlock's hand. "You're safe. He'll leave you alone for a little bit."

Mycroft practically glued himself to Sherlock, arms around him and legs tangled up near Sherlock's injured ones. "You're alright, 'Lock. It's all going to be alright. Do you know where you are?"

Mycroft sat on the edge of the bed and pulled Sherlock close to him. "Nobody is hurting you. All the pain you are feeling is from previous injuries and your body trying to recover. Nothing new is happening to you. You're recovering, and it hurts. Could you try and breathe slowly? In, then out. 1-2 ratio."

Mycroft practically glued himself to Sherlock, arms around him and legs tangled up near Sherlock's injured ones. "You're alright, 'Lock. It's all going to be alright. Do you know where you are?"

Sherlock attempted to follow his brother's instructions with his breathing, whimpering with the pain of it. He tipped his face to Mycroft's chest and greedily tried to absorb the heat from his brother.
"C-Can you m-m-make them ssstop doing th-that to John? I- they w-won't listen to mm-me. I sh-shot him and he's s-still screaming. I didn't m-miss, I didn't miss. I d-d-don't understand." That, in itself was worst than anything else. He didn't understand, and John was in agony, and he couldn't make it stop.

The sheer depth of Sherlock's psychological trauma was overwhelming. Mycroft was tempted to coddle him, but that wouldn't get him anywhere. What had he read? Validate the fear, then start to work against it. "That would be very confusing.I understand. It must be terrible to feel that way. Moran tricked you. He played John's voice on a recording to make it seem like he was hurting him, but in reality, John has been with me. I've been protecting John. You shot someone who looked very much like John, but it wasn't him."

Sherlock listened to his brother, groaning and shaking his head.

"Moran w-wanted mme to believe I w-was hurting h-h-him, that I did h-hurt him but I did not, My, it w-wasn't m-my doing. I c-could never do what th-they d-d-did to him to an-any l-living p-p-person. G-god they...oh g-god John...th-they...h-he's so af-afraid. They're k-killing him. He-" Sherlock shouted against Mycroft's chest, shaking his head.

"You don't h-hear him. O-only I hear him. N-N-Not real, it's n-not real. Th-they keep...I d-didn't even a-apologize b-b-before I k-killed him I just sh-shotted him. I shot him. My I j-just...M-Moran's hand around m-mine and the g-g-gun and I t-t-t-took John out. He's g-gone. I- he's gone."

The weight of that memory was too horrific. He floated in the loss of it, wrapped up in that misery. 'Th-they b-b-bait him outside m-my room and then br-bbrought him...his f-face...his...th-they b-bait it in," Sherlock suddenly gagged, recalling the mess they'd pulled into his room, the encompassing torment John was subject to. "I d-d-didn't...he n-never knew. I n-nnever told him and now-" his breathing hitched and he sank against his brother, breaking into anguish tears, working through that particular memory. The feelings associated with it were devastating and his mind struggled with the guilt he'd carried since his rescue.

"I l-loved him. My. I l-loved-" he shook his head, unable to carry on speaking.

"You didn't shoot him. It must have been terrible to believe you did. He should never have done that to you. You didn't deserve it. But John is very much alive, and in the other room. He knows that you love him." Mycroft pressed a kiss to the top of Sherlock's dark curly mop of hair, and could smell the sweat and stress radiating off him.

"They beat the other man so you wouldn't recognise him. They beat him outside the door so you wouldn't see because they didn't have John. Logically, if you think about it, if they wanted to hurt you the most, they would have beat him where you could see. At that time, John was in his bed, safe and in my facility." Mycroft gave Sherlock a light squeeze. "And I can prove that, if you need me too."

Sherlock nodded, desperately trying to listen to his elder brother, to believe him. Mycroft had never hurt him before, not intentionally, not maliciously. He had no historical reason not to believe him.

"I...is...is he here? He...he is t-terrified of me, I don't w-want to s-scare him. He's alive? I- h-how is he alive I-" he closed his eyes and tried to put his mind to it. He'd seen John at some point, with a tube in his nose and horrifyingly thin, Greg at his side...a wheelchair...

Sherlock groaned and nearly broke down again. "I don't understand...I c-can't sort it. I don't-" the timeline was a complete mess. "H-He's here?"
Mycroft took out his phone and texted Greg and Paul once more. Perhaps John should be allowed a phone.

_Could I have some sort of message from John? I doubt a text will convince him._

"Yes, he's here. He's just down the hall, probably in bed or sitting out by his tree. He likes to watch the stars, and sit near the roots of a massive tree in the courtyard. He's safe, protected, and not in any pain at all." Mycroft held one of Sherlock's arms to his chest so the man wouldn't have to waste strength keeping it there himself.

Greg was presently sitting up, working at a bit of soup, the drip disconnected and a bit of color back to his cheeks. He read the text as Paul knocked on the door. He called to the man to let him know it was alright to enter, looking over at John. "Hey, do you think you could record a message or something for Sherlock? I think he may be having a hard time."

Paul responded to Mycroft swiftly,

_We are working with John now. If you need assistance with Sherlock, as ever I am available._

Sherlock was grateful for his brother's support, slowly, slowly coming down from the nearly paralyzing fear. "I...sitting at his tree? He-" Sherlock's brow knit, trying to mesh that with the John he knew. It made no sense. John was not an outdoorsman. He gasped and pulled at Mycroft, shaking his head.

"He's...he...a-always on the wall. He's a-always on the wall. Trying n-not to sleep...he n-needs help, My...he n-needs help."

"No, Sherlock," Mycroft explained, "John Watson is in a room down the hall. He isn't on the wall. There is a tree in the interior courtyard, which is still very safe, that he likes to sit at. He watches the stars. It seems to make him quite happy."

Sherlock was drifting in hell, pressed as close to Mycroft as he could get, bombarded with images he'd never dealt with, only stored in his too sharp memory, all demanding his attention at that moment. He wept, confused and in pain, afraid of the walls around him, afraid of and for his brother, not at all clear on anything at the moment. "He...he..." Sherlock shook his head, gasping with the pain of it, holding tight to the material of Mycroft's shirt.

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John was incredibly pleased to be helping, and took Greg's phone right out of his hands. "What should I say? You'll tell me if its the wrong thing, right? I'll say something nice. He liked to hear nice things, even if he never said so. Everyone was so mean to him." John prattled on as he got to the video function, cheery with Greg's recovery and his ability to help.

John fumbled with the camera a bit once it was on, and stared at himself in the front view for a few seconds before speaking. He was leaning against Greg's shoulder, his hair slightly mussed and the tube down his nose hooked back up. "Hey, Sherlock." He was proud of his ability to say the word without panicking, and it showed in his features. "Paul said you were having a hard time and...Well, I don't really know what I'm supposed to say to help, but...Just let me know if I'm supposed to help. I'm alright, Greg isn't as sick anymore, which is good. Are you alright? I'm glad you're back." He looked over to Greg then, unsure of how to continue.

Greg smiled at John and took the phone from him, swiftly sending off the message for Sherlock.
"That was very good, John, that...I think that will make him happy." Paul watched the two of them, focused on John's recall of Sherlock. Everyone was so mean to him. That was interesting. He looked to Greg, who was clearly on the mend after being hydrated and given antibiotics. They had yet to address his mental break, but that could be done later, and was far from unexpected.

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Mycroft checked his phone when it beeped and saw the media message. A play button hovered over John's nose, and he swiftly held it in front of Sherlock's face. "Look, Sherlock, look. It's John. He's trying to give you a message. Would you like to see John?"

Mycroft realized this was a bit of a trust fall, not having screened it first, but John was leaning on Greg, and he doubted he would let anything harmful through. "Hey, Sherlock," It began, and Mycroft breathed a sigh of relief. John sounded at least somewhat cheerful.

Sherlock leaned back sharply at the sound of John's voice. It was like nothing he'd ever heard before. It wasn't John as he'd known him before, nor was it the horrified, betrayed man who loathed him from after. He watched the screen, air seized up in his lungs as John spoke. When it abruptly ended, Sherlock reached forward and played it again, and again, and again, attempting to make his sluggish mind put the details together.

Before his brother could stop him, Sherlock pressed the reply button with a trembling finger, his face washed with tears and pain, swiftly replying to John. He stared at his own face on the screen for a moment, taken aback. The bruising was down to a sickly green and yellow mix. His left eye still drooped from swelling, and possible nerve damage it would now seem, he looked so very little like himself. He blinked the thought away and spoke into the camera, the angle askew and unsteady.

"J-John," he breathed, hardly able to force sound out around the tight bundle of nerves, "I..y-you are n-n-not supposed to do a-anything. I'm s-so sorry, John...f-forgive m-me, I- a-are you..." he closed his eyes, trying to make his mind work. It was incredibly difficult to accept that this image was current, and not simply a recording. "W-Would you please t-t-t-tell me y-your middle name?" He highly doubted anyone would capture John saying 'Hamish' on camera in advance. He pressed 'send' and then repeated the video of John talking to him again.

Greg looked down at his lap when his mobile buzzed again, shocked to see the unnerving image of Sherlock's face. He bit his lip and handed Paul the phone, who walked out of the room and watched it. When he returned, he looked to John, crouching down in front of him. "John, Sherlock has responded to you. I need you to hear me and then decide what you want to do. He's very afraid, and he's still physically healing. He's...it's a bit difficult to see. You do not have to watch this. The choice is yours."

John took the phone and pressed play. The broken, terrified man on the screen was nothing like the cold man that had been present during his torture, but was also not the Sherlock he knew before. "Oh, god," he muttered and listened to the entire message. When he was finished he placed the phone face down on his chest and held it there, as if by the action he could somehow comfort the broken man.

Unlike Sherlock, he didn't watch the tape over and over again. He hit record and the first word out of his mouth was; "$Hamish. You stole my birth certificate. You should know. With as hard as you worked for it, I thought you would at least toss it in a drawer of that mind palace of yours." He gave a small smile and turned the camera to Greg. "Here's Greg. Uh...he's not as sick as he was. I miss you. You don't sound alright. I don't have to help, but I want to." John abruptly hung up and took a deep breath. It was rather difficult to use long sentences.
Greg could not help himself as he reached out, wrapping his arms around John and pulling him in tight. "You are incredible," he whispered, threading his fingers in John's hair and gently stroking his scalp. "I love you, you are just incredible." John had remembered the Mind Palace, he'd recalled how Sherlock got to his middle name. He had spoken calmly and above the capacity of a small child. It was stunning, just stunning. Greg squeezed him tight, pressing his face to John's neck, "That was amazing."

He handed the phone back to Paul, who sent it on back to Mycroft, deeply troubled with Sherlock's condition.

John's primary goal for drinking, speaking Sherlock's name, and being stable on his feet was to help Sherlock. His goal for staying calm was often to keep Greg from being upset. It was clear that he made the best progress when the force motivation was not simply self improvement. John began to cry then, collapsing against Greg, each exhale a mournful whine. "He sounded so sad," John lamented. He knew what had happened more intimately than anyone else possibly could, and he had always been an empathetic man to begin with.

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Sherlock looked to his brother, trying to focus. "You wouldn't...you wouldn't lie to me about this. You wouldn't. If John was dead, you'd tell me. I can trust you. You are safe to trust. I...you are my big brother," he was mostly assuring himself. Mycroft as his 'big brother' had not been a comfort to him in years, but in this...in this Sherlock needed his old protector.

Mycroft kissed the top of Sherlock's head. "I will never lie to you. I am your big brother. I am your protection. I'll never lie to you, I'll never hurt you, and I'll never let anyone hurt you." Mycroft recalled a time when Sherlock, hardly eight, had informed a boy's mother that her husband was having an affair. It proved to be correct, and they ended up getting a divorce. The child, who was a grade ahead of Sherlock and quite large for his age, proceeded to take out his aggression on the boy he blamed. "Remember Tommy Burndon? How he tried to hurt you? Do you remember how I protected you? I'll do that again. Nobody will hurt you."

Mycroft assumed Greg had screened the video, so he shushed Sherlock and pressed play.

Sherlock's fingers were bloodless in their grip on the mobile. He cracked a brittle laugh at John's irritation, believing Sherlock to have forgotten his middle name, watching him speak. Tears slid heavy down his face and after the video ended, he pressed the phone back to Mycroft.

He curled his fingers up to his lip, closing his eyes and mentally replaying John's words. He was alive. "He...he can bear my name," he managed, his breath hitching. "He'll...call...sometimes. Maybe he'll...I might be allowed to see him at Greg's."

Sherlock tried to make that okay in his mind. It was more than he'd thought he'd be allowed the day he'd tried at the needle. He chooses his eyes and leaned into his brother, heartbroken and shaking. "It's good that he's...Greg is...good for him. He has a chance now."

Yes, Greg had been a great help. He taught John not to be afraid of you, he's been very gentle." Mycroft wasn't sure about the exact nature of Greg and John's relationship, but they were, without a shadow of a doubt, very close. He didn't wish Sherlock to be jealous, or worse, dismayed. Jealously at least had energy to it, and might prompt Sherlock to fight for John's companionship, but dismay would immobilize him.
"He can say your name, and share stories about you. He remembers the Mind Palace, and many other things about you. He's improving because he wants to help you. He's fiercely loyal, and I think Moriarty, not understanding the sentiment of it, might have overlooked that fact." There was a chance that Moriarty knew it damn well, but that conjecture wouldn't help Sherlock at all.

"You'll be allowed to see him. He'll invite you over, or the three of you can live at Baker Street." It was quite clear that John wouldn't leave Greg, but he believed Sherlock could still be in the picture.

Sherlock's mind had been temporarily shifted from his immediate past by the exchange. "G-Greg's wife left h-him in financial ruin. H-he will need assistance." He dragged in a shaking breath, attempting to stop the tears. He was, by nature, exceedingly selfish and it was incredibly difficult to look at this as positive for John.

"I'd...I'd h-have...I'd have done f-for John if..." had he not been made to fear Sherlock above all else. He'd tried desperately to help him for months. In the end, he'd still lost him. It was okay though. It had to be okay.

"I...I w-wouldn't have b-been able to play f-for him again, anyhow," he whispered sadly, summarizing the whole of his value, the only helpful thing he'd ever managed to do for John. His hands were destroyed. No surgery would repair the dexterity after all of that. He'd be lucky if he learned enough to manage a needle back into his arm.

He pressed his fingers to his eye, trying to soothe himself. It all ached horribly. "I -was such...such a f-f-fool. I-" he shook his head and curled in on himself, wishing desperately that he had simply died.

Mycroft stroked his fingers back through Sherlock's hair and massaged his fingers at the base of his scalp. "You're going to be useful to him. If you're kind, and loving, he'll see that there's nothing to be afraid of. You know, he was afraid of you the most, but now he's more afraid of food and water than he is of you. He's progressed."

"I know you would have comforted John if you could." Perhaps that was part of Moriarty's game. He would hurt John terribly and rob Sherlock of even the basic ability to be a comfort to him, forcing him to watch someone else fill that place. "And you'll be able to some day."

Sherlock closed his eyes and just gave into the heartbreak of it all. "He...he w-would have to s-suffer my company to see that. He would ha-have to be n-near me. I'll not hurt h-him like that again, brother. He has no n-need of me. I...I'm glad f-for him," he sobbed, weeping as he had the day Redbeard had been put down, "I am, I...w-wanted him to live...want h-h-him to live. He's...he..."

Mycroft would soon return to work and Sherlock would be so utterly alone. Before, that had been tolerable, preferable even. John had breathed life into a part of him that had longed for friends and died with that dog, and now he'd be on his own with his nightmares and his demons, no work to occupy him, no violin to abuse.

I'm going to burn the heart out of you.

He'd won. He'd won and made a mockery of Sherlock, so complete he could hardly wrap his mind around it. His posture sagged and everything rushed away from him, leaving him hollow and empty. The quality of his weeping changed,simply the sound of crushing loss."
Most people would assume, from briefly surveying his tendencies but not looking deeper, that Sherlock was rather heartless, or at the very least indifferent to the workings of other people. Mycroft knew it had been quite the opposite when they were young, and Sherlock didn't just wear his heart out on his sleeve, he invested it entirely into another person. When Redbeard died, Sherlock had cried despairingly, a sound Mycroft had only ever heard elsewhere when another mourned the loss of her child. Mycroft had watched Sherlock withdraw, which had been rather upsetting for Mycroft, who was still young himself.
Then there was John, and Mycroft had a whole new set of worries. Loving a dog was one thing. It could die, or run away, but if treated reasonably it would be as affectionate to it's owner as allowed. But a man? Mycroft had worried that John would hurt Sherlock, scoff at him, mock him, hate him, or even just simply not care about him. He had been proven swiftly wrong, and from the outside the two often appeared to be in some sort of relationship. Mycroft had been hesitant. He wished to protect Sherlock from something like Redbeard happening again, and thus lost no opportunity to inform Sherlock about the mistake he was making in investing his heart in John.

Then, Mycroft had come to see Sherlock's heart be mangled, beaten, torn, bruised, and burned both literally and figuratively. "He still loves you. Don't fret over it now. Believe me when I say he wishes to help you."
Sherlock slowly began to fall asleep, even while actively grieving. He'd shed more tears for John in the last few months than in the whole of his life. For the rest of his days, numbered as he hoped they were, he'd never, never forget the bitter anger with which John spat back his confession. No, John did not love him. John despised him for his cowardice, for his selfish withholding. He'd been too afraid, and he'd waited too long, and how he'd deserved the spite. He'd put a scar on John's arm, and John had returned it to Sherlock's heart, and that was the end of it all.

Mycroft cradled his little brother in his arms and wondered -and it was not the first time such thoughts had drifted into his mind- if the very act of keeping Sherlock alive through this utter misery wasn't, in itself, an act of torture. "William Sherlock Scott Holmes, I promise you John loves you and the two of you will be able to see each other regularly. Try and sleep now."
"I wish I could have...have properly said goodbye," he breathed as sleep began to pull him under. His grip eased on Mycroft's shirt, and slowly his hiccuping breathing faded down to rhythmic calm.

Meanwhile, Greg held John to him, reeling from the harsh reminder that while they'd pulled John through the raw first weeks of rescue, Sherlock was just starting them. He'd looked...devastated. Greg leaned his cheek against John's head and carded his fingers through his hair, trying to soothe him. "He'll be alright, John. He'll pull through it. He's...he's strong. You did a kind thing, you did."

For some strange, glossed over reason, John hadn't grasped the connection between what had happened to him and what had happened to Sherlock. He saw the cuts on Sherlock's skin and the scars on his own, but it was now, with Sherlock struggling to stay calm, that John truly emphasized. He let out a long, agonized wail and buried himself down into Greg's shoulder. To think that the water, knives, whips, and pliers had been used on his Sherlock was to invoke terrible pain that wrenched at his gut and left him gasping.

Greg did not understand as John began to cry in earnest. "You're safe, John, you're safe," he assured, tucking John in close and trying to wrap around him as best he could in the way that had comforted John in the past. "John, it's safe, I promise it's safe. I have you, you're okay." His heart twisted up in fear that they'd set John back drastically by allowing him to see the video. "You don't have to do that again, I'm so sorry, you're okay and you don't have to do that again. It's okay, you're safe. You're safe."

Paul watched the pair of them closely, tilting his head slightly to the side. What he was seeing from John was not panic...it looked like grief. He held up a finger to Greg to stop him talking, keeping a close eye on John.

John wept and put his hands over his face, palms pressed over his eyes and fingers curling slightly into his hair. It was not the panic driven, defense oriented action he had performed before, but rather
the action of one who simply couldn't handle the grief they had been affronted with. "H-He...they c-cut him a-a-and- oh, god. I-I'd t-take it. I'd d-d-do it instead. He...Sherlock-" John managed not a single word more and sobbed into Greg's shoulder. John couldn't imagine any other human being enduring what he had, but the idea of Sherlock strapped down on the table made John let out guttural, devastated wails.

John's grief was so profound that even Paul was affected. The sound reached through his clinical detachment and called out to his humanity, forcing him to breathe slow and deep to keep his face steady and his eyes dry. Greg was utterly failing at doing just that. Paul reached out and gently wrapped a warm hand around Greg's ankle where he sat, crouched before the two men, trying to provide a bit of anchor for him.

Greg gathered John up tight and before long he was softly crying with him. He'd been horrified to see the state Sherlock had been rescued in and had not at all been able to put any mind to that with his occupation with John. And here, John was not in panic, he was in grief. Not only that, but he was grieving for Sherlock, bemoaning that it was done to Sherlock and not to him. Greg managed to keep it together aside from the slide of tears on his face, lightly rocking John as he rubbed his back, doing his best to remain solid as John fell apart.

"He's going to be okay, John, he is. He's safe now. You are safe now. I'm right here, John, right here with you. He's going to be okay, he will. It's..." well, it wasn't alright, but surely they would pull through. "I'm sure it helped him to see your message, John breathe. Take a breath for me, John. I'm right here."

John screamed, but it was a low, burning sound, not the high and panicked ones of before. The lamentation ripped through him and John seemed to be attempting to force the terrible grief out through his throat, but it was lodged too soundly in his chest, secured by razor coil and barbed hooks. John screamed again and tried to loosen it, but it held fast with its icy grip. He sat up and dropped his head between his knees and screamed until his vision went blurry with the effort, each long, drawn out symphony of sheer agony taxing him greatly. When he fell back and lay prone on the bed, his eyes were squeezed shut and he seemed to writhe as if in physical pain. "H-h-h-he-" Unable to articulate the raw, aching sensation in him, John simply cried into the air and grabbed fistfuls of the sheets.

"Paul," Greg breathed in brittle fear, watching John revert back down to a screaming mess. His hands trembled hard as he reached out for John, touching him gently. "John," he called out, agonized over the mistake they'd clearly made, "Oh...John, no...no...please, John, oh god, I am sorry, we should never have...John please," he gently took John's closest wrist.

Paul stood up and moved to the hallway, swiftly returning with a low dose of sedative. He was grateful Greg had a hold of the wrist that contained the drip port, and swiftly pushed the medication.

"John," Greg called out, "Sherlock isn't going to hurt you. He isn't. You are safe, I promise you are safe. John...oh...John, I'm sorry."

"I-I-know that-" John managed to say on an exhale before violent sobs wracked his slender frame once more. "The-ey're h-hurting... they-they h-hurt Sh-" He broke down again and clutched Greg desperately, breathing deeply at his chest and trying to calm himself.

"I-I-I-" John looked to Greg and tried to communicate, falling to an agonized look riddled with grief. "W-would have t-taken it..." John managed to stutter before attempting to force that agonizing pain in his chest out through his throat with another scream. "Sh-Sherl-lock...I-I'm...M'sorry..."
Greg stared at John for a full ten seconds before reacting, so utterly taken aback by his sudden shift. This was...so incredibly beyond anything John had ever processed before. Greg hadn't seen much aside from indifference and avoidance when Sherlock was brought up. This...this is how John would have reacted, had he been John.

"John, it's not your fault," he said in a rush, startled back to himself when John began to scream. He looked imploringly to Paul, who shook his head and pointed to John. "This is grief, he's allowed to grieve. It's not panic, it's grief." He stepped back, knowing John didn’t much care for him, and tried to give him space.

Greg looked down on him, his hands hovering over John, no idea what to do. "I'm sorry, John, I know it's hard, I know it's hard to know that. But he's...he'll me okay...he never wanted you to hurt any more, he'd never have let you take it for him. John, this isn't your fault. He's...he's being treated. It's going to be okay. Please, John...what can I do? What...how can I help you? I don't know what to do? I'll...John please, please breathe."

Paul narrowed his eyes at Greg and held up a hand, slowly lowering it, trying to keep Greg calm. He was so sensitized to John panicking that it was starting to rattle his nerves. "Greg," Paul called out gently, "this is okay. Relax."

Oh, god, Sherlock. John could see it so clearly, his own memories crashing with what he remembered of Sherlock to paint a macabre picture inside his mind of his best friend bleeding on a table, or hanging in chains, or lying on the floor in a heap.

John tore at his hair and pressed his knuckles against his teeth while his grieving breathes hissed between them. "No...oh, God, p-please..." John shook his head and began to tear the skin off the front of his knuckles on his teeth.

A sickening thought hit him like a punch and knocked John into a stunned silence. "No...nooo...." John thought back to Moran, how sick he had been in ways that Moriarty had not, the things he had threatened to do that John had escaped through self inflicted pain or obedience, things that Moriarty had stopped once he was satisfied John had done well. Moriarty was dead, and that had given Moran free range. "D-Did-" John gagged and coughed, unable to even articulate a sentence. "H-He w-w-was with M-Moran... S-Sick bastard..."

John curled into the fetal position and took gasping breaths like a fish suddenly tossed onto land. "G-Greg t-tell m-me if-if-if there...if there were signs of..."

"John," Greg cried out, pulling John's hands from his teeth, his eyes wide and his heart racing, "oh god, Paul, help, help, he can't-" Greg was shaking so hard it was difficult to keep a grip on him. "John, please, John I don't know what...signs of what, John? He...it looks like he was treated as you were...I don't...I don't know what you are asking me. Paul, help."

Paul moved slightly closer to John, keenly interested in this sudden turn. "What, John. Signs of what?"

John's chin quivered and he sat up, tucked his knees up to his chest and dropped his head down. "That h-he-" John let out another agonized scream and fear was laced in, pulling the pitch up a bit higher.

"H-He-" John couldn't seem to manage anything past that point and became a quivering mess of sobs. He scooted back so he was pressed against the headboard and turned away from both of the
men in the room in burning shame. He felt was disgusting, and didn’t want to share with Greg what had happened for fear he would leave. But they had to know about Sherlock.

Paul blinked, staring at John. This was new. This was something Mycroft had to know right now. He drew out his phone and stopped Greg from advancing on John, shaking his head with a hand on his shoulder. He swiftly typed in the text and held it for Greg to see so that he would be in the loop.

*We very well may have overlooked sexual assault. Sherlock's doctor must be informed. John is abruptly displaying signs, may have settled enough to face it. Be advised.*

The color drained away from Greg’s face as he looked over to John. He was a damned police officer, he should have recognized...

"John," he said quietly, not making a move toward him while he was physically guarding, "John...I understand. We will have the doctor look at him."

John's grief was beginning to give way to fear, and he desperately tried to put the memories back on lockdown. As it was, his mind seemed them far too traumatic for him to view, even if Moriarty had been there to keep Moran on a relatively short leash for the majority of the time. "H-He- G-God I-"

John took a few deep gulps of air through his mouth and shied away from them further, though he knew Greg would offer nothing but comfort.

He curled in on himself while his mind violently forced him to focus on something else, and he became unexplainably caught up in the way each time he looked away from the clock then back, the first second seemed longer than the rest. This was his world now. That clock, and it's little red second hand he could hardly see at this distance. Maybe his eyesight was getting bad. Would he have to wear glasses? Tick. Tick. Look away. Tiiiick. Tick. Tick. Tick. Look away. Tiiiiick. Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

"John," Paul called out, steady if not a bit loud, "John, you have to focus. Tell me where you are. Come back right here, and tell us where you are. You are safe, John. Stay here."

Greg edged back, watching John withdraw from them. "Okay, John, it's okay. I'll leave you alone." He got off the bed, backing up and all but falling into the chair that John typically occupied. This change was...god it was...he swallowed hard and put his face in his hand, trying to breathe. He was no stranger to crimes of this nature, being a detective and all, but this was...terrible. Far too personal...far too much for John or, god help them, Sherlock, to endure.

Mycroft read the text and swore. He was completely unprepared to handle something of that nature, though it seemed to fit perfectly with the behavior Sherlock had exhibited, or what little amount he could see beneath the screaming. Mycroft looked to his baby brother and fury bubbled up inside him.

*I see. Your services may be required with him, then. How is John faring?*

Tick. Tick. John looked away, then back again. Tiiiick. It was funny how the brain, unable to make sense of the blurred motion when the eyes dart from side to side, fills in that information with a picture of whatever the eyes land on.


The mind knows full well that if you didn't have a cohesive picture of what was going on, if that millisecond of unregistered information was shown to the cognitive brain as ????instead of just a nice little picture of what the eyes landed on, you wouldn't handle it well.
John's mind seemed to know that right now was not the time to be handling such events. He was
tired, stressed, and emotionally pained, so, he watched the clock tick.

Paul moved slowly, speaking calmly to John. "John, I need you to look at me," he called out as he
very carefully moved forward. He was going to sedate him if he did not respond, worried of an acute
breakdown. This disconnect was dangerous. "John, I'm going to touch your arm, help ground you.
John, can you look at me?"

He slowly reached forward and placed two fingertips on John's forearm, watching him closely,
constantly calling out his name as he did so.

John jumped and jerked his arm away. He hadn't heard a word of Paul's warning and did not want to
be touched. John stared at Paul, suddenly mute, and scooted away in the mattress.

He tucked his arms in, wrapped low around his waist this time. "Help him."

"John, I won't touch you again, but I need you to respond to me. Or to Greg. You don't have to talk
to me. I can't help Sherlock right now. I need to help you."

Greg stood back up and moved to the foot of the bed, running a hand over his mouth. Jesus Christ
what a mess. "I'm here John, or do you want us to go away?"

John came back to himself suddenly and made himself very small. "You have to help him," John
managed to say. Perhaps it would be the humane thing to kill Sherlock, then Greg, then himself,
before any of them had a chance to feel more pain.

John crawled under the blankets and sheets, which wouldn't be much protection physically
but helped emotionally, and curled into a tiny, whimpering ball. "Don't...don't touch me." Oh,
but he wanted Greg to hold him. He wanted to be comforted, but didn't want fingers on his skin, or
to feel trapped. Perhaps if Greg simply wrapped an arm around him with the protective barrier of the
blankets, it would be alright. But he had no way of articulating this, and was silent.

Greg whispered to Paul for him to back off at the same moment Paul began to give John space. He
looked over to Greg and whispered swiftly, "I'll be outside," tapping his mobile to indicate Greg
should text should he need him. When the door closed softly behind him, Greg crawled fully up on
the bed and sat horizontal at the foot, his back pressed to the wall, looking to his side and watching
the little ball under the blankets that was John.

He was quiet for a long time.

Finally he spoke, soft and just over a whisper. "I don't know how to help, but I love you, and I'm still
right here."

John tried to reason with himself. Maybe Moran hadn't been interested in Sherlock. Maybe Sherlock
had been given options, had been allowed to cut himself to escape the threat. But then, those had
been Moriarty's rules. John imagined an unrestrained Moran with Sherlock and his stomach churned.

"You've got to help him," John whispered, "Moran, he...he likes hurting people..."

Greg nodded. That was abundantly clear. Sherlock had endured what looked to be much the same
treatment as John in much less time. He was very near death simply from illness and exposure by the
time he was rescued, not to mention the horrific physical trauma. How Moran would have been able
to...it would have been bloody. Where he could have even grabbed hold of Sherlock without making
him bleed was beyond Greg. The thought was horrific and nauseating.

"I don't know how," Greg confessed, "and I'm not leaving you. He will be okay. John...I...please I
"Could you come protect me?" John whimpered, but kept himself isolated under his blankets. "M-M-Moran, he-" Another wave of fresh tears rocked him and stole the steadiness in his voice he had only recently claimed. "H-he was s-s-sick, but M-Moriarty-"

John bit down on the blanket and screamed again. "Sherlock, Sh-Sherlock, I'm s-sorry."

Greg crawled up closer to John, not sure how much contact he wanted. He set a warm hand down over where John's ankles seemed to be and closed his eyes as John screamed.

"John, we don't know...we don't know that he did anything like...like that..." he trailed off, pulling his phone from his pocket, unaware that Paul had contacted Mycroft already. Surely all the labs were done that could ever be done, but he had to know for sure.

"We should have done a rape kit. Were they both tested for...everything?"

"Mycroft, I think John-"

He had to close his eyes again and force himself forward. He willed his fingers to move, nausea bubbling up in his throat.

"They have been tested for every disease possible, though what prompted it was the needle marks, not the possibility of rape. Has John told you anything useful?"

John flinched and his eyes flew open. He very suddenly needed to see that it was Greg touching him, and he ripped the covers back. After a moment of staring at Greg, trying to measure what the likelihood of the man hurting him would be, John crawled into his lap like a small child and cried into Greg's knee.

Greg reached down and very gently ran his palm over John's head, his thumb brushing along the shell of John's ear and registering the ridge of a scar. He tried his best to pull up all his officer skills, closing his eyes and taking a few moments to breathe before speaking softly.

"John...it would help me to help Sherlock if you could tell me..." he paused as he deliberated over the right word. Details? Specifics? "...anything that helps me understand what Moran did to you. You can tell me, or I can ask you 'yes' or 'no' questions, but they may upset you. Sherlock's not been back very long, we could still help him. Can you tell me if he needs a..." he cleared his throat. It had been what? Ten or so days that Sherlock had been back? Longer? "more ah, thorough...exam?"

"H-He...Moran..." John gagged and shook his head. "M-Moran is b-ba-ad and there was no M-Moriarty to-to-to-" Without Moriarty there to tell Moran what sort of trauma would be constructive to their goals at what times, John could only imagine how far Moran would go. "H-He needs an exam...I can't-" John couldn't form words, the act of pulling from the event to create a cohesive response was far too difficult. But John, ever the doctor and defending soldier, still desired to help Sherlock. "J-Just ask."

"Sherlock needs a comprehensive exam, per John. Paul is free if you need him."
"Okay, John...I'm..." he cleared his throat, loathing pressing this. "Did Moran force himself on you, John?" he blurted out, glad his voice had remained steady despite the way his hands shook. John had already endured so much...so, so much.

John flinched so hard it might have been a muscle spasm and dove away from Greg back under his blankets. Too much. The question was too much. John avoided it and instead showed Greg a particularly nasty scar on the back of his arm. "Sometimes I got to hurt myself and M-Moriarty would stop him." John held out his arm from under the blanket as evidence.

Greg closed his eyes and gave himself three seconds to internally scream. When he opened his eyes again, he cleared his throat gently and tried to accept everything John was saying. He'd only spoken a few words, but he'd shouted volumes. John had said got to as though it was some privilege, and it then occurred to Greg that it likely had been, comparatively.

"I'm so sorry that happened to you," Greg replied quietly, his mind drifting to Sherlock. If Moriarty had been the buffer...he ran a hand over his mouth and closed his eyes. A few slow, deep breaths later, his fingers were shaking on his phone.

Mycroft, you need to make sure Sherlock is alright.

As soon as he'd sent it, he felt foolish. Of course Sherlock wasn't alright, but if there was damage, it had to be fixed before it healed wrong.

He's asleep currently. I'll text Paul and ask him to come now, but I won't wake him until he is ready.

John left his arm out for Greg to see.

Come on, John. If you get the knife all the way through your hand, I'll call him off. He'll be so disappointed, John. He's been asking to take you for soooo long. It's your choice. It's always your choice.

Chapter End Notes

Hellooooo lovelies! We had a bit of a complication, but we're back to posting again! We still want your art, songs, suggestions, and head cannons. Anything you can give us to motivate us on!!
"I-I don't h-have to choose t-t-to h-hurt m-myself o-or b-b-be t-touched...I-I...Moran, he-" John wailed again, hands buried into his hair and eyes squeezed shut.

Greg reached down and very gently covered the pitted scar with his palm, leaving his fingers flat so John could pull away with no resistance if he wanted. He kept his other hand on the back of John's head, gently running his fingertips along John's scalp. "John," he breathed, no longer the police officer, now just Greg, mourning with John, wanting to gather him up and keep him from hurting. "That's never, never going to happen again. You are safe. You are safe now. I'm... John I'm so sorry."

John retracted his arm and put the other one back in its place. He showed his arm, then turned it so the other side was showing. Three puncture scars, larger at the top than they were on the bottom, went up the already destroyed skin. "It happened a lot," he whispered, then retracted the arm. "And Sherlock... Moriarty wasn't... Moran," John wanted to rush to Sherlock and help somehow. "I'd have switched with him. He'd be here with you. I'd have gone back."

Greg allowed John to show him his scars, very carefully touching around the wound but not the new scar tissue. *It happened a lot.* Oh, how he wished he knew exactly what John was talking about. Or rather, he really did not *want to know* but it was... difficult to know how to react when the specific 'it' was undefined. "Sherlock never ever wanted you to go back, John. Never. He went to this knowing how dangerous it was, he wanted to keep you safe. He couldn't help you here, so he helped you there. Or at least, that's what he told me his reasoning was, right before we lost him."

John took a moment to consider everything that had been done to him. With a heavy heart he took stock of the situation, factoring in time lost, injuries gained, relationships destroyed, and trauma inflicted. When viewed from a distance, not just the instantaneous horror he was feeling at the moment, or the mountain he was climbing that day, he was able to get a full grasp of what he had lost. "I'd rather Sherlock and I had died on a case."

Greg exhaled slowly and shook his head. "I'm so sorry you've suffered so horribly. I am. I wish I could ease it for you." He tucked his hands in his lap, giving John his space. "Would anything help? I... we could go out to your tree or... anything, what can I do?"

John, having only recently brought these memories back up, was wracked with sobs once more. When he finally calmed, he shook his head and put his face down on into the sheets. "No, I'm going to sleep. I'll just sleep."

Sleep was the closest thing he could get to the death he so sincerely wanted in this moment.

Greg did not dare move. He stayed just as he was, sitting watch, allowing John to curl up to rest. Paul had already given him a sedative, so hopefully he'd be able to properly sleep. "Okay, John. I'm right here if you need me."

Paul responded to the text, then slowly and painstakingly made his way down the hall to Sherlock's
room, passing the thick layers of security without much notice. Sherlock Holmes was going to be...challenging, to say the least. He'd not worked with him before, but he had plenty of information on the man's disposition and temperament.

He very lightly knocked on the door, pushing it open quietly and announcing himself on a whisper. Mycroft looked up from his place in Sherlock's bed and motioned for Paul to come forward. "As you know, evidence has come to light that Sherlock, and possibly John, have been sexually abused by Moran." He looked down to Sherlock's beaten and torn body. Each movement had brought him pain when he was found, and he could hardly imagine... "What would you suggest?"

Paul had not seen John right when he was recovered. He'd seen Sherlock, but only briefly and with the context of aiding John. Now that Sherlock was sleeping and less buried under grime and blankets, he had to take a moment to take it all in. John's wounds had scarred over, Sherlock was still bruised and smelled of blood. The entire room smelled of blood and astringent, in fact.

He looked over to Mycroft and then down at his brother. "I would suggest making him aware that you know of the potential. Put it on the table, let him choose what he does with it. John is very...there is enough threat of extreme violence that medically, if there is damage, it should be tended to as swift as possible. If he's struggling with infection, his lungs may not be the only source." He quieted, letting that information hang, sliding his hands in his pockets and looking around the room.

"This is very much like the setting in the last tapes, is it not? This wall," he fanned his hand out at the wall at Sherlock's feet, is nearly the same size as the projection wall John was always on. Might want to consider putting something up. How lucid has he been?"

Mycroft gently stroked his brother's hair. "I'll have the medical team on it. As for the room, I'll have things from his old room brought in like we did with John. If Sherlock was sexually abused, it would be devastating. He's hardly been intimate in the past. I might decide to have someone screen the tapes..." Mycroft had no desire to watch his brother be raped, if that was the situation. It would be a terrible invasion of privacy, but they needed to know. "I could have a team work on it...Not tell Sherlock, of course. But if I had people on it we could screen all the footage in a week."

Mycroft looked about the room. "We could bring that awful wallpaper in, his lamp, bed...He still needs medical restraints, though, and I wouldn't want to put those on his bed. It might give him the wrong message, especially with the new information we've gained."

Paul exhaled slowly and shook his head, "I wouldn't bring in things from his home just yet, or at least, not in such detail. If he's still so lost that he has to be physically restrained, it would risk a potential comfort later. Just as you've said with his bed. It is your choice, of course, to have a team review the tapes. However, be advised that he may take that as a massive invasion of privacy and it may damage his trust in you. He was...quite upset that the tapes existed at all. I've a feeling he will eventually puzzle it out that people have watched them."

"Perhaps we can redecorate in a way that is contrary to his place of torment but still far enough away from his home that he doesn't associate home with this difficult period." The room was clean, white, and well lit. The blank wall opposite would be quite easy to project a tape onto.

"He'll likely think we watched them anyway. We did watch them, just not all of it. I believe he is going to hinge his progress on John and I, and would prefer he trust me. Once he wakes, analyze him and tell me what you think. He's been somewhat lucid, but falls into fits quite easily." Mycroft had found one spot on Sherlock's skin that wasn't bruised, cut or burned, and he rubbed it absently with his thumb.
Paul nodded to Mycroft, agreeing with his assessment. "Yes, let's see if we can get the room less clinical. Any lucidity is a very good sign. It's not surprising that he falls into confusion easily, and I encourage you not to become disheartened with it. I'd honestly not expected him to be lucid at all. He will need to be told of the exam. It would be a gross violation not to let him know."

Mycroft pinched the bridge of his nose and prayed that Sherlock would understand the need for, or at least consent to an exam. "That will be a lovely subject to bring up, I'm sure. I prefer for you to be able to watch his reactions, but it might upset him if someone else is here while the subject is open. Sherlock often thinks himself back on the table, and I'm fairly certain he can hear John screaming."

Paul hummed and tapped his lip, looking down at the sleeping man. "That's...problematic, to say the least. We need to address that. I will observe unless I become a problem for him, at which time I will step out."

Sherlock shifted then in his brother's arms, his hand twitching away before relaxing back to Mycroft's chest. Paul stepped back, "I'd like to observe him upon waking as well, if you'll allow it. I cannot effectively help him if I do not get to know him."

"As long as your presence does not stress him, I would prefer you stay. Even then, you'll need to observe. I could set up a camera, or an observation window." Mycroft spoke softly to his baby brother and pulled the blankets up over his shoulder.

"I'll trust your judgement on this. So far, he's only had a few moments that I could call lucid. Even then, he's struggling. He wasn't as psychologically conditioned to be submissive as John, but equally traumatized." Mycroft looked at a wound on Sherlock's collar bone and wondered what had caused it. *Spike, punctured in on the left and dragged to tear the skin.*

"John has a violent fear of medical staff. Does this hold true for Sherlock? We've had to watch John very closely, particularly when Greg was being treated. He's exceedingly protective of him, very articulately threatening the staff when they come near him." Paul's words were cut short as Sherlock suddenly began to speak without otherwise moving.

"Th-that is b-b-because..." Sherlock's breathing hitched, though he was otherwise still, "they h-help cause th-the pain. They k-keep you from dying...k-keep you...th-they hurt." Sherlock's fingers curled tight in Mycroft's shirt, clinging to him as his breathing picked up. Paul went very quiet, nodding to Mycroft as he stepped back, obviously handing him the floor as he kept his eye on Sherlock.

Mycroft's eyes flew to Paul and he wondered just how much of the risky conversation Sherlock, seemingly asleep had nonetheless heard. "Yes, I believe the medical staff still makes Sherlock nervous..." Mycroft answered unnecessarily, then addressed his brother. "Sherlock, the doctors here aren't like the doctors Moran had. These ones give you morphine before they work, and they aren't prepared you to be hurt. This is Paul. He's been helping John."

"The doctors here a-are *exactly* l-like the ones M-M-Moran had. They do what th-they are paid to do." He did not let go of Mycroft, did not, in fact, otherwise move. His breathing leveled to something slow and even, despite the way his back tensed and he held to Mycroft as though he may fall.

"J-John doesn't like Paul," he remarked absently. "Paul is..." slowly Sherlock looked over his shoulder at the man, sweeping his eyes over him, "S-Single, professor, d-drives a Prius."

Paul's face shifted in mild surprise. He'd known the Holmes brothers were a force, but that had been...unexpected. Sherlock looked away before he could respond, but he did not seem to be hiding. To his brother, he whispered in French, "I am i-in pain. John w-won't stop screaming. I know h-he's
not screaming, but he won't s-stop. Why is this man h-here and not with John?"

Mycroft was somewhat pleased with Sherlock's deduction, and it told him that he was at least seeing the basics. "Yes, these doctors do what they are paid to do. But remember that I am the one paying them, and I am protecting you. They do whatever I say, and that keeps you safe."

"Why do you say John doesn't like Paul?" Mycroft didn't so much care about the answer, but wanted to get Sherlock talking. "And I know you are in pain," he responded in French, "And the screaming will stop. Would you like music?"

Sherlock shook his head and held tight to Mycroft's shirt, his voice muffled from under the blankets, tucked down in the hollow of Mycroft's chest.

"John c-clings physically to s-safety. He n-never let's go of Greg f-for long. P-Paul doesn't have s-so much as a wrinkle on him. John's n-never clung to him, b-but he s-smells faintly of Greg's d-deodorant so he's recently come f-from John's room. John is v-very...h-he'd have touched him if h-he felt s-safe with him. Ergo, John doesn't l-like Paul."

He shifted in closer to Mycroft, physically behaving as though expecting pain, guarding and tense, though speaking as though he was at ease. "No music," he returned in French, "m-music is for John."

"Yes, I suppose John is very physical about his need for protection. Perhaps its just that John already has Greg, and doesn't need another person to...cling to..." Mycroft had both arms around Sherlock's shoulders, the need to hold him becoming swiftly for his own sake.

"If you don't want music, is there any way I can help you with the sounds?" Mycroft looked to Paul for help. Sherlock's voice and body seemed disconnected. "Would you like me to lower the lights?"

Sherlock somehow managed to shift deeper into Mycroft's arms, not at all relaxing his body, if anything more tense. "H-He doesn't like Paul," he affirmed, as though convincing himself of it. He blinked slowly then, turning to look back at Paul and then easing back slightly to look at his brother. "W-Why is he here, My? Wh-why...you've n-not had him h-here without John before...s-something's happened. What's h-happened? Oh g-god is John...is John...p-please tell me he...no, My, n-no," his voice swiftly tanked to the pained whine of denial, shaking his head, "p-please no, My, please no."

He could see it perfectly, John still on a slab, foam at the corners of his mouth, eyes dead and staring blank ahead with too much morphine in his veins, heart finally still and silent. He could see his John dead on the cold metal which was far too similar to the torture tables he’d fought so hard to escape.

"Sherlock, John is fine. He is safe and alive. Greg is keeping him safe, and there are people nearby if he needs help. Paul is here because I asked him to come." Mycroft debated whether or not to use John's behavior as a way to open the topic, or if that might be just a bit too difficult for Sherlock to hear. Then again, if not from John or the tapes, how else would he have gotten the information?

"Earlier today, John began to exhibit signs of sexual abuse." Once the sentence was out, Mycroft regretted not phrasing it softer. There was a difference between knowing something and hearing it spoken from someone you trusted. "It seems that it was most likely Moran. If anything of that nature occurred, it would help us if we knew."

Sherlock's jaw twitched and he otherwise did not move. Paul watched as his heart rate dipped and then sped up, though nothing so much as to tip the monitors.

Sherlock's hearing had all but snapped off. His hand began to shake where he grabbed hold of Mycroft, his pulse roaring in his ears.
"Wh-when you say," he managed, his voice breathy and detached, "when y-you say 'signs,' d-does that mean he's t-tested positive for something? Or a-are you t-t-trying to t-tell me I've t-t-tested positive and a-are trying to s-s-s-soften the blow?"

"Neither, Sherlock, neither." Mycroft said hastily and pressed a kiss to the top of his head. Mycroft hadn't been able to watch the video feed, which he usually did when something important happened. He wasn't sure what had transpired. "You were both tested for the major infections, but we haven't run a kit on either of you. With your permission..." Mycroft stopped and looked over to Paul, expression pleading for assistance.

"I was just wondering if there was anything you could tell us."
Sherlock drew his hand away from his brother, trembling and pressing his face to his pillow as much a his broken body would allow. "What w-would you have me t-tell you? Your...c-conclusions are n-not wrong. Please, b-brother do not subject me to...to that."

Mycroft's heart sank like a stone into the coldest recesses of his body and left him feeling old. It was crushing to have a verbal confirmation, even though in his mind he had already knew it to be true. He had illogically held on to a small scrap of hope. "I'm so sorry, Sherlock. I'm so sorry." Mycroft held Sherlock to him and tried to cover him with his arms.

Paul stepped forward then, speaking softly. "Sherlock, you do not have to tell us anything you do not feel comfortable sharing. It is your physical health we are immediately concerned with. If there is...a need for medical intervention...the sooner we know the better. John believes you should submit to an exam."

Sherlock suddenly shouted, turning his face to Paul and grabbing Mycroft for grounding security. "John has s-said no such thing! John is g-glad that I'm awake! He d-does not w-want- he, h-h-he would n-never-" he shouted again, his eyes flashing before turning back to Mycroft. "M-Make him leave. John isn't...John wouldn't...he wouldn't!"

The shouting surprised him, and Mycroft tried to calm him. "Sherlock, it's alright. I'll have him leave. But please remember that John is a doctor, and he loves you. Therefore he would only suggest something if he genuinely believed it was the begs thing for you."

Paul swiftly moved out into the hallway, encountering Miller who'd moved towards the room at the sound of Sherlock's shouting. Quietly the two of them stood outside, discussing the case.

"NO!" Sherlock shouted at Mycroft, though he clung to him anyhow. He was trembling now, from his toes to his head, his stomach turning on him. "No! N-No John wouldn't- he wouldn't! My, h-he wouldn't. No, no I c-can't. I cannot. I w-will n-not. It is p-pointless for a kit, t-too late after a-and..." he gagged, shaking his head and groaning, "I kn-know who- it w-w-w-was just him and-"

Sherlock was suddenly trying to sit up, pushing up off the bed as well as he could with the one arm, his breathing wild and panicked. "I w-want to leave. I want to l-leave now I- n-no more of this I d-don't p-please I don't want the d-d-doctors putting the-their hands-" He was suddenly sicking up over the side of his bed, bile tinged with blood, hardly anything at all and yet his body nearly doubled with the violence of it. Pain seared across him as he curled his back and upset just barely healing wounds, making him scream when he could gather enough air to do so. Mycroft waited for him to finish sicking up then clutched Sherlock to his chest. "Okay! Alright! There will be no kit. Absolutely no kit. The doctors won't touch you, I won't let them hurt you. You're right. You know who it was. We'll just go on that." Mycroft wasn't sure how that choice would go over with the doctors, but it was important for Sherlock to feel safe with these doctors.

Mycroft hadn't been touched with anger for years. Irritation, yes, but not anger. His emotions ran rather shallow, or more likely, he had them tightly regimented and controlled. But now, with his little
brother tortured and raped, he was mentally screaming. Moran would be brought alive, and Mycroft would handle him personally. "No kit. No kit. It's alright."

Sherlock blindly pushed back against Mycroft before something gave just above his elbow, searing pain across his mind and drowning out his rationality. He went lax in the way he knew bought him time, panting with a terrified groan on each exhalation.

He clamped his eyes shut and cradled his arm to his chest, coveting the ability to do so while it lasted. John screamed right next to his head and he flinched violently away, right into Mycroft, clutching at his brother again and screaming until his voice cracked.

Paul opened the door then, coming in quietly with Miller. He took in the situation, holding up a hand to keep Miller from approaching.

"Sherlock? Sherlock! It's alright. Everything is alright. Here," Mycroft took out his phone and played the video with John speaking pleasantly and happily, with no trace of pain in his voice. "John is fine, and you are safe. I won't let them hurt you." The screaming was disconcerting, to say the least, and drew from Mycroft an expression of helpless anguish.

Paul raised his hand to stop Mycroft but it was too late. Sherlock went very, very still. It was actually Miller who moved first, his legs twitching to life before Paul's as Sherlock dropped into blind, unrestrained panic.

"'NO!' He roared, lashing out in a desperate bid to protect himself, "God no, NO!"

Miller caught his wrist before he managed to clock Mycroft for six. Paul moved in then, slipping a sedative into Sherlock's line that would force him to relax. Sherlock swiftly lost muscle tone as he struggled under Miller. "A-anything else...any- please...M-Moran...Christ...please!"

Mycroft shut the phone down as soon as Sherlock's reaction was made clear. "Sherlock, Sherlock, it's alright! John isn't in pain! Listen to him! He was happy!" Mycroft clung to Sherlock and ducked his head down to keep from being hit.

"Moran isn't here! He's gone! It's Mycroft! My!" The older brother tried in vain to soothe the younger with soft words and gentle touches, but it did little to help the panic.

Miller let Sherlock go as the sedative kicked in, only to watch him reach for himself, clawing at his own skin in agony. "Stop!" he shouted, trembling hard enough to make the shocks on the bed creak with the force of it.

He swiftly drew blood and Miller grabbed his wrist again as Paul spoke to Mycroft.

"This is a complex flashback," he stated over Sherlock's acute panic, "he has the sedative on already, it just has to pass."

Sherlock had wide eyes to Miller, gagging as he tugged at his wrist. "I hurt h-him, it was m-m-me I...l-listen...please listen! It w-was me, god stop...Stop!" He gave another desperate twist, trying to free himself, "don't...don't! N-Not today, I...please I'm..." He broke down into French, pleasing for Mycroft again. "I don't feel g-good...My...I...I d-don't feel good," pathetic and child like as he began to sob.

Mycroft grabbed Sherlock's arm and held it flat against the man's rapidly rising and falling chest to keep him from hurting himself. "Sherlock, that's not Moran! John is safe! John is very, very safe." Mycroft repeated the phrase in a plethora of languages, Dutch, Latin, French, Arabic, Slovak, Russian... It went on and on, and he prayed something would go through.

Sherlock abruptly stopped when the barrage of languages did over his mind, demanding his focus. He blinked at Mycroft, quieting.

"My," he breathed, shifting as much as he was able and pressing his forehead to Mycroft's chest, "My. I want t-to go home."
Mycroft put his hand over Sherlock's ear and pressed him to his chest. "I know you want to go home. I know. I am so sorry, but this is safer. We'll go into a different room, though, if this one upsets you. Maybe one with a window."

Mycroft didn't know if it would upset Sherlock or help him to see John out by the tree, alive and unharmed, or if it would simply stress him more.

Paul kept a close eye on the men, making a note to ask Mycroft what had been said in the languages outside of English. Sherlock began to cry, shaking his head. "J- John didn't...h-h-he didn't tell you to l-let them...please t-tell m-me he didn't tell you to let th-them touch me. I- he wasn't suppos-s-ed to s-say a-a-a-nything about that p-part." Paul wondered if Sherlock was aware of his language shift, sliding in and out of English at random.

Miller spoke softly to Mycroft, "I need to look at that arm."

Lying to Sherlock Holmes was generally a practice that only served to waste one's breath and tarnish one's reputation, but Mycroft tried anyway. "He only said that you might need medical help. That's all. He didn't say the doctors could touch you. All he said was that you might need medical attention. He never said they could touch you. Nobody is going to touch you."

Miller's mind was on fingernails pressed into burned skin, and a body already teeming with infection. "Mycroft, I am sorry, but I very much need to see what's been done to his arm and his chest. We could sedate him properly and handle...everything."

Sherlock went very still, curling in on himself at the idea of being pressed to his back now that all of this had been called up. "Don't...d-don't touch me... I want to g-go home, I don't want to b-be here I want to go h-home!"

"Alright, sedate him, but don't do anything else." Mycroft didn't want Sherlock restrained at this moment, not with the new information at hand. "Sherlock, it's going to be alright. It really, really is. You can go home once all your injuries have healed, I promise."

Sherlock began to beg as he turned his face in horror, eyes only to the syringe, scrambling into his brother's space as Miller came slowly to his side, speaking slow and soft, which still did nothing for him. It was another thirty seconds before his iron grip on Mycroft slowly eased, and his eyes rolled up in his head, and he dropped off.

"Likely an hour," Miller said of the time Sherlock would be down. He rolled the limp man to his back and looked back to Mycroft. "We really should do an exam. If he's had damage done, now is the time to fix it."

Paul cleared his throat and touched Miller's back to silence him, his eyes to Mycroft. "Let's have a walk, Mycroft," he offered, noting all the tight, stressed lines on his face. The man had just learned an entire new level of torment his younger brother had endured. Anyone would be hit hard.

Mycroft gathered Sherlock back up and held his brother long after it was quite clear the man was under. He held him, wondering if memories of what had happened even in the supposed peace of sleep.

When he finally did release Sherlock, he kept him on his side as he had been. Sherlock wouldn't know he had been on his back, but it still bothered him. Sentiment.

Mycroft did not want to be psychoanalyzed by a shrink, at the moment, but knew he needed advice
at how to best handle Sherlock, and left the room with Paul. Paul walked with him slowly, keeping to his side and breathing deep as they effortlessly slid through security. He was intentionally keeping Mycroft moving, which was one physical way to help settle the mind.

"I know you don't want to talk about yourself, so please hear that I will not press you. That was...traumatic for you. A walk will help. Now, when you are ready to talk about Sherlock, tell me."

Mycroft walked down the halls, stopping occasionally to clear them to security. "Yes, traumatic. My position as the older brother has been to protect him since he was born. Such a long standing goal is difficult to fail, even when I am well aware I got him out faster than anyone else ever could."

Mycroft was very open, but spoke in a flat, monotone voice that gave little hint at his own pain. "You are not my therapist, Paul. You are Sherlock's, and Greg's, and John's. If I need to converse with someone about what happened, I will do so. For now, I would like to hear your plan for his recovery."

Paul put up his hands, "That's all I was referring to when I said to let me know when you are ready to talk about him. You've made yourself abundantly clear regarding help for yourself. Would you like to take a few minutes before we press on, or are you ready now?"

Mycroft rounded a corner and looked outside to John's tree. If the damn thing offered Greg and John so much comfort, then perhaps there was something to it. Ignoring his own overly defensive attitude, Mycroft walked out the doors and around the small path. "Let's not waste time."

Paul made no mention of their destination as he kept pace with Mycroft and began to speak. "Sherlock is still very much in the acute stages. I do not want you to lose hope here. It is common for the confusion to persist while he is still so physically injured. He has several triggers which call him back to you and they appear to have consistent outcomes. This is very useful. I would highly recommend that you refrain showing John on camera or audio while he is confused or hallucinating."

"Perhaps the languages center his mind," Mycroft offered and rounded the outside path. It was well kept, with a cement base printed to look like cobblestones. Mycroft kept his eyes ahead, on the wall that they walked towards in the square courtyard. "I won't lose hope just eleven days after he arrived. John was still foaming at the mouth, and Sherlock has managed to speak. It's encouraging, somewhat, though still disturbing."

Paul nodded, keeping to the man's side. He was going to be...interesting to work with. "I do have to agree with Miller and John though, Mycroft. He needs to be looked at. John does as well, likely, though the rush is less urgent as the damage is already done. I don't know how extensive John's...contact was. It sounds as though Moriarty tempered it. Neither have been very clear. That said, I'm sure I do not need to explain the need for caution. Perhaps another look at the tapes would aid us in our efforts to help them."

He cleared his throat and looked to the sky for a moment. "On a very encouraging note, John was...very...protective of Sherlock in his own way. His reaction was...had Sherlock been more stable, I'd have brought them together right then."

"I think it would be good for Sherlock to have John, but if he is in a fit it might prompt him to believe John is about to be hurt. That, in turn, could set John off..." Mycroft had always hated walking on eggshells when it came to people, but these two men needed it more than anyone he had ever come to deal with.

"Examining Sherlock without his consent is something I simply will not do unless his life is on the line. If you believe they can get it all done without him ever finding out, I'll consider it. It would be a major violation of trust, as I've already established that the doctors only do my bidding. Sherlock
needs an anchor, and John is not steady enough to provide it." Mycroft walked by the door for the second time, leading them in circles around the tree.

"My suggestion is not to deceive him. This is often the very first step in dealing with victims of this nature, getting them to accept the need for medical attention. I would never advise you to lie to your brother, just as I have never advised Greg to lie to John. In regards to a visit, I need you to make the nature of John and Sherlock's relationship more clear. I was there when Sherlock told John that he loved him. Which decidedly did not go over well. Is he aware that Greg and John frequently exchange those words? I highly doubt John will be willing to part with Greg anytime in the next year, possibly much longer. Is there anyone else in Sherlock's life that might...serve to help him? I am aware your line of work will not allow interaction with Sherlock as Greg provides for John."

Greg was a fantastic asset for John, but Sherlock might be disheartened to learn that his only friend and love was literally clinging to someone else for comfort. "Yes, the two were always very close. John became very loyal to Sherlock very quickly, and while perhaps John remained oblivious, almost everyone who knew them could tell they were attached. Personally, I think that Sherlock needs John to functioning properly more than he needs him to be single, or unattached, or whatever you'd call it. Perhaps if Sherlock could learn to trust Greg as well, the three could socialize. Mrs. Hudson has always been a comfort to him, his landlady, but she handles stress rather poorly. Theres a young woman, Molly, who was quite smitten with him, but I don't think she would handle the pressure well."

Paul nodded and went quiet, letting his mind work on that for a few moments. "So no, then." He hummed and folded his hands behind his back. "That is unfortunate."

There really was no solution for that. "Even if John were able to tolerate Sherlock's company for long, he and Greg would likely have to abruptly and unpredictably depart. I can't imagine that will be easy for Sherlock to handle." He looked over to Mycroft for a moment and then back to the path. "Well. In that case, our primary goal first and foremost should be to find how to keep him comfortable in his own company. John can scarcely tolerate Greg's absence for more than a literal minute at a time. Sherlock cannot be allowed to form such an attachment with you."

Mycroft kept his eyes ahead, but his attention was more in tune with Paul. "I suppose such an attachment would be devastating, either for him or for my work. He's got the possibility of becoming even more attached, as he wasn't exactly emotionally well rounded before this. He'd hide how much he hated John leaving by pretending he didn't notice, and that was just to shops. In my opinion, John should begin to learn how to be comfortable in his own company. He'll need to be able to some day. For god's sake, Greg needs to shower without stress."

Paul cut his eyes to Mycroft with interest before looking away. That was an interesting moment of displacement. He'd not once asked of John's progress outside of the benefit to his brother. "Mycroft, I do hope that you understand the differences between Sherlock and John. John was brainwashed and horrifically conditioned for months on end. Sherlock has endured, much as it seems otherwise, and is not so far gone. John is...recoverable, I fully believe, but I highly doubt that attachment with Greg will ever fade. We are already working on getting Greg away from him in short stages, but it is incredibly traumatic. He is making stunning strides in his progression."

He went quiet then, thinking of the complex issues at hand. "I am aware this is...perhaps not exactly favorable to Sherlock. We can only work with what we have."

"Yes, it's all rather unfortunate isn't it? John is injured, and Sherlock is forced to watch him grow attached to another. Moriarty always was rather dramatic." Mycroft spoke dryly and made their
fourth revolution around the path. "I doubt John will ever be able to live without Greg. Not outside of a mental hospital, anyway. Sherlock will not be happy with that, as I believe he might have pictured himself having some sort of life with John. Not anymore, I suppose. But I doubt he thought their adventures would end this way. Perhaps if we can get him alright with Greg being across the room, or in a different room nearby with the doors open, Sherlock and John will be able to interact in a way he would like."

Paul nodded, "All part of the plan, Mycroft, John has simply not been ready. I do anticipate that in perhaps two years time, John will have the potential to operate normally again. I do not see him as a man doomed to a half-life. He is remarkably resilient. That he has recovered even this much is stunning. As for your brother...this will undoubtedly be difficult for him. He has already seen John's attachment to Greg. That may be helpful. I doubt they will physically be near one another any time soon, anyhow. Sherlock will have to find other ways to manage. I do not say that with lack of sympathy. This is, by far, the most malicious scenario I've ever professionally encountered."

He allowed the silence to hang for a few minutes.

"What is your timeline of availability?"

"All of this," Mycroft waved his hand at the facility and it's staff, "is possible because Moran is a threat to national security. Taxpayer money is not simply going to waste, and neither is the funding I've supplied myself. When it was Morairty, I had more leave to pursue the project, but now that it's only a secondary threat, the funds might run out. Also, once we remove the threat, none of this is necessary. Once they are no longer an asset in finding a threat to national security, the government cares very little about the recovery of my brother and his friend, unfortunately."

"Ah. That...is complicating. Understandable but complicating. John will likely go anywhere Greg takes him. Sherlock...well." He ran a hand over his mouth and shook his head. "So Sherlock has essentially doomed himself by killing Moriarty. That...would be information he would be best kept away from for now, I believe. Do you have any estimate on how much time they likely have to stay here? And am I correct in assuming that once Sherlock is no longer here, is time with you will be...drastically decreased?"

"Not necessarily," Mycroft interjected in response to killing Moriarty dooming Sherlock. "Yes, he likely would have undergone less sexual abuse had Moriarty been there, but he also would have been properly psychologically conditioned. Moran lacked the finesse and thought Moriarty put into things. He just slashed. Also, Moriarty would have been harder to find."

"As for time..." Mycroft put his head down into his hands. "I might be able to work from home occasionally, but I'll be needed once this project is over. If we could get him living with Greg, that would be best. I'll fund it, of course, and make things easy for Greg in payment."

Paul nearly reached out to put a hand on Mycroft's shoulder before thinking better of it. "Are they looking at a few days left here? A few weeks? Sherlock has more surgery to undergo, does he not? We will find a solution, Mycroft. There is always a solution."

He looked over to John's window, staring in their direction. "If living with Greg and John is something we seriously want to consider, then John is going to have to spend time with Sherlock as soon as possible. I honestly don't know if he will be able to tolerate Sherlock for more than a few minutes at a time, which obviously rules out that option if it cannot be...improved in time."

"I could always..." Mycroft shook his head. If he was going to stall and capture Moran later in the game to give Sherlock and John a better chance at recovering, he sure as hell wasn't going to tell someone who had gotten in on Greg's good word. "I believe the three of them should start spending more time together, and John should learn to spend time alone."
"I will do my best, Mycroft. He nearly dissolved once Greg left the last time. It is...very difficult on Greg to put John in hysterics. A timeline would be very helpful, but I will proceed from there. I don't particularly think this is a wise way to proceed, but we will try. I will go speak with John, I'd suggest you spend as much time with your brother as possible while he is here. It never hurts to build up in his mind that he is loved. I imagine he's not exactly feeling as such at the moment."

"I'll likely take..." Mycroft knew he could whip Moran into prison in under a week and a half. He was nothing compared to Moriarty when it came to hide and seek, and this time he didn't have one of Moriarty's pre-made hiding holes to shut himself up in. But a week seemed so terrifyingly short. They might as well just ship them out now. "Two weeks. But after that I can insist on dismantling the entire web, which might buy us more time. Two weeks is solid, and time after that is subject to how much of a threat they deem the headless snake, and how much of a benefit two broken men could be."

Paul nodded. That was not enough time by half, but they would have to work with what they had. Greg and John had a few hours of rest since the morning, and while there was this trauma to deal with, there was the very real issue of a recently rescued man potentially returning home completely alone. As it stood, Paul gave him three nights, maximum, on his own before he killed himself.

"Okay. I'll go speak with John and Greg. Please do not hold for a miracle there, Mycroft, as it would be nothing short of one if John was able to stomach living with your brother."

"Able to stomach living with your brother. There was one phrase Mycroft would never subject Sherlock too. "Of course. Perhaps houses adjacent to each other, or in two separate flats in the same compound. Speculation isn't useful at this moment. The closer John is to being able to stay with Sherlock, the better. He needs John. He needed him before when none of this had even happened."

Paul looked at Mycroft with an expression best described as Professionally Saddened, a distant sort of empathy. "I am very sorry to hear that." He looked over to John's window and back to Mycroft. "If I can get John to come see Sherlock today, will that be acceptable? This is not advisable. Any of this. But the alternative of Sherlock returning to live alone, just weeks after massive surgery and torture...far less advisable. You will have to consider hiring someone to look after him, Mycroft."

"I've considered hiring someone, yes. But he's a bit difficult to live with, even for those who love him." Mycroft opened the door and headed back down the hall to his study. "Pushing this will be difficult and taxing for both of them, but Sherlock won't last long without John. If he thinks John needs him, and John thinks Sherlock needs him, the two will go on living despite their own pain."

Paul found that scenario very unlikely. John would live for Greg. He would empathize with Sherlock, but it was Greg he would live for. "I would not leave Sherlock unrestrained if he is alone. I'll be in touch as soon as there is anything to report."

Paul parted from Mycroft and moved back to John's room, lightly knocking on the door. Greg's voice was swift to invite him in, and he entered quietly, taking a chair. "We need John up. John...can you talk to me for a moment?"

John awoke blearily, rubbing his eyes and stretching his tight legs. His mind chose not to draw up the recent developments, and instead it felt like a normal day with Greg. "What is it?"

Paul very much did not like this idea as a practitioner, but their hands truly were tied.

"John. I do apologize for being so forward with this. You are, as ever, free to say no." He looked to Greg in a sort of silent apology and shifted to better face John. "Our timeline has just shortened, John, and I must ask you some frank questions regarding your thoughts on Sherlock Holmes. There are no wrong answers, I simply need to know where you stand. Can you talk to me about this for a
"My thoughts on Sherlock?" John retracted a bit and his eyes squinted in suspicion. "If I can remember, I'll tell you. That doesn't sound too bad. It's not bad, right Greg?" John looked to the man for confirmation of his own thoughts, as if they couldn't truly be solid until Greg had validated them.

Paul looked between them. Greg gave a small nod, but John's earlier dedication to Sherlock seemed to have vanished. "Let me be more specific, John. Sherlock is hurting and would very much like to see you."

Greg looked up sharply to him and then to John, utterly shocked, now sure that Sherlock had been subject to the treatment John feared. There was something else on, but he wasn't sure what.

"Okay." John said simply and looked around the room. He refused to make a big deal out of this. "I can see Sherlock. I did it before and-" John's voice cut out and his expression changed. "And I hurt him, and he was worse, and he didn't see me again for...for...I don't know..."

"Since. He hasn't seen you since. You were not as...you are now. John, if you believe this will be a problem, it is alright to tell me so. You are not obligated in this, and it is a very real possibility that Sherlock may panic no matter what you do, through no fault of your own."

Greg's face was pulled tight in confusion. This was not at all what he'd expected.

"I don't want to hurt him. Don't let me hurt him." John turned to Greg and took hold of his arm. "You musn't let me hurt him. I'll go, and if I start to do something wrong, stop me. Last time I...What was it? What did I do? I said it was his fault. Oh, God...I didn't mean that." John took a moment to collect himself, then spoke with resolve. "I'll go."

Paul tipped his watch. It was very likely Sherlock was awake. Perhaps this meeting would remind Mycroft what a poor option this was. He sent off a text, letting Mycroft know they were coming.

"I'll get you a chair," he said as he got up and left the room.

Greg looked over to John, speaking soft and quick. "Are you sure? John you don't have to go. Paul just said Sherlock might react poorly no matter what you do. I don't want you to get hurt."

"I'm supposed to help Sherlock," John said firmly and gave a small nod. "That means that I go when I'm supposed to and I show him that I'm alright and that he'll be alright and the pain gets better." John had, in one statement, summed up his entire worth and value according to himself.

Paul hesitated outside the door, at odds with his professional mind. This was likely going to end poorly, but the situation was far from normal. He exhaled swiftly and brought the chair into John's room. Mycroft had not replied, but he'd take the invitation as standing.

"He's still...very lost, John. He may not particularly understand what is going on."

John, however, got up willingly and straightened his old jumper that hung like a tent about his thin shoulders. "I'm alright. Greg'll come, and Greg will keep things alright."

Greg blinked and tried to remain calm at that idea. "I will do my best," he said quietly, getting up and helping to detach John from the feeding and drip lines. John was...a bit more fleshed out, less Holocaust and more terminally ill in appearance now, the distinction was minor, but he'd take it. The increased feeds were helping, if only slightly.

Paul dragged a hand over his head and allowed Greg to push the chair after grabbing an injectible sedative, as well as John's dissolving pills. He led the way, slowly, painstakingly, to Sherlock's room, gently knocking on the door and waiting for the invitation to come in before pushing it open.
Greg closed his eyes as the faint smell of blood and fear floated out of the door and towards them. He held out his palm to Paul and instantly offered John two of his pills before pushing him in. "I'd take them, John. Please."

John recoiled from the scent and raised wide eyes to Greg. The room did not smell safe. It smelt of torture and pain, as his own had when he was with Moriarty. "They aren't hurting him, right?" John asked and took the pills without a moment's hesitation. "They wouldn't do that, right? Can I see him? Is he alright?"

Mycroft opened the door for them and took in their appearances. "He's stirring. Come in."

Greg leaned down and whispered to John before they moved. "He's not being hurt. He is wounded, and is still healing. He's still confused, and he's hurting from what's been done to him, but he's not being hurt anymore here, okay? No one here is hurting him."

He moved John slightly inside and then left it up to him where he wanted to go.

Sherlock had been treated, bandaged and seen to, though without the recommended exam. He had a hefty dose of painkiller and was at a slight incline. He'd been trying to wake up over the last ten minutes, silently moving on the bed, twitching here and there, his breathing picked up though not overly so.

John took all of Sherlock's injuries in with a methodically moving gaze, never allowing himself to linger on any one contusion for fear he would recognize the imprint of the pipe or crowbar. John wheeled himself just inside the doorway and stopped, trying not to panic at the terrible smell of the room. The blood and sweat bothered him the most, though the smell of astringent almost helped, reminding him of a time when he was a medical man and such smells meant other things, not pain. This period of concentration lasted several minutes, and John scowled at the ground in front of him. "Is he okay with sleeping?"

Sherlock's eyes flew open when John spoke. They locked to the man in the chair and he silently stared, his face falling to an expression of shocked silence. "J-John?" he finally breathed, looking up slowly at Greg and then Paul before finding his brother. He swallowed hard and looked back to John, studying his face, trying to pair it with the man in the video who'd told him he was glad Sherlock had woken up.

John pushed himself up to his feet and walked over, proud that he had been exercising and could manage it easier. "Uhm...Yeah, It's me. John. Are you...Are you alright? They said you were hurting and I don't like it when you're hurting." John had his hands in nervous little fists held together in front of his stomach, not quite over his chest out of fear, but not relaxed and by his sides. He wasn't worried for himself, no, this man was clearly not a threat, but he was worried. "I don't want to mess up and say the wrong thing. I'm sorry. I never was good at knowing what you were thinking."

Sherlock followed John with his eyes, dumbstruck, trying to take in details and failing. He looked from John to Greg in a panic. Did Greg know? Did they all know? What the hell was John doing here? John hated him, blamed him, held him accountable for everything and Sherlock had accepted a long time ago that it was rightly so.

"I...I-I..." he struggled to form words, so incredibly stunned to see him. "I'm...f-f-fine, John. E-everything is f-fine. You d-d-don't have to..." he closed his eyes and tried to calm himself down. God, was John here to convince him to have an exam or..."I...y-you don't have to be s-s-sorry." He
loathed how destroyed his voice was, hardly recognizing it himself.

John didn't quite whimper at how devastated Sherlock sounded, but he exhaled sharply and his face fell. John slowly sat down in the chair that had been pulled away by Mycroft when he went to get the door. It was a perfect distance away, and kept him about eye level with Sherlock, if he slouched. "I want to do something to help you," John said in as reasonable a tone as he could. Nervously, he cast a glance back to Greg, wondering if he was doing anything wrong yet. "I...I miss you."

Sherlock looked from John to Greg, and then from Greg to Mycroft. He stared at his brother for nearly a minute, trying to determine if Mycroft had done this to John, had put him up to this. John was keeping as far away from him as possible. Nothing about his behavior lent to the authenticity of that statement.

He looked back to John then, taking in what was left of the man he'd so deeply loved. He gave him a sad smile as his heart twisted in his chest. Whatever cruel game the others were playing, it was clear that John was just a gambit. "You w-were always such a t-t-terrible liar," he said fondly, suddenly having to look away. "I'm s-scaring you. I d-don't mean to. J-John you don't h-h-have to be here. I..." he closed his mouth as his eyes burned, wondering if perhaps he was hallucinating the entire thing.

"I wasn't lying," John said in a small, defeated voice and looked down to his lap. He didn't miss Sherlock, per say, and was quite content to be told Sherlock was asleep and stay with Greg for the day. But he did miss the old Sherlock, the cases and the happiness that had been so quickly ripped away from him. "Never mind. I...I just wanted to say hello..." John looked back to Greg and could feel tears burning in his eyes. But Greg was there, Greg would keep him safe, and thus John turned back to Sherlock. "You don't scare me anymore. Not really. I'm here, and I couldn't watch a video before but I'm here now and I can see you and it doesn't really hurt but you're sad and I don't like it when you're sad because you're Sherlock and I'm supposed to protect you." John had to take a deep breath after the long, rambling, grammatically appalling attempt at a cohesive sentence was finished. "But if you send me away, I'll go. I'll shut up."

Greg moved closer and put his hand on John's shoulder to steady him as Paul looked to Sherlock. This was entirely unfair to both of the men. He watched the distress flit across Sherlock's face before he schooled it, blinking up at the ceiling before looking to his brother.

"Why are you doing th-this to him?" He breathed, very carefully keeping the pain out of his voice. He switched to French, speaking as calmly as he could make himself through the intense wave of pain, "He's h-here through some desperate s-sense of purpose. You are h-hurting him. Look at him, My, h-he's afraid of m-me. He can't help me an-anymore. W-why are you doing this to him?"

He carefully turned back to John, trying to give him as warm of an expression as he was capable of making in that moment, broadsided by the weight of his loss. "I'm doing it wrong, aren't I?" John asked in earnest and turned his face up to Greg. "I'm awful. I'm sorry. I-I'm not good at this like Greg is." Taking Sherlock's calm French to mean that he was, in fact, calm, John rose to his feet and took shuffling steps over. "I'm sorry," he said and reached out his hand. Leaning forward he could just barely brush the tips of his fingers against Sherlock's, but the man's smell kept him from coming closer at the moment.

"I really do miss you," he tried again, eyes filled with tears and chin almost touching his chest. "I tried. I want to help you and do something but I'm an idiot and can't do anything right. Please, I'm not trying to hurt you."

Sherlock forcibly kept his chin still as warm heat bled up from his fingertips, making him want nothing more than to reach out and wrap around John and never let go. He was breathing harshly
through his nose, doing his best to keep quiet, eyes down to where John had briefly and yet willingly touched him.

"I n-never-" he paused, breathing through the ache in his throat and the burning blur of tears, "I thought I'd n-never get t-t-o speak with you again," he managed. He counted his breathing, in for three and out for five, repeating three times before he could trust himself. He had to tell John now, right now, while John seemed to want to talk to him. "I w-was a coward. I should h-h-have looked for you, I missed you and I w-was...so m-miserable that you'd l-left that I hid mys-self. I d-deserve this, but you? You n-n-never deserved th-this. I am so ind-descrribably sorry, John."

He could not bear to look at him, could not bear to see betrayal on John's face again. "You are not-t an idiot, a-and you are so f-f-far from useless I d-don't even know where t-to begin. I..." his voice cracked then, already rough and gravely, shattering as his walls, now hilariously made of sand in the path of the tide, dissolved to nothing. He pressed his hand over his face as well as he was able, loathing the audience, wishing he could strangle himself with his drip line. "I m-miss you, I will...I will continue t-to miss you. I am s-so glad Greg has you n-now," of and the lie that was, "I- I...John I-" he shook his head as his chest caught hard over a sob and he made himself go silent, trying to gather himself back to some level of composure.

John slid his fingers into Sherlock's injured hand and kept it there. For a brief moment an irrational panic struck him, and he feared Sherlock would grab him by the wrist and hurt him. *We've held hands before on a case. This is nothing new. I'm alright. I can do this.*

John was rocked hard by Sherlock's words. He was still feeling betrayed and worthless deep down, as all his time thinking he was just a day away from rescue was for nothing. "I understand that you were tricked," John said, each word pronounced well and deliberate. "I don't think you deserve this." That statement was as true as anything he'd ever said, and John repeated it just to be sure Sherlock understood. "You don't deserve this. I wish he had stopped with me, or come back for me, but you..." John curled his fingers around Sherlock's and his shoulders shook lightly. "I-I wish you weren't hurting. I hate it when you're hurting. I want to help. I should have known you didn't want me to leave. I thought..." John grit his teeth and his other arm came up to cross his chest. "Thought you'd be glad I wasn't there to bother you. I was going to miss you and you acted like you didn't care and-" John stopped, unable to put into words how badly that had hurt. Unrequited affection is a bitter pain, and John had believed their relationship to be rather one sided.

"I-I-I'm sorry, Sherlock, I-I-" A heavy, coughing sob shook him and he pressed his fingers against his eyes. "Should h-h-h've known.."

Sherlock stared down at their joined hands as a tear struck down the side of his face.

Greg moved forward, propelled by John's shaking shoulders, coming to stand at his side and wrapping an arm around John's back, lightly squeezing his bicep. This was all incredibly difficult to watch. John was afraid, but making a valiant effort at maintaining. He could easily recall Sherlock's aloof, nonplussed behavior the weeks before John left. He'd practically stopped talking, only snapping and throwing into the mix as rude of behavior as possible while working cases. He'd gotten under John's skin, and John was not particularly pleased with him on the day he'd gone to the airport.

Sherlock had yet to speak as heavy tears quietly rolled down his cheeks. It was a crushing punishment for his inability to function properly. That John had left because he could not behave like a proper man, that they'd endured all of this unspeakable mess because he personally was a social moron, was a blow so heavy he'd have sworn his ribs had been crushed in.
He forced himself to drag in a few panicked breaths, his heart racing along at a pace that was nearly painful, before he managed to school himself again. He flicked his eyes to John before looking down once more, staring at their fingers. "W-Will I be allowed to s-s-see you at all once we've left here? O-or if not that...then p-perhaps a ch-chat over the phone now and again?" he asked, hardly above a whisper. He pinched his eyes closed, bracing for the answer, not daring to squeeze John's hand lest he run.

John had to remind himself that Sherlock wasn't supposed to be told that he planned on leaving, and agreed readily. "Yeah, Sherlock, I'll see you still. I'm going to help you. I'm going to stay with you and help you if you want me. I'm sorry. He said I was going to hurt you and I tried not to but-but I-I-" John shuddered and dropped his head down. It was only with a great deal of will power, more than he had ever needed in his life, that he kept his hand in Sherlock's.

"I-I never never wanted to-to hurt y-y-you-" John broke then and his hand twitched. He turned away in shame, not fear, and grabbed a hold of Greg's shirt. "I'm sorry!" He cried, hand in Sherlock's still but just barely, and buried his face against Greg's stomach.

"I'm not mad at you, Sherlock," he spoke through tears, "I'm n-not scared of you I-I-" John pried himself away from Greg and looked back to Sherlock with tears wetting his cheeks and tinting the rims of his eyes red. "I'm sorry, please, don't hate me for this."

Sherlock had looked up sharply when John proclaimed that he'd stay with him, only to see the deception there. He'd been coached, and was clearly dropping lines he'd been told to. His eyes fell closed when John turned away, burying into Greg who wrapped protective arms around him, holding John while he cried. He was holding Sherlock's hand as one would reach out towards a venomous snake, with great exertion and effort.

"I don't h-hate you, John," Sherlock breathed through the lump in his throat, hardly able to generate sound. He looked back up to Greg as he very slowly pulled his hand away, giving John a reprieve. "Please t-take him where he's c-comfortable. Please."

Greg looked from Sherlock to Mycroft and then down to John, whom he was holding very tight to his chest, trying to soothe him. Sherlock had an expression on his face that Greg had never seen there and it hurt. He leaned down and whispered softly to John, "Let's go, John, let's go get you in bed, let you rest."

Fearing that he had, once again, done the wrong thing, John turned an imploring look to Greg and shook his head. "I can stay. I can. I'm alright," John kept one arm wrapped firmly around Greg, but squirmed in his chair to face Sherlock.

"Please," he begged, confusion, agony, guilt and pain tearing at the lines in his face, "Don't send me away. I don't like being sent away. I want to help. That's all I want to do is help." John believed himself to be failing miserably and began to beg for acceptance and forgiveness. He already viewed himself as worthless, broken, abused and cast aside, needed by no one and a burden to everyone, and watching Sherlock ask his handler to bring him away was devastating.

In an act of desperation and bravery, John released Greg and slipped out of his chair. He knelt down beside Sherlock's bed, forcing himself to take deep breathes through his mouth to avoid the smell. He trembled with the stress of it, but managed to tip his head forward to rest against his and Sherlock's hands. "D-d-don't p-push m-m-me aw-away."

Sherlock stared down at John in complete shock, rocked hard by this display. He could hardly believe what he was seeing. Tentatively he reached up, letting go of John's hand to very gently rest his shredded palm over the back of John's neck, thumb brushing along the base of John's skull. "I'm not trying to s-send you away," he whispered, doing his damndest to keep himself outwardly calm. He
wanted to pull John up to him and bury his face against John's chest, hide in the comfort of the man he loved. John was obviously forcing himself into this, and it was beautiful and horrible and Sherlock wanted to scream until the roof caved in on them all, silencing the hell they were in.

Greg stepped back, staring at John, shocked down to his marrow. Days ago he'd been ready, honestly, truly ready to put John down. He'd been ready to stop his heart. Had a plan, had a schedule. Was going to do it. And here he was at Sherlock's side, back where he belonged, trying to comfort the man. He looked over at Paul, who leaned to the side and very slowly began to dim the lights in the room. It was still easy to see everything, but eased the clinical harshness.

"I n-never want you to l-leave, John. I'm a selfish m-man and I- it is d-difficult to breathe without you. I never w-want you to leave," Sherlock whispered with his eyes closed, gently brushing his thumb along John's neck.

John released a shuddering breath at the touch to the back of his neck, which he had clearly expected to hurt. When it didn't, his mind was equally tormented. It was comforting, soft, not angry or upset, and John manually loosened his stiffened joints and relaxed his contracted muscles. "I-I'm not trying to hurt you," he whispered, eyes squeezed shut and stars dancing in his vision despite it.

Hearing that Sherlock didn't want him to leave was crushing. Here was this man in front of him, so broken and abused, a man who had already lost everything and didn't even believe he would be allowed to speak with the one he loved, and John was considering abolishing what one comfort he had left. Pressured by the situation and his own burning desire to keep this man safe, John lightly squeezed Sherlock's hand nodded. "I'll not leave you, then."

John let out a sob then. What would his life entail if he decided to stay? He comforted himself by remembering that even if he stayed alive for now, Greg's promise would still hold. He looked back to Greg and whimpered. The proximity to Sherlock was starting to break him down, but he was afraid to break away.

Greg swore silently at the look on John's face. He was fluent in the language of John's panic and this was decidedly the start. He moved swiftly, sitting down behind John and shifting him so that John was in his lap, no longer with his thin knees pressed to the floor, without pulling him away from Sherlock. John was shaking, something Greg had not noticed before until he had hold of him. He ran his hand over John's back gently, wrapping an arm around John's middle, trying to lend him his own strength. John refused to leave, and Greg would not ask it again.

Paul had a close eye on the men, occasionally looking to Mycroft to gauge his reaction. John seemed to be bordering collapse and Sherlock looked as though he'd stop his own heart with whatever it was he was restraining himself from doing.

Sherlock looked down at John when the man began to cry. He closed his eyes again for a moment as he forced himself to gather his courage. "John," he whispered, trailing his fingers reverently over the side of John's face, traveling along the line of his jaw, touching him in a way that was clear he was putting the tactile sensation to memory. "I know y-you are trying for my sake, I know you are," his voice was everywhere, wavering hard with emotion, so low he was almost inaudible. Greg strained to hear what he was saying, "L-thank you for t-trying, John. I w-want you here, I'm n-not trying to send you away, but y-you are hurting and it's from m-me. I want you, m-more than I could ever hope to express, but m-mo-more than that, I don't w-want you frightened or hurting. I-I t's okay, John, if you go. M-May s-s-send me a message when...when you think about it? I-" his breathing hitched and he forcibly kept himself from crying.

He looked to his brother, anguished, taunted with the man he so desperately wanted, hurting him despite his intention. His French was brittle, "My...th-this is cruel."
This was faring far better than Mycroft could have anticipated, and the man looked down at Sherlock and John with an almost relieved heart that there was no screaming yet. "It's not cruel. He was just as afraid of speaking, and now he and Greg tell jokes, and he laughs. Soon enough this will be past, and he'll be able to enjoy your company again."

John, clearly not understanding the French but still clinging to Sherlock's words, made a desperate attempt at calming himself to answer properly. They were exactly what John needed to hear; validating his efforts and telling him that his fears were understandable. John nodded against Sherlock's hand and slowly retracted. "I'll come back," he spoke with such exhaustion that he might have been awake for days.

Greg's arms offered a safe repose, and John had no concept that being held by Greg might upset Sherlock. He tucked his arms across his chest and nuzzled down into the side of Greg's neck, shivering and breathing as though he had ran a marathon. "I'm going to come back," he whispered into Greg's shoulder, though the words were directed at Sherlock. "I'll t-text y-you if you want. Y-You always s-said y-you preferred t-to text." John was still thinking of ways to make things better for Sherlock, but had little understanding that things might be different than they were before. Sherlock nodded as he watched them, hardly able to breathe. John was that shaking mess because of him. He'd walked into the bloody hands of a sadist to keep John from hurting again, and here he was hurting him anyhow. John fit in Greg's lap as though they were created for the other, and it was all he could do to rasp out a brittle "Thank you," before biting down on the tender inside of his cheek, intentionally attempting to draw blood, preferring physical pain to the broken glass that coated his insides.

Greg carefully got to his feet, keeping John to him, nearly carrying him to his chair. He settled him down and wrapped his blanket around John while Sherlock watched them, tears quietly dripping off his chin. He caught the sympathy on Greg's face and suddenly wanted to beat someone, damn near anyone to death with his bare hands.

Paul and Greg quietly took John from the room, and Sherlock closed his eyes. He ignored his brother as his stomach twisted and he balled his fists, savoring the flare of agony from his shattered arm, curling down around his middle as he shouted his grief to his knees. His less damaged hand found its way to his hair and he pulled with the intent to rip the strands from his scalp, screaming his broken rage as tears rolled fast and chaotic down his cheeks.

Sherlock's screams echoed through the hall and John stiffened. "Greg," he called in warning as the creeping feeling of fear began to claw it's way around his mind, paralyzing his thoughts and body in it's vice.

John was suddenly very active and he doubled over in his chair so far he almost pitched forward out of it, both hands in his hair and a scream forcing it's way up out of his body and into the air to mix with Sherlock's.

Once they reached his room, John dropped forward out of his chair and onto the rug on the floor. He was glad for the extra padding they had added, as his frail knees wouldn't be able to take the impact on the tile. John reached out and pulled his blanket off his bed, which he wrapped around himself tightly once he was in the furthest corner of the room. "H-He wants m-me not t-to leave him," John lamented and pulled the blanket over his head. "Greg, Greg, please, please help me."

Greg put his back to the bed and sat on his arse, pulling John and his blanket into his lap, wrapping him tight in his arms. "Breathe, John, breathe for me," he instructed, wrapping his hand around the back of John's neck and holding him close, keeping his head covered under the blanket.
John felt his pent up fear and sadness weave itself into a knot in his chest close to the base of his throat. In a desperate attempt to dislodge the pain manually, John let out a guttural, heartbroken scream and arched his back out of Greg's hold. "G-G-Greg I-I don't want to stay! I want to help and then leave! He wants me to stay and-and-" John stared at his hands before pressing his fingernails into his scalp and dragging them down the sides of his face with intent on drawing blood. "I-I-I d-don't w-w-want it! I don't want any of this! I want Sherlock to be okay! Greg, help me, please!"

Greg took John's hands, stopping him from hurting himself. "John, you are panicking. I know you are scared, I know seeing Sherlock was hard. This is panic. It will pass. Breathe, that's all we are doing; breathing." He held tight to John's wrists, having expected this reaction. He stayed present, not allowing John's desperate bid to die get at him. John had forgotten happy. He would remind him. "I will help, John, first breathe."

John rocked himself back and forth, muttering to himself and digging his fingernails into his scarred palms. "I want a sedative," he whined and forced himself back against the wall. Finding the action cathartic, John banged his head back against it several times before collapsing into tears again. Sherlock had been so injured. John remembered what those marks had felt like, the blinding agony of it all, the terror when the doctors came in and the sheer horror when one pulled at his stitches.

John glanced down at his hands again and screamed in shock, holding them away from him as though they held a dangerous animal. Open, bleeding cuts and burns marred his flesh and John lost sight of Greg and his Baker Street-ish room as an onslaught of images pounded against his mind. "NO!" He cried, hands smearing the perceived blood on his clothes and blanket. John could see them, Moriarty or perhaps Moran, standing over him with that damned crowbar, the sadistic grin just as it had been before. "NO! Please! I'm so sorry! It w-was h-him, oh God, h-he d-did it I-" John thrashed wildly and kicked off the wall with every ounce of his strength. He could feel himself topple over with someone, but hardly knew who.

Paul had lunged forward as Greg tipped to the side and John lost himself. He pulled the pre-drawn syringe from his pocket and uncapped it with his teeth as Greg did his best to hold John down. Paul swiftly plunged the needle into the port in John's hand and pushed the sedative, helping as John instantly began to go lax. It took the both of them to get John into his bed, wrapped warmly in his blankets, dead weight to the pair of them.

John struggled to scream as the sedative took action, but only managed a few hoarse exhales before he lost complete control. He didn't know what would happen to his already broken body while he was unconscious, but in those last few moments of awareness, while he felt himself being lifted and set gently down onto something soft, John prayed it would be enough to kill him.

Greg sat back then, a rising bruise on his cheek from where John had caught him with his elbow, dropping his head in his hand. "He still thinks it was Sherlock," he bemoaned, his gut twisting on it was him, he did it. He stood up suddenly, pacing in the small room, raking his hand through his hair. "Did you see him, see Sherlock? Christ, Paul, just Christ."

Chapter End Notes

So we have some conflicted feelings in the comments. On one side are the people who appreciate the pace, the realism, and how things take time.

On the other hand, there are people who are tired of it and want action again.
Now, the thing is, progress is repetitive, but changes each time. John is stuck in a rut, but a catalyst is about to enact.

I think we can all agree that everyone involved is damaged.
Sherlock had narrowly dragged in another breath when some of the infection in his lungs rattled loose, choking him as he was doubled over. He tried to cough, shaking his head and grabbing his throat, struggling for several long seconds before managing to clear his airway again. He screamed at his brother as his heart shattered, "Why would you do th-that to him! He- oh god, he-" Mycroft had clearly manipulated John into coming there. "Why? Why w-would you m-make him-" Sherlock shook his head violently, tearing the oxygen off his face before ruthlessly grabbing the drip lines he could reach and ripping them out, clawing at the leads on his chest as he shouted his heartbeat to the heavens. He was going to leave. He was going to throw himself in traffic and remove himself from John so the poor man could live his life.

Mycroft rushed to Sherlock's side and pulled his arms down by his sides. "That's only the beginning!" Mycroft explained and gestured for the doctors to help him. "Please, don't hurt yourself or we'll have to sedate you."

Sherlock tried to wrench away from his brother, screaming at him as his world cave in on him. "HE CANNOT STAND M-ME! HE DOES NOT N-NEED ME! I NEED TO DIE, MYCROFT!" It was the most articulate thing he'd managed since his recovery. Seeing John like that had destroyed him, sucked him right back down to the hell he'd been in when he'd put the needle to his arm. He was used up, cut down, and utterly worthless now. His body was in agony as he physically fought with Mycroft and it was a brilliant relief from the pain of watching John. He screamed again, gagging as bile rose in his throat.

Miller and his team rushed in, swiftly taking hold of Sherlock and pushing him to his back in an effort to keep him from further harming himself. He was freely bleeding from his drip sights, his skin growing ashen without the oxygen. He struggled hard, blindly trying to defend himself as the situation crashed down out of his control. "No no! I- NO! S-S-STOP, STOP!"

Mycroft struggled to remain calm. "You don't want to die! You'll get better and John will love you again and everything will be fine!" He held Sherlock down at the shoulders while the medical team attended to his wrists. "Sedate him. SEDATE HIM!" Mycroft turned his icy stare to the doctors and demanded that something be done. "We can't just strap him down until he tires himself out!"

Miller was already pushing a sedative as Mycroft shouted at him. Sherlock screamed right up until he was pulled forcibly to unconsciousness. They set to work replacing drip lines and trying to get him cleaned up, putting a full mask back over his face to help him breathe. Miller said nothing to Mycroft as they worked until he'd set Sherlock back right. "Well, no major damage done.He's very lucky the surgical lines are holding."

Mycroft pulled away once Sherlock was under and sat heavily down into his chair. To avoid being taken over by the sheer onslaught of difficult emotions, he left the room and headed for John's. "Paul," he said upon entering, and glanced Greg's way as well. "We need to talk."

Greg did not speak as he moved over to John, sitting down at John's side and taking his limp hand in his, covering it and trying to soothe him even in his sleep.

Paul nodded, "We can speak here if you'd prefer, John is sedated. I'm sure Greg has a few things he could contribute."

Mycroft looked down at John and praised the man mentally for trying so damn hard. "We need to
speak about long term solutions, to put it simply. Greg, how long are you willing to work with John? Are you willing to help him interact with Sherlock? I won't have this facility forever."

Greg looked at Mycroft in open confusion. "I don't expect I'll be away from him in the foreseeable future. I offered him a place to live, and I'll stick to his side as long as I can afford to. I'm not walking away from him unless he truly wants me to go. When he sees Sherlock, I'll be there, yeah. Of course."

Paul looked to Mycroft and then to the sedated man on the bed. "Mycroft...this is not something that will acceptably resolve in two weeks time, likely not a month either. In six months, John may be able to do this without having to be sedated, but you saw him, he gave an impressive attempt. He is trying, but this is, frankly, a deeply traumatizing way for this to go. He is aware that he does not want to fear Sherlock. That does not equate to comfort around your brother."

Mycroft listened gravely. Having Greg to stay with John would be helpful, because then, at least, John wouldn't be his problem. It was selfish, but he needed to focus on Sherlock. "Greg, thank you. If you require compensation for your work with John, it will be given."

He turned to Paul and scanned him once more. "I am aware, but Sherlock doesn't have another option, does he?"

Paul approached the subject very cautiously with Mycroft. "I don't believe he has this option, Mycroft. He can reasonably expect texts, perhaps a phonecall from time to time, but John has not yet processed what was done to him and, given what he was saying as he went under, it's entirely possible he still believes Sherlock did this to him. Even if he did not, Sherlock clearly brings back the memories in an overwhelming barrage. John experienced a complex flashback just before we put him under, which is why Greg is sporting a bruise. I do not know what you expect of Greg here, but even the most intensive psychotherapist would have a difficult time with this. Putting these two men in the same home will be...explosive. He's not ready, Mycroft. I know you do not care to hear that, and I do wish that it was not the case, but we must work with what we have."

He looked to Greg and exhaled slowly. "John and Greg could go to Greg's flat, and Sherlock back to his home with paid help. Or a facility. John still needs saving, Mycroft, he cannot save your brother right now."

Greg shifted, looking at Paul and Mycroft as he thought of Sherlock. "I'll try. I...god help me I've no idea how it will work, but I'll...I'll try. Neither of these men can be the collateral damage. I- hell I'm not...I've not done that well of a job with John, I know. I am doing my best, Mycroft. I know this isn't what you wanted when we got Sherlock back. It- Christ the way he looks at me when I hold John..." he shook his head, sighing heavily. "I don't know what to do, but I want to help. I can ditch my flat, and if you can pay me my normal salary, I'll just resign my position." Damn if he hadn't worked his arse off for the Detective Inspector position, and been very fulfilled in his work, but it was all for naught if he had no one. He'd give it up for these two.

Mycroft didn't want to accept what had been stated, that Sherlock would be doomed to a life alone, getting occasional phone calls, texts or videos from John, hardly living in between. Even for Mycroft, who didn't care much for company, understood how painful that would be. "He can't just live a life alone. He'll kill himself. He's depressed, lonely, and very inventive."

Mycroft closed his eyes and leaned against the wall. "John needs a safe environment, yes, but Sherlock needs John. He needs John. He'll die. If Sherlock doesn't think the situation will improve, he'll leave. Even if John had flashbacks, Sherlock can handle it. Maybe. What I suggest is Greg and John live in a flat with Sherlock living nearby. They could visit whenever it is comfortable for John, and could leave when he gets upset. Maybe Sherlock wouldn't feel so alone then."
Mycroft was grasping at straws, trying to keep Sherlock and John as close together as possible. He wasn’t intentionally being a puppet master, but he simply could not stand the idea of Sherlock being alone or dead. Surely, he could get him a good life. "Greg, thank you for everything you've done. I couldn't have managed this without you."

Greg nodded, holding tight to John's hand. He fully agreed with Mycroft on Sherlock. He'd never seen the man so...he didn't have a term for it. "Maybe Sherlock could live in 'C,' next to Mrs. Hudson. Know it's a bit...not as nice, but it would be close?" He looked to Paul, who was clearly deep in thought.

"Either way, what I think is the best course of action for John is to get him comfortable around water, and comfortable with the idea of Sherlock, and perhaps by the end of the week we'll have made progress."

"Water, yes. He'll need to shower on his own eventually, or at least bathe himself. I suggest Greg learn how to give John his sedative and regulate his medicine." Mycroft pulled a chair in from outside and sat down in front of Greg. "If we could clean 'C' up a bit, that would probably be the best option. Maybe we could soundproof the room as well, though. Mrs. Hudson gets anxious often, and if one starts screaming it might set the other off. We can teach John to be comfortable without Greg in a month or two once he's got water under his belt."

Greg shifted slightly. "John and I have already worked out a plan with the water. He knows it has to be fixed, and he knows how he wants to go about it." He couldn't put his finger on it, but he was growing increasingly defensive of John as Mycroft settled in. He stretched his legs out beside John on the bed, his back to the headboard, and bent his knee up slightly to block some of Mycroft's view. It was subtle, but he was getting worried.

He looked over Mycroft, seeing the weight he'd dropped, the sleep he'd lost. They both were worse for wear at this point. "Is Sherlock alright? We heard him screaming, that's what set John off. If we soundproof his flat..." Greg trailed off. One way or the other, Sherlock was still being left to care for himself. The idea of Sherlock down there, locked in a flashback or coming out of one, only to care for himself alone...Greg swore and ran a hand over his mouth. "I can't be in two places at once, but I'll do what I can."

Mycroft watched Greg and his increasingly defensive posture. "I will continue to keep John funded for whatever he needs, and you'll stay with him as long as you want." He leaned away and faced Paul then, hoping to give Greg some sense of security.

"Then we'll get a panic button or something. Perhaps Molly would be able to handle it. I could hire him a personal therapist and caregiver to keep him safe and sane. He'd hate that, though." Again, the futility of the effort came into his mind. "It could just be a transition period. Ideally, I'd like Sherlock and John to have free interactions."

Greg nodded at that. "Molly's a tough little thing. She's not ah, the most socially adept, but she can hold her own. I don't think she'll shy from this. I've watched that woman dive into a belly full of maggots without batting an eye, and she's never let Sherlock run over her. Well, not in a long while, at least. I don't know that she'd live with him, but she might be willing to give up weekends for a little while."

Paul was more interested in Mycroft's lack of an answer. "Mycroft, is Sherlock alright?"

"Sherlock begged to die, but it wasn't unexpected. He believes himself to be hurting John, and, seeing how much he cares for him, it pains him considerably." Mycroft crossed one leg over the other and watched with a look he deemed 'mild interest'. "If Molly could be a companion to him, it might fill in the time between John's visits. Paul, do you think John will be able to text regularly
Paul nodded swiftly, "Yes. So long as he's not convinced Sherlock hurt him. I'm not sure exactly what he was trying to say when we sedated him, but before that, yes. John has clearly made Sherlock's recovery his personal goal, as he cannot stand to focus on his own well being for the sake of himself."

Greg closed his eyes. Sherlock had very nearly succeeded in getting himself killed or killing himself, and to hear..."We threw a lot at them today. There...I mean hell, these men were...I mean, what Moran did to them is unspeakable and then we pushed them together, only to watch them tear the other apart." He drew in a deep breath and reached to his side, sliding his fingers through John's hair.

"Speaking of Moran, don't we need to handle that before we take their protection away?"

Mycroft understood that Moran was still a threat, but the man shouldn't be too terribly hard to find, since Moriarty wasn't there to direct him. "I'll kill him. Before Sherlock and John leave, he'll be dead. That's the deadline. Perhaps after, if I get grants to dismantle the web as well. Our priorities for John should be water, and getting used to Sherlock. Let's work on texting, for now, or the video messages. John obviously is only staying alive for the purposes of helping Sherlock. Use that as much as you can. A purpose could help him feel less worthless. I'll work with Sherlock and see if I can't help ease his pain."

Greg set his jaw but nodded anyhow. "That was already the plan. We all want to help Sherlock. I wish there was more we could do."

Paul hummed his agreement and then moved to open the door for Mycroft, intent on following him out into the hall and leaving Greg and John alone.

Greg stared down at John, closing his eyes as he considered the men. It was a terrible mess, and he had no idea of how to help both of them without hurting them. They'd just have to wait and see what John had meant and what condition he was in when he woke.

Mycroft considered Greg when Paul left. It had been months side the two really talked or any long amount of time, but it hardly felt like a week. Or perhaps a lifetime. "John is a very strong man. I can tell that you love him very much. I'm glad that you do. It's the reason he has done so well thus far. Sherlock, though he'll try not to, will likely be upset that John found someone else. I say that in the kindest way, and just want to warn you that it might upset him when you hold John. By no means are you to let that affect you."

Greg nodded, rubbing a hand over the back of his neck. "Yeah, I...I saw him, when John...the first time when he got here and then today. I saw him. Christ, Mycroft, this wasn't my intention. I- I feel horrible for Sherlock. I used to pull him out of gutters and now I feel like I'm putting him in one."

He slid his fingers through John's hair. "I don't know how they made it. I don't know what will come of this revelation that there was...that...sort of abuse. Sherlock...he's...that's got to be..." he sighed, giving it up. What could they possibly say, it was horrific.

"Believe me, if we can successfully do so, I plan on it," Mycroft responded just as darkly. "And John clearly loves you, more so than I believe he ever loved Sherlock. Perhaps not. He's clearly more attached. I think at this point, Sherlock would be grateful just to be near him. Honestly, I don't know how they're going to move past this. It seems so insurmountable."

Greg nodded. "Yeah, I- I don't know either. But John....he couldn't talk, and he couldn't sleep, and now he's...I mean, I had him honestly laughing earlier. I mean, really, really happy, telling me he could stay...he could see himself living, if he just didn't have to feel pain all the time. John is strong.
Sherlock is stubborn. We just have to hope."
"Progress isn't linear. It goes forward, and backward, but never just straight. He'll recess, then have progress..." Mycroft took a moment to really look at Greg, and saw a man deeply changed. "And how are you faring through all this?"

"Better," Greg answered swiftly, "this is the hardest thing I've ever done, and I'm rubbish at it, but I caught sight of John deep in there and I know he's still...that we can get him back. Not the same, but not so changed as the man we see today. I needed to know we were doing the right thing. I saw that, and at least for John, I think we are."

He took a deep breath and ran a hand over his head. "I shouldn't have let Sherlock go, that day. I shouldn't have let him walk out there. It was...I didn't have much time and I knew if we lost John, Sherlock wouldn't survive the night, so I- hell I don't know, Mycroft. I've never seen Sherlock steeped in guilt and he's just been drowning in it for...since he pulled John out of that warehouse. I don't know what to do. Hard fact is that John does blame him, and is betrayed by him, and Sherlock...god you can just see it on his face. Not even walking into Moran's arms absolved him. It's...I mean, not as though John can help it, but...just hard. It's hard. I feel like a totally useless ass, and I'm terrified every minute of every day that I'm going to make another mistake. That last one almost killed him. I'm rubbish at this."

"You aren't trained in psychology, but you are hardly rubbish. You've done amazing." Mycroft rarely gave compliments, but the dedication showed to John was remarkable. He gave a small smile to Greg that softened his hard, calculating features. "John blames him, yes, but I had hoped we were past him believing it was Sherlock with the knife. Seeing how intent he is on Sherlock's recovery, we can hardly say that he harbors any serious animosity towards him, but his feelings of betrayal are likely unavoidable."

John twitched in his sleep and curled his fingers around a patch of blanket.

"I think he may be pulling up out of it," Greg said and moved to comfort John immediately. "I agree with what you've said, he doesn't...he was really crushed when he realized that Moran had been at Sherlock like that," he slid his fingers slowly over John's scalp, trying to soothe him. "These men...they're family...they, they're really all I've got in the world and I...I've pulled needles out of Sherlock's arm and seen him through overdose and withdrawal, I've watched him turn to work instead of getting high and I'm damned if I'm about to lose him to a thick skulled psychopath's dog."

Greg tucked the blankets better around John, wanting him to feel secure when he came up. "I don't know how he'll react to you in here, he might not be lucid, I don't know."

Mycroft had always taken Greg's services for granted, that is, after he offered him money in return for keeping tabs on Sherlock. He took the statement as he cue to leave, and slipped out before John woke.

The first thing John remembered was the last thing he had said before he went under. He remembered begging, and telling Moriarty it had been him and- "No!" John cried and sat partially up, eyes wide but blinking in the sudden light. "Was him...him... was...it was..." John coughed hard and looked wildly around.

"John," Greg called out, not wanting to touch him while he was confused, "you're safe. Try to breathe," he instructed, his heart sinking. Seeing Sherlock had been a setback. He shifted so that John could better see him, glad that it was still bright out, giving John daylight. "Look, you're in your bed, in your room. Breathe for me, it's alright."
Bit by bit the day before began to trickle back to him in a series of images his mind had deemed important enough to hold on to. John held his breath for a few seconds then took a deep gulp of air as if coming up from a dive. When he spotted Greg he let out a cry of sheer and unmatched delight. John leapt into Greg's arms as if the man were there to save him against some terrible fate. "Greg, oh, God...Greg..." John muttered the name to himself and took gasping inhales.

Greg made a small sound of distress at John's fear and wrapped him up tight in his arms. His heart clenched at the idea of Sherlock, trying to come up out of something like that, alone in his bed. The pain of it made him tip his head to John. "I'm here, I've got you. You are safe," he assured, rubbing his hand down John's back. Christ, what were they going to do?

John went limp in Greg's arms, but not in the catatonic way he had before. He trembled and shuddered in a way that showed his great distress and dismay.

It was several minutes before John managed to speak, though when he did, he sounded tired, but relatively lucid. "Thought...I thought Moriarty was here." Greg shook his head and ran his fingers through John's hair, exhaling in relief. "I'm sorry, that must have been really scary," he said gently, trailing his fingers down the side of John's neck and back up into his hair. "Is that why you were saying 'It was him?' God how he hoped so. He really didn't want to go all the way back to John believe Sherlock would have done those things to him.

John gave a small nod. "Mmhmm. That's what I was supposed to say. I thought..." John hit a mental wall, or rather, a gap where his new way of thinking didn't quite match up with the old one. "I thought he was hurting me, and by saying that I could make him stop. I thought Sherlock was...but he wasn't, and I know that, but..." John shook his head and stretched his legs. "I know it wasn't him, but sometimes I forget." Greg shook his head and stilled his hand. "I'm sorry you were asked to do that today. That...that wasn't fair. It was really remarkable for you to do what you did."

He kept his fingers in John's hair, not sure if this was good news or not. He'd take that John was lucid. At least there was that.

John nestled down into Greg's lap and stretched out his arms. In doing so he noticed the bruise on Greg's face. His blood chilled. "What happened?" He gasped and brushed the tips of his fingers across Greg's face. "Did the doctors...is someone hurting you? Or..." John couldn't remember falling asleep, and figured he must have been sedated. "Did I...?"

"I lost my grip on you and slipped, did it to myself on accident." Greg lied easily. There was no need to upset him. He'd not struck Greg intentionally. "No one here hurts us, the doctors here are good. You're safe, John, you were just upset from seeing Sherlock is all. Everything is okay."

It was over an hour before John fully recovered his wits and slowly pushed himself to his feet. He walked over to the door then back to the window in his short, slightly awkward stride. "Did I help, or did I make him worse?"

John dropped his head to Greg's shoulder and watched his tree. "It hurt to do that, but it's a good thing to do, so it's not that bad. It's not as bad as...uhm...I don't know. A shower or something."

"Yeah, I know it hurt, I do. I'm sorry that was like that." He leaned against John and stared out the window as well. "I won't take you back, it's...not for a while. I don't want you hurt."

Paul followed Mycroft down the hall, not speaking for quite some time. "I do hope you are willing to talk to someone if this get to be too much. I know you'd rather not talk to me, I just hope you talk to
John took a step away, a gesture he had been using to show discomfort for several weeks now. "No. I'll go back if he asks me to because helping is helping and I can't just go when it's convenient."

Mycroft was logical about this as he was all things, but had a tendency to deny himself any emotions. "If it gets to the point where I am not able to function under the stress, I will consult you."

Paul nodded, stopping outside of Sherlock's room and looking to Sherlock's brother. "I'll leave you here, unless you'd rather I go in with you." They were going to have to push John hard to get this situation to something more conducive to Sherlock's recovery.

Greg held his breath and nodded. "Yeah, John alright. I'm sorry. If you want to go back, we'll go back. I only meant you'd not be...that it...I mean, Sherlock knows what you want. You don't ah, I mean helping is good, but not if it sets you back, okay?"

"Oh, it hardly matters if it sets me back. I don't matter here, remember? I need to heal and recover so you aren't sad, and then... I need to be good for Sherlock, and all that stuff." John didn't sound as if he were recounting burdens. He might as well have been listing a book of facts that meant nothing to him, that was how much he had accepted it.

"Nope," Greg replied quickly, shaking his head and leveling a look at John, "no, sorry. You matter to me. I'll tell you as often as you need to hear it. Your healing is important, regardless of Sherlock. Remember? We are getting you better so I can take you for a pint and crack you up at the pub. You are getting better for happy. Remember? Happy? I've happy on my phone for you if you forgot." He reached out and wrapped his hand over John's shoulder. "I know you don't like to think about it, but you matter. A hell of a lot. To me."

Sherlock had his eyes open when Mycroft came back into the room. He was staring straight ahead, his fists balled so tight his knuckles blanched, in restraints with Miller across the room, watching him. Mycroft walked over and sat down in his chair, the one that had been previously occupied by John. "Sherlock, it's alright. Everything is alright. Could you tell me what you are thinking right now?"

John looked over at Greg and decided it wasn't a good idea to argue with him. "Okay, Greg. I'll do that. I'll be happy again. Can we do something today? I want to do something."

Greg smiled at John and nodded, "Yeah, 'course. What do you feel like doing? We can go outside or walk the floor, can watch a movie, play cards, whatever you'd like." He knew John was pacifying him, and he was perfectly fine with that. They could start there. Paul knocked on the door and Greg looked up, surprised to see he wasn't with Sherlock. "Hey Paul, I don't know if John is up for a visit right now," he said calmly, looking to John in a way that hopefully made it clear the choice was his.

When Sherlock failed to respond in any way to Mycroft, Miller spoke softly. "He pulled out of that sedative much faster than I was anticipating, and my proximity to him was very upsetting. I did not have time to give him another, he was...very disturbed with me in arms reach."

Sherlock blinked at the spot he'd last seen John, all the color drained from his cheeks as a bead of sweat ran down his temple.

John sat down on the plush carpet and folded his legs. "We could play cards, or watch a movie. Or both? We can sit on the floor and I could beat you at rummy again." John tried to smile up at Greg, but it was forced, and he was tired.

Paul's arrival was a bit unsettling for John, but his question was even more so upsetting. "Again? Already?" John slowly pushed himself to his feet and looked at Paul almost defiantly. "I'm going to
do normal things now. Normal, good, not painful things. I'll do the bad stuff after." He turned back around and walked back to his place on the floor with an air of finality.

Mycroft gently placed his hand on Sherlock's shoulder and leaned in. "Sherlock, could you look at me? You don't have to say anything, just look at me."

Paul nodded, "That's good, John, that's really good. I've a deck of cards I'll get for you two, and I'll leave you be. Was just coming to check on you. The only suggestion I have is that effort you were making with the water. Let's not make poor Greg here hide his bottles, yeah? He got very dehydrated last time."

He nodded to Greg and then swiftly left the room, leaving the pair of them to discuss it. Greg looked over to John and smiled tightly. "I can ah, put them across the room and I won't drink anywhere near you, if that's okay. And yeah, you handed it to me at Rummy last time, so I've a score to settle." He grinned at him honestly then, comfortable on the floor across from John.

Down the hall, Sherlock leaned into his brother's touch, holding still for a minute before slowly turning his eyes on Mycroft. He did not speak as a shiver ripped down his spine, making him close his eyes for a moment.

John took the cards and dealt them easily, his hands remembering each time he had played before. The idea of a bottle made him nervous, but Greg needed to drink, and Greg wouldn't be hurting him with it. "You can have a bottle. It's alright. Just don't pour it on me, okay? I don't want that."

Mycroft was greatly relieved that Sherlock was at least functioning somewhat, and he pushed the dark curls off his brother's forehead. "You did very well today. Both you and John made incredible progress. Do you need anything?"

Sherlock stared at his brother for a moment longer before looking back to where he'd last seen John. He closed his eyes at the memory of John gratefully retreating from him, curling to Greg as though avoiding a beating. A bead of sweat dripped down close to his eye and he moved to sweep it away, only to be reminded that he was bound. There would be no escaping this. His breathing grew harsh as claustrophobia wrapped around him, sinking down into his bones, standing the hairs on his arms on end as he could practically feel hands on him.

"H-he was g-g-glad to be rid of me," Sherlock whispered tightly. "I caused th-this. All of this." He went quiet again, staring back where he'd last seen John, hardly breathing without realizing it.

"No, Sherlock," Mycroft repeated, "John loves you. He wasn't glad to be rid of you. Not at all. He is under a lot of stress, and that is neither of your faults. Try and focus on the good things, if you can. It sounds preposterous, but he said he would text you, call you, give video messages and visit when you called for him."

Seeing his brother strapped down made Mycroft's stomach churn. "If I unclasp these, will you promise not to hurt yourself?"

Sherlock turned slowly and stared at him with hopeless, self-loathing eyes. "I'll n-not be calling on him. I will not h-hurt John Watson. I d-didn't touch him, he...it w-wasn't...it was my voice and m-my..." his eyes went glassy and distant as he tried to explain, "It c-couldn't have been m-me. I loved him. I...I would n-never have...I'd never h-hurt John." A tear slowly rolled down his cheek as his
mind played back footage he'd never wanted to see again, listening to John scream and plead mercy. "I didn't...th-that wasn't m-m-me. I-" he trailed off, shaking and going quiet as he stared at nothing, locked up in his head, his entire body thrumming with pain.

Mycroft nodded and slowly unclasped one of Sherlock's arms. He kept it in his hand and sat down on the bed next to him, where he could properly be a comfort without scaring him.

"You didn't hurt him. If anything, you are giving him a reason to live. You know that, Sherlock. You have to. Without you, without someone to help and a goal to work towards, John is directionless. I don't suggest you push him away." And oh, if only Mycroft could have suggested that before this entire ordeal began.

Sherlock did not respond to Mycroft. He allowed him to manipulate his arm as he pleased, still staring ahead, shaking as though he were freezing. John had been so relieved to go, so reluctant in the way he'd approached him. So very calm when Greg had folded him in his arms.

Moran forced John under the water again as a searing blade dragged down his arm, deep enough to audibly scrape the bone. He could feel it in his teeth as he suddenly screamed, turning his face away and clenching his teeth together. He pulled hard against the restraint and swore loudly as he gasped for air. He pulled at his hand and began to sob, starting in on reciting what he'd done in a desperate attempt at avoiding further punishment. He could feel the blood pooling in his palm and sliding between the webbing of his fingers, making him gag and cry out again.

"No, no, Sherlock, it's going to be alright." Mycroft had jumped at the sudden, unexpected scream and tried to assuage his fear. "Sherlock, you are with Mycroft in a highly secure facility." He repeated the same words that had helped him when Sherlock was first taken, not wishing to aberrant from the proven course. "Nothing is happening! You're alright!"

Sherlock turned panicked eyes to his arm, fully expecting to see it laid open, staring in shock at the bandages and the clean, tended to nature of the dressings. He slowly looked up at Mycroft and closed his eyes, breathing so wildly it was making him dizzy. He tipped his forehead to Mycroft's shoulder, gasping on each inhalation.

"I hurt him. I hurt him. Just looking at me hurts him. He was so afraid of me. He was m-making himself stay. I don't e-ever want him to look at m-m-me like that again. I hurt him. He was hurting. He has Greg. I'm not needed. I hurt him. My, I hurt him," he shouted again, not quite a scream, heartbreak dragging his voice down and making him cry. "I'm alone now," he breathed, brittle and terrified, "you are g-going to leave, and I'll just h-h-have th-this. I'm alone."

Mycroft had always rather preferred to be alone, but the nature of other people's minds compared to his own made it quite difficult for him to stand many people for very long. He had people he had tea with, and attended meetings, and indeed social skills are incredibly important in holding an office, so he never felt as acutely as Sherlock how alone he really was.

But now, it was clear to Mycroft that without Greg, John, or himself, Sherlock would have nobody. "You aren't alone. I'll not leave you until John is able to see you regularly. It isn't hurting him, it's giving him a purpose! Would you really strip that from him?"

Sherlock looked up at his brother sharply, his breath held, fear painted across his face. He knew he was frightening John. If John's hurting was John's purpose, then was his brother going to punish Sherlock for not carrying on with it. Mycroft was helping, he was helping. He wouldn't...it couldn't...John's purpose was not suffering. John was all the things right in the world, contrast to Sherlock.

"I-I...I d-d-d-don't want to st-" he could hardly get the word out, ears ringing loudly and mouth full
of copper, "st-s-s-strip John of...I- n-no. I'm s-sorry I...I...he isn't...h-his purpose isn't t-to hurt...My I
d-don't understand...please d-don't....don't m-make me-" he pinched his eyes closed and groaned,
panting wildly in his fear as his room tipped sideways and he was pitched into mental chaos.

Mycroft caught his word choice after the fact and closed his eyes as Sherlock began to stutter. "No,
that's not what I meant. I'm not going to make you do anything. All I am saying is that John wants to
help you. He's dead set on it. It wouldn't be very nice-" God, now he was talking like a child, '-to just
push him away when he is trying so hard. Remember how much you wanted to help him? How
badly it hurt to be pushed away? You should let him try. At least let him try."

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badly it hurt to be pushed away? You should let him try. At least let him try."

It was quite some time before Mycroft created a suitable argument to combat Sherlock's grief with.
Trying to avoid a cacology like his previous, Mycroft formed his words very carefully. "John was
afraid of speaking. He was terrified. He was awfully scared, and yet, you made him learn to tap. That
tapping was a gateway to letting him speak. You know, yesterday he told a joke. He enjoys speaking
now, but it hurt him terribly. Now, I believe you might find hurting John a point of stress, due to it
being the common theme during your time with Moran."

Sherlock was drowning in it, falling to bits, hearing Moran and John as pain lanced up and down his
body from where he'd torqued himself in an effort to get away. "I c-can't," he whined, pleading with
his tone for mercy, "I- p-please brother I- please! He h-had to speak, he h-had to sleep! There was no
w-w-way around it but he does n-not need me!" he tried to touch his face, crying out as his arm was
stopped, his heart monitor blipping in warning as stars cracked along the sides of his vision. "I- he's-
j-just let me go! I- it's o-over! I lost! I c-can't do it, I can't! Please, p-please I can't!"
"He needs you, Sherlock!" If Sherlock believed that John needed him, there might be a chance.
Mycroft was gambling all his wages on it and repeated himself for emphasis. "John needs you.
YOU. He needed to speak and sleep, and now that it's over, he needs a reason to live! You can't just
expect him to live for his own sake after something like that. Love is a far more powerful motivator.
If you refuse contact with him, I doubt he'll go on living."

"Greg!" Sherlock countered, slowly going lax against the bed despite himself as the effort exhausted
him, sobbing and breaking apart. "H-he loves Greg. He has G-Greg." As heartbreaking as it was,
he'd resigned to his loss of John a long time ago. Now he had the peace of Greg there to keep John
safe and loved. He turned his face away from his brother, weeping like a child, gasping to fill his
lungs properly. "He d-did not come here on his own. I c-can't ask for him...I can't w-watch him f-f-fall
apart just because he's n-near-"

_Hurry, John! We're losing him!_

_I had a row with the chip-and-pin machine._

_Bit not good, yeah._

_That's...that's brilliant._
His voice dipped with renewed loss as he was suddenly reminded of the first days, of the way John's face lit up when he smiled at him, the way he'd sounded when Sherlock had done something John found amazing. "He s-said he used to love me. I- I don't do l-love. I didn't know h-how and it scared me and n-now I've...he's the o-only man that-" he gave a gentle cry of heartbreak and loss, tipping his forehead to his brother's shoulder.

"He has Greg! He has Greg, and he could very easily have said no, and stayed in his room with him all day. But John didn't! He came back to you instead even though he was in pain, even though it bothered him. Before, when you had not been taken, he watched tapes of you to try and learn not to fear you, because he remembered that he loved you. Even when he didn't remember, he gave you medical treatment and stayed with you while Greg came. What would you call that? Are you blind to love even when it is so clearly written? He is struggling against this for a reason!"

Sherlock flinched back from Mycroft at his anger, trying to turn it over in his mind even as he shied away from the man, breaking as much physical contact as possible, shivering hard. He swallowed and nodded to him, "O-okay," he whispered, not daring to move his arm from Mycroft's hold. He went silent then, only his shattered breathing and the continued warning tones from the monitors filling the room with sound. He locked his body up tight, prepared for whatever was about to happen. He'd not intended to anger anyone. His eyes slowly moved up to Miller, who was still in silent attendance, not wanting to disrupt anything, and he stopped breathing.

"Please," he breathed, "Oh...oh please, I- okay, My, o-okay. I'm an idiot. P-please, I don't know wh-what I was thinking oh p-please no, please no, please, god please-I oh god, don't. A-anything I'll- what do you want me t-to say? I forgot! Please I j-just forgot! I'm d-daft, what- whatever you- I'm sorry oh god I'm s-s-s-sorry!"

"No, Sherlock, no. I didn't mean to frighten you." Mycroft wished to call in Greg, someone gentle, someone who was simply good at being kind. "You don't have to say anything. You don't have to say anything you don't want to." Mycroft drew Sherlock back to his chest. "I didn't mean to sound angry. I'm just worried about you. I'm upset that I can not help you. I wasn't angry at you, I was angry at myself."

Sherlock was stiff in Mycroft's arms, his heart like a humming bird, beating a pulse too thready and fast, all but quivering in his chest. He tried to catch his breath, frightened and wary, soaking in confusion. He was in pain, and so very afraid to ask for relief. He'd upset his brother and there was a looming doctor in the room.

It took several minutes for Sherlock to slowly realize that no one was coming at him, carefully allowing himself to sink down into his brother's hold. Oh, how he ached for the comfort of John. He spoke softly, brittle and quiet, halting in his request. "Can...can I j-just listen to...listen to that message again. Wh-when he...when h-he said he was gl-glad I woke up?"

"Of course," Mycroft said readily and with great relief. He understood the terror Greg had described when he thought he had ruined John to him. "Here, here it is."

"Hey, Sherlock," the video began and John's thin, but not unhappy face showed in miniature on the screen. "Paul said you were having a hard time and...Well, I don't really know what I'm supposed to say to help, but...Just let me know if I'm supposed to help. I'm alright, Greg isn't as sick anymore, which is good. Are you alright? I'm glad you're back."

Sherlock stared at John's face long after the message stopped, recalling how he'd felt when he'd touched him, how soft his hair had been at the back of his head. He'd likely never, ever have that again. He'd been a different man when he'd come to see Sherlock, so cloaked in fear and uncertainty.
Here, on the screen, in the company of Greg and safe from Sherlock, John almost looked happy.

"S-supposed.' He always s-s-says..." Sherlock was about to express himself again before he remembered his brother's anger, snapping his jaw shut and going stiff again.

"S-sorry I f-forgot...f-forgot...I'm...m...s-sorry."

'No, it's alright. You can tell me. I won't be angry. Here, I'll play it again." Mycroft pressed play and John spoke again, just as small and not-sad as before. "See, Sherlock? He's happy. He's alright. You can say anything you want." Sherlock shook his head and tensed, closing his eyes and breathing through a massive wave of pain. His fist balled tight and he carefully looked back to Miller before dragging his eyes away again. John had been happy until they'd made him come see Sherlock. He'd been relaxed and smiling, and then he'd been terrified, and he'd wrecked it just existing.

Mycroft turned off the video and put his phone down on the bed where Sherlock could reach it if the whim arose. "It's alright, Sherlock. I'm sorry I was angry. I'm sorry."

Several minutes of silence passed with Sherlock's heart rate remaining elevated and his body tense. Sweat beaded along his brow and he pinched his eyes closed, locked up as though bracing.

Miller finally spoke softly to Mycroft. "I haven't given him pain medication yet, he was too upset when he woke. He did a lot of moving when he was tearing out his lines, that may be contributing to this."

"Sherlock," Mycroft said gently, holding him close and trying to sound as gentle as possible. "Could you let Dr. Miller come over for a moment to gave you the pain medication? He won't touch you, and I'll be here to keep you safe."

Sherlock did not at all respond to his brother. His mind was racing, throwing imagery at him that caused him considerable pain, rapid fire slides of things both done to him and done to John and he could not pull himself from it.

Mycroft waved the doctor forward and held Sherlock's hand. "It's alright. He's going to come give you a painkiller. It's going to help you. Try and sleep, alright?"

Miller moved swiftly, as quiet on his feet as he could manage. He slipped the narcotic into Sherlock's new line and managed to push the entire dose without Sherlock noticing him.

Sherlock slowly began to relax, his posture easing somewhat as the physical pain eased. He otherwise made no sign of shifting, keeping his fist tight, not present with his brother.

Mycroft refused to leave him, even if Sherlock didn't seem to be gaining anything by his presence. He sent a quick text to Paul regarding how to proceed.

Sherlock's isn't responding. Do you recommend trying to pull him out of it or letting him be?

Paul responded quickly. He'd been concerned for Sherlock when he'd heard the man scream.

I am on my way, it depends on his behavior.

Sherlock's breathing kicked up and he slowly tried to pull his arm out of Mycroft's grip to his chest. Slowly he began to whimper softly on every breath, his head aching with imagery.

Mycroft was used to being in control and generally rather powerful. This helplessness was beginning
Paul arrived shortly after sending the text, passing Miller on the way. He took a moment to speak with the doctor, getting the details of what happened. He knocked lightly and walked into the room. He took a look at Sherlock and then Mycroft. "He needs to come out of that," he said, shaking his head and moving closer.

Mycroft had expected that answer and, very gently and with great caution, wrapped his arms more tightly around Sherlock's shoulders. "Sherlock, could you tell me what you're thinking? Or if that's too much, just look over, or tap?"

"Has he been responsive at all since that screaming episode? I heard him as we left. What happened?" Paul did not lower his voice as he stepped closer to the silent, tense man, looking over at Sherlock's monitors before looking at the man himself again.

"Earlier, he claimed he wanted to die. Then, he thought he was back with Moran. After that he seemed to calm a bit, though his discomfort was clear, and asked to watch the video with John in it."

Mycroft stared at his unresponsive brother, wondering that if, perhaps, he had gotten there a week earlier this wouldn't be as bad.

Paul reached down then and touched Sherlock to see if he could get a response out of him. "Sherlock," he called out loudly, giving his shoulder a squeeze. Sherlock remained as he was and Paul looked to Mycroft. "You pair have an eidetic memory, yes? Use mental mapping?" He reached over and pulled the oxygen mask off the wall, covering Sherlock's nose and mouth with it, trying to slow his breathing.

"Yes, we do. He's got all his important memories stored in one place. From what he had expressed, it's in shambles." Mycroft squeezed Sherlock's hand and tried to get in his line of sight. "Sherlock, please. You've got to snap out of this."

Paul nodded, "Do you have any idea of how to help him with that? I imagine his ability to restrain thoughts and filter them slowly is impaired." He moved out of Sherlock's line of sight and walked to the edge of the room, dimming the lights.

"Sherlock," he called out from a distance, loud and with the intention of startling him, "Mycroft he has to come out of this. I'm going to get John if necessary. That would be less detrimental than this."

"Come on, Sherlock. Come back to the realm of what is active. Be present. Don't dwell in the past." He spoke loudly and sat Sherlock up a bit. "Yes, bring John. Bring John in. I'd prefer him out of this, even if it's only to fuss at me for forcing John back in."

Paul picked up the phone and called Greg right then. "We need John. I know. I know. Yes, right now. He can have two more of the pills, give them to him right now. Believe me, Greg, I would not call for him if it wasn't."

He rang off and looked back to Mycroft, nodding. "They will be here soon. I'd just sedate him, but that has a very high likelihood of trapping him there, making this worse when he wakes back up. Not to mention Miller's concern with continually sedating him after he's been down for days."

Sherlock's breathing was loud and rough as he forced air through his teeth, looking as though he were in nothing short of a stark panic.

"Sherlock, we're bringing John. John is going to come help you." Mycroft prayed that the man's
presence would get a reaction from the man trapped in his mind.

John crawled over and listened to the phone call with his ear close to Greg's. "Again? So soon?" His
eyes, though wide with surprise, contained no fear or hesitation. "I can help again. Can I?"

Greg got up and grabbed John's pills, offering him the two Paul said that he could take. "I don't
know what's going on John but it's not good. He's not doing well. I don't want you to get scared."
He helped John off the floor and stood there, watching him.

"Oh, here," he said swiftly, crossing the room and going into the lav. He returned with a little pot of
menthol suspended in petroleum jelly. "Dab this under your nose. I know Sherlock smells like blood,
this will keep you from smelling it. Use it all the time at crime scenes that have a strong odor."

He then went to get John's chair, putting John's blanket in it first and then waiting for him. "Can you
do this?"

John looked at Greg like the man was an utter genius and took the petroleum jelly. "You're fantastic.
Truly fantastic." He got in his chair and looked eagerly out the window. "I can do this. I can help
him."

Taking the pills made John feel a bit better, and he was feeling brave. "I hope he doesn't send me
away again."

It did not take more than ten minutes for John and Greg to arrive. Paul had his hand pressed over
the mask at Sherlock's mouth, the air up as high as they could safely go, constantly talking to him.
Sherlock's body was shaking from the strain he was putting on his muscles.

Greg moved them into the room and stood just at the door, staring. Paul began to speak without
turning around. "He's unresponsive. Nothing is pulling him out of his head."

John heard the problem and scrambled for a way to help. He'd seen Sherlock withdraw into his
mind, but it had never made a particularly negative impression. If John needed Sherlock's attention
for something, he'd shout or poke him or take whatever he was staring at out of his hands.

John stood up out of his chair and walked forward with the blanket wrapped around him like a
shield. Now that the smell wasn't an issue, he was able to get much closer without having to fight
down panic.

When John was just a few inches away from the bed, he reached out and shook Sherlock's shoulder
lightly. "Hey...Uhm...Sherlock? Could you say something?"

Greg moved with him, surprised to see that Sherlock did not react at all. Paul pulled the mask off
Sherlock's face, taking the white noise away with it, keeping a sharp eye on Sherlock's monitors to
make sure he did not go too long without support.

A slow tear slid down Sherlock's cheek, but he did not respond to John.

"We may just have to put him under," Paul said quietly to Mycroft, shaking his head.

Sherlock's distress had a powerful effect on John, and he sat back on his heels beside the bed to get
on eye level. "Sherlock? Please, I know you're in there. I know that trick. You just go far enough in
there that nothing can hurt." John kept his finger on Sherlock's temple and slowly brought his other
hand to his tear stained cheek. "C-could you do something for me? Could you just...I don't know,
say something?"
John looked back to Paul and shook his head. "Don't sedate him. Don't. It'll hurt him. What should I do? I don't know how... I want to help and-" John whimpered and kept himself close to Sherlock despite the anxiety that crawled up his skin. "Should I just try to shock him out of it? I don't want to hurt him. I don't- Greg, what do I do?"

Greg stared at John and moved forward before suddenly stopping. Sherlock made a pathetic sound of distress and had slowly turned his eyes to John, staring at him without speaking, "John," Greg whispered, nodding in Sherlock's direction.

Sherlock stared at him, wide-eyed and afraid. He tried to reach for him suddenly, only to have his wrist caught. He did not speak as his heart rate shot through the roof, slowly looking over to Greg and then back to John, lips moving slowly as though he were speaking to him without saying a word.

John saw the wrists and didn't hesitate for a moment. To John, restraints meant pain, and Sherlock was someone he didn't want to be in pain. He only fumbled slightly as he remove the buckle from Sherlock's closest wrist and freed his arm. "They won't hurt you," John said and his eyes darted back to the doctor. There was only a small hint of the protective anger in his voice, the one that had been used to protect Greg.

"S'alright, Sherlock," John muttered and sat back down.

Sherlock followed John's hand back with his own, his eyes never moving from John's face, catching John's fingers as John glared at the doctor. He was shaking terribly and gasped when he made physical contact with John, jerking his hand back and staring as he held his breath.

Greg moved closer to John's back as Paul called out Sherlock's name. "Sherlock," his voice carried loudly and he stepped into Sherlock's sight. Sherlock, however, did not look away from John.

John was doing everything in his power not to break down. He so desperately wanted to be alright, to be strong for Sherlock, but he was at best nervous.

Remembering the objective, John leaned forward and crossed his arms on the edge of Sherlock's bed near his pillow and set his chin down on them. He was quite close to the man then, just a few inches, and he was able to see the swelling and yellow-green bruises on his skin. "I miss you, Sherlock. I miss when we were alright. I wish this hadn't happened."

Sherlock stared at John, blinking slowly every now and again. His eyes were slightly unfocused, clearly staring at John's face without outwardly reacting much. His fingers twitched toward John once before stilling. Greg looked to Paul in question, and Paul shook his head and held his finger to his lips.

It wasn't until Miller moved in the background that Sherlock reacted, suddenly animated as he flung his arm out behind John, nearly coming off his bed as his large hand splayed protectively over the back of John's neck and the base of his skull. "NO," he shouted in panic.

John hadn't seen Miller move, and thus had no idea what Sherlock was reacting to. John cried out in fear and sat up straight. His eyes darted around in an attempt to identify the threat, but his vision was blurred and flashed with images. John rose to his feet shakily only to take a few steps and drop to his knees with his hands gripping his hair.

Panic gripped his mind in it's icy, shredding claws and tore away the logical, less instinctual part of his mind. He took deep breaths in, but his panicked lungs refused to exhale, leaving him dizzy and more terrified than he had been to begin with.
But John was a strong man, and he was desperate to help those he was loyal to. Despite the fear, nausea, and panic that welled inside him, he forced himself to exhale as long as he possibly could. That was something small he could do. Breathe in as long as he could, breathe out as long as he could.

Greg had gone down beside John, not daring to touch him in his panic. He watched in stunned silence as John managed not to scream, and more incredibly, pulled himself slowly out of panic. All the while, Sherlock was in silent hysterics, reaching for John, too terrified to make a sound, his heart racing as he was locked in place with fear.

John was not aware of how long he stayed like that, breathing on the floor, but eventually he calmed, and with that calm came shame. John had ignored everyone in the room while he collected himself, determined against everything in his body to do it on his own. The panic had hit him hard, but like an electric shock, it was over quickly. When he was able to stand he walked back to Sherlock and laid his head back down in the exact same spot it had been before. "Sorry...I'm sorry... I thought, I don't... I got scared..." Terribly worried about how his knee-jerk reaction to the sudden stress had upset Sherlock, John wrapped an arm nervously around the man's shoulders.

As soon as John slid his arm across Sherlock's shoulders, Sherlock broke down hard. He leaned as close as he could, not quite touching John's head with his own, crying his eyes out in fear. He managed John's name in the tone of brittle anguish, trying to reach for him.

John grit his teeth and was glad Greg had given him a solution to the smell. The proximity was wearing his nerves down like sandpaper on wood or waves on a beach, but John was so fiercely determined to help that he kept his expression calm.

"It's okay. It's alright, I won't let them hurt you. I swear. I won't. You remember that, right? You've got your own personal soldier." John attempted a smile, but it faltered. "Well, a broken one...but I'm still going to protect you. Could you try and say something? I'm scared that this is my fault and I'm trying to say the right things...to be articulate but.." John dropped his head to Sherlock's shoulder in a proper embrace.

Sherlock struggled with himself, gasping and shaking his head, working his throat. He slowly reached a hand up to his mask and dragged it off his face, tipping his head down so that he was whispering only to John. "I'm a-afraid," he confessed, his voice catching as his chest buckled on another sob, desperately trying to school himself so that he could speak through the tears. "T-Tell me you're...y-you're actually h-here. I- s-s-so many times I w-watched...p-please be here. God p-please be here."

John's chin wouldn't stay still and his eyebrows drew together. "I know you're afraid. God, I know. I really, honestly do. It hurts, and I wish you weren't in pain."

He curled his arm more firmly around Sherlock's shoulders. "I'm here. Real. Ask me something that they wouldn't know. I'm real, and here, and I'm afraid too."

Sherlock reached up very slowly and touched John's arm across his shoulders, letting his eyes fall closed as he held on for dear life, holding very still now that he accepted John was actually with him. He was deeply afraid of their situation and of John turning away from him, and would take what he could get.

"I'm...I...J-John I'm s-sorry," he breathed, fear dragging his thoughts down into confusion. "I j-just wanted t-to make it stop f-for you...I- please John I t-tried to h-help." He dragged in air as deep and slow as possible, straining to keep hold of John even as he was trembling apart.
John couldn't seem to breathe right. His chest felt tight as though Moriarty's clamps were back on him and his breath was being forcibly squeezed out his throat.

"L-Last t-time I got scared and I said something I shouldn't have. I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry. I never meant to hurt you but you screamed and-" John seemed to forget that he too was a trauma patient. Now that he had accepted responsibility for his actions, he felt crushing shame and guilt when his uncontrollable terror caused others pain. "I didn't mean it. Any of it. I don't think so, I can't remember. I want to help you. What can I do?"

"Don't h-hate me, John, p-please don't h-hate me. I- I couldn't s-s-s-stop him and-" He was stopped as Miller began to whisper to Paul that Sherlock needed the mask back over his face, watching as Sherlock began to grow a shade of grey that was bordering blue. Paul nodded and moved forward, gently reaching out and putting the mask over Sherlock's face.

Sherlock caught none of it as his hand flew up, trying to push whatever was on him again, violently shaking his head and gasping for air. "N-No! P-please, no!" Sherlock cried out in fear, all cloths and molded, harsh fabric, air that was too thin and too heavy with water as his nose burned.

John was trapped between growling at -and possibly hitting- the doctor, and suggesting to Sherlock that he take the oxygen mask. "Sherlock, SHERLOCK!" He shouted loudly to get his attention and snatched the mask from Paul's hand.

"You stay away from him," he snapped at the psychologist and put his hand on Sherlock's face. "Sherlock, let me do this. You'll be hypoxic if you don't. Please?"

Despite the weight of the situation, Greg could not help but flash a smile in John's direction. This was what he needed, John had to walk someone else through recovery to carry himself as well.

Paul instantly handed John the mask and stepped back, hands up, watching as Sherlock put his eyes to John. It was clear he was struggling to breathe, using his accessory muscles to move air, wheezing and straining his abdominal muscles for help. Tears flowed down the sides of his face as he tried to go still for John, eyes locked to John's hand as he held himself still, fist balled tight in the sheets, shaking violently.

Greg had a hand pressed over his own mouth, watching John take care of Sherlock, overwhelmed with pride and relief so complete his legs nearly gave out. There might be a fallout later, but for now, all he could see was the promise there in that moment.

John still had one arm around Sherlock, or rather, draped across his chest, but could tell that the man needed the touch. John pulled his fraying nerves together as best as he could and, with not so much as a whimper of fear, leaned down to wrap Sherlock in both arms. He leaned over the bed, slightly on his toes, and draped himself carefully over the wounded man. With his own chest John could feel
Sherlock's heart fluttering, and he prayed Sherlock was on enough painkillers that his tiny amount of weight, leaned on Sherlock's chest, wouldn't be too much.

Shock closed his eyes, resting his better hand on John's elbow with the lightest pressure. Within a minute, his heart rate began to slow just enough to be noticeable.

His fingers slowly twinned in the fabric of John's shirt as he whispered to him, "I...I miss y-you. I'm s-sorry I can't p-play for you anymore. H-h-he took my hands f-from me."

John hardly breathed. To advance this far without anything but a disaster and one trial run in between was difficult at best, but for a man who so easily lost progress, it was a Hail Mary pass.

"I miss you too," he whispered and decided not to lay his head down. This was too much. John kept, in his mind, an imagine of what he was doing. He was hugging his friend. The simplicity of the action, when held to comparison with how monstrous his discomfort was, made the situation seem almost laughable in a sick, twisted sort of way. Moriarty would have laughed.

"Greg's got tapes," John breathlessly managed to say. "I never knew you played when I was having terrors. I mean, I always heard the song, and it always helped, but...I just didn't know."

Sherlock nodded, topping his face more to hide in John's arms. "E-Every time," he whispered, wishing he'd not been such a coward and just..."I...I...should h-have gone to you. Thought y-you...you'd n-not like it. I was so s-stupid."

John, disturbed by the sensitive subject and the idea that this could have been avoided, flinched heavily and buried his face down on Sherlock's shoulder. "I wouldn't have been upset with you. It would have been nice to know that you....I don't know, felt things. I don't know. I can't-" John could feel the fuse on his panic bomb beginning to burn short as the ropes that held his mind in place frayed.

Greg moved forward, reaching out and touching John's back gently as he whispered John's name, letting him know he was there. He looked up at Sherlock, who had pinched his eyes closed tight when John flinched, letting his fingers drop away from John's shirt despite his nearly insatiable need to be in contact with him.

He drew in a few rapid breaths, already spiraling down hard into guilt once again. The relief was swiftly draining away from him and he mentally screamed at himself for saying anything.

John was laboring to breathe at a calm rate, but his heart rate was beginning to soar regardless. He wanted to speak again, but the old terror that he would mess something up was presently stuck in his windpipe and blocked his words from coming out.

What had Greg said?

Sherlock had confessed his...love? John was beginning to see it more clearly, see how awful he had been, and what a mess he had made. "You said that you didn't want me to go because and I got mad because I thought that you didn't care and I might not have done but that was mean and I'm sorry. M-Moriarty would have taken me anyway, and done things, and-"

John let out a pained whine and held Sherlock tight. "And I don't want to be angry at you and I'm sorry. I wasn't angry at you just angry and-and-" Speaking about such difficult a topic was challenging for John even when he was wrapped in his blankets, cuddled against Greg. But here, in the sterile white room with Sherlock trembling and crying beneath him, John's stress level skyrocketed.
Sherlock hardly dared to breathe. He was trying desperately to hear him, to put the words somewhere they made sense. John's speech was chaotic and Sherlock was already having a hard time remaining present. He held perfectly still as John began to come apart on him, sure that he was the cause, that he was making it worse. John was trying to tell him something about Moriarty, which instantly called up an image of Moran in front of John, who was on his bony knees, Moran's hand fisted in his hair and the other tight on his chin, trying to part John's teeth with his thumb.

"J-John I'm s-sorry," he breathed, nearly to quiet to be heard over the mask, "I...y-you can be a-angry with me...I sh-should have...so many things...s-so many things I sh-should have done."

John shook his head and grit his teeth together. "Not angry...not angry..." In fact, he was angry at Sherlock, though his logical mind, of what little of it was left, told him that couldn't possibly be true. This wasn't Sherlock's fault, but weeks of prayers for the man to come and rescue him, swearing to Moriarty that Sherlock would skin him alive for what he was doing, had been prayed to a man who sulked in his house.

"I'm s-s-sad because-" A sob escaped him then and he stopped, sat up and withdrew his arms. "I'm not angry," he said again and took Sherlock's hand in both of his.

Sherlock felt the loss of John's proximity as surely as if the lights had cut off and all the heat drained from the room. He grit his teeth, bearing the withdraw like physical pain, his breathing kicked back up and his heart rate skyrocketing. When John took his hand again, Sherlock looked down at their fingers, tears slipping around the sides of the mask, clinging to the plastic. "I...I t-tryed to kill him. I s-s-swear it John I t-tryed. I sh-should h-have...I...I t-tryed," he faded out lamely. Excuses would never matter, the facts stood as they were.

Greg crouched down behind John and rest the flat of his palm on John's back, close enough that John would be able to feel his body heat. John looked ready to peel out of his skin and Greg could hardly blame him. "I'm right here, John," he whispered.

John tried to recall something that was pleasant, but each and every image he recalled was twisted against him. He imagined the beach and saw himself being held under the water. He imagined himself sitting in his flat, listening to music, but Moran burst in and pinned him to the floor. With the macabre images hammering against his mind in relentless torrents, John was unable to speak. He shook his head and cried out in fear.

Sherlock closed his eyes, turning his hand in John's and attempting to comfort him as he wrapped his functioning fingers around John's and brushed the pad of his thumb along the side of John's palm.

Greg shifted so that he could pull John to his chest, keeping him in the same spot, one hand wrapped around the back of John's head and the other slung across his back. "I'm right here. You are safe, John, you're safe. Breathe for me. Do you need to go? We can go."

John, his panic growing inside him, was losing control of his mind quite quickly. He leaned into Greg and became physically attuned to him, though his mental attention was on Sherlock.

"I'm sorry, Sherlock, I can't-" Guilt and worthlessness filled him as he pulled away, knowing that soon he wouldn't be able to function. John wrapped both arms around Greg and his knees grew weak with exhaustion. "I'm sorry," he said again, though his back was turned, "I'm so sorry, I'm tired, just tired.."}

Sherlock’s fingers curled in on themselves over the bandaging and he stared at John for another moment, looking away as Greg wrapped him protectively in his arms. He swallowed hard around the
swelling tightness in his throat and turned his face away, unable to withstand the imagery behind closed eyes, unable to stand John collapsing in on himself from his interaction with Sherlock.

*John stood panting, back against the wall, hair wind-tousled and a flush to his cheeks as he smiled with Sherlock. Delighted and breathless laughter filled the hall of 221B and John grinned at Sherlock. He'd no awareness that he'd left the cane, that he'd run with Sherlock and pushed himself physically without help. He was beautiful in that moment, and the sudden knowledge that his life was forever changed wrapped around Sherlock like a warm blanket, settling the constant mix of mental chaos and allowing him to be still in a way he'd forgotten existed outside of the needle.*

Sherlock's breathing stuttered away from him as the memory sliced across his chest in white-hot brilliance, the weight of loss threatening to snap his ribs. He did all he could to remain outwardly still as he heard Greg gather John up and carry him over to the chair at the end of the room, taking all the warmth with him.

Greg whispered softly to John all the while, wrapping him in his blanket and nodding to Mycroft and Paul as he pushed John into the hallway. "You did brilliantly, John. Keep breathing, we'll have you in bed and it will be okay. Just breathe."

Sherlock was very still as he stared at the doorway, shivering in fear and loss once again as he was left behind.

Chapter End Notes

I haven't been posting recently, and I'm sorry. I had stuff. I was injured in an MMA fight. Bla bla bla. I'm posting again. Two chapters tonight!!

ANYWAY, I cried like a baby editing this, but not nearly as much as I cried in the next chapter. Go ahead. Read it if you need your heart ripped out.
Fear is the Little Death that Brings Total Obliteration

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

John began to whimper and cry as soon as they had left the room, and he turned in his hair to shout back at Sherlock's door with a grieving voice. "I'll come back," he called before sobs rocked him into silence.

John had always taken care of Sherlock as best he was able. From small things such as making the tea and insisting Sherlock eat, to checking the flat for drugs when Mycroft called and said it was a danger night, he was always on guard. John would always cancel his plans, no matter how promising they had been, in favor of helping Sherlock with whatever it was he needed. All of this had happened while Sherlock was still relatively independent. He never asked for things, or even admitted he needed the help, and indeed John was often put off by his roughness. But now Sherlock was begging for forgiveness, needing to be touched, and John couldn't even stay with him.

John lamented his helplessness to the walls around him in drawn out, mournful wails.

Greg carefully pulled John into his arms once they were finally inside his room, lifting him from the chair and sliding him into bed. Deftly he attached John's fluids back up and connected the tube to the feeding, knowing that much of effort would physically tax John in the extreme. As soon as that was done, he dimmed the lights and turned on the music, letting Sherlock's violin softly work around them as he pulled John into his arms. Greg cradled his John against his chest so that John's head rest in the crook of his elbow. He trailed his fingers through John's hair and just sat with him, silent for the moment, letting John feel what he needed to feel. He wasn't in dangerous panic. He was heartbreakingly sad, as was clear from the nature of his crying, and it tore at Greg's chest as he empathized as much as he could with the poor man.

Paul kept his eye on Sherlock as he let the interaction he'd seen between the men settle into his mind, analyzing it carefully. John had made unspeakable progress, it was a marvel how broad of a mental jump he'd made just in his forgiveness of Sherlock, at least on some level. That was not to mention the call back to his medical days, his attempt at giving Sherlock some measure of treatment, and his physical defense of him when Dr. Miller came near. Sherlock was breathing too fast, and his heart was racing, but he kept quiet and still. Only his fingers moved, brushing over the blanket in the space John had been, feeling John's body heat slowly dissipate out of the fabric.

It took John a full hour, which to him was hardly time at all, before his heaving sobs simmered down into heavy, whining exhales. He felt awfully small in Greg's lap, where he was safe, but useless, and the months of torment that had made him so frightened now served to make him feel so terribly worthless that it stole his breath away. John needed a purpose, something to rationalize in his mind why he was pressing on through so much pain to a vague and almost futile horizon. He couldn't help Greg, but he could stay alive for him. Sherlock he was supposed to help, but couldn't even manage being in his company.

"You know what they do with lame horses?" John asked Greg once his crying had all but stopped. "The ones that can't work anymore? I suppose if they're sentimental they'll let it live in the pasture, but most just get sent to the glue factory. Or put down. Or to France. I heard they eat horses over there. Maybe not. I don't know. It's not really the point, though, is it? I'm not doing this right. I'm lame."

Greg adjusted his hold on John so that he could see his face properly. He slid his palm over John's cheeks for the hundredth time and shifted back so that his back had more support.
When he spoke, his voice held soft and quiet, setting in with the calm music from Sherlock's violin. "What you did in there today...John...I don't know how to describe it. You...do you realize you were doctoring him, protecting him? Christ John, you forgave him. It was...remarkable. I am so proud of you I could burst. It...I didn't expect anything like that from you. None of us could pull Sherlock out of it, but you did. You helped, John, you managed what the whole team of us couldn't do."

John shook his head against the list of his successes and chose to let the music drown out Greg's voice in his mind. "I've patched him up before. He's come back with bruises and scrapes and little injuries and things that I could fix without him going to the hospital. It was easy. It never hurt like that. I can't... I couldn't live near him, Greg. I can't. I can't keep doing this. It hurts. But I'll do it anyway, and I'll keep going even though I'm lame, until I run myself into the ground and end up in the glue factory myself."

Greg sternly kept the pain away from his expression. He'd too much hope that perhaps they would be able to do this after all. He'd expected to hear that it was hard, that John was frustrated, but not that. He gave himself a minute to breathe before softly replying.

"Today has been a lot for you to handle. It was unfair to ask so much of you. Do you...do you want to sleep? You don't have to live near Sherlock, John. It's...something will work out. We will try not to have you two back together until it doesn't hurt anymore. I don't want you this run down. Sherlock doesn't want you this run down."

"I can't do this, but I have to." John gave Greg a look so piteous and exhausted that it seemed to shatter the last reserves of will that he kept stored away in the recesses of his body. John sagged against Greg, limp and defeated.

"Tomorrow we'll play Rummy," he remarked in a disconnected, inane voice. "And I'll go to the tree. I'll not be in pain. I can do tomorrow. I can do another tomorrow. I can-" John's voice cracked and tears slipped down his face. He didn't want to do another tomorrow.

Greg's heart broke as he felt John go limp in his arms, speaking so pathetically, worn down to nothing. He gave him a gentle nod as he reached to the side table and tipped out a few of John's sleeping pills, handing them over as exhaustion settled back on his shoulders.

"You won't be in pain," he agreed, aching for Sherlock but resolved to keep John safe from him. "We'll play Rummy, and we'll go to your tree."

John took the pills and curled up into his usual sleeping position, which involved tucking his knees close, covering his neck and face with his hands and his ribs with his elbows. "I'm worthless if I can't help him."

Greg shook his head, letting John curl up in his familiar and gut-wrenching position to sleep. He trailed his fingers gently over John's back and tried to soothe him somewhat. "That's not where your worth is, at least not for me, John. You've tremendous worth if I count." He knew, of course, that he most likely did not.

John decided that it was no time to be awake anymore, and dropped off to sleep rather quickly.

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Paul had attempted to engage Sherlock in conversation for the last hour, wanting to bring his vitals down to something more acceptable, trying to shift Sherlock's thinking, or at least assess his thought
process. He was just at the point of giving up for the day, looking to Mycroft.

"I am going to go check on John, let Sherlock have a bit of time with you and see if that helps." Dr. Miller had left the room forty-five minutes ago, knowing his presence often upset the man.

Mycroft went to Sherlock's side, but avoided the place where John had briefly laid his head down. "Sherlock, He'll come to visit you again. It will be easier for him to come back if you and I work on talking and engaging in conversation. It was difficult for John as well, but he's learning. You can too. Could we have a conversation today?"

Sherlock waited for Paul to leave the room before responding to his brother, still touching the bed where John had been. "Wh-what could you possibly...w-want to discuss?" he asked, his voice weighed down hard in sadness.

Mycroft was relieved that Sherlock was speaking, but was careful not to press the issue. "Perhaps you could tell me what you would like to do for the next few weeks while you recover. I can make a plan for John to visit regularly, text you, call, or send videos."

Sherlock slowly turned his focus to his brother. He stared at him for several minutes as he carried on breathing too fast, too shallow, long since buzzing with lightheadedness. He could not stop the imagery, no matter if he opened or closed his eyes, sick at his stomach and aching for John.

"G-Get out," he breathed as a heavy tear streaked down the side of his face.

Mycroft didn't move from where he stood despite Sherlock's wishes. "You shouldn't be alone for this. You should have someone with you. If you could just practice holding a conversation, it would put John at ease when he visits next."

Sherlock's hand tightened in the blankets where John had been, keeping his eyes to his brother. "Wh-What do you wish f-for m-me to tell you? W-would you like to h-hear how cl-close I came to strangling mys-self in the f-first few days? H-how I was b-beaten into submission? Sh-should we talk about h-how I bent like a d-d-damned s-sapling under the w-weight of him? Or w-would you like to gl-gloat in the glory that y-you are n-now ultimately correct; s-sex does a-alarm me." He was throwing barbs, sick of them in his own skin, ready to tear the walls apart before he found a way to dispatch himself.

"I am h-hurting him. He w-wants to help and he cannot st-stop...f-fearing me, l-l-loathing me..." He swallowed hard and looked back to where John had been, reaching up and touching his collar bone where John had his arms around him, giving Sherlock his first moment of peace in nearly eighteen months. He'd given it, only to pull away, repulsed. "I am n-no longer w-worth regard. G-Get out and leave me be."

Mycroft's face grew stiff and he stared at Sherlock with a look of suppressed horror. "I...Sherlock….What...What happened to you is...I'm sorry I wasn't able to protect you from that. We expected him to stay, to be able to move in. As it turns out, he had planted snipers in the area weeks in advance, even before we planned on calling him. I should have been able to find you sooner. I...I didn't know, I...I'm so sorry. I'll...What can I do?" Mycroft was going to skin Moran alive. Boiling anger filled his mind and filled him with hot energy so intense he wanted to throttle someone.

Sherlock closed his eyes and spent the next few minutes just trying to breathe. Eventually he spoke, quiet behind the mask. "H-he will always associate m-me with the...th-this. E-Even if the f-fear ever left him...wh-when he looks at me, he'll s-see pain."
He couldn't do this. It was too much, too difficult, too horrific to think on. Even if they survived the next few years, John would always look at him with disdain and betrayal. "Y-You can hardly st- stomach me. J- John was the single person on th- this planet who could have... c- could have...." his voice broke and he tried to pull his hand away from Mycroft, hating how immobile he still was. "I know you f- f- find me weak. N- Now I quite agree w- with you."

"It's not that John 'could have' loved you. He did. Everyone saw it, Sherlock, you just never picked up on it. The man followed you around like a puppy, except when you were in a mood. And now here he is, trying to help you even though it hurts him. What would you call that if not love?" Mycroft desperately wanted for Sherlock to see that there were people who loved him. He needed his broken baby brother to feel loved and wanted after his months of being a toy to a sadist.

"I never found you weak. The fact that you are enduring is fantastic."

Sherlock broke, closing his eyes as his brother began to speak, the words driving though him as sure as Moran's spikes had. "I... I didn't know! I- I sh- should have seen a-a-a and I f- failed to see! Th-This has been the price, I- I have n- nothing left to pay with!" He lost his ability to properly speak as grief and deep, blistering regret enveloped him. He'd had love and not known it, and then he'd squandered it and utterly lost it. Exhausted, he nearly doubled with the words thrown at him, not braced against his brother as he should have been. He'd not expected the hit.

"L- L- L- et me be, please... I c- cannot... p- please," he begged, reaching up and pulling at his hair, insides twisting with self-hatred.

"It wasn't your fault! You and I are not supposed to love. That you found it was rare and unexpected. It's not your fault that you didn't see. He never said anything, never gave you any reason other than his behavior to suspect he was interested. He did have girlfriends. You must have just interpreted it as friendship." Mycroft was aware that Sherlock hadn't had good friends before, and John's affections might have been taken as such. "I'll let you be, since you've asked, but I'm not going to go far. If you need me, I'll come back in. John will love you again. He still does, I think.'

Sherlock was reeling as his brother left, dizzy with guilt. He wasn't supposed to love. He'd ruined John with it, utterly destroyed him. It was... the whole of it... entirely his fault. When the door closed, leaving him to himself, Sherlock shouted his guilt to the ceiling, tearing the mask off his face. He could not breathe for the pain of it. He'd loved John and John's life had been completely destroyed. He'd suffered a fate far worse than death. Now he had a chance with Greg and Mycroft insisted, instead, on forcing John to function as a tool for his own survival. He was killing John just by carrying on breathing.

It was all very simple, really. He'd just stop.

Sherlock's blurry eyes suddenly panned the room, searching desperately for anything to use. There was a vial of dilaudid on the counter to his left, but that would require several steps he was not capable of taking, and he doubted he'd have the time to crawl. He caught sight of a scalpel on the trauma cart near him, within arm's reach, his heart sinking. That wasn't how he'd wanted to die, not with pain and the sickeningly hot spray of blood. His fingers shook as he reached out for it, sobbing bitterly, already sick at his stomach before he even felt the bite of the blade.

He held the glinting metal in a shaking fist, staring down at it as he debated what to do. He'd have preferred the length of his forearm, but his dominant hand was a splintered, pinned up mess and he doubted his dexterity. The jugular would be easier, though horribly messy. He was gasping for air as he reached up with trembling fingers, holding the blade to his throat, whispering apologies to John that the man would never hear as the blade bit into his skin.
Mycroft had sat down outside the door in a small chair and dropped his head into his hands. All of this seemed cruel. It seemed terrible to force the two to live when neither wanted to do so, motivated by each other and pressured into putting on a brave face.

It was several minutes later when he finally decided it would be best to check the live video feed of Sherlock on his phone. As long as the man didn't call, he wasn't going to intrude, but Sherlock likely couldn't see the cameras and would be none the wiser. He clicked on the feed.

"DOCTOR MILLER!" Mycroft practically screamed down the hallway and threw the door open. "DOCTOR MILLER!"

Never far from his only patient, Miller was in the hall following Mycroft into the room within seconds. He swore as he rushed to Sherlock's side, pressing his bare hand to the wound at Sherlock's neck, calling out for help. Sherlock lay nearly unconscious, a dark, growing patch of red soaking into his pillow and gown, the blade dropped to the floor. His eyes were fixed to the corner, lips moving slowly as he stared at images Mycroft could not see.

Soon he was engulfed in medical staff, crying out weakly in fear, bloodied hand flailing out in a bid for help. Miller looked up over his team, searching out Mycroft. "He missed the major vessels," he informed, "not physically strong enough to manage a lethal cut."

Mycroft swore colorfully in multiple languages and stood far back against the wall. "God...Sherlock," He fisted both hands in his hair with supreme agony and his heart seemed to be struggling to get out of his chest.

"Missed the major vessels...Not lethal." Mycroft repeated the words to himself and attempted to use them as a sponge to cleanse his mind of the image of Sherlock's neck split with blood. It was pitifully ineffective.

His chest heaved and he had to sink into a chair to keep himself from falling, only to get right back up and pace back and forth. All the while, Mycroft held fistfulls of his hair and stared wildly ahead of himself with wide, panicked eyes. He tried to logic himself down from the panic, but for quite some time, he remained in the pain of it.

Sherlock was just barely clinging to consciousness when, nearly an hour later, Miller rolled back from the side of his bed and pulled his gloves off, leaving a line of sutures and a fresh dressing pressed over the left side of his neck. He would still need a bedding change, as well as a new gown, but he was receiving fluids to build him back up and had been treated.

Carefully Dr. Miller addressed Mycroft as he cleaned up around Sherlock. "I believe we've reached the point where we absolutely cannot leave him unattended without restraints."

"He was so calm," Mycroft lamented. "He was calm. He was speaking rationally. I didn't think... Yes, we'll keep him restrained when I'm not here. Also, I plan on making this room a bit kinder and less clinical. Curtains, wallpaper, maybe some lamps, something to make it a bit more friendly. We'll also have to be careful about not leaving scalpels where the clearly suicidal man can reach them."

Dr. Miller nodded as he swiveled back, plucking the blade from the floor. "I will be sure to tell the staff," he assured, easing Sherlock's head off the pillow so that he could toss the blood-soaked mess to the side. Sherlock whimpered and flinched away from him, his hand moving defensively, fingers shaking and smeared with rusty, clotting blood.

"It's alright, Sherlock," Miller said gently, starting to unfasten the clasps on Sherlock's gown, now
stiff with blood.

Sherlock was just touching darkness as he felt his clothing shift. He cried out pathetically, hardly making sound, managing to get his hand around Miller's wrist. "I can't," he breathed, tone shaking hard, "pl-please n-not now...I c-can't...g-god please no."

Mycroft went to Sherlock's opposite side and put his hand over Sherlock's. "Miller, could you possibly not undress him?" There was an implied 'for right now' to his sentence, as Sherlock could very possibly black out soon, and Mycroft didn't want him to think something upsetting was about to happen.

"In light of what has happened to him, I'd prefer we kept him clothed." Mycroft turned his attention to Sherlock then, touching his face, hair, and shoulder. "Sherlock, nothing bad is going to happen. You're alright. I’m going to protect you."

"My," he whined, reaching for his brother as he suddenly recognized him.

Sherlock's voice broke as his hand feel back down to the bed, "I...I don't w-want...I don't want...p-

"I won't let them hurt you. You can keep your clothes on. See?" Mycroft pulled the light covers close around his shoulders and stood very close. "Nothing is going to happen to you."

Miller watched as Sherlock tried to move defensively, obviously unaware of his location. He could hear John's name in the mix of pleading words before Sherlock went limp, finally losing consciousness.

"He needs to be looked at for that, Mycroft. I know you don't want him to be, but given the brutality of the man who had him, I think it exceedingly prudent to ensure he's not suffered...damage."

Mycroft almost cringed. The idea of someone taking Sherlock, the one who he still saw as a boy, was frankly sickening. "It would break his trust in me if he found out. I suggest the three of us speak, the third being Paul, to see what option has the least risk involved. Medically, I'd vote for it. But his reaction was very severe."

Miller leaned down and began to fix Sherlock's wrists into the soft restraints. "I can see to him without his knowledge if it comes to that. Likely Dr. Watson needs examining as well, and I fear for him the most. If he has healed incorrectly, he will need intervention. It is unfortunate this was just revealed."

He began to work the gown off while keeping Sherlock carefully covered from hips down, Sherlock's chest was exposed completely as Miller spoke again. "Perhaps it would be more comfortable if we put him in clothing from home. If he has night attire that buttons in the front, we could use that."

"I'll have something brought in. If we do it at all, it's to be without his knowledge, for we don't have his consent." Mycroft decided he would text Mrs. Hudson and have her get some of Sherlock's nightclothes.

"John can be sedated. He needs it periodically for cleaning." Mycroft texted Paul and Greg, informing them of John's medical needs.

Miller drew the blankets up high over Sherlock's chest, leaving him included for now. He slid a proper sedative into Sherlock's line and spoke softly, "You are welcome to stay. If you'd like to step
out, I'll alert you when I am done.”

Greg read the text, his heart sinking. John...would likely die from panic if told, but if he needed intervention, he would have pain from the repairs and know he was betrayed.

He replied with the request for time to talk to John.

Mycroft decided that even his best stoic mindset couldn't handle knowing that his baby brother was going to be examined for damage done from a sadistic rapist. He stalked into the hallway and leaned against the door, praying that Sherlock wouldn't know find out, and that if he did, it would be far enough in the future that the information wasn't devastating.

*You can have time, but if there is damage done it might be better to make the corrections sooner rather than later.*

Greg stared at the sleeping John, knowing this needed to be handled but wanting very much to delay. John...John would panic at the idea of doctors at him like that.

*I'll broach it soon, he's already so overwhelmed. I don't know how helpful he can be to Sherlock in the near future, this is hurting him.*

Mycroft sat on the floor with his back against the wall, a position he hadn't been broken down go for years. It was with terrible resolve that he decided it was best to go easy on John for the sake of long term gain when the present seemed so demanding.

*If it becomes too taxing, we'll slow down. John's personal improvement is more important right now.*

Greg exhaled in relief, adjusting John in his arms, trying to wrap him in closer, suddenly exceedingly protective. To Mycroft, he texted a swift message.

*Thank you. It's too much, I don't think he'd come back from it without tremendous effort. He's using that for Sherlock. How is he? I am worried.*

He then pulled open his email and began the slow process of drafting one to Molly, not having spoken with her since Sherlock was found. She was a comfort to him that he'd not utilized, and at the moment he deeply needed uplifting. He worked on the massive thing while waiting on Mycroft to let him know how Sherlock had fared after they'd left.

Mycroft deeply needed Sherlock to pull out of this and live on his own. Mycroft's own life was coming to a screeching halt and threatening to stop completely if Sherlock wasn't taken care of by someone he trusted.

*Sherlock is greatly distressed. He is going to be examined without consent, and hopefully without his knowledge. Pick a day to speak with John about an exam and don't put it off.*

Dr. Miller came out into the hall nearly an hour later. He came over to Mycroft and simply sat down on the floor next to him, lacing his hands together and wrestling his wrists on his knees. A minute of silence passed before Miller slowly looked over to Mycroft. He cleared his throat and spoke very quietly. "John has to be seen if the same man was at him as was Sherlock."

Mycroft cast a glance to his side that didn't turn his head. "Yes, if Moran was 'at him' the same way..."
he was at Sherlock, there will likely be damage. It's unfortunate, how he specifically broke each thing in them so they couldn't help the other."

Mycroft turned and faced Paul now, a more professional attitude about him. "There's a subject I wished to speak with you about. Sherlock is utterly terrified of hurting John, to the point of not wanting John near him. I hold that fear of hurting him is from his torture, as that was the main premise. He's rebelling against the psychological conditioning, and therefore rebelling against John's care. We need to convince him that it's not hurting John."

Paul nodded, "That's going to be exceedingly difficult. Sherlock only seems to begin to waver when John is openly afraid. John has made remarkable progress but will likely continue to fear Sherlock's company. He has said himself that he is incapable of carrying on so close to Sherlock, though is determined to do so anyway. The sad truth is, John is being hurt when he's with Sherlock, through no fault of your brother's."

He ran his hand over his face and then looked to Miller, "Did he need stitching?" When Miller cleared his throat and nodded, Paul swore. Miller spoke softly, "A good bit of healing had already occurred. Had to open a few places and make corrections. The damage was...notable."

"Stitching. God..." Mycroft ran his fingers back through his hair several times to smooth it from where he had been messing it, trying to establish some small sense of control and normality via his hair.

"If Sherlock was raped to the point of needing stitching, he'll likely not take kindly to knowing he was touched by the doctors. If we just drop the subject all together, he'll get suspicious. He might figure out by our sudden disinterest in the subject that something is up, and even though his mind is mostly gone, I don't want him to work it out." Mycroft texted Greg once more to let him know what had been revealed.

Sherlock needed stitching.

Miller spoke softly, "I imagine he'll work it out by sensation alone. I've done what I can to keep it as...comfortable as possible, very fine sutures, single knot, I've numbed the area as much as is possible. He's going to feel it though, he will likely be able to tell. It was unavoidable. That sort of damage, he was healed, but improperly so. Truly needs surgery, but that can wait until he’s more stable. I've had to open and correct some of the wounds. I do hope John is not suffering similarly."

Paul shook his head, speaking softly. "He said that Moriarty kept Moran in check to some level. He may not have been so reckless with John."

He looked back to Mycroft. "You have tapes of this, Mycroft. Have you given thought to what you will do with them?"

Greg's text came as Paul was speaking.

Jesus Christ. I'll try to get him talking. I'm so sorry, Mycroft.

Mycroft was all business now, no longer the caring yet devastated brother he had been a few moments ago. Now he had a job to do, and wouldn't simply allow his mind to be clouded. He could have a breakdown later. "Yes, it's likely that Moriarty kept Moran in check when he...took...John. There might not be as much damage. Either way, he's healed, and either needs corrections or does not. I'll text Greg again, or maybe go talk to him, about getting John used to the idea of an exam."

It needs to happen soon. Do you need help with it?
Greg read the text, which came just after he sent an email to Molly. He shook his head despite his solitude with John, responding swiftly.

*No, I don't.*

He shifted next to John, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath for a moment. John had been sleeping for nearly four hours now, at least, and it was still daylight outside. The sleeping pills would likely have him groggy, but Mycroft seemed to abruptly grow impatient. He wanted to ensure it was from himself that the question came. With a gentle nudge, he softly called out John's name.

John groaned as he woke and shook his head blearily, nuzzling into Greg. He wasn't dreaming intensely, with only bits and pieces of meaningless scenes playing themselves out simply in his mind. "M'asleep..." John muttered and pulled Greg down onto the bed beside him like a child would pull a stuffed animal to them for comfort. "Not waking up."

Greg bit down on his tongue and allowed John to pull at him. When they'd settled he managed to get his phone out, responding swift to Mycroft.

*I can't do this to him right now.*

He pulled John in tight and whispered to him, "That's okay, John, you sleep. I've got you."

*Yes, you can.*

John nuzzled his face down on Greg once more and closed his eyes.

In most cultures, touching the face is considered an intimate gesture. You caress a lover's face, cup someone's cheeks when they cry, and to strike someone in the face is a capital offense. Adults may touch arms, shoulders and hands without too much meaning behind it, but suddenly when the face is involved it becomes intimate. Children, unaware of this and still needing intimacy, escape this until they grow old. They have their cheeks pinched, foreheads kissed and hair ruffled. But to someone so starved of any touch other than pain, John craved it.

He needed the intimacy, and rubbed his face against Greg's chest like a cat. "M'kay, Greg. Greg. Greg..."

Greg closed his eyes and tipped his face down to the top of John's head. Mycroft was not going to let it pass.

"John," he said softly, fear sliding through his gut. "I...I need to talk to you."

John rolled over so he was on his back looking up at Greg, a position that he only allowed himself to be found in when feeling safe and at ease. "Okay, I'm awake."

Greg stared at him, giving John a warm smile after a moment, just to assure him. He touched the side of John's face and shifted, sitting up and tugging John up to do the same. He wrapped John in his arms, sitting him nearly in his lap. How was he supposed to do this? He held his phone and texted so John could not read it.

*I cannot. Not today.*

John loved the affection and hummed Sherlock's music softly to himself. "Can we play cards today? We can put a movie on and play Rummy. That would be good."

*You can, and you will. It's medically important.*
Greg held John to his chest and closed his eyes. Mycroft was going to force this.

"John..." he stopped, nearly choking on his hesitation. "John, love, Sherlock had an exam...we...we think you may need medical attention...John..."

John tensed immediately, though the words had been gentle and the affectionate name warmed his chest. He squeezed his legs together and crossed his arms over his chest. "No. No, I don't. The doctors can't touch me. Don't. Greg, don't you dare let them touch me. I don't-" he dug his fingernails into his shoulder blades and shook his head. "I don't want to be touched. Greg, don't."

Greg closed his eyes and held John tighter to him. "God I'm sorry, John, I'm sorry. If there is damage that's healed wrong...Sherlock was...he was really hurt...I'm so worried about you."

The combination of Sherlock being hurt and his own pending abuse shredded John's mind to quickly dissolving bits. "NO!" He screamed, quite loudly and forcefully, with as much authority as he could. "No, I'm fine! I'm not in pain anymore! It hurt and then it went away! It stopped hurting after a while! We don't need to do anything. Let's stop. Let's not. Don't you DARE let them touch me."

Greg was quiet as John feel apart, holding him tight with his eyes closed, chest aching. How was he supposed to do this?

"John," he whispered in lament, "love...please...John," he drew in a deep breath, squatting his resolve, "I won't let anyone hurt you, John, God I'm so sorry. You...you've got to be treated...John please."

"No, no I don't!" John held onto Greg's shirt and the color bled from his hands. "Greg, please! Don't let them touch me. I don't want to be touched! I don't want it! You said I-I could-I could-could-" John pushed himself back against the headboard with his legs straight but crossed tightly and a large pillow held over his chest and hips. He watched the door now instead of Greg as it was clear the man had no intention to protect him. The knowledge that if the doctors walked in to abuse him Greg would do nothing was tearing at his mind and John let out a sob.

"NO. I'm saying no! NO! That means something. You're supposed to keep them away from me. YOU SAID-" John breathed a shaky exhale and looked around the room for something to defend himself with. "I'll hurt them. I'll HURT THEM!"

John blurred as Greg's eyes stung. John had pulled away from him, dissolving down into panic. "John," he breathed, not daring to reach back for him, though he desperately wanted to hold John close again and promise to keep him safe, "No one is coming for you, John. You're safe, no one is coming. I-" he raked his hand through his hair and sent another text to Mycroft.

*Are we to forcibly make him submit to an exam, because that is the only way this will happen. He's falling apart.*

He looked back to John and spoke softly, "No one here hurt Sherlock. He was already damaged, and they helped him, John. You've not been eating. You haven't really...it may cause you terrible problems, John, if...c-can you tell me if..." he closed his eyes and took a deep breath, loathing himself for what he was about to ask, "You said Moriarty kept him in check. Did...god, John I'm so sorry...did he ever...John did Moran ever...did Moriarty ever let him loose?"

John began to cry, his legs tightly pressed together and hands clutching the pillow over his hips. "S-Stop!" John cried loudly, partially at Greg and partially at the images that presented themselves. Moriarty had never done a thing that wouldn't be constructive to John's terror. He'd only truly let Moran have free reign over what he did to John's body once, but it had been for a very specific
"He's going to come hurt you today, John. Do you know who?" Moriarty crouched down beside where John was lying on the floor. He had always been gentler than Moran, more soft spoken, careful never to overload John with pain to the point where his mind wouldn't work. John had known who, but he couldn't even think the name, let alone say it. John gave a small nod.

"Yes, it's Sherlock," Moriarty continued "he's coming to hurt you."

John had dissolved into tears, thrashing and begging, but it had done no good. He'd been blindfolded, which was the only scrap of cloth on his freezing, bleeding body.

Believing Sherlock to be on his way, John cried and struggled to curl into a position where he could take the pain, but he was grabbed roughly and forced flat. Sherlock's voice surrounded him and John was laid out on his back on the Belstaff coat by Moran.

John's feet were crossed and flexed, knees pressed together and body trembling. "NO! NO! Greg, PLEASE!" He didn't dare move from his guarded position, though his mind had dissolved completely.

Greg shifted back as John cowered from him, shaking his head as his breath seized up in his lungs. He gave John space as he texted Mycroft again.

We are not doing this to him.

It took a few minutes for Greg's breathing to settle down into something more acceptable, his hands out towards John as he spoke softly. "Okay, John. Okay. I'm sorry, that's...I'm not going to let them touch you, okay? I'm not going to let anyone touch you. We don't have to talk about it, it's okay. I'm so sorry. You are safe, John. No one is going to touch you."

John let out a terrible, guttural cry that channeled such excruciating pain and abuse that it would shake the heart of even the coldest of men. "I-I-I-I thought-thought it w-was-" he couldn't continue. It was a terrifying aspect being brought to light, dragged from the clutches of his mind where he had so carefully packed it away.

Greg's ears began to ring at the horrific anguish John was giving voice to. He reached forward before stopping himself, his fingers curling in on themselves in the air. "Please," he said as he shifted carefully closer, "John please let me hold you. I'm- oh god, John, please. You're safe. I'm so sorry, John please," he did not realize he had tears on his own face, heart crushed and breaking for John. Christ, what had they done? It was months past. If there was damage, it could likely wait to be addressed. Sherlock was still physically healing, but John...he'd just unwittingly ripped open a scar and John was bleeding out, right in front of him. "Please, John, oh, god I'm sorry."

John kept himself physically guarded as he mentally fell apart. With a trembling body and legs growing sore from being held together so forcefully, John wondered if he might be raped by the doctors when he was sedated. "Greg," he gasped, eyes going wide, "don't l-let the doctors...don't let them r-r-" the word wouldn't come, and he substituted it with his safer, blanket word. "Don't let them hurt me when I-I sleep."

Greg could not stand it. He shifted as close as he could get and, leaving the pillow on John's lap, reached out and wrapped his arms around John. He spoke forcefully, a touch of anger in his voice. "No one is going to hurt you, John. I will slaughter anyone who ever makes the mistake of trying to lay a finger on you." He swallowed hard and attempted to calm himself, needing John to feel safe again. "John breathe, please breathe. You are safe, I swear you are safe. I shouldn't have asked...I
am just worried...he really did damage to Sherlock and-" he shook his head, holding tight to John, "no one is going to hurt you."

John needed Greg's anger so desperately, and that fierce protective presence that Greg projected soothed John's frayed mind. "I want a gun. I'll shoot them myself."

He suddenly remembered the bruises on Greg's face from when he had panicked, from when the man he loved had become a faceless enemy holding him down.

"No! No gun, never mind. I can't have a gun. Can't have one. You have to kill them all. Kill them if they try to hurt me. I tried to kill Moran but." John lifted his legs together and wrapped the blankets around them like a cocoon, adding a layer of security lest someone try to force them apart.

"Thought it...I thought-" Deep breaths. "Thought it was him..." John hadn't used the pronoun to describe Sherlock in months, and the name wasn't uncomfortable for him anymore, but at the time of the incident it had been. The him, and therefore the fear of the name, was burned into his mind when Moran, under guise of being him, forced himself violently on John.

Greg responded automatically to John's need of comfort. He wrapped him up tight in his arms, dragging the blankets tighter with John, burying them down into the covers. He slid his arm around John's legs, helping to keep John in the protective ball the man had pulled himself into, trying to alleviate some of the effort of holding himself like that.

"John, it wasn't him. It wasn't Sherlock. He was...Moran was trying to make Sherlock..." he cleared his throat and shook his head. They had tapes and yet hadn't seen...he had no idea what was done to either of the men, just...ideas. His work as a detective gave him too much possibility to go off of, from what he'd historically seen. He knew how damaging a man like Moran could be to the more delicate interior parts of the human form.

"It wasn't Sherlock. He would never hurt you. Christ, John, I'm so sorry. I- if you need to talk about it...I'm- I'll listen, okay?"

He drew in a slow, deep breath and held John as tight as he could. "You don't need a gun. I would take you far away from here if I thought anyone would hurt you. You are safe here."

John held Greg, and while his desperate crying had gone down, his entire lower body was still very tense and clamped in preparation for abuse. "I-I- Greg, please," he didn't know what he was asking for, but he knew he needed help.

"I-I know...w-wasn't...but it was him, now it isn't..." At the time, John had believed it was Sherlock. It was a reasonable result of the trickery as his already devastated mind believed Sherlock was the one hurting him, he couldn't see, Sherlock's voice was playing, his smell was all around him, and he could feel the coat at his back. At the time, it was Sherlock pinning him roughly, Sherlock’s fingers digging into his legs and hips, and though John knew now that it was Moran, the utter betrayal was still there despite his attempts to love Sherlock again. "I-I n-need help," John gasped and clung to Greg. He was rapidly slipping back into blind panic. "Help, HELP! HELP ME!"

Greg pushed John back enough to see his face and sharply called his name. "John!" He shouted, totally intent on shocking him back, "look at me," he commanded.

John was lost now, screaming in fear and agony, his throat raw and jaw wide open. His mind, or what was left, did little to remove the fear of torture and abuse that caused him to brace himself for impact rather than try and escape.
Greg pulled John in close and texted a 999 request to Paul for help. He drew back and took hold of John, wrapping him in his blanket like a cocoon. He lifted John into his lap, rocking him and trying to speak swiftly over John's screams. "John! John stop, John!"

John arched his back off the bed and scrambled away from Greg to the opposite side of the bed. He did so without separating his legs or removing the blanket that was wrapped around them, which took quite a bit of maneuvering.

Paul came in the room just as Greg was getting out of the bed. Greg spoke furiously to the man, pointing to John, "Mycroft damn well insisted on this. Look at him, fucking look at him! I don't know how to fix this, goddamn it, look what I've done!"
Paul put his hands up to still Greg, looking over to John and speaking softly, worried that Greg would frighten him. "John, can you talk to me?"

John let out another long scream that ended in loud tears that splashed onto the pillow he held tightly over his hips. "Th-they're going t-to come r-r-rape-" his eyes filled with dread and he jerked.

Greg tugged at his hair as John panicked. "John, it's okay, please John."

John wasn't focusing. He wanted Greg to be back with him, but remembered that it hurt him when he drew away. "I'M SORRY!" John screamed desperately, "GREG! GREG! I'M SORRY!"

Greg was shaking as he crawled back into the bed, desperately trying to comfort him. "Please don't be scared of me, please, John, it's Greg...it's Greg," he pleaded as Paul began to draw up a sedative.

John screamed with each exhale, and quickly began to hyperventilate, which made the screams short and rapid. "DON'T!" He demanded when the frantic roving of his eyes caught the sedative. "THEY'LL TAKE ME! I CAN'T SLEEP!!"

Greg shook his head and pulled John into his lap, holding him tight enough that John would not be able to break free even if he used his strength. He spoke swiftly to Paul, "Do it, Jesus Christ just do it," he lamented as he held John's hand out with the port, recognizing that John was too far gone in his fear to be reasoned with. Paul fully agreed as he took a knee on the bed in front of John and pushed the needle into the port, swiftly giving the sedative, helping Greg restrain him.

Greg spoke loudly to John as he held him in place against his chest. "You are safe, no one is taking you, I've got you," he repeated, sick at his stomach, loathing holding John down.

John struggled against Greg with every ounce of his strength. He arched his back and struggled to put space between Greg's hips and his body, a reflexive action that brought his caretaker indescribable pain. He was quickly losing his comprehension of the situation in his confusion, but John could hear Greg egging someone on to do something that John did not want done. Do it? Do what??

"No, NO! STOP! I DON'T WANT THIS!" He gave Greg a heartbroken, betrayed and imploring look as Paul advanced, surely to hurt him, while his protection simply held him still. John abandoned the idea that his arms across his chest would protect him, and instead wrapped them around his knees to keep them together. When Greg pulled one arm away, he interpreted it as the man he loved helping his attacker, and pain sliced through him. "NO! GREG, PLEASE! I LOVE YOU! I LOVE YOU!" John screamed it even as his arm was dragged away, surely so Paul could force his knees apart. "I-I LOVE YOU! PLEASE, DON'T DO THIS TO ME!" Not his Greg. His Greg wouldn't do this. His Greg wouldn't hold him still for someone else to rape. But, oh, here came Paul, and Greg was holding him still, and- "NO!! NO!! PLEASE!!" John knew himself to be
alone, then. Greg was helping Paul rape him. He was going to wake up and be in this place, this place he could not escape, this place with a man he loved who was aiding in his abuse. John’s throat burned out a screaming sob that dragged into the air and shook it with visceral agony.

As the sedative began to work, John stopped his screaming and struggled weakly against Greg, muttering his apologies and pleas before finally going limp in his arms. His hands fell away from his knees and his legs relaxed. His head lolled back and Greg, with eyes wide and full of tears, let out a guttural, defeated sob.

Chapter End Notes

I don’t know if you guys get how painful it is to write this.
Ways of Escape

Down the hall, rooms away and out of John and Greg's earshot, there was a sudden, low-pitched, desperate wail in the shape of Mycroft's childhood name as Sherlock came awake with a very specific sort of pain.

Mycroft heard the name and rushed into Sherlock's room. He was expecting utter betrayal, hatred, panic, fear, but was prepared for none of it. "It's alright," he began immediately, "I'm here."

Sherlock's eyes were shut tight, a light sheen of sweat on his brow, fists balled tight. He had shifted enough that the blanket was slung low on his hips, blood clear on the sheets.

He was babbling in Latin, broken words he'd repeated to himself in captivity, mixes of ancient texts and scattered conversation with Mycroft. He never spoke to John, not there where his voice hurt the man like a whip. He was shaking terribly, no sign that he heard Mycroft at all.

Mycroft pulled the blanket up higher over Sherlock's hips to his stomach. "Sherlock! It's Mycroft! My is here! I'm right here, nothing is going to hurt you!"

Sherlock did not respond to his brother outside of a desperate plea to a man he believed not really there. "C-Come get me, b-brother...please c-come get m-me."

Mycroft took hold of Sherlock's shoulders and gave a light shake. "SHERLOCK. It's me, MYCROFT. MY is here!" Perhaps auditory wasn't working, but Mycroft was willing to try just about anything. He tapped on Sherlock's shoulder in morse, took off his jacket and laid it near Sherlock's head to smell, and held the sides of his face. "Please, Sherlock. I'm here!"

It took Sherlock several minutes to become aware of his brother. He was shivering as though on ice, turning his eyes up and focusing on who had hold of him. As soon as he realized it was his brother, he broke down in panicked tears. "He's here!" Sherlock screamed, trying to reach for his brother, "h-he's here...where is John y-you have to protect...My, h-he's here!"

Mycroft wrapped his arms around Sherlock's shoulders and tapped along with his slow words. "Please, 'Lock, I'm here. I am keeping John safe, and keeping you safe." He wanted to unclasp Sherlock, but he had slit his throat last time, and Mycroft begrudgingly thought better of it.

Sherlock dragged in a deep breath as his personal childhood name was used. He shook his head and punched his eyes closed and he bit down on his lip and cried out for Mycroft again. "He...My...I...h-he...I've b-been...I'm...I h-hurt."

"I'm here," Mycroft managed to shout and keep his voice gentle at the same time. "I am here, 'Lock. My is here. You are in a high security facility, being healed. I am helping you." Mycroft took one hand to text Miller and ask for a painkiller.

Sherlock pulled away, shagging his head as he tried to explain. "My...it's...h-he..." his back arched and he tried to twist free of the restraints, "I...it h-hurts...I...I can f-feel him."

Mycroft flinched a bit and shook his head. "No, no, he didn't. He didn't take you. I promise. I swear he hasn't been here. I've been watching the whole time, and he hasn't been here."

Sherlock tugged hard at the restraints, suddenly screaming out his anger and his fear. He was pulling on his bad arm, his ruined legs shifting despite their plasters. "H-He's HERE," he shouted at the image of his brother, shivering against the table as the stench of blood and fear wafted around his
nose, "H-He's...I'm...J-JOHN! JOHN!" he was shredding his voice, cracking his pitch as he pulled hard at his wrists.

Mycroft grabbed hold of Sherlock's arms and held them gently down. He didn't want to risk removing the restraints while Sherlock was so terribly confused. "SHERLOCK, I'm here. I'm right here and it's going to be alright! John is safe, and I am here. Please, 'Lock, My is here." He carded his fingers through Sherlock's hair and touched his face. "I'm here, and you're safe!"

Sherlock shouted again, screaming at the top of his lungs. "M-MORAN! MORAN I'LL BLOODY K-KILL YOU! C-COME BACK YOU F-FUCKING S-SADIST I'LL K-KILL YOU LEAVE HIM ALONE!" Tears poured down his face as he dragged in pained breath after pained breath, staring at his brother without realizing he was real. "I- f-failed him I FAILED h-him," he lamented, gagging now as his stomach turned, "H-He's going f-for John next...always g-goes for him wh-while he smells of m-me. He's g-" he closed his lips as his mouth began to water, "I w-wish you were here," he said, far more childlike than before.

Mycroft kissed Sherlock's forehead and crawled into bed with him, though he kept a bit of distance. "God, I know you're scared, Sherlock, I know, but I'm real. I'm here, and you're in my facility, and-" his voice broke and he clutched Sherlock to his chest as best he could with the man being restrained. "I'm so so sorry. I'm sorry this happened to you. I should have been a better brother. I should have protected you or gone in your place or ordered a fucking aerial attack and bombed the place, I should have done something. This...I should have prevented this."

Mycroft wondered why Miller hadn't come in yet, as he always had whenever Sherlock came into a fit such as this. "Please, Sherlock, believe me. Moran is gone. If he were here, I would kill him."

Sherlock went very still as Mycroft climbed up into the bed with him, a bolt of fear slicing through his mind before Mycroft's familiar touch combined with his scent and the familiar timbre of his words. He leaned into him then, keeping quiet, trying to breathe slowly. "Why..." he whispered after several long minutes, "w-why do I st-still hurt a-as though he w-was just here. S-so many t-times I- it f- feels like he w-was just here."

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Greg let John go as soon as he was unconscious, nearly falling out of the bed as he ran to the lav and violently began to sick up into the sink, failing to make it to the toilet. John had thought that Greg was hurting him, that Greg and Paul were going to...he groaned at the thought and fell into the shower, fully clothed, cranking the water as hot as it would go as he sat under the spray.

Paul took advantage of the moment, calling in Miller. Together, while Greg fell apart in the shower, they stripped John, preparing to handle him. Mycroft had made his wishes clear, and ultimately John needed to be seen to. Paul stepped back as Miller began to work at John's trousers, stepping out into the hall to give them privacy.

Greg realized with a start that he'd gotten into the shower dressed, pulling his shirt and trousers off, down to naught but his soaked pants. He left the water running as he climbed back out, wrapping a towel around his hips, intent on fetching proper clothes. When he walked out into John's room, he glanced to the side and found Miller pulling John's bare knees apart. "What in the fuck," he breathed, moving without thinking, launching himself at the man.

There was a short but violent scuffle, and Greg ended up on his back with Miller over him, pushing him to the floor. "I'm trying to see to John, Greg. Let me get a look at him and then I'll go, alright?"
You can stand right here and watch if you want."

Greg stared up at him, panting hard, shocked beyond belief that he'd so easily been put to the floor. He stared up at Miller, furious, shaking his head. "You will get the fuck out is what you'll do. No one is going to examine him like this, where the hell is Paul?"

Miller let Greg go, easing him up from the floor and calmly pointing to John. "He stepped out to give him privacy. He's just outside the door, he called me, Greg. Let me examine John."

Ten minutes later, Miller walked out into the hall, his eye blackening as he looked to Paul and shook his head, finally seeing the page from Mycroft to come help Sherlock. He headed that way, trying to clean himself up somewhat, leaving Greg and John to Paul. Greg's knuckles were split and his hands trembling as he began to dress John again, having successfully kept him from being examined, wondering how long it would be before Mycroft tossed him out.

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Mycroft was struggling with his options to alleviate Sherlock's current fear and tell him that it was just an exam and some corrections, or to simply soothe him and hope this memory too was lost in the sea of swirling terror that was his brothers mind. "I...I promise he hasn't been here, Sherlock. You just aren't on as many painkillers, and you're feeling sore."

Mycroft waited until he heard Miller coming, as he had memorized each man's walk, to elaborate. "We'll get you some painkillers to fix that right up." Guilt was beginning to gnaw at him. Moran had brutalized Sherlock, ruined him both inside and out in both the literal and figural sense of the word.

He wished to know how it had gone with John, as it only seemed logical that Greg would have brought the topic up to John. But it was the last topic that he would discuss in front of Sherlock, and he sent Greg a text instead.

**Did John have damage?**

Greg's reply was fast and abrupt.

**John has not consented. Your physician now understands this.**

Miller walked into Sherlock's room and looked over the men. Sherlock's vitals seemed alright for the most part, fear evident but mostly steady. "Is everything alright?" He asked gently, watching Sherlock flinch hard and try to grab for his brother once again.

"My," he breathed, utterly terrified as his pulse spiked.

Mycroft read the text just as Miller walked in wearing the obvious signs of a scuffle.

**You are not allowed to abuse my staff, especially not when they are under my orders. John is to have an exam within the week. Sherlock didn't consent either, but Miller made corrections he needed. If John continues eating, he'll need it.**

It was with a morose attitude that Mycroft, turning back to Miller, addressed what was happening with Sherlock. "He is having pain. Could he have something for it?"

Miller shook his head, answering quietly, "He's as dosed as I can get him without fully sedating him again. It's not unexpected that he feels it, as sorry as I am to say it. There is little more that can be done unless he is put under again."
Sherlock was whispering in Latin under his breath all the while, shaking and trying to reach for his brother, sure that they were about to be harmed. "I want...I w-want to go home. He's...oh g-god he's never going to s-stop."

Greg read the text as Paul walked back in. His response was furious and blunt.

*Your brother is only days back. John has the ability to say no, and I'll not take that from him. Your bloody staff was abusing John!*

Mycroft was getting difficult news from two people now, and his brother didn't sound very lucid. He addressed Sherlock first, responding in Latin and telling him that the hurting had stopped for good.

He then texted Greg, with whom he was becoming increasingly irate.

*Remember who owns this facility, Lestrade. You have been very helpful to John and I would hate to separate you from him. If he's going to recover he needs this. My staff was not abusing him, I can guarantee that. I think you need to speak with Paul about what happened.*

Lastly he set his attention on Dr. Miller, to whom he gave an apologetic look. "If there is anything that you could do, including sedation, it would be appreciated."

Miller nodded, drawing up a sedative and swiftly sending the trembling man back under. He binned the needle and settled down in a chair to monitor Sherlock, cracking an icepack and resting it over his swelling eye.

- Greg read the text twice, raking a hand through his hair and pulling tight. Fear and rage wrapped around his gut and he nearly threw the damned phone.

*That sounds like a fucking threat, Mycroft.*

Greg pointed at Paul, furious. "What the fucking hell are you on about bringing medical in here," he shouted, hands shaking, ready to go rounds if needed, "He won't come back from that! He must have trust in someone!" Paul shook his head, trying to diffuse the situation. "He needs attention, Greg. It's for his-" Greg bodily shoved Paul back with both hands, pinning him to the wall. "I will fucking kill you if you do that again, do you understand, Paul? I'll kill you. No one is going to touch him."

Paul stared at his old friend, keeping the shock off his face as he went lax and calm. "Greg. You are too close to this right now. I need you to take a breath and calm down. This isn't going to help John."

Greg growled at him, pushed completely to his limit. He shoved Paul out into the hall and slammed the door, stalking back into the room and dressing swiftly. The water in the shower was still running and he didn't give a damn, sitting on the edge of the bed, guarding the bundled, sleeping man.

- Mycroft watched Miller's actions with supreme gratitude. "Greg attacked you, then. I apologize. He will be spoken to, hopefully made to see that an exam is necessary. He is currently very hostile, even towards me."

*It isn't a threat, Lestrade. With my position, it is a promise. I don't want to remove you from John, but if I need to separate you from him while he is examined, I'll have it done. Try to be reasonable about this.*
Mycroft shut his eyes for a moment and leaned back against the headboard. "You've been invaluable. I'm likely going to have to remove Greg for a moment, for however long you need for John's exam and any corrections."

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Paul knocked on the door before moving back into the room. Greg was in a flurry of activity, throwing things into a bag, glaring up at him. "Don't fucking do it, Paul. Just walk out. Just turn around and walk back out."

Greg's phone was in bits, broken apart against the wall, all of John's medications and his music player shoved into a pack. Paul swept his eyes over the scene and cleared his throat. "Greg...sit down. Talk to me about this. It can't end well, this plan, whatever it is."

There was no sign that Greg heard him as he carried on shoving things in the bag. Paul reached out and touched Greg's shoulder, watching as the man spun on him. "I cannot sit here while John is forced-" his stomach buckled on him and he nearly vomited right where he stood, the image of Miller exposing John burned forever into his mind.

Paul was calm as he replied to him, "You won't get out of the building with him, Greg. Mycroft would never let you, and it's not safe. You are having a crisis. Let me help, this isn't healthy. You have been under tremendous pressure, Greg. Please sit down, you are not thinking clearly."

Greg pointed to the shattered phone and pulled at his hair, "Mycroft is going to take me away from John, and then what the hell is John going to do? He will fall apart, Paul! He won't come back! I'll lose him! Sherlock will lose him! We can't force him to- this is wrong!"

In a flurry of activity, Paul was suddenly on his arse in the hallway, panting and staring at the door. His fingers shook lightly as he pulled out his phone, texting Mycroft.

We have a situation.
Dr. Miller looked over to Mycroft, shaking his head. "There is nothing to apologize for. He found me sitting with John about to examine him. It was a shock and he is understandably protective. I am happy to carry on treating these men, it's not the first scrap I've been in."

Mycroft scrubbed the heels of his hands across his eyes to press the painful images out of his eyes. "Yes, I suppose, given the history, watching someone spread John's legs would be very difficult for him. I'll speak to him." Pain laced his words and he shook himself.

When he saw the message from Paul, he slowly retracted his arms from around Sherlock and got to his feet.

He checked Sherlock's restraints, around his bed for possible objects he could harm himself with, as was his new decided custom. "One moment, please."

Mycroft instantly called Paul. "What's wrong?"

Paul had pushed himself to his feet before answering the phone, keeping just outside the door. "Greg is in a panic," he said calmly, keeping his nerves out of his voice. He was calm, it had just been a shock to be so forcibly shoved out of the room twice. "He will not allow me in the room, and is, I believe, thinking of running with John. Or rather, thinking of attempting that, despite my warning against the safety and possibility of that idea."

Greg looked around the room, trying to devise a plan of escape. It would be damned hard, but he wasn't going to abandon John, nor was he going to let him come to harm. His hands were shaking and he was hardly breathing in his panic, knowing Mycroft was likely to tear him away at any moment.

Mycroft headed to the door and left the room. "I assume you've already spoken to him about it, so I won't bother asking you to talk him out of it. I will request that you try to keep him talking to occupy him, or at least gauge his mental state."

He surged down the hall, past endless security that he now realized had proven more of a hassle to him than an asset. Mycroft informed them that neither Greg nor John were to be let through until he gave permission otherwise. It didn't take long until he found Paul. "He knows he won't get past one layer, correct?"

Paul put his hands up to still Mycroft. "I am sure he does. He's behaving desperately as he feels cornered. I doubt any of us would fare well put in Greg's position. John was...inconsolable, in deep hysterics, afraid even of Greg when I had to sedate him. He believed Greg was giving aid to people wanting to harm John, and it's pushed Greg past his limit. Please, Mycroft, you are under no requirement to listen to me, but I implore your consideration here for a moment. He is a man exhausted and balancing the lives of the people he loves the most on every single action. I understand that you are in a similar position, with the one key difference being that you call the shots. Greg knows you are going to take him from John. He is threatened and reacting to protect John to the best of his ability."

Greg had positioned himself back on the edge of the bed, his knees bouncing as he pulled at his hair,
tears sliding down his face. They were trapped. Bag in the chair ready to go, no hope of making it past Mycroft's men.

Mycroft listened respectfully to everything Paul had to say, his face concerned and understanding. "I don't want to hurt Greg. I don't think he should be in the room when John is examined, for the safety of the doctors involved, but I don't plan on having him dragged out. I do call the shots. I decide when I drag in a dangerous criminal and when these two end up on their own. I decide many things, which doesn't actually make it any easier."

Mycroft knocked on the door softly and used his diplomatic skills of speaking. "Greg, could we talk for a moment? I heard you're planning on leaving. I'll have the guards let you through. Might I suggest taking one of my personal guard with you? Moran is still out there, and will likely pick John back up if he gets the chance. If you must put him in that danger, at least take a guard."

Paul kept to Mycroft's back, his admiration for the man swelling exponentially as he handled the situation. It was the perfect response to a man in protective panic.

Greg looked up at Mycroft, his expression falling as he was able to see the actual man and not deal in impersonal text. He turned and looked back to John before shaking his head. "I'm not taking him anywhere," he nearly whispered, instantly ashamed of himself, "I can't keep him safe here, how am I to protect him out there?"

He stood up, dropping his eyes to the floor. When he spoke, his voice was rough and worn thin. "I...he was unclothed and on his back...I didn't know..." he scrubbed a hand over his face, nearly breaking down, "he thought I was helping people rape him, Mycroft. I have no idea if he'll be alright when he wakes up. He was begging me to save him and-" Greg's voice snapped and he closed his eyes, trying to breathe slowly. "Please, please be careful with him. I know you are going to make me leave. He's so afraid. I-" he shook his head as he ran a trembling hand through his hair. "I'm sorry."

Mycroft reached out and put his hand on the man's shoulder. A little bit of realism thrown in with a quick reminder that this place was less dangerous than Moran and an offer to help Greg anyway seemed to have deflated his anger.

"I understand that you are upset," Mycroft began and spoke gently, "It was a very upsetting thing to see. It is wonderful that you are willing to protect John, and both he and I are so very grateful to have you. I am going to suggest that you leave during his exam. You need a proper shower, one with soap and enough time to relax, a good hot meal, and some rest. We'll keep John under and you'll be back before he wakes."

Mycroft put his hand on Greg's back and gestured to the door, not pushing him towards it but directing all the same. "We will be very gentle with him. I'll stay in here and make sure nothing happens that you wouldn't approve of. You want him eating again, correct? This is what is best for him."

Greg looked back to John and then to Mycroft, shaking his head. "I'm sorry. Your brother is going through the same and you've had to manage all of this. I shouldn't be going to bits on you. Stronger man than I am, Mycroft." He loathed leaving John, but knew there was little option for him and that this was likely as good as it was going to get.

It was then that Miller entered, with an assistant in the hall behind him. Greg’s eyes snapped with fury, and the doctor took a step back. “Greg, before you start, I want you to know that I completely understand why you were upset with me. That being said-”
“He fucking said no,” Greg interrupted and stepped forward with his hands clenched in fists. “He said no, and the second I left, you were about to give him an exam.”

Miller shook his head, and put up his hands. “I did not know he had not given consent, and from what I know from Sherlock’s exam…” A touch of pity was clear in his eyes. “There was so much damage. Sherlock needed stitches, corrections where he had healed wrong, and there was so much scarring I’m worried about complications in the future. The only reason there haven’t been any serious complications or infections is that he was starved while in captivity. John… I’ve been told John is eating. If we don’t examine him, and he begins to eat more, we could have very serious, very painful problems for him. My intention is not to hurt John. From what I understand, there’s a chance he has less damage done than Sherlock. We can hope for that. Perhaps there won’t be need for stitching or corrections.”

Greg began to see the logic of it and his anger fizzled into despair. “John said no,” he whispered pitifully. “He… If you need to make corrections, he’ll think I…” He shook his head. Clearly, this was needed. He couldn’t imagine finally getting John eating regularly only to have him relive such personal pain just because he wouldn’t consent to medical treatment. “He said no,” Greg said again.

“He also says no to food and water and sleep,” Mycroft supplied gently. “I don’t mean to push this, but with Sherlock, the damage was serious. It’s better for John in the long run if we get this over with now.”

Greg looked to Paul and then shook his head, nearly whispering an apology before his throat closed and he had to stand there, blinking at his feet like an idiot. Eventually he cleared his throat and spoke. "I'm sorry. John...god if John needs stitching he will never forgive me. I- I don't know how to help and-" Paul cut him off, looking to Mycroft and nodding, "I'm going to take Greg to my room, let him get washed up.”

"Thank you, Paul,” Mycroft said in a weary voice. “Greg, don't be too hard on yourself. I've been dealing with Sherlock's trauma for just under two weeks. I'm not doing nearly as well as you did.”

Mycroft waved Miller in and looked down at John with pity. "I'd like for him to be examined now. As you said, it is imperative to both his physical health, and I believe his mental health as well. Needless to say the more painless as you can make it, the better. He believed he was being raped when he was sedated.”

Miller nodded and walked to the lav, turning off the running shower and scrubbing his hands. He returned gloved and looked to Mycroft. "Your brother had wounds not yet healed. If John has anything to the extent Sherlock does, he will likely require time in surgery to manage repairs. I...am aware this is a difficult subject for you, Mycroft. I am sorry this is a factor on top of so much else.”

"It is a difficult subject for me, yes, but shouldn't be avoided because of my feelings towards it. If there is anything I, personally, can do to help, don't hesitate to inform me of it.”

Miller began to undress John once again, his hands gentle as he moved, careful to keep him covered as best he could in respect for the man’s privacy.

Mycroft didn't watch the examination. He stayed outside the door, his head in his hands, and thought through the emotional aspect of Sherlock’s damage.

Miller drew back after a few minutes, carefully arranging John's clothing and stripping off his gloves. He called for Mycroft when he was finished, and the man stepped back inside. "There is some scarring, but he is not in the same condition as your brother where this is concerned. I don't believe
this will require surgical repair."

He cleared his throat and drew the blankets back up over John, staring down at him before speaking again. "He needs to eat. This method of feeding him has gone on far too long, and he has no hope of recovery without drinking fluids. His veins are going to wear out at this rate."

Mycroft breathed a sigh of relief for both John and Greg's sake. "Thank you. Yes, I agree he needs to eat and drink. It seems to set him off rather traumatically, but I'll request that Greg press the issue. He should agree to it if I word it properly. As for John, he would panic if he knew he had an exam."

Miller nodded and looked back to the man, hanging a new bag of fluid and trying to set him in a position that would be comfortable. He topped off the sedative and looked back to Mycroft. "I'd like to keep watch over Sherlock if you do not need anything else from me. He is sedated, but very adept at fighting it when afraid."

"Sherlock was fantastic in the ring, and I don't doubt he will injure us all at some point in one fit of panic or another." The words were spoken drearily, but with not a hint of dubiety. "If he wakes, call and I'll come. I don't think John will be available for a few more days."

Miller nodded and soon left the room, heading back to keep an eye on Sherlock.

Mycroft sent a text to Greg, hoping to ease some of his obvious discomfort.

*He isn't as bad as Sherlock. Dr. Miller believes no surgical repair will be needed.*

Paul read the message, having forwarded everything to his phone at Greg's request, as he'd shattered his own when Mycroft confirmed his threat. He responded swiftly.

*Greg is in the lav. I will pass that on, though it is outstanding news.*

*See if you can talk to him about maybe taking occasional breaks from John's presence.*

Greg was away for a full hour, showering and putting down a hot meal without hiding it. He was utterly exhausted and prickling with nerves as Paul tried to speak with him about leaving John's room from time to time. "That isn't going to work for John, I can't do that," Greg insisted as he headed the short distance back. He pushed the door open and moved straight for John's bed, exhaling slowly as he found him sleeping and bundled up tight.

Mycroft waited for Greg by John's bed on the opposite side so he didn't block his way. "Hello," Mycroft began when Greg arrived. "Why don't you sit down? I'd like to tell you how it went and discuss what the doctor said about his recovery thus far." He had taken the chair, which meant Greg would be in bed with John. It seemed to be the best way to put the man at ease.

Greg had not even noticed Mycroft, so intent on ensuring John was alright. He sat down on the side of the bed and pulled at the sleeping man gently, not responding to Mycroft until John's head was in his lap, his own legs crossed, sliding his fingers gently through John's hair.

"Paul said that he...that it wasn't similar to Sherlock. I- Christ, Mycroft, I'm so sorry about Sherlock. When I can get some time away from John...hopefully soon...I know he needs to be okay without me for a bit...I'll come sit with Sherlock too. He...we are not as close as we used to be, but there was a time when he wanted my company and he knows...surely he knows how deeply I care for him as well."
He had one hand wrapped protectively over the side of John's neck, the other lightly rubbing at John's scalp. "I mean...John's okay, yeah? They didn't have to...he won't be in pain, will he?"

Mycroft looked at John, who appeared in one instant to be much older than he had ever been and as vulnerable as a child. "Yes, Sherlock is rather damaged at the moment. He woke up saying that Moran had taken him again. That he could feel it. I'm fortunate not to be able to emphasize with the feeling."

He watched Greg's actions, how insistent he was on touching John constantly, how he wouldn't speak until he felt John was safe. "John, thank God, didn't have nearly as much damage as Sherlock. Some scarring, which is horrific in and of itself, but no repairs needed. His pain shouldn't be as bad as Sherlock's. Sherlock was...devastated."

Greg's expression pinched slightly as he dropped his eyes down to John. "And you were dealing with my foolish arse all the while. I am sorry, Mycroft. I should not have let myself get so...compromised. I'm- I've never been in a position anywhere close to this and- well, I suppose you've not, either." He shook his head, glancing up at Mycroft again. "Thank you for staying in here. I know you've an incredible amount on your plate. I...it is nerve-wracking to think I'm damaging John beyond repair with every step I take. I watched Sherlock in agony over losing John for months and now I feel as though I've both their hearts riding on my completely inadequate attempts at helping. I- Christ, Mycroft, I'm ashamed. I will do everything I can to help Sherlock. If he...if talking to me while John cannot be near him will help, I'll do so. I-" he took a deep breath, tipping his head back against the headboard. "I swear to you, Mycroft, I'm trying."

Mycroft's expression was one of compassion as he listened. "I am aware that the situation seems to be resting on your hands, but their recovery isn't completely hinged on you. There are other factors. You're the most important one for John, and I am ecstatic that you have stayed with him so long, and bonded with him so strongly. Occasionally you will need to step back and see if what you are feeling is constructive, or simply protective panic. You've gotten John further than I ever thought possible."

Greg watched John as he carded his fingers along John's scalp. "He is so close to wanting to heal. He...he keeps wanting to do things that make him feel happy, and there are finally flashes of the man that was taken from us on a more regular basis. He's here, Mycroft. The John Watson we all know. He's still right here, right in this body, in this mind, hiding behind defenses that kept him functioning before. He's...they are both incredibly brave, stronger men than me. Sherlock...he's there. You see that, yeah? When he...there are far more flashes of Sherlock than there are of John. John’s mental damage is far more complicated and complete than I can even comprehend. And Sherlock... I know he gets lost, but he's right there. When he can move his body, it will likely help. That arm...Jesus that arm. He and John...I mean, I know pain changes people and they won't ever be who they were...but they are still here and they just need...I don't know, but I'm trying. John is just starting, Mycroft. He's just starting to come back. He's...there is so much further that he will go."

Mycroft stood and walked over to John's side. "I'm glad to hear it, Greg. Really, I am. I am glad that he is starting to surface. There are four factors that need to be worked on at the moment. First, John's veins are going to be worn out. This," he gestured to his IV port, "won't sustain him forever. He needs to drink, needs to eat. Second, he needs to get used to being away from you. I know," Mycroft put his hands up and tried to look non-threatening, "I know it's a difficult thing to discuss, but he needs a small amount of independence. Third, he needs to work on simply...oh...I don't know, texting Sherlock. Fourth, I would get him used to Paul. He could alleviate some of your workload if John would be content to sit with him. You could shower."

Greg closed his eyes, nodding. "I know. I agree with it all and I'm trying, Mycroft, I'm trying. I want
him to eat and drink more than anything. I...it's hard to know when to push and when to stop. I swear I am trying. He...sometimes he's okay with Paul, we'll work on it. I'm doing my best, I swear it."

Mycroft's mobile suddenly went off, Miller paging him.

_Sherlock is awake._

"Thank you, Greg. You're doing very well. If you need anything, I'll grant it. I'd prefer you didn't try to take John out of this facility, or help him 'leave', but other than that, I will do what I can." Mycroft took out his phone and squinted at it.

_On my way._

Mycroft didn't take long to get through security and was soon by Sherlock's side, hushing and comforting as best he could.

Sherlock was silent as he stared at Miller, not daring to take his eyes off the man. Aside from open eyes, he remained just as he had while sleeping. He was nude under the blanket and bound to the table in the damned room, waiting for instruction, waiting for the screaming on the tapes to begin. His complexion was nothing short of grey and his breathing wild. He did not notice his brother at all, no idea that he was safe.

"Could we put some clothes on him?" Mycroft asked as soon as he entered the room. "Some sweatpants or something? Something soft but with a waistband he can feel. He's naked and strapped down. Jesus, it's enough to make anyone nervous." Mycroft snapped orders at the men in the room until it was clear that his was not ever an acceptable way to leave his brother. He sat down heavily beside Sherlock and began the same litany of promises, coaxings, and pleas that he always fell to. _You're alright. My is here. Everything is safe._

Sherlock's voice was dripping with pained venom as he glared at Miller. "My...my b-brother as well? H-have you no limits. Wh-what do you want me t-to say now? H-Have I harmed him as well? Sh-Should I tell you I've b-broken his arm and p-pushed him to the g-goddamned floor? Do...y-you need m-me to tell y-you...that...that I m-managed an erection and-" his stomach turned, closing his eyes and tripping over his own breathing. Miller stood up slowly to comply with Mycroft's request when Sherlock flinched back hard, crying out as his body jarred and he interpreted that as torture.

"I...sh-shot your f-fucking maniac b-boss in the g-goddamned face and he was gl-glad to be rid of you. N-No remorse. You can...i-it doesn't m-matter how many creative w-ways you come up with to...to...f-f-f-force yourself on me...he n-never loved you." He was trembling hard in fear, his teeth chattering with the force of it, tears sliding down his cheeks despite his expression of pure loathing and defiance directed at the man he truly believed to be Moran.

_Jesus._ Mycroft's stomach twisted violently and his heart sank like a stone. "Sherlock! I've come here to help you! I'm here to help. I've got you. Moran isn't here. Moran is gone. You are safe." He leaned over the edge of the bed and lightly draped his arms over Sherlock, cautious to proceed until he knew Sherlock's reaction.

_Creative ways to force yourself on me. Jesus._

Mycroft took Sherlock's face in his hands and kissed the top of his head. "It's me, Sherlock, and nobody is hurting me. My is here. My. Please, 'Lock, I'm right here and I am protecting you. Could you look at me?"

Sherlock jumped hard when he was touched, taking a moment to work out that the man he was so
deeply afraid of was too far away to put hands on him. He sucked in a sharp, frightened breath, whimpering as the rules changed on him. It took a moment for him to force himself to look at who was touching him, his heart flipping in his chest.

"M-My?" he whispered, not daring to hope, swiftly looking around the room before setting his eyes back to his brother. "I...I...oh god please be r-r-real, My...p-please I'm s-so t-tired..I c-can't do this anymore...p-please be here, p-please be h-here."

"Yes," Mycroft exclaimed, and kissed the top of his head again, just as he had when Sherlock was a child and he’d needed to bend down to do so. "It's My. My is here. I'm going to protect you and make sure nobody hurts you. I took you away from Moran. Moran does not have you anymore. Mycroft has you." He spoke in short, repetitive sentences that would be easy to understand -he hoped- and continued to touch Sherlock's face to show him how real he was. "My has you in a secure facility where nobody can hurt you."

Sherlock exhaled with a soft sound of relief, closing his eyes and leaning into Mycroft's touch. He was quiet as Miller slipped out of the room, long minutes passing as he tried to breathe, dropping asleep every few seconds before startling hard awake again and again. He did not dare to speak as tears rolled down his cheeks without sound or pause.

It wasn't until Miller was back, carrying a pair of black sweatpants as Mycroft had demanded, that Sherlock opened his eyes and began to shake his head, looking anywhere but the man at the door. His breathing became harsh again, panting with fear as he tried to keep himself from screaming, fists balled tight as he began to shiver hard with terror.

Miller spoke softly to Mycroft. "I'll help you with this and then wait in the hallway?"

"I think I can manage it on my own," Mycroft said and took the sweatpants. "I dressed him plenty of times as a child, he's just a bit..bigger now." And an adult, and injured, and frightened, and abused, and in pain, but Mycroft didn't want Miller near Sherlock when he was naked and awake. The poor man might break down again.

"Sherlock, it's Mycroft. I'm here and I wanted to ask you if I could put these sweatpants on you. I don't want you to get cold." Mycroft remembered a time when he had disdainfully glared down his nose at Sherlock and demanded that he put his trousers on. Mycroft would kill to go back to those problems.

Sherlock was still making an effort to push back on the bed, which he was perceiving as a table, starting to give voice to his cries now without intending to. Miller slowly backed out of the room, closing the door and leaving the brother's to themselves, hoping Mycroft was braced for what he might see.

It took a few minutes from Miller leaving for Sherlock to finally look back down at his brother, teeth chattering, shaking so hard it was deeply painful to his already stressed body. "I'm a-a-fraid," he whispered, looking back to the door in panic, "I d-don't want to b-b-be naked anymore...My...I d-d-don't want..." he swallowed hard, deeply confused, "I a-always s-s-s-said no, I didn't w-want...don't l-listen to him...I n-never wanted..."

Mycroft pulled the very bottom of the covers up so he could see just Sherlock's feet, wrapped and likely pinned. The plaster on the leg would be difficult to work over gently, but luckily the trousers were large. Mycroft moved in increments, never pulling up more blankets than he needed to see, never leaving Sherlock exposed and speaking gently through it all. "You won't be naked anymore. It's going to be alright."
Sherlock nearly blacked out in fear, shame squeezing up in his gut and making him gasp for air. His legs ached and he turned his face away, hoping Moran hadn't gotten to his brother. "Y-You h-have n-not...not a-a-accepted his account...h-have you? I never...n-never hurt John...n-never w-w-willingly...I never w-willingly...h-he-" Sherlock sobbed, biting down on his lip, his blood pressure making a thin line of red slowly spread across the crisp bandaging at his throat.

"You never hurt John. Not ever. You've always protected John and John loves you very very much." Mycroft worked the soft fabric over Sherlock's hips and tied a loose knot in the drawstring. "He is here with me, and is safe. John is safe. Later, I can ask him to text you." Mycroft pulled the covers back down and went back to Sherlock and leaned over so he would be in his brother's line of sight. He touched his face gently in an attempt to keep him present.

Sherlock leaned into his brother's touch and began to cry quietly. "Wh-when is he coming back? I am s-so tired. I c-cannot think, My...it's...my m-mind I've b-b-been shut out. I've been sh-shut out. I- pl-please stay w-with me until h-he comes back I-" Sherlock grit his teeth and stuttered on his words, "John is...J-John doesn't c-come back an-anymore...he...M-Moran has h-him and he is s-s-so frightened of me..."

He pulled in a desperate breath as he began to break. "My...pl-please stay with me f-fo-for a while...I'm...it's f-frightening."

"I'll stay with you," Mycroft said and laid down on the bed next to him. It hurt terribly to see his brother like this. It was more painful than anything he'd ever experienced. He didn't know he was capable of such deep distress, and tears filled his eyes, which forced him to press his face down on Sherlock's shoulder to hide it. "I'll stay until John can come back. He isn't feeling well today, but I'm sure it won't be long until he's alright again. He always pops right back up." Mycroft had observed how well John responded to being touched by Greg, and Sherlock seemed to appreciate it as well, so he continued to play with his hair, touch his cheek and trace absent patterns over undamaged patches of Sherlock's skin. "I'll stay here for as long as you want. John will come back."

Sherlock went quiet, his heart rate and breathing slowly falling and evening out. He rest there, folded as much as he could be against his brother, passing through nearly a half hour with short spells of sleep between startled waking. Finally he spoke in soft French, his eyes closed and words slurred against Mycroft's neck.

"When they finally g-give'you my b-body, i-i wonder'f you'll be d-disgusted'w-me? I...I t-tried to k-kill him'n-then m-myself. I f-fought.... Oh, b-both-I h-hope you'll be'ble t-to tell how'ard I f-f-fought... I wish-I could s-say goodbye-t'you."

Mycroft's heart almost shattered to hear Sherlock's words. "You fought so hard, and I am so proud of you. I'm not disgusted, and I'm right here. You don't have to say goodbye."

With a silent prayer that this was a safe thing to do, Mycroft unclasped Sherlock's good arm and gently placed it across his chest. "See? I'm here. I'm really here."

Sherlock shivered hard and grabbed at the material over Mycroft's heart, clinging to him, keeping as tucked in close as he could manage. His fingers trembled, vibrating over Mycroft's chest in fear and exhaustion.

He did not speak as he lay there with his brother, still not understanding. He'd take the comfort in any form and latched on tight, his entire body thrumming with pain as he slowly drifted down into a proper, deep sleep.

Mycroft kept his brother in his arms and tucked his chin down onto Sherlock's shoulder. "I'm going to keep you safe from now on," he muttered even once Sherlock was asleep, "and you'll recover and
be with John pestering the world and going on cases as you should be."

Sherlock shook his head, but pressed his face against Mycroft. Mycroft splayed his hand across the back of Sherlock’s head and breathed slowly. “I love you so much,” he whispered and kissed his head again. “I’ll always be here for you. Always. You’re my little ‘Lock, and there is nothing I wouldn’t do for you.”

Mycroft meant it. He would tear down the entire world and everything in it for his little brother.

And with his mind, that was a very real possibility.

Chapter End Notes

I need opinions.
Greg shifted carefully his later, his hands still on John's neck and head, respectively. He'd personally fallen asleep for an hour or so, waking to a thermos of hot soup and a new mobile phone on the nightstand. He poured himself a small cup of the rich tomato bisque and sat there with Josh's head in his lap, waiting for John to wake.

John was first roused from his sleep by a stab of fear. The events before his sedation came rushing back. Paul had been coming to have him, and Greg had held him still, pulled his arm away from where it held his knees together, and egged Paul on,

John let out a piteous, heartbroken whimper and didn't dare open his eyes. He crossed his legs slowly, breathing a sigh of relief that he had trousers on. After that, he was still. Hopefully Paul wouldn't come back for him if he believed John was asleep.

Greg set his cup aside, mostly finished now, and thread his fingers through John's hair softly, heart cracking at the horrible sound John had made, watching as his posture curl in defensively.

"John," he whispered quietly, holding on to the side of John's neck still, trying to keep as calm and gentle as possible, "I've got you, John."

John flinched at Greg's voice. They know I'm awake. They might start again. Greg might hold me still and-

John kept his knees pressed together but was otherwise still. His breathing was carefully monitored to stay slow, but his heart rate had skyrocketed.

John didn't dare shift to check for pain. His heart was on fire and tears slipped down his face even though he did his best to appear asleep. Greg held me still. He pulled my arms from my knees. Paul raped me. I know it. Greg didn't protect me. He helped Paul. I need to die.

"Hey," Greg whispered as John began to cry, moving his hand from John's neck to brush his knuckles over the slow falling tears, "John...I'm right here. Can you open your eyes and look at me? I've got you. We are alone." He shifted John's head and reached down, taking one of John's hands and holding it tight. "I've got you, John."

It was clearly pointless to pretend that he was asleep, and John slowly scooted away from Greg to bury himself under the covers. He couldn't bear to open his eyes and see the man he loved so much. He couldn't bear the shame of it, the heartbreak and betrayal of being held down. He utterly refused to look at the man who he had invested all of his trust in, all of his recovery, and all of his love, only to be held down and abused. "Please don't," John whispered and a small sob escaped him.

Greg did not try and stop John from moving away, though he did unintentionally let slip a pained sound from his parted lips, nearly in the form of John's name. He stayed just as he was, watching John retreat.

"John," he whispered when he got his throat working, "you...you were confused when you fell asleep. Do you think something happened?"

John's eyes flicked open and he cast a glance at Greg that was equal parts despair and heartbreak, but
quickly looked away.

John had, in his mind, an image of what had happened. Articulating it would be gut wrenching, but he wanted Greg to know he understood. "You..." He shook his head and a burning lump rose in his throat. "You told Paul to...to do it and..." John let out a choking sob and pushed the blankets away so Greg could see him. "I-I was trying and-and he...you were... And I -hurting- and tried to get away but you held me down and P-Paul came and I-I had my knees together." John demonstrated by wrapping his arms around his knees and keeping them shut tight. "But you-" he seemed incapable of speaking properly and showed Greg by pulling his own arm away from his legs, jerking his knees open in the process as had been done before.

John had no comprehension that what had been done to him was just a simple sedation, that Greg was holding him to keep him from hurting himself, and that Paul had no intention of raping him. In his mind, Paul had come for him and Greg had helped.

Had John not loved Greg so dearly, the perceived betrayal wouldn't have been so devastating. As it was, John still loved Greg, needed him and couldn't bear the thought that Greg had aided in his abuse. His mind began to shut down to guard against the impossible reality that his panic had fabricated around him.

The color drained from Greg's face and he shook his head, eyes wide. "N-No, John, god no. God no. You've...Paul didn't...John no, that's not-" he cleared his throat, trying to keep himself calm as realization pooled like hellish fire in his belly.

"Oh, god, John. No! You were panicking terribly and we had to give you a sedative. Paul didn't...John, no, no. You're safe, you've been safe, I've been here keeping watch. So has Mycroft. No one attacked you, John no, god no."

With shallow, rapid breaths, John began to violently shake as through seizing. "Y-y-you w-" he bit down hard on the inside of his lip and nodded down at his arms wrapped tight. "H-had them...I had...had m-my legs t-together and-and-and you-" Had Greg pulled his arm away or pulled his knees apart? John couldn't quite remember, and decided it didn't matter.

John shook his head a few times and his vision spun. He took the blankets and wrapped them around his legs before falling onto his side and letting his upper body go limp. His face was relaxed, blank, nearly peaceful, but his chest heaved and his legs trembled.

Other than what was physically needed to keep him safe, John had given up.

There clearly just wasn't a point to this anymore.

They wouldn’t let him die, and he didn’t want to recover. His love, his Greg, the only good thing in his life...John couldn’t even think about it. He lay still save the occasional tremor, and stared listlessly at the opposite wall.

"John," Greg whispered, his heart seizing up at the state of him, "John I did not hurt you! I did not help anyone hurt you! I pulled your arm a bit so that we could give you medicine, I never pulled at your knees. I- John I swear it, please!" He was starting to sweat as John fell apart.

"Please...I can't...I can't do this, John," he breathed, heartbroken, nearly cracking down into tears. A shock of adrenalin tore through his chest. "Please...I can't...I...oh, John, please don't be afraid of me! I would n-never hurt you, I would never let anyone hurt you. John...p-please don't do this!"

He ached to reach out and touch the man, terrified that he would again be thrown out, separated from
John forcibly, doomed to pace the halls and pull at his hair in distress. "G-God please, John, I would n-never let anyone- oh god, John, god."

The idea that Greg had pulled his arm for medicine seemed somewhat reasonable to him, but John's mind was far beyond reason. He stared with slightly widened, but completely blank eyes at a fold in the fabric where the cloth twisted and tucked underneath another wrinkle.

He didn't respond to Greg. He didn't blink, or move. His arms were limp near his legs and his head resting on the mattress. Were it not for his heaving chest and shaking legs, he might appear restful.

There was a small thread poking out from the seam on the blanket, right where the fabric turned. It was frayed at the end and was so fine that John thought if he plucked it out and dropped it it might float gently down, or lift up on an unseen draft. Other thoughts were forcibly banished from his mind. He could stare at the thread, because unlike everything else, it brought him no pain.

Greg moved off the bed then, suddenly shouting his frustrated pain to the wall before he raked his hands through his hair. He'd been pushed up to his limit already, attacking Miller and tossing Paul out, nearly running with John. He paced the room, nearly in hysterics, feet crunching over the remainders of his old mobile.

"I did not hurt you!" He shouted, knowing full well it was not at all a good idea to holler at a torture victim, fully unable to stop himself. "John! My god, John, it's me! Greg! Police officer, remember? No, of course you don't because I've bloody well terrified you!"

John stared at his thread, which he now realized was composed of two smaller twists of fiber going in opposite directions and twisted together. When Greg screamed he shrank away mentally and his concentration on the string doubled. What a lovely string. It hadn't hurt him, it wasn't being mean, it wasn't making him say anything or do anything or touching him.

Greg's screams alarmed John, but he had quite given up on his own safety and retreated further into his mind. He imagined what it would be like to be a mouse, curled up in a den so very far away. But mice are vulnerable. John quickly imagined himself as something different. A tiger, perhaps. No, that's what Moriarty had called Moran. A dragon. John would be a dragon now, burning his enemies and flying far away. He would escape any chains and melt the bars that kept him. Knives wouldn't pierce his scales and crowbars would bend on his horns.

Externally, John did not move.

Greg dropped down into John's chair, elbows on the arm rests, fingers tangled in his overly long hair. He leaned forward, pulling hard enough to rip strands of it free, teeth grit and tears sliding down the sides of his face. He went quiet, rocking slightly as he sat there, doing his best to breathe.

The clock quietly ticked and the silence stretched out as Greg sat like that, twisting in his own anguish, determined to endure this as long as John felt like punishing him.

If John were a dragon, he would like to be gold. He decided it would be a nice color, look good in the sun, and was the closest dragon color to his own sandy hair.

John had completely separated himself from reality and chose instead to glide high over London on massive gilded wings. He saw Moran and Moriarty down below and breathed fire on them as he passed, headed for someplace safe. Dragon John found a tree not unlike the one in the courtyard, though instead of walls, this one was in an open field surrounded by dense, protective forest.
John wasn't aware of time passing as he hurtled himself violently away from reality, sinking deeper into fiction as a means to escape.

Greg gave him an hour before he got up, moving back over to John and reaching down abruptly. He wrapped the blankets around the man, bundling him close and holding him tight.

"I did not hurt you, John Watson. I love you, I would never hurt you." He pulled John up off the bed, disconnecting the tubes and suddenly walking out into the hall. He moved them through security to the courtyard, sitting down with John in his lap, looking up at the tree.

"If you are going to hate me, I'll leave. I'll go and you don't ever have to deal with me again, but I'm not fucking going until you tell me to."

John wasn't aware of himself being moved, as he subconsciously deemed the real world far too difficult to deal with. It was only when his blank eyes were met with branches above him that he blinked.

It was immediately worked into his story, however, as he had been by a tree in his mind at the time. John reached out his hand and touched the bark. He noticed his hand, bony, weak and disfigured with scars. It was nothing like the strong talons that he had in his mind, and his own vulnerability shocked him. He rapidly withdrew his hand and looked around. The dense forest slowly gave way to whitewashed walls and John shrank back, wishing to go deeper, to lie comatose for weeks and become a dragon in his mind. But he felt his blanket around him and with a few pained sounds, slowly began to filter back even as he desperately clung to the fiction as one clings to a pleasant dream when waking."

"I love you, John," Greg whispered as he touched John's face, bitterly hating himself. "I...I'll say goodbye, I'll go, but you have to tell me to leave."

He shifted John in his arms, keeping him tightly wrapped and warm, hating absolutely hating everything. "It's...I just wanted..." he cleared his throat and looked up at the canopy, tears sliding slow and quiet down his cheeks, "You are always going to fear me, aren't you? I'm always going to be someone that hurts. I love you and I want...want to help you. I'm sorry, John. I'm sorry I made you doubt, made you fear. I will leave and never come back, I just need you to tell me to go." He was talking in circles, hardly making sound, bordering a breakdown.

John eventually sank further into his disconnected state.

Oh, how he longed to fly. If he could fly, he could leave the pain behind as surely as he left the ground and take to the sky.

It was interrupted.

Someone loved him? John could recall the words from several minutes ago but only began to process them now. Who loved him? The question distracted him from his fantasy and he gave a small whine.

Greg shifted John in his arms, bringing John's head up closer to his own, resting John's cheek on his shoulder. "You are safe. I know you don't believe me, but you are safe."

He dragged in a slow, deep breath, crushed under the weight of failure, wondering how the hell he was going to manage to walk away when John came back to himself enough to shout him out of his life.
"You are not alone. I'm not leaving until you tell me to go. You've got to come back enough to tell me off if you want rid of me, John."

Greg. Right, of course it was Greg. It was always Greg saying that he loved him, touching his face and calming him. John was pleased for a moment until he remembered Greg's latest deed.

John jerked suddenly and buried his face down on Greg's shoulder as he was both fearful of the man and fiercely dependent on him. The conflict seemed to tear him in two. On one hand, John needed Greg. He needed to be touched and held and spoken to, and he needed to have someone he could cling to, someone who would murder anyone who tried to hurt him. On the other, he was scared. He wanted to love Greg, but he could still feel his arm being pulled away. He'd had his fingers wrapped around his knees and his legs had parted for just an instant before the sedative had stolen his memories. It was an ominous fade into blackness from there.

John kicked his feet until he reached solid ground and moved his hips away from Greg, but kept his face buried into his shoulder. His legs were crossed tightly and his bony knees dug into the roots of the tree, where he was uncomfortable and cold. His face and arms were pressed against Greg's shoulder, where he was warm and comfortable. He was torn between flight and comfort. It was awkward and tearing, a perfect reflection of his mental state.

Greg closed his eyes at the horrible pain of John's reaction, his breath shaking in his lungs as he forced himself to carry on functioning.

"Tell me to go," Greg breathed, another heavy tear sliding down his face, "If you really believe I'd...if you believe I'm that s-sort of man, tell me to leave. You'll never see me again, I'll go."

He was shaking terribly, knowing that he would leave the building and be dead within the hour. He didn't care fuckall about the sky or the weather, the time of day, the way it would hurt. He could not take this any more, utterly strung to the end of his rope. "Either have me out, or listen to me. I cannot do this."

John was filtering away from his glittering, childish fantasy and coming back to the painful reality. He knew he was supposed to speak and be articulate, but could only manage a few words. "I don't...don't want you to...to hate me..."

John simultaneously tightened his grip on Greg and moved his hips further away. "Please, protect me."

"I have done, believe me I have done. It's not enough though, you're...you think I..." Greg shook his head, making no move to tighten his arms on John.

"I don't hate you, John. I just can't...I can't...it hurts, god help me it hurts to watch you hide from me. I...do you want me to take you back to your room? I'll take you back, and then I'll go. I...well, I want to tell you that no one here hurt you, but you don't believe me anyhow."

He spoke in low, pained dejection, useless. "I'm sorry I'm not enough, John, really, truly I am."

John made a valiant effort to make sense of the words Greg was saying. He wanted to understand, but the event had seemed so clear to him that it was difficult to dispute.

He was fully aware of one thing, however, and that was that he did not want Greg to leave him. It was a piteous feeling to be so dependent on someone that John believed had helped another rape him. He felt like a toddler with an abusive parent, one completely dependant on the one they both
feared and craved love from. In the end, it came down to one question. Which did he need more? Greg, or safety? John let out a choked sob at how fucking pitiful he was. "Don't go," John quietly implored. "I can't be alone. I...I'll...I'll not make a fuss if..." John whimpered and clutched Greg's chest, still scooting his legs away. "I'll not scream. Please stay."
That was his choice, then.

Greg swore under his breath. "Jesus," he whispered, pulling away from John and getting to his feet. The look of relief and loss on John’s face was too much, and he had to close his eyes. He scrubbed a hand over his face and paced away, tugging at his hair, ready to scream to the heavens and very narrowly keeping himself from doing so.

He was losing his grip on himself, forcing himself to move back to John, crouching down and wrapping him up in the blanket before lifting him. He held tight to John, tears sliding down his face as he carried him past security, back to his room where he carefully put him in his chair.

Greg dashed a hand across his face, fingers trembling as he pulled out John's music from the bag packed in panic, his knuckles purpled and bruised, plugging it back in and turning it on.

Greg then moved to the foot of the bed and dropped himself to the floor, back against the wall, arms crossed over his knees just in front of his chest. He tipped his forehead down and let himself cry quietly, sick at his stomach and hopeless.

John decided he needed Greg more than he needed to be safe. He would trade one fear in favor of another. He had survived the ordeal, but believed himself thoroughly incapable of living without Greg.

"I-I'm sorry," he whined, thinking that perhaps Paul's attack was a punishment for some unknown wrongdoing. It was always his fault, wasn’t it? "I'll do better, don't leave me. Please, don't leave me. Don't-please-I-" John took a shuddering breath and was grateful for the chair that protected him from behind. He hooked his foot under one of the short legs and crossed the other underneath it. His Union Jack pillow held tightly over his hips was the last aspect to his posture, and with that he relaxed a bit.

"I'll be good. I hit you...I'm sorry I hit you, I didn't know it was you and-" John held the pillow with one hand and scrubbed the other over his eyes. "I need you. I can't...I have to help Sh-Sherlock so I can...I need you to stay." Tears flowed down his face at what a wretched nothing he'd become.

Greg wrapped his arms tighter around his knees and broke down completely, gasping for air as pain constricted his ability to think, his ability to cope. He shook his head, understanding that John thought he'd punished him. He chewed hard on his lip, wanting nothing more than to pull John into his arms and convince him he was a better man than that. John was all he had, and to know that John believed him the sort of man who-

His stomach rolled and he was nearly sick, quiet in his grief as he broke apart, slowly rocking himself against the wall at the foot of John's bed, keeping as much space as possible between them.

John saw Greg's distress and it greatly disturbed him. He believed himself inadequate, broken, loved by nobody but cared for by Greg. He slowly crawled out of the chair and crawled to Greg. He laid his head down on the man's knee.
"Forgive me, Greg. I need you." He whimpered and tears streamed down his face. “F-Forgive m-me. I-I can’t...They’ll c-come back and M-Moran will g-get me.” That was another aspect of it. With Greg, things were significantly better than they had been with Moriarty and Moran.

Greg looked up then, staring at John. "I...I would n-never let anyone t-touch you like that, John, not...not to hurt you. Never to hurt you. John- god- I s-swear I am not that sort of m-man. I-"

He dragged a hand down his face to dry his cheeks, sniffling hard as he tried to get himself back under control. "I love you. I would never-" he could not help it as he stuttered over tears, shaking his head. "I need you. I- you're all I have and you think that I would...that I-" he tipped his face to the ceiling and exhaled slowly. "I nearly broke Miller's face protecting you. I'd n-never-"

John put his hands over his head and cried into Greg's knee. "I don't understand," He lamented and every single ounce of desire in his ruined body yearned to believe Greg. He was willing to forgive whatever the man had done, to live as an abused but loyal dog so long as he was loved. "I want to but I don't. I don't. You-I thought-Paul-and..."

Greg bit his lip and nodded, closing his eyes and looking away. It hurt, deeply, to know that John still feared him. It wasn't John's fault, but Greg was down to dregs, and the person closest to him believed...

"You think I'm a monster," he breathed, pressing a shaking hand to his eyes, dizzy with it. "I...no, John. You were in panic...you needed medicine and you were too scared to let us give it to you. I...I should go. I'm not good for you."

"NO!" John cried out and sprang up only to fall back onto Greg. He tipped them both over sideways and landed lying over him, holding tight, almost pinning him to the floor. He had one arm wrapped around his neck, the other under his arm, and stayed with his chest over Greg’s, but his hips far away in a scarf-hold sidemount. "No. Don't leave. Don't you dare. I'm sorry. I can be good. Don't leave me, I'll die. I'll die!! I need...Please, just tell me what happened."

Greg hit his back and braced his hands on either side of John to keep John from being hurt, letting his body cushion John's fall. He dropped his hands away, not daring to touch him, as soon as he was sure John would not fall. He fisted his fingers in his own hair, pulling tight with his eyes closed.

"Sh-Sherlock was hurt, he needed a doctor. I tried to get you to see one b-because I was scared for you and you panicked. You panicked so hard you were barely breathing, hiding and terrified and I couldn't help you! I couldn't help, and you always want to sleep when you are like that, so I...I didn't know what else to do! We g-gave you a sedative to help, but you were fighting hard so I had to hold your arm so that you wouldn't hurt yourself." He dragged in a desperate breath, having been speaking through hopeless tears, knowing all this was pointless.

"I k-kept you wrapped up tight! I p-put myself between you and the door, I- Christ I wrapped you in your blanket and t-ried to keep you safe. I would never...I would never force myself on anyone!" He nearly gagged at the idea, shaking underneath John, feeling his mind unraveling.

John stared Greg directly in the eyes. The need for someone to trust was strong in him, but so was the instinctual desire to hide from anything that caused pain.

Nonetheless, Greg's story made sense, and he could logically see where the man was coming from. "Please," he begged, "Please don't be lying to me. I couldn't.I can't- I'll die. I'll die and it will hurt. I need you to not hurt me." John was doing everything in his power to believe Greg. His story was
completely favorable to the truth, which made him want to adopt it either way, but he still held out on one point. "Did someone..." He exhaled slowly and sat up, hands shaking, and looked at the loose knot on his sweatpants that did little, as the elastic kept the pants up. "I tied it... and... Did someone take off my trousers?" He carefully untied the knot and retied it, leaving a small loop on the inside that would fall out without being noticed when untied.

Greg nearly blacked out, keeping on his back, his shaking hands pressed over his face as copper and saliva flooded his mouth. John was never going to understand, never forgive him, never trust him again. He rolled to his side, pulling at his hair, already knowing that this was the end.

"Dr. Miller. You were given a medical exam. There was nothing done."

He did not give defense to himself. There was nothing to be said. It was over. If the water had nearly done them in, then this decidedly was the last bit of it. He could taste the burning ashes of his effort as the words fell away from him, waiting for the fallout, knowing it would be agonizing.

John froze and his fingers curled around the hem of his sweatpants. "You said-" John got up abruptly and dashed to the door. He didn't want to run from Greg, and quickly turned back around. "Come on. Come with me. I can't... I can't be here. I need to leave. This... I can't..."

John grabbed Greg's wrist and hauled him back out to the door. He was immediately questioned by the guard outside his door, who were disconcerted by his wild, panicked look. He absolutely could not stay here, where doctors touched him when he slept. "You said you'd fucking protect me," John almost snarled and didn't release his grip on Greg. The first guard stepped into his path and John looked at him with murder in his intention.

Greg could hardly believe John had pulled him off the floor. He held his hand out to the guard to get them time, easily pushing John back into his room. "Sit down and listen to me, John. Goddamn it."

He pushed John into his chair and gave him space, keeping his body between John and the door. "I said no one hurt you, no one touched you to hurt you. That's what the fuck I said. Why don't you just get up and have it out on me already? Go on, right here," he shouted, tapping his own cheek, "I won't hit back, have a swing. I didn't protect you well enough. Just put me down for it, trust me it would be fucking kinder than this!"

John struggled weakly against Greg, but didn't go completely limp on the floor as he would have if he were truly wanting to be difficult. His lower lip trembled and he whimpered when he lost hold of Greg's wrist. He was angry, but dependent. "You. Said. They. Wouldn't. Touch. Me." John had no desire to punch Greg, and instead reached out and wrapped his hand behind his neck. John pulled Greg close, very close, so their foreheads were touching. "I don't know what is going on," he snapped and tears burned again in his eyes. "I don't know what is going on and it is hurting me. Don't ask me to hurt you. Please don't ask that. I want to do what you say. I really do. This is agony."

Greg closed his eyes, making yet another tear drop heavy down the side of his face. "I tried. I put Miller on his back, I fought with him. I was being stupid. You were never going to accept the need for medical attention, and I was cornered. He didn't touch! He just had to look, he's a doctor, he just looked!" He flexed his hand at his side, breath shattering in and out of his lungs.

"I know I'm not good enough, John," he whispered, his chest burning along with his eyes, "I know I fail over and over and over again. I did not know you believed me an animal. This is killing me. I'm sorry I'm hurting you, I wish you would just take the swing, I really do. This is agony."
John shrank back and shook his head. "No, no, I won't hit you. I won't hit you. Don't ask me to do that, Greg. I don't like hurting. I really, really don't like hurting." John wrapped his arms around Greg's neck, even though he was frightened of being held down again. The conflicting ideas, the one where Greg had held him down and Paul had taken him, and the one where Greg had held him still and safe and Paul had sedated him clashed together in his mind. "I am trying so hard to not be afraid. Don't ask me to hit you. I'm not like them and I don't punish people."

Greg pulled back from John, raking his hands through his hair and pulling hard. "You would be in PAIN if I held you down so that Paul could- it would hurt! Are you in physical pain? Do you hurt? How can I s-stay here when you think I'm- that I would."

He clutched at his chest, nearly doubling over with the grief of it, shaking hard and wanting to run.

"I know it's not enough but I fucking love you and I've tried to give you literally everything I have. It won't ever be enough. I get it, I get it." He'd not been enough for his wife or children, never enough for Sherlock or his work, and now he was not enough for John.

"I'm not enough, but I'm not a goddamn rapist!"

"And I am TRYING to understand!" John was screaming now, eyes wild and full of tears. "I don't want to think you fucking held me down for Paul to...to..." Greg pulling away drove a needle of ice through his heart and he cried out.

He reached out again and grabbed hold of his shoulders. "I need you more than I've ever needed anything. Ever. I'm a fucking worthless child. I can't feed myself or drink or even bathe properly. I'm a man who has to hide from doctors and get fucking sponge baths and I can't lose having someone I trust but that scared me and now I can't think straight and-and-" With a piteous cry he crumpled, face down with his knees to his chest like a frightened turtle.

Greg looked down at John and closed his eyes, struggling to get hold of himself. He moved to the bed and grabbed the blanket, dragging it over and easing it over John's shoulders before moving as far away from him as possible. He sat back down by the foot of the bed where he'd been, curling back into the exhausted position, sick to his stomach and wishing John had just beaten him bloody.

"I...I'm scared to touch you. I don't know what you want from me. Every single thing I do makes you worse. I wish I could help you without hurting you."

"I want you to hold me but I don't want you to hold me down." John gave the sentence as much strength as he could and grabbed hold of Greg's shoulders. "No more holding down. I don't want that. Not ever. I don't care what it's for. Just lock me in the room and I'll be alright soon. Don't hold me down again."

Greg turned his face away, making no move to hold John, feeling his failure to an overwhelming degree. He gripped his own arms, shaking hard, digging his nails viciously into his skin. His eyes fell closed add tears spilled down his cheeks, hardly able to breathe.

"Look, it's okay," John stammered and held Greg gently in his arms. "I can't...Please, please, please be alright. Hold me, and don't hurt me, and I-I-I-" John ducked his head down between his hands and crawled away. He was clearly being too needy. "M'sorry...Sorry..."

Greg nearly reached for John, his fingers curling back in on themselves. He dragged in a pained
breath, turning to face the door when it suddenly opened.

Paul stood there with the guards John had nearly gone after. "Greg," he asked in soft question. Greg shook his head and tipped his face back down to his knees. "John thinks I helped you rape him. He...I keep...I'm...I th-think I'm making everything worse. John thinks-"

John reeled back at the sight of Paul. He scrambled to the back of the room and pressed his back against the wall. "Don't you DARE come near me!" He huddled in the back corner for a moment, so close to breaking down, before something in his mind decided that now was no time for tears. John's eyes darted around the room for something to use as a weapon. "I'll KILL YOU!"

Greg dragged a hand across his face, gesturing to John. "You see? I just hurt him. If I hadn't...god, I did this to him." He raked his hands back through his hair again, struggling to accept what he'd done. Paul closed the door behind him, shutting out the guards.

"John, you have to calm down. I've not harmed you."

Greg shook his head, "He won't listen. He-I-" he cracked a sob and shook his head, shaking hard as he stood up. "Mycroft was going to make me leave anyhow, I'll spare everyone the drama." He staggered as he moved for the door, nauseated as he pulled it open. "I'm sorry I- I love you, John. I'm sorry." "No, please, no," John wanted to rush to the door, but Paul was near it as well, the man who had hurt him, the one he did not like. "Greg! Please! I need you to stay!" John's anger dissipated and he fell to his knees, unaware that he had ever risen to his feet. "Greg, I'll die! I'll DIE!" Somehow, Greg leaving him alone with Paul was even worse than Greg helping with the act John was still not sure was completely fiction.

Greg watched in shock as John went down to his knees, moving without thought towards him, brushing past Paul. He went down in front of John, reaching out and nearly pulling him into his arms before he drew back, curling his fingers into fists without having touched him.

"Why...why does it m-matter if I stay? You think I l-let someone...not just let them but h-helped," he looked down at his own hands, his shoulders shaking hard, "you think I h-held you down and..." he closed his eyes as his stomach turned. "Why would you want me to stay? You think I'm a monster."

Paul frowned at the entire scene, watching John carefully. This was...not particularly unexpected, but the shocking reaction Greg was having decidedly was. He chose to hold his tongue for a moment, waiting to see what the men would do.

John was a mess of confusion and tears. He didn't want to be held down again, but he also couldn't stand the thought of leaving.

It is a fact that once an animal is imprinted onto a parent, it will follow them despite any harsh treatment. In fact, studies have shown that an animal that is rejected by a parent will be even more attached and dependant.

John believed himself to be punished, hurt, and abused, but less so by Greg than anyone else. "I need you," he bemoaned desperately and threw himself into Greg's arms. "Y-You...You can't leave, don't leave me with the doctors, and-the-the soldiers, I don't want that."

Greg still did not touch John, allowing him to cling to him without holding him. He closed his eyes and bit down hard on the inside of his lip.
Paul watched with deep concern. He cleared his throat and spoke softly to John. "We did not hurt you, John. I did not have sex with you, Greg would have torn out my throat if I'd tried that. I would never hurt you, and Greg would never allow it. Can I do anything to help you? What do you need, John, to know that you were not assaulted?"

"He let the doctor examine me," John claimed to Paul, as though it was a terrible crime. "And I said no but it happened anyway. I said no! What else can I not say no to? Is there a fucking list? What am I not allowed to say no to?" John sounded bitter and nuzzled down onto Greg in a small hint that he needed to be comforted.

Paul debated telling John the whole of the situation before deciding against it.

Greg pushed John back gently and dropped his face into his hands, fingers curling into his hair and pulling tight as he choked on a strangled mix of pain and frustration, shaking his head and nearly drawing blood as he tore at his hair. Every single one of John's words were a barb, twisting in his gut, tearing him open.

Paul crouched down, still just at the door, not wanting John to feel intimidated. "Greg was in a very difficult position, John. I am sorry your trust was damaged, I am."

John didn't care that he was pushed away and latched right back onto Greg as soon as he could. He sat beside him and adhered to him like a wet blanket, molding himself to get as much physical contact as possible while still keeping his hips away. "I-I-I love G-Greg," he stammered and motioned for Paul to come over. "Help him, please."

Paul looked between the two men and shook his head, "I can't help him," he whispered softly to John, making no move to advance.

Greg did not try to push John away, though his posture bent and his breathing was stuttered and harsh. He was failing, always and forever failing. This last accusation was too much...too hurtful...too cutting. He'd been trapped between Mycroft and what John needed and John's demands that he not be cared for and-

Greg cut off his line of thinking with an agonized shout, shaking his head and seriously debating getting up and having a go at the nearest guard, just to feel some sort of pain outside of the crushing weight of failure. "I'm sorry! I can't- I'm not- it's never enough!"

John was beginning to panic. This was far too much stress at once and his mind was dissolving into chaos. "PLEASE!" He shouted, though he wasn't sure if he was entreating to Greg or Paul. John got shakily to his feet and tried to pull Greg towards his bed, but the man was far too heavy for his weak muscles to handle. "Greg, Greg, please. Please come into bed. Please."

Greg could feel John's rising panic like sandpaper, dragging him down and closing his throat. He moved as an automation, slowly following John where he wanted to go. Paul cleared his throat and stood up, stepping out of the room and staying just outside the door.

Greg's voice was wrecked when he sat just on the very edge of the bed, "I...y-you're scared of me. I don't w-want to touch you...you're going to tell me how horrible I am and I can't take it, John. I'm weak and I can't hear you h-hate me right now. I'll...I don't want to give you a reason to th-think I'm hurting you."

John dragged Greg forcibly over and moved him up to the headboard. "Just don't hurt me, alright? Then we'll be fine. I can't-can't-I-" He dropped his head down to the pillow and let out a single,
confused scream. He didn't know what had happened and Greg's obvious guilt combined with his insistence that he was innocent was decidedly not helping. "GREG!" he screamed into the pillow, "GREG HELP!"

Greg looked over to John, distant and not at all sure what to do. Tentatively he reached down and rest his hand very, very gently on the top of John's head, fingertips grazing over John's scalp.

"What can I say?" He asked, detached and hardly inflecting his tone, "That you are safe? You are, but you won't believe me. That I'm here? I am, but you think I'll hurt you."

He closed his eyes as John fell apart, knowing he'd done this to him unwittingly. He'd taken a shower and had a meal and in that effect he'd destroyed John. Tears slid down his cheeks and he sat there, shaking apart next to the man he'd tried so desperately to help. "I'm s-sorry I'm not what you need. I'm not what anyone needs. I-I want to help you so badly. I'm not good enough."

John screamed into his pillow until his throat hurt and his insides ached from the effort. He muffled the sound because he was sedated when he screamed out loud, and sedation was no longer a positive thing. "Please, love," John said in a wrecked and scratchy voice. He reached up and cupped the side of Greg's cheek gently. "Please stay with me. I'll be good. I'll not try and escape and I'll stop...I'll not scream when I get scared...I'll be good, and I'll believe you, and I'll drink w-w-water." He broke then, clutching Greg and begging him in broken words to stay.

Greg was hardly breathing as John fell apart, screaming until he'd nearly lost his voice beside him. He had no idea how to help John now, his mind locked up and frozen with fear. "I didn't ask you to drink water," he whispered as John sobbed against him, "I didn't tell you not to scream or- I- never said-" he tipped his head back, tears sliding down the sides of his face, beaten down to nothing. He'd foolishly believed John trusted him, that John had some sort of...warmth towards Greg. But really, he was just...the lesser of all John's evils. "I...I'll sit in here with you, John, if that's what you want. I'll just sit here."

Chapter End Notes

I....I'm so sorry.

Happiness will come soon. I swear.

By the way, the psychology behind this chapter took us a while. So. I hope you appreciate the research.
John climbed up onto Greg's lap and wrapped his arms around his neck. The man seemed so cold, and it frightened him. "I love you. I love you. I'll love you no matter what. I will. I can't not be near you." John realized that no matter what Greg did, no matter how much he was hurt, even if Greg decided to start torturing him, he would always come crawling back in hopes that he would be met with comfort. It frightened him to his core. He'd seen abusive relationships, one where the abused would come back, defend their abuser, and be coerced with kind words and apologies. He'd never understood how someone could be so insecure that they needed someone who hurt them. Now he understood. "Please just love me."

Greg endured John's proximity, truly wanting to just shove him off his lap and put space between them. He'd brushed their lips together at one point, days or weeks ago, he couldn't remember which, exactly, and now the idea of that was beyond obscene. He did not want to touch him, repulsed with the idea that John would believe that he had done such a horrific thing to him.

"I do love you," he whispered as his heart broke, "I...I'm just realizing what I am to you. I- should have been clear...I-" he huffed a pained, empty laugh at himself, mocking his foolish mind for believing that he could matter to someone like that. He'd forgotten his place, which was to get John calm enough to be near Sherlock. That was the point. He was never important, just a tool. He kept his hands away from John, his heart racing in his chest as he feared making a wrong move and further upsetting him. "I do love you."

"Then what's wrong? What did I do? I'm sorry! I didn't-" John decided that Greg must be angry about something. He didn't sound sincere, the warmth and affection was seemingly gone. "I've done something, haven't I?" John shook his head, dug his fingernails into his scalp and scraped down past his cheeks and down the sides of his neck. Greg wasn't punishing him, but he would do it himself.

"I need you to love me," he gasped and hated how terribly dependent he had become. Torture and trauma and abuse had torn down his personality and left him a quivering mess. Greg had built him back up, but he was built upon Greg. John took the sides of Greg's face in his hands and pressed his lips forward against Greg's desperately, not in the shy way of before. He was in full blown panic, and would do nearly anything to keep the one who kept him from torture there with him. "I do love you."

Greg sharply turned his head to the side to break away, holding on to John's wrists and closing his eyes. "John," he breathed, shaking so hard it was difficult to keep a grip on him, though he leaned further away. "John I don't...I don't expect that from you! I didn't help anyone hurt you! Please, Jesus Christ please tell me what I can do to prove it!"

He pulled John tight into his arms, pressing his face down to the side of John's head, holding him tight and trying to breathe. "You've not done anything wrong. I'm just sad, I'm- you don't need to worry about it, I'm sorry, I don't expect you to-" he was going to be sick, nauseated at the idea that John thought he wanted him to perform.

John couldn't take this one moment longer. He was confused, terrified, and horribly, horribly guilty. "I-I'm sorry," John cried and burrowed under the blankets. John scurried out of Greg's arms and dove instead for the safety of isolation. He would lose his caretaker, then. Fine. Fine. He'd go back to Moran. Alright. He didn't care. He was fine. It didn't matter.
John pulled all four corners underneath himself with the middle over his head, making a small package that would be difficult to open without ripping the fabric out of his hands. With the edges pinned beneath him, he isolated himself.

If John were a dragon, he would fly so high that nobody would ever hurt him. Nobody loves a dragon, not really, but nobody tries to hurt a dragon either. John could live with that.

Greg slowly stood up and turned on John's music before walking out of the room. He made it a few steps before he just began to vomit right there on the floor, shaking hard before nearly blacking out. A guard grabbed him as his knees gave, keeping him from hitting the floor, and Paul suddenly texted Mycroft.

_Greg needs a doctor right now._

Paul pushed open John's door, suddenly terrified that maybe Greg had given him something. He moved to the side of the bed, deciding not to try and disrupt John for the moment. "Greg, did you give him something," he called out, touching John's back through the blankets, looking around for any sign of a syringe or empty pill bottle.

Greg was trying to push off of the guard, narrowly keeping his feet as he shook his head. He staggered to the wall and braced a hand against it, slowly walking towards the exit. Paul called out to him, leaving John in the bed, "Greg! Let a doctor see you, what are you doing?"

Greg shoved the guard off him, obviously intent on leaving the building. Paul's gut twisted at the development, wondering what to do. On the one hand, Greg might be able to recharge and be better off for it, on the other hand, Greg might go home and eat a round. His swiftly texted Mycroft as security rushed around Greg.

_He's trying to leave._

Mycroft swore and surged to his feet. He left Sherlock in the capable hands of Miller and his team and rushed for John's room. Yes, Greg was within his rights to leave, but the man was clearly emotional, and likely suicidal. He needed help at the moment, not free reign.

_Keep him here._

He sent another text to his men, simple and concise.

_Do not allow Greg Lestrade to leave the building. He is not well. Likely violent towards others and himself._

--

John was in full panic. He kept himself wrapped up in his ball of protection and screamed as loud as he could, over and over again. Greg was gone, Paul was nearby, and he was in terrible danger. It was futile to leave his position though. He wouldn't get far and this was as safe as he was going to be.

John thought that fact over, however, and found it faulty. He rolled off the edge of the mattress taking the blankets with him, and slithered underneath the bed. Here, he would be safe. Moran couldn't get to him under here; he couldn't fit. Greg likely couldn't either, but perhaps Sherlock could. Moriarty couldn't. Probably.

Of course, Moran could lift the bed like a child with a magnifying glass lifts up rocks in the summer...But he would worry about that later.

--
Greg shouted at the guards as he was suddenly apprehended, pushed down into a chair with calm words and strong hands, making him entraged. He was shaking as though dunked in the Thames mid-January, pale and sweating. Paul kept his distance from John's bed, knowing the man was unlikely to bolt.

As soon as Greg caught sight of Mycroft he began to shout. "I TOLD YOU! I TOLD YOU THIS WOULD HAPPEN!" He curled to the side and started to sick-up again, gagging as he failed to sit up properly, stress knocking him down hard. It was too much, too fragile, and he could do nothing properly. He'd ruined everything, he was useless now. "I CAN'T EVEN HELP HIM ANYMORE! HE'S SCARED OF ME!" He'd just thought back to the agony of his life after pulling John into the shower and knew for a fact he could not tolerate it again, not again.

Mycroft took hold of Greg's shoulders and spoke in an incredibly urgent whisper, as if the lives of everyone in the building hung in the balance. "Greg Lestrade, be quiet this instant. You are going to upset John further. You left him in there unattended, and now you are screaming. That will send the wrong message. I know you are upset, but you need to lower your voice."

Mycroft pulled Greg to his feet as a man handed him a bin. "Greg, I need you to come with me. You're going to take some time off and sleep properly. What happened was not your fault. It was mine. Please, do not blame yourself." He wrapped his arm around Greg’s shoulders and helped him upright. "Just come rest, get something to eat, and take some time to think."

"Just let me leave," Greg said in broken anguish, "I've done enough damage let me leave! He shut down on me, he doesn't want me to sedate him he doesn't want me to- he thinks I helped fucking rape him and-"

That had done it, he'd been more repelled by the crime of rape than nearly all others, and here he stood accused by one of the men who mattered the most to him. He'd been forced to allow the exam and now he was forced to endure John's fear of him and he buckled, would have hit the ground were it not for Mycroft supporting him at his side.

Mycroft led Greg to a nearby room where he could get some sleep. "Greg, please do not leave. Legally, you are allowed, but I implore you, as a friend and employer to stay. I will pay you to stay. We've been through this before back when you thought he would hate you forever because of the incident with the shower. It's in the past, and you've moved on. This too shall pass.

"He's n-not moved on," Greg whispered as the men half dragged him along. He dropped hard to a nearby bed and grabbed his hair, pulling tight. "I...it took weeks...weeks t-to get him...weeks...He thinks I..."

Greg pulled hard at his hair. "I told you! I told you he'd...that this would..." He shouted as his stomach bucked.

Mycroft put his hand on Greg's back and sat down on the edge of his bed. The man's personal space boy boundaries were becoming incredibly blurred through this process. "I know he panicked. You were right. But this will pass. It always passes."

Greg had hold of his hair, feeling as though he was shaking apart, teeth chattering and heart rate through the roof. "I c-can't do this," he whispered as he pinched his eyes closed tight, "I keep...I m-make it worse. I'm no good to any of you, I can't do this. Y-You need to f-focus on so many other things besides me. I c-can't do this."

"You do more good for John than you do hurt him. He's been psychologically abused! Of course he's going to take things the wrong way every once in a while." Mycroft did not desire for Greg to leave. If Greg left, John surely wouldn't be able to handle visits to Sherlock. Above that, Mycroft cared about the man's well being.
Greg did not answer Mycroft, just trying to calm down. He had never previously been prone to this sort of gripping panic and fear, he'd never have been able to do his work.

"I'm sorry," he managed, voice soaked down in sadness and regret, "I don't know what's wrong with me. I'm sorry."

Mycroft let the silence hang for a few moments before continuing. "You are under a great deal of stress. You have to deal with screaming, pain, rape, abuse, torture and panic on a daily basis. Anyone lesser would have cracked far before you."

Greg's stomach turned and he suffered the humiliation of sicking up again in front of Mycroft. "I-" he gasped, tears sliding down his face, "I...anything but- I can't...god that he would b-believe me capable...Christ he kissed me trying to ensure his safety! H-He-" he shook his head, again gripping the bin in a bloodless grip as his ears rang and his stomach heaved.

Mycroft's face mirrored Greg's in a diluted amount and sadness pulled at his stern features. "He's not in his right mind. His view of reality is twisted and marred. I don't think he believes you are capable, and that is perhaps why it upset him so. If this is too difficult for you, you may take time away. You may leave. But I implore you to stay in the building and continue living for John's sake. He'll come out of this like he did with the water."

--- ---- ---

John was huddled under his bed with his back still pressed against the wall. The bed pushed down on him, the wall protected one side, and the floor the third. He was hidden and safe.

Paul took up a chair in John's room, far away from John. "I'm here, John, and I'm not going to touch you. You can stay where you are."

John was lying face down, which was the only way he could squeeze into such a small space. "I want to know what happened! I want to know what happened and I want someone to not scream and cry while they explain!"

Paul let a moment hang between John's demands and his words. He shifted out of the chair, sitting down on the soft rug as far opposite John as he could get, crossing his legs and folding his hands in his lap to show that it would take him a while to get up from that position.

"Alright, John. I will explain what happened."

Paul began to explain, keeping his voice very soft and calm. "John, you told us what happened with Moran. When he found out, Sherlock underwent an exam, where a great deal of damage that required repairs was discovered. This made Greg and everyone else very worried for you. When we asked you to have an exam, you began to panic. You were going to hurt yourself, John, so Greg pulled you into his arms to keep you safe, and assisted me in getting a sedative into your port."

He waited to see if John was going to holler, slowly carrying on. "You believed Greg was attacking you. When you finally fell asleep, Greg was violently ill and had to be in the lav. This seemed the ideal time to give you an exam, as it would be private for you and he would not need to be involved. When Greg came out of the shower, he saw Miller and panicked. He attacked Miller and was removed from the room, made to shower properly and eat a meal. Miller, under the supervision of Mycroft, examined you. No repairs were needed, the entire exam lasted under five minutes, and you were settled back into bed. Greg returned as soon as he was allowed, and sat with you for the next few hours until you woke. That is what happened, John."

John wept. He cried openly through Paul's story for sheer confusion. It seemed so logical, like something that would really happen, and it frightened John. While this story was preferable from the
one he held in his mind, he was still skeptical of what was being said. Paul's calm, even voice was helping though, and as much as he had tried to believe and understand Greg, the man had been too crazed for John to understand.

"That's not what I remember," he cried and pulled a loose end of his blanket up closer to him. "I remember I was attacked, and I tried to get away, but he held me down. I tried to keep my knees together with my arms, but Greg pulled one away and you came forward and-" from there he only had speculation, but his mind was very willing to take old memories and apply them anew.

Paul nodded, speaking softly to him. "You've suffered terribly, John. It is only natural that your mind would supply the gaps with what you've known to happen in the past. I would like to gently remind you that you would...be aware...of an invasion of that sort. There would be pain...physical evidence. Has that occurred?

John closed his eyes and took several long, deep breaths. It smelled like dust, but he didn't mind. It could smell worse, like blood or burning flesh. "I don't trust you. But I don't feel...that pain..."

Paul nodded, allowing John a moment to think before he spoke again. "I am not asking for your trust, and fortunately, you do not need to accept my word to know what the truth is. You, unfortunately, know what the aftermath of an assault of that nature is like. It is understandable to have doubt, John. You have physical facts you can rely on. When you are ready, I'd like you to check yourself for bruising. If you were restrained to cause harm, there would be bruising, you would have physical pain and soreness."

John turned in place, though he didn't check for bruising. He could feel that there wasn't any tearing, no stinging or soreness associated with it. "It's not my fault. I didn't...I thought..." John tore at his scalp, neck and the sides of his face with his fingernails and tried to keep himself focused. "He held me down and-and you -he said to do it- and it was bad and I tried to hold my knees but he-" John jerked into a tighter ball and the bed shook. "I don't want Greg to be mean. He's gone now. He left me. I did something wrong and now he won't come back."

John, believing himself to be insane, alone, too much to handle and left by the one he'd built his entire progress on, pressed his face into the carpet and wept. He was beginning to accept Paul's narrative, in which he had not been raped, only examined, in which Greg had stood guard, not held him down, and in which he had no pain, the later of which he knew as fact.

But still, he'd blamed Greg, and now Greg was gone. Worse, he'd left him with someone he knew John feared.

“I'll never get him back,” John whispered to himself, with no knowledge that the man he so desperately wanted was just a few yards away, aching to see him as well.

Chapter End Notes

I (Dem) would like you guys to know that a significant amount of research goes into this work, but it is beyond that.

I love Shakespeare. I love the writing, and I love (surprise surprise) the tragedies. What I believe is best about Shakespeare's work, what has allowed it to last throughout the ages, is that it has captured human truth.

Human truth does not change over the centuries, which is why many of his works are
still relevant today.

In this work, I have tried to capture human truth, and human condition. Mainly, the quality I've tried to show is fear, and what it does to the mind. The way it twists and turns the mind, the way it sets up functions and walls that are difficult to pull down, the way it burrows into the deepest parts of the emotional mind and takes hold there where logic does not touch.

What do you guys think? Have we shown this?

-Dem
Infarct

Chapter Summary

If you have any interest in continuing this story, skip this chapter. See the chapter notes **BEFORE** reading.

Chapter Notes

We recognize that this story is very long, and that many of our readers are at the point where they simply want an end. This chapter was written specifically for those of you who are ready to stop reading. It is **NOT** part of the original story line, it's just for you.

For those of you who want to carry on with our absurdly long story as it is originally written, please skip this chapter and jump to Book 2 (Mezzanine) of the series, which continues fluidly.

If, however, you are ready to leave this story, carry on with this. All sorts of warnings here, but we are not going to tell you in advance. Thank you all for sticking with us as long as you did, if this is where we say goodbye to you as readers.

Take a deep breath, here we go.

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Sherlock came awake in a terrible panic, quiet just long enough to drag in a sharp breath, screaming John's name as he stared wide-eyed at the corner where Moran had John by the throat, a bloodied drill cast aside, pushing the bleeding man to his back.

"STOP! N-NO! JOHN, JOHN," voice cracking, hands reaching out for the illusion he was watching in the corner, Sherlock screamed.

Mycroft was notified by Miller that Sherlock was awake and in panic.

He raced down the hall towards the first door, through which he flew with the use of all his executive pass codes.

When he finally managed to get to Sherlock's room, seven and a half minutes later, he rushed to his side. "Sherlock! I'm here! I'm here!" Hopefully, he would respond to him.

Sherlock was completely silent, eyes locked to the corner in the same transfixed state of complete horror he'd spent most of his time in while under captivity.

John lay staring up at the ceiling, no longer making anything more than choked, guttural sounds of agony as Moran grunted above him. John's arms were slightly bleeding from where the bit of the drill had gone into his flesh, the remaining wounds almost obscene in their small appearance, the
pain of that specific torture much more encompassing than the remaining holes. His own voice played over an extremely clear speaker as Moriarty stood at John's side, whispering how sorry he was that Sherlock had turned out to be as vicious as this.

Outwardly, Sherlock did not move at all. Tears slid down his cheeks as his entire body shook under the stress of watching without the ability to stop what was happening. His curls stuck to his forehead, breathing clipped and panicked.

Mycroft took Sherlock's hands and moved into the place where Sherlock was staring. "Hey, hey, it's okay. Look at me. Sherlock, look at me." He squeezed his hands in time to give code to his words.

Sherlock startled hard, looking down at his hands where Moran was gently pressing the grip of a pistol into his palm. He almost doubled over on himself, shuddering with fear as his fingers wrapped tightly over the weapon. Moran wouldn't release his hand, helping him only to point the damned thing at John.

He went very still, holding his breath as events past swirled and collided in his mind, jerking hard as his mind supplied the sound of the shot. In the corner John jerked with the impact of the bullet, and then went completely still as he the life left his body. Sherlock's eyes fell closed as he wailed John's name, doubling over under the weight of impossible grief.

Mycroft stepped back and grabbed a fistful of his own hair. Sherlock's grief was pouring off him in waves, and Mycroft could not stand it. With tears in his own eyes he fumbled for his phone.

*We need John.*

Greg read the text in great distress. He looked over to John, who was resting tentatively at his side, and bit at his lip.

He replied to Mycroft in a bid for mercy.

*Please don't ask this of him right now. I don't think he can.*

Mycroft looked to Sherlock, heard him wailing in distress for John, and texted again.

*He's screaming! Can you hear him? Just bring John here for a moment. You had him calm. Please just for a moment.*

Greg could in fact hear Sherlock, making him swear and close his eyes. He drew in a slow breath and touched John's face very gently. "John...John can you talk to me for a moment?"

John had only just found comfort in Greg's arms, had only just reconciled that the incident had indeed been in his mind. He assumed he was going to be scolded, and looked up tentatively. "Yes..?"

Greg talked his fingers along John's cheek. "I'm so sorry to ask, John, but Sherlock is lost and screaming for you. I'm so sorry."

John tucked his face into Greg's shirt. "I don't have to," he muttered to himself. He hated being forced into uncomfortable things. "But I will. Okay. Okay. I'll go. Let's...yeah, let's go." He made no move, however, to let go of Greg.
Greg held John tight to him, banking with the urge to tell Mycroft to just sedate his brother. "I'm...I'm going to carry you and...and we'll be right back okay? Short visit, very short visit."

John nodded and wrapped his arms around Greg's neck. "Don't let the doctors near me," he whispered. "I don't like them. I'll hurt them. Keep them away from me, okay? I'll go help Sherlock. Keep the doctors away."

Greg held John tight to him as he got to his feet. "No doctors. I'm not going to let anyone put their hands on you. I've got you, John."

It was exhausting to get John through security without hurting him, careful of the way he was holding John. It took almost fifteen minutes to get to Sherlock. Greg's heart dropped when they walked in the room, looking at the state of panic Sherlock was in.

John clamped his hands over his ears as Sherlock's screams grew louder. "H-He's...he's not being hurt..." John shook his head and entered the room.

His heart broke when he saw the state of Sherlock, with Mycroft bent over him, trying to help but getting nowhere.


Sherlock shoved his brother back as hard as his ruined arms would let him, looking over at the source of John's voice. He stared as though seeing a ghost, looking between the frail man in Greg's arms, and the crumpled body on the ground, both as corporeal as the other. He could not speak, shocked to his core as his mind wrestled with what he was seeing.

"N-No," he breathed, looking from the real John to the dead man on the ground again, "No I just shot you...I- I just k-killed y-you."

John shook his head and slowly lowered himself out of Greg's arms and to the floor. He stood shakily on trembling legs, as he was yet to fully recover from his previous shock. "No, no, you didn't. You didn't. I'm alive." He reached forward and inched closer. "Please, look at me. I'm real."

Tears rolled heavy and fast down Sherlock's face, looking to Mycroft but not seeing him as his brother. He shot a hand out towards John, trying to stop him. "NO! He- y-you have to leave! G-Go! RUN!" he screamed, his voice cracking as he desperately tried to protect John without understanding what was happening.

For a moment, John considered doing just that. But he couldn't leave Sherlock. Not here. "I'm safe," he told himself and Sherlock. "I'm safe here. Mycroft keeps us all safe." John's eyes cast to Greg for a moment and he flinched. "And Greg keeps us safe too. You're alright." John inched further still until he was very close, but soon realized his mistake.

Sherlock reached out and grabbed hold of John's wrist, glaring at Mycroft without knowing who he was. "D-Don't t-t-touch him! Don't t-touch him," he seethed, trying to pull John to him with an iron, freezing grip, absolutely sure they were still in extreme danger. He could hardly control his own body, soaking in pain from moving himself so.

John flinched hard and jerked his hand away without meaning to. "Sorry," he gasped, and stood with his hands in fists across his chest. "I didn't...I-I don't like to be grabbed." His voice wavered horribly and he tried once again to step closer. "I'll hold your hand, but d-don't do that."

Sherlock looked over to John, slowly drawing his hands in. "I- it w-wasn't- c-can't you s-see him?" He sobbed, no longer caring about the danger in the room. John still didn't trust him. "C-Can't you s-
"see me? I-" he scratched hard at a line of sutures down his arm, making them bleed, "it w-wasn't me, John," he wept, staring at John in open, horrified betrayal.

John reached out and caught Sherlock's hands before he could further injure himself. "I know. I know. I'm so sorry. I just get scared. I'm sorry." He dropped his head down to his chest and breathed a slow sigh. "You were calling for me. You were confused. I'm here to tell you that things are alright."

Sherlock pulled his hands away from John. "NO they a-aren't!" He looked back over at Mycroft, whom Greg had approached with the intent to steady. In Mycroft's place he only saw Moran, grinding his teeth and looking down at his own hands.

"I'm...I'm ins-sane," he breathed, John's body still cooling in the corner, bits of white matter floating in the slow-growing pool of blood. He looked back over to John, staring at his hand. "I- y-you're not here. You l-left, and th-then I-" he sank his hands into his hair and pulled viciously, "You're n-not here!"


Greg moved forward, worried about John keeping on his feet. He touched John's back, trying to assure him.

Sherlock clutched at John's hands, his grip unyielding. He was struggling to understand all the players in the room, and he was not about to allow anyone near John that he did not understand. John whimpered a bit at the grip on his hands and took deep breaths through his nose. "I'm here, Sherlock. You're okay. Try to breathe. I'm John, right? You know me."

Sherlock did not yield his grip. "I kn-know you," he agreed, glaring at Greg.

"Easy, Sherlock...you know me as well," Greg said gently. Sherlock tried to pull John closer to him, reaching up and taking his bicep instead of his wrist, easing him closer.

"Okay," John said hastily, "I'm okay." He tried to be okay with being pulled closer, but after his scare with abuse, and the fact that he'd originally experienced the torment while convinced it was Sherlock, his fear was understandable. "Sorry...I'm sorry."

Sherlock looked to John, staring hard at him, trying to prove to himself that John was real, and physically there. He studied John's face, holding him tight. "You...you're scared of m-me," he whispered in dawning understanding. His grip eased on John, slowly letting him go. "E-Even after...all th-this...you're still...y-you still s-see..." he let him go as though burned, dragging in a sharp breath. He looked away from the man next to him to the body in the corner, blinking slowly.

"No, no, I know you didn't do it." And logically, that was the truth, but his body had not accepted that just yet. "I'm here with you. I-I'm here. Please, you're safe."

"Then s-stay? Please s-stay! I- I still s-s-see you dead in the corner, J-John. P-pl-ease, I n-need you. Please s-stay." He reached back out for John, pleading with his eyes, fingers shaking as he held his breath and waited.

John let out a sad whimper, but leaned in to rest his head on the edge of Sherlock's bed anyway. "Okay. I'll stay. I'll stay. I'm here. Just...could you not grab hold of me? I-I had a b-bad day today."
Sherlock cringed at that. "Y-You...you wouldn't c-care if it w-were Greg. W-Won't you s-sit with m-me? Please, John, p-please don't k-keep pushing m-me away I c-can't bear it a-any longer. I've d-done everything in m-my power to m-make amends. Please. J-John"

John's face twisted with betrayal. "I didn't mean to," he whispered, "I really didn't. I would mind if it was Greg. I don't like being grabbed." A bit of defensiveness snuck into his voice even as he sat down on the edge of the bed.

Sherlock reached out and tentatively touched John's back. "I'm...I thought...I'm sorry I th-thought they w-were going t-to hurt you. I'm s-sorry. You-" he looked over to the corner, whimpering under his breath as the John on the floor twisted slightly, an impossibility after being shot, but it happened none the less.

"D-Did he c-c-come for y-you again t-today?"

John breathed a small sigh and inched his arms over to wrap around Sherlock. "Did who come for me?"

Sherlock's voice grew very, very quiet. "M-Moran. H-he was h-here today. I- it w-was a bad d-day f-f-for me as w-well."

"Oh, no, no...I didn't see either of them today. I got scared that..." John trailed off and shook his head. That was something he simply could not tell Sherlock.

"I just got lost," John said with a shrug and tried to downplay it. "You know how sometimes you think people are other people or that people are going to hurt you when they aren't? Just a little of that. I just got confused. But I'm good now."

Sherlock nodded his head and leaned against John, staring at his likeness down in the corner. "I- y-yes...I know wh-what that...is l-like."

"Yeah..." John decided that he needed the comfort and nuzzled the side of Sherlock's shoulder. "I got really scared," he began, "a-and I thought...I thought Paul was going to hurt me, and Greg was helping. But I'm okay now."

Sherlock scowled at Greg, wrapping an arm around John protectively. He dropped his voice to a very low whisper. "Is G-Greg h-hurting you?"

"No! No, not at all!" John looked over to Greg and gave a small smile. When he turned back to Sherlock, he looked weary, but not scared. "I just got confused. They'd asked me about...Uhm...about an exam...and I panicked, but Greg...he was going to sedate me, and I thought he was..." John shook his head and ground his teeth. "I just got scared. It was stupid. And...I curled in a ball...and they pulled my arm away and I thought they were pulling my knees apart..." John's face was red and he pressed his face into Sherlock's shoulder. "Nothing happened. I know that now. I just got scared."

Sherlock bit down hard on the inside of his cheek and closed his eyes. "They...th-they did th-that to m-m-me as w-well. Are...d-does it h-hurt?" He shifted uncomfortably and tried to quiet himself.

John shook his head. "No, no, it doesn't hurt. But I thought-" John ground his teeth and tears welled in his eyes. It was too fresh. Emotion was filling his battered chest and he was beginning to lost hold. "I...I thought it w-was Greg coming to hurt me." First he'd thought Sherlock had raped him, then Greg. John's battered heart couldn't take it, and a wretched sob escaped him.

Sherlock flinched even as he wrapped an arm around John, trying to comfort him. He did not know what to say, lost in his confusion. Why didn't John hurt? Not that he wasn't glad for it, but if his
exam had caused him pain...why hadn't John's? Doubt began to creep into his mind as he looked with more intensity around the room.

John cried against Sherlock's shoulder even as he struggled to remain calm. "I'm sorry," he whispered. "I didn't mean to be so sad. I'm okay now. I-I'm sorry." He looked around the room when Sherlock did.

John found himself increasingly worried that he was hurting Sherlock, and he gentled his hold. "I-I'm here. I'm okay. You're alright."

Sherlock's eyes found Mycroft and he very cautiously began to speak. "Wh-Why is it s-so painful f-for m-me? If he h-had an e-exam and isn't h-hurting...why...why am I?" He tightened his grip on John, feeling incredibly sick and hyper aware of the pain that hadn't been there days ago.

"You might have had stitching," John ventured with his eyes squeezed shut. "And I don't think I needed stitching. I-" John realized then that it had been on his judgement that Sherlock had been examined. "I'm sorry!" He abruptly shouted. "My fault! I'm sorry!"

Sherlock startled terribly, jerking away from John as he was suddenly shouting. He looked wide-eyed to Mycroft, putting distance between he and John as much as he was able. "What- wh-what do y-you mean? Y-Your fault? J-John what do y-you mean," he stuttered, nearly turning green, perilously close to the edge of the bed.

John shrank away from Sherlock and pulled his hands up to cover his mouth. "I'm sorry," he whispered, "I'm s-sorry! I-I was w-worried and they...Moran didn't have Moriarty to...to say n-no..."

No, no, Sherlock, not today. Johnny boy has been good today. Maybe I'll let you have him tomorrow.

"I'm sorry," John wailed, much louder this time. "S-Sorry. They a-asked if y-you should h-have an exam and I-I said yes."

"No!" Greg shouted as he lunged forward, keeping one hand on John and grabbing Sherlock with the other to keep him from toppling off the bed. It was surely painful, but falling would have been far worse.

Sherlock was hardly breathing as he was wrenched forward, pain slicing up the side of his body, paralyzing him. He couldn't think. Could not process what John had told him. He only knew he was being restrained and he hurt and someone had done something to him without his consent and he began to scream as he struggled against Greg.

John dropped his head to Sherlock's chest, squeezed his eyes shut, and latched on. "I'm sorry!" He shouted, voice full of agony.

Stupid John!

Now, there's a good boy, John. Hurt Sherlock. Hurt him. That's all you ever do, isn't it? You hurt people. Come now, pet, do as you were created to do. Ruin them.

John shook his head against Moriarty's voice and hummed loudly and without melody.

Greg tried to let Sherlock go without risking him falling, while Sherlock was trying to push John off of him.
There were too many hands, too many bodies, and Sherlock couldn't think. He screamed out for his brother, too weak to do much of anything to protect himself.

John was also having a difficult time with all the people touching him. He was being pushed off of Sherlock, which only confirmed he was doing something wrong. In a sudden burst of guilt he let go and scrambled half way off the bed before landing in Greg's arms. "I'm sorry!" He shouted and reached for Sherlock even as he drew away. "It's John! I'm sorry!"

Sherlock carried on crying out for Mycroft, blindly reaching for some measure of safety. The chaos in the room was like brilliant, painful white-noise and he could make no sense of it.

Greg hesitated at the side of the bed, not wanting to pull John away if he wanted to stay, but the situation was plummeting out of hand.

Mycroft had his baby brother in his arms and was trying to shoo John out of the room.

John shook his head and grabbed Sherlock's hand regardless. "Please," he pleaded, "I-I know I'm n-not good f-for you a-and h-he trained me t-to h-hurt y-you and that makes m-me sad b-bu-but-" John let out a long, slow sob that burned in his throat and lingered in the air. "Sorry! I- stupid John- and I-I didn't m-mean to!"

Sherlock wrenched his hand away, terrified at the panic and activity in the room. he buried his face against Mycroft's chest, clinging to him with quaking arms, struggling to breathe at all.

Greg gathered John closer to him and tucked his face against his shoulder. "We'll try later, John. Time to go."

"No! NO! Let GO!" John wrenched away from Greg and stood on his own. He had his knees bent, arms out to keep people away from him, and posture both defensive and aggressive. "Stay away from me. Everyone! I-I do what I like!"

He looked to Sherlock, cradled in Mycroft's arms, and reached out to him. "Sherlock, please! I'm sorry! I-I didn't mean to! It isn't my fault!"

Greg stood back in total shock at John's behavior. He looked up to Mycroft and then to Sherlock, who was frozen still against his brother, obviously terrified. The energy in the room was too charged, and John's begging was making him physically ill. He wailed Mycroft's name in a desperate plea for help, too frightened to manage anything else.

"Out!" Mycroft waved his hand at Greg and John, but John was too determined.

John walked over to Sherlock and his brother and dropped to his knees on the floor. "Please, Sherlock, look at me. P-Please. I-I'm sorry. I-"

"You're being such a good pet. Maybe I won't let Sherlock take you tonight. Maybe."

John abruptly tucked his arms across his chest and doubled over. "Sherlock, PLEASE! I'm trying! I'm trying to help! I-I don't want to hurt you!"

Mycroft glared at Greg. "Get him OUT!"

Sherlock was screaming against Mycroft's chest as the sound track to his torture played right beside his head. His muscles locked up in anticipation of the whip, or fire, or that fucking drill perhaps. He was nearly convulsing he was shaking so terribly.
Greg ran over and pulled John into his arms, wrestling with him to drag him into the hallway, desperate to keep from hurting him.

"No! NO! I'm SORRY!" John was thrashing against Greg and his blood ran cold. Suddenly he was screaming as well as his grasp of the situation slid away, leaving him only with the knowledge that someone was grabbing him, Sherlock was being hurt, and he was being dragged to God only knows where.

"NO! NO!"

Sherlock's stress levels rose so sharply as John's tone shifted to terror that he fainted dead away in Mycroft's arms.

Miller ran into the hallway to help Greg, both men very worried John would hurt himself. Greg was speaking as calmly as he could while Miller pushed a sedative, enough to nearly put John to sleep.

John saw the sedative and grabbed the hem of his pants with his left hand while punching Miller across the face with his right. "Stop it! STOP! HELP! HELP!" John tried to rip his arm away, but it was held fast. Tears poured down his face as he slowly went lax against Greg and he held on to his trousers in stress from the recent events.

Greg buried his face against the top of John's head, clenching him as his heart slammed against his ribs. It took him several minutes to compose himself, speaking softly to John as Miller closed the door to separate them from Sherlock's room.

"You're safe...you're safe...just Greg...you're safe," he repeated over and over again, lifting the nearly unconscious John and taking him back to his room.

John was mostly limp in Greg's arms, but he still let out pitiful, lamenting whimpers and gurgles. His head lolled back and he flinched each time his half-lidded eyes fell on anyone, including Greg.

"You're okay," Greg carried on in a panic, struggling to keep as calm as he could. As soon as they were back in John's room, he called into John's bed with John in his lap, cradling him as he covered him with blankets.

"You're okay, you're okay, I'm here, it's alright," he repeated over and over again, tears rolling down his face.

John made a small attempt at struggling, but his arms felt like lead. 'I'm....d-don't...don't..." He grabbed the hem of his trousers and weakly pushed against Greg's chest. He knew he did not want to be touched, but was confused about everything else.

"Stupid John!"

Worthless. Always so worthless. See , you're here for a purpose. I am training you for a purpose. You're going to hurt Sherlock Holmes. You're going to ruin him.

There's a good boy, John. I won't let Sherlock hurt you if you can remove that finger. Come now, I've given you pliers.

This is what you were created for, pet. Hurting Sherlock Holmes.

This is why I have to punish you, John. Because you've always been hurting people your entire life. You deserve this.

John flinched hard and slowly moved his hands up to cover his ears. "S-S-Soorry," he lamented.
Greg could hardly breathe as John pushed against him in a bid to get away. He eased John down onto the bed, bundling him up in the blankets, and very reluctantly let him go. Greg settled down on his side with just a bit of distance between them, his face level with John's.

"John...please look at me...it's okay. It's okay. You're safe, no one it's going to hurt you. It's alright. Sherlock's going to be okay, we'll just try again later, it's okay. Please John."

John raised weary, red-rimmed eyes to Greg and with them showed the depth of his mental agony, the constant flow of hatred and fear he received from his own mind. "Hurt him," John whimpered, "I-I only h-hurt..I-I hurt e-everyone. 'S all I-I do....A-A-All I-I do... S-Stupid J-John... I-I c-can't...don't w-want m-medicine...." He hated how limp and vulnerable he was, and tried to scowl at Greg. "NO!" He tried to shout, but it came out more of a wail.

Greg backed off even further, struggling to keep himself under control.

"I know...I know I'm sorry we gave you medicine, John, you were hurting yourself. I'm so sorry. I love you, I'm sorry. Please breathe, John...just breathe. No one is going to touch you. I love you, breathe for me..."

John tried to sit up, but he couldn't quite manage it. The medication continued to pull him towards sleep in his already exhausted state, which was incredibly terrifying. He looked at the port in his hand where the medicine to do this to him had gone in, and tried to understand. "So I won'scream?"

John looked up to Greg in question. Sometimes he'd been drugged when moved, or when they needed him to be quiet during pain. "It's o I won'scream?"

Greg reached out to assure John. He curled his fingers in before he touched him.

"No, John, not at all...we were trying to help you but panic. Just to help you feel less afraid..." He could not help the fast and stay aside of tears, "pear John, it's me...it's Greg...I won't hurt you."

John shook his head and raised tear-filled eyes to the ceiling. "Thurt him...n'now I-I'm 'n t-trouble..."

John closed his eyes and tipped his head back. He remained that way for quite some time, wallowing in vague, weak fear.

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Mycroft managed to get Sherlock back on the bed. "I'm sorry," he shouted, "It's alright! It's me!"

Sherlock was limp and hardly breathing as he looked at Mycroft, openly afraid. "H-He...still h-hurting John...s-still here, I'm still h-here. You're not r-real."

He stared across the room, white walls and medical equipment, just waiting for John's likeness to appear on the wall.

Mycroft waved his hand in front of Sherlock's face to interrupt his line of sight. "Nobody is hurting John. John is down the hall and very safe. It's alright. I'm real. Look at me. I'm real."

Sherlock looked up at his brother with fear in his eyes, tucking closer in on himself. He did not speak, holding silent as Moran shuffled about in the corner.

Mycroft settled down for the long haul with Sherlock in his arms and bundled up in blankets. "I love you. I am your brother. I'm My. It's okay."
Sherlock did not fight his brother, showing the handing without a sound. He lay limp and horrified in Mycroft's and, neither asleep nor fully aware, his breathing staggered and irregular.

Mycroft stayed as he was for two hours, constantly trying to speak to Sherlock, always rocking him, always being kind and loving, though he doubted Sherlock could hear any of it.

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John had drifted off into uncomfortable but nonetheless death-like sleep for several hours without intention before he finally woke. He jerked, sat up, and scrambled to put his back against the headboard. He drew his knees to his chest and wrapped his arms around them before he took stock of the room he was in.

For a moment, he relaxed when he saw nobody was attacking him, but the memories came crashing back. "Oh...Oh God..." John covered his mouth with his hand and shied away from Greg. "I..."

He'd ruined everything. He'd screamed near Sherlock. He'd made him cry.

**Stupid John!**

Greg gave him space, moving to sit at the opposite end of the bed. He wrapped his arms around his knees, watching John with intense grief.

"I'm not going to hurt you," he whispered, heartbroken. "Please don't be afraid of me."

John jumped when Greg spoke and he slammed back against the headboard again. "No! No! I-I hurt Sherlock! I hurt-" John realized in that moment exactly who he was, and why he'd been released. "I-I'm o-only here t-to hurt him! I-I can never help him!!" John ground his teeth and swallowed repeatedly as his stomach churned. "M-Moriarty m-made m-me into something...I-I'm n-not J-John any m-more I-I-I'm-" John turned and threw up violently off the side of the bed.

Greg scrambled forward, one hand on John's back and the other against his shoulder to keep him from pitching off the bed.

"Breathe, John breathe...slow down, it's okay...breathe," he coaxed, rubbing John's back through it, hitting the button on the wall for Miller.

John shoved Greg hard, not out of fear of being hurt, but fear of hurting him. "Stay away from me!" John's voice shook with fear and self-hatred. "I-

*John ground his teeth as his hair was pulled back and his knees dug into the hard cement floor. He stared up at Moriarty with exhausted fear, but there was still a spark of stubbornness left in him, even if he had lost all will to carry on. "I'm not going to hurt them," he choked and blood tinted the corners of his mouth.*

"Oh? Is that so? John, tell me, if I brought Sherlock in right now, would you be pleased?"

*John flinched and his heart rate picked up. He shook his head.*

"No? Oh, now won't that disappoint him! He always looks forward to seeing you." Moriarty bent down and grabbed John by the jaw. "See, this is just the beginning. I'll break you down. Already you've lost your fight. You're suicidal. You don't try to escape. Already you flinch at his name, at his voice, and at his smell. I will break you down until there isn't a scrap of John left in you, and once you're a blank slate, I'll build someone new."

*John jerked his head away and tried to bite Moriarty, which earned him a heavy knee to the back from Moran, who still held his head tilted up. "Fuck y-you," he spat even as he coughed. "W-Won't do it. I will not hurt Sherlock!"*
Moriarty grinned his Cheshire cat smile, and stepped back to his cart of instruments. "Oh? We'll see about that."

John dug his fingernails into his skin and tore. "I'm HURTING HIM!"

Greg fell back, hardly breathing. He stared at John in shock. He shook his head, refusing to be pushed away. Miller came in quietly, going to clean up the sick before it made the room more unpleasant.

Greg spoke swiftly, keeping close but not touching John. "You and Sherlock are sorting it. You are still yourself, John, you've got to hold on. You need time, please. Breathe, John, please calm down."

John doubled over and his chest heaved. "No! No! I'm s-sorry! I-I'm n-not m-myself anymore." John raised his tear-filled eyes to meet Greg's, and spoke in a voice hardly above a whisper. "Can y-you honestly look at me and say I am John Watson? Am I the same man?"

Greg reached out with a trembling hand, wanting desperately to fix this. "Of course not, but that...John that...please, you don't have to be the same. John...please...look at me, I'm right here with you." His heart was twisting with anxiety. John had been in a solid state of panic for days, and he could not seem to fix it for him.

John only heard the first three words. Of course not. He let out a lamenting wail, and wrapped his arms around his chest. "I just HURT everyone!" He was exactly what Moriarty had said he would. He was doing exactly what Moriarty wanted him to. "I'm s-s-sorry! I-I...I..." John screamed in frustration and bitter agony.

All he'd ever done was hurt people, ever since he got out. He'd made Greg sad. He'd made Sherlock sad. He made Sherlock cry. He made him scream. What good was he?

John whimpered and rocked himself back and forth. "I'm so s-sorry. I-I'm o-only hurting people. This i-is what I-I am now." John felt the intense need to feel pain in that moment, to do something to make up for what he'd done. "I-I deserve t-to b-be h-h-hurt," he cried and looked about the room for something to get it over with. Every time he'd done something 'bad', he was tortured. If he did it himself, it would often be lesser. He needed to hurt himself before he was punished for what he had done. "I-I...G-G-Greg, I-I need t-to have a-a shower."

Greg shook his head, "No," he said without hesitation, "absolutely not. No. No. You're not thinking clearly."

He reached out and pulled John into his arms. "Calm down. John please calm down."

John once again struggled free and stood on his own, his back to the bathroom door. "I-If I d-do it m-myself it's b-better," he claimed with one hand on the door. "N-Not as b-bad if I-I do it. I-I n-need... I-I was b-bad and..." John shook his head. He didn't expect Greg to understand. In fact, he didn't understand himself.

"No," Greg shouted, getting up and putting a hand over John's shoulder to keep the bathroom door closed. "No. You are not going to punish yourself. You did not do anything to intentionally hurt him. John, stop."

With Greg's hand on the wall behind him, John shrank away. He sank down and sat on the floor with his knees to his chest. "Go away!" He shouted. "I-I don't w-want to hurt you! I-I'm d-doing exactly what Moriarty s-said I would!"
Greg went down with John, not touching him but keeping close. "No. I'm not leaving. Scream at me if all you want, I'm not going to leave."

Miller walked back out after trending to the mess, leaving the men to themselves.

John screamed as loudly as he could with his hands clamped over his ears. "H-He's going to HURT ME!" He wailed, "I-I need t-to use the water o-or h-he-he'll make it worse! P-Please! PLEASE!"

John reached out and grabbed Greg's hands, even as he kept his head bowed and his knees to his chest.

Greg pulled John to him, wrapping around him even as his heart plummeted. "No one will hurt you, no one. You are safe, I have you. John breathe. Breathe." He had no idea how to reach him, physically holding a man he felt worlds apart from.

John pushed Greg off him in a sudden burst of energy and threw open the door to the bathroom.

*Stupid John, always ruining everything! You deserve to be punished for this. You always hurt people. Punish yourself, or I'll do it for you. You don't want that, do you?*

John cried out in fear and slammed the door shut behind him. "G-Go away, Greg! I-I n-need t-to do this!" He leaned his weight against the door, even though he doubted it would be enough.

Greg shouted in defeat, jumping up to try and push the door open, feeling that it was John on the other side and refusing to risk hurting him by diving the door open.

"John! Please stop! This is what hurts, John! Not you...you don't hurt me, but you hurting yourself does! Please! Please if...if you need to hurt we can figure something else out. John please!"

John pressed himself against the door. "If you try to open the door, you'll hit me!" John knew damn well he was taking advantage of Greg's love, but he didn't care. He pressed the lock in, which could easily be undone with a paper clip, as it was meant for privacy rather than security.

"I-I'm not John anymore!" The terrified, confused man shouted and brushed tears from his eyes. "I-I just hurt people. I-I need...I need to learn not to hurt people! I can s-stop once I've learned!" John was hurled back into the same sick, twisted logic that Moriarty had forced on him months ago. If he hurt himself when he did something bad, he wouldn't be punished as severely.

"J-Just g-go away!!"

Greg leaned his forehead against the door, fully in tears. We're he acting as an officer, he'd be through the door. But he was just Greg, and that was his John in there, and he was frozen in indecision.

"Please, John. You're scaring me."His voice cracked and he added, raw and honest, "I don't know what to do. Please, John please."

*Oh, you're even hurting Greg now! After everything he's done for you, you're just hurting him. That's very bad of you, isn't it, John? Do you know what you're supposed to do when you're bad?*

John cried out in distress and dropped to the floor with his hands over his ears. "Make it STOP! STOP! I-I'll do it! Stop!"

He managed to get to his feet, though he was shaking horribly. "I'll d-do it," he whimpered again, and pulled back the shower curtain. His stomach buckled and he turned to throw up violently into the bin.
"Sorry! S-Sorry! I'm g-going!" John apologized to the whip bearing Moriarty that rode shotgun in his head. He reached out and pulled the tap.

A loud scream tore from his chest and John threw himself back hard enough to break the wooden cabinet behind him. The sound of water, horrible and terrifying, struck fear into the very core of John and he writhed on the floor.

Greg was through the door in the next second, breaking the thin wood from the hinges, grabbing John in one arm and turning off the shower with the other. He pulled John out of the lav and dragged him back to the bed. Even as his own shoulders shook with fear, Greg held John’s back to his chest to restrain him without threatening him.

"It's alright, it's alright," he said again and again, holding John in a grip the man surely could not break free of.

"No! NO!!" John screamed and thrashed even as he was held by the person he loved. "I need to use the water! I need- Greg, STOP IT!" John squirmed and tried to turn to face him, but ended up limp and sobbing. "Worthless John," he whimpered, "a-always hurting. Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Tried, sir. I tried. I tried." John's head lolled back and he completely limp. "I t-ried sir," he muttered, eyes glassy and tracking something that was clearly in his mind, not the room. The flashback had come slowly, stealing his mind away. "Y-Yes, sir. Yes sir." John nodded to the fictitious Moriarty.


Greg had no idea how to fix this. He held John, rocking him slowly and constantly speaking to him. "I have you, you're good, you're good, you're safe, Greg has you. Greg has you," he kept trying to assure John as his heart broke for him, hope draining away with each passing moment.

John stayed as he was, frozen and expecting pain, for nearly a quarter hour before his mind filtered back to him.

When it finally did, he blinked at Greg. "I was supposed to g-get in the water," he whispered. "I was...I..."

You were hurting everyone, that's what you were doing.

John whimpered and covered his face. Moriarty was right. He was always right. All he ever did was hurt people. All he did was thin lives. "Greg?" John whispered.

Greg relaxed slightly as John whispered his name. He nodded, trying to better cradle John against him. "Just me...it's just me. I have you, John. I've got you."

"Greg..." John breathed a slow sigh. He wasn't doing any good here. He was supposed to stay to help Sherlock, but he was only hurting him further. He was supposed to stay because Greg loved him, but it would be better in the end if he died.

"I think I need to go now."

Greg's throat closed nearly instantly. He tightened his hold on John, rocking slightly faster as his
"No," he whispered, tucking his face down against the top of John's head, "John...no you don't. It's just been a hard few days...just a hard few days. You...you don't have to go. I'll take you with me, we can just...we'll go somewhere nice, John, we'll go somewhere comfortable and nice and this...if you can't do this anymore we will find something else that you can." Anything, anything to derail this line of talk.

John shook his head and tears slipped down his face, but they were not tears of grief or fear. They were tears of relief. He’d made his choice.

"No, Greg, I'm sorry. I can't keep going like this. I'm only alive because I was told I could help. I can't help now. I know what I am, and I...I need to be put down."

A cold, sickly sweat broke along Greg's brow. He'd made a promise, he'd sworn to do this if John truly wanted it, but now that it was being asked of him, he was absolutely sure he couldn't do it. He dragged in a clipped breath, shifting John in his arms more so that he was cradling him more than anything else. For several minutes he just held John, rocking him slowly, struggling to get his throat to work.

"It's just too soon," he whispered in a pleading voice, "it's too soon. You could still help, there...it just needs time," he could not open his eyes and look at John. How would he do this? How would he sit there and watch the light go out of John's eyes and do nothing? He could not keep his chin steady, grief and fear tearing at him.

"Please," he breathed against the crown of John's head, "stay with me."

John reached up and brushed his fingers over Greg's cheek lovingly. "It's alright. It's alright. I can't stay. You know that. You know I'm too damaged. I..." John sat up slowly and, with great difficulty, pulled his shirt over his head. The scars that made a latticework over his body hadn't seemed to fade at all beyond healing. There were punctures, whip lashes, burns that flowed down his shoulders and chest that were clearly the result of boiling water, and tiny little drill holes that in no way were accurate to the pain it caused.

"I need to go now," he whispered again. "It's time, love."

Greg sat in paralyzed denial, staring at John's face for a few moments before looking down to his chest. The vicious JM stood out in bold mockery; how could Greg compete with this sort of trauma? He looked back to John's face as tears streaked down his own. His lips moved, but he could not speak.

John looked so relieved. How could he take that away? He and Sherlock had been at a stalemate, going round and round again in the same holding pattern, simply treading water for the sake of treading water.

"John," he managed, voice cracking like brittle glass as the color slowly faded from his cheeks.

John leaned forward and kissed Greg on the cheek. "It's alright," he whispered and his voice broke. "It's better this way. I..." Tears poured down his face and he slowly leaned against Greg's chest. "I'm just tired, love. I've been tired for the past year and a half. I'm done. Please, let me go. It's time for me to go."

His emotions were spinning out of control, and he clung to Greg. "Please, I need to go. Let me go. I can't hurt anyone anymore. I've been through too much. I can't do this anymore."
Greg wrapped his arms around John.

Or rather, he watched himself wrap his arms around John from some other perspective, abruptly a third observer to a great tragedy he was not involved in. He held John to him, keeping his arms gentle, brushing John's hair back from his face, eyes red and dull, the tears slowing until they stopped altogether.

He pressed his lips to the side of John's head, lingering at his temple. "Okay," he breathed, heart in his throat, "it's okay...it's okay...I've got you," he reassured, easing John down to his side so that he could get up and fetch the ampule of Morphine and a syringe.

Greg moved across the room as an automaton watching as someone else's hands reached down and got the little glass vial and packaged needle, fingers remarkably steady as he drew up a dose far too large for John's slight weight. He watched at a distance as his body returned back to the bed then crawled up to cradle John as delicately as if he were made of spun sugar.

He moved John so that he was comfortably cradled against him, brushing his palm over the top of John's head, through his sandy, grey-speckle hair. "I love you," he breathed, rocking John slowly. "I'm...I'm so sorry I made you stay. Thank you for trying. You...you're a beautiful, good man, John Watson."

It wasn't enough. There was so much more to say, so much left he wanted to John to understand. He held the syringe in a pale hand as tears began to slide fast and heavy down his face. "I don't want to say goodbye to you."

John managed to get his shirt back on. He didn't want to leave the world behind in such an ugly, marred, weak body, but it was all he had. He curled up on Greg's chest and took great comfort in the warmth he found there. "I'm sorry," he whispered. "I don't want to say goodbye to you either." He had his eyes locked on the syringe, and his chest ached.

"You..." His voice faltered and he paused. "You tell Sherlock that I'm sorry, okay? You tell him that. Tell him I loved him. And..." He looked to the syringe again. "I have...I have been through so much. I've been starved and beaten for eating, I've been water boarded and burned, I've been whipped and cut and tricked into thinking my best friend raped me..." John turned and pressed his face into Greg's shoulder. "And you've been the only good thing I can remember. I can't remember anything good. You are an amazing man, Greg. I love you more than I could ever express." John pressed a kiss to Greg's cheek. "You've been the only good thing I can remember. I don't know what I'd do without you. Thank you for this. Thank you."

John was so ready to end, to cease, to be done with all this suffering. "Oh, God..." he whispered, "I'm done. I'm done." He broke down into fresh tears and put his hand over Greg's where he held the needle. "Please. Please."

Greg shifted John very slightly in his arms, rocking him slowly. He brought the syringe up and tore the cap off with his teeth, refusing to let go of John. Time slowed as the earth ceased it's turning, his failure stopping the rotation.

He slid the needle into John's port, thumb on the plunger. "Look at me," he breathed, nuzzling the top of John's head before brushing his lips to John's hairline, "look at me, John."

He waited until John's eyes turned to him, slowly starting to depress the plunger, his lips turned in a shadow of a smile as tears flooded down his cheeks. "You're my best mate," he whispered as the medication began to flow into John's body, "you saved me more times than you can possibly know. I love you. You're the strongest, most selfless man I've ever had the honor of knowing. I love you, I
love you, John," he said as gently as he could, determined for John's last minutes to be calm and gentle. "I have you," he added as they hit the maximum dose limit. His smile faltered for a moment, but he pushed on past it. "You're safe. No more pain, no more. I love you, John." Greg carried on rocking him slowly as the last of the massive dose went in. When it was done, when the fatal amount had been administered and John was truly on his last few minutes, he dropped the needle. Greg kept his voice soft and gentle as he spoke sweetly and rocked John. He brushed his fingers along John's face, his eyes locked to John's, determined to be with him until the very end. "I love you."

John's tears slowly stopped and he kept his eyes on the one good thing he had in the world, the thing that even after death Moriarty was still taking away from him. The medication in his veins sang sweet promises, and John sank into the glorious arms of euphoric numbness. "I love you too," he whispered and reached a heavy arm up to touch his face. "No more pain," he echoed. "No pain." A small smile ghosted on his lips and he tilted his head back.

Laughter bubbled up from his chest and John leaned against the hallway wall in Baker Street, breath heavy, mouth in a smile. "That was ridiculous," he panted. "That was the most ridiculous thing I've ever done."

Sherlock grinned back at him with elation on his beautiful, elegant features. "You invaded Afghanistan."

John, already enjoying their banter, countered. "That wasn't just me."

John's eyes grew glassy and he dropped his hand from Greg's face. "You'll make sure 's'alright?" he slurred and felt himself growing heavy. "Shr'lock...you...you two've got to...got to be alright..."

John was more peaceful than he had been in a year and a half. He was more peaceful than he could ever remember being in childhood. He was the sort of peaceful that one gets after a hard day when one finally sinks into a familiar bed. The kind, gentle arms of death opened up to John,beckoning for him, promising him sweet numbness and the release of all pain and responsibility. "Love...you..." John muttered, as casually as he had countless times when falling asleep. “I love you too,” Greg whispered and could tell John was close. “I love you s-so much.”

The battered soldier, the man who'd been tortured simply for his loyalty, the man who'd endured so much and tried even after to help others, breathed one last slow, shallow breath, before falling still in the peaceful, quiet, painless repose of death.

Greg did not move for many minutes. The second hand continued to tick forward, marking time that absolutely could not still be passing. John was heavy in his arms as the tension bled away, leaving the battered shell that once held the most impressive man he'd ever known. Eventually Greg took a breath, and then another, fingers sliding to the side of John's neck, searching out a pulse.

"God," he stuttered as he pulled John's limp body up. Greg clutched him to his chest and buried his face in John's hair, rocking as a cracking sob tore up out of his lungs. In abject loss and horror of what he’d done, Greg’s fingers curled tight in John's shirt as he wailed his grief against John's cooling neck.

The first tower had fallen, and Greg was quite sure the others would not stand. How could he go to Sherlock's room and look that battered man in the eye only to tell him he'd just killed John? What was he to do now? Hand over John's body, allow Mycroft to drag him off to jail, stand trial for murder? Even if Mycroft let him go, what was waiting for him?
His arms were growing tired, starting to shake as he supported the weight of John’s body. The light from the day was fading, the room slowly growing darker and darker. Out of habit, feeling John’s skin cooling, Greg gathered the blankets up around him better. But John wasn’t going to warm up, wasn’t going to breathe slowly and speak to Greg again. This wasn’t a spell. John was gone. Greg had killed him.

He shifted back on the bed, pressing to the headboard and bending his knees up to help him support John’s weight. It was nearly an hour later that he was able to make himself look at John’s face. He gasped as he realized John’s eyes had not quite closed. He slid his hand over them as a wrecked sob caved his chest in, nearly making him ill. He pressed a slow, lingering kiss to John’s forehead, absolutely paralyzed with indecision.

Out of all the things that John had endured, death had been the most kind. The battered nerves in his body ceased firing. The terrors, the horrific memories, the hellish training were all dead with him.

Greg had finally relinquished his hold on John, easing his body down to the bed. He’d grow stiff soon, and Greg absolutely could not endure feeling that happening. He covered John as though he were sleeping, brushing his hair back from his face, so much more peaceful in death than he had been in sleep.

But no, he wasn’t peaceful. He was just gone. There was no comfort for John, just darkness and nothing.

Darkness and nothing. Better than what Greg had to offer.

"Get up," he whispered to himself. He dragged himself off the side of the bed and went back to the formerly locked box of medication from which he’d taken the Morphine to let John go.

A few minutes later, with a full syringe at his side, he penned a letter to Mycroft.

*I made a promise. There are not words to express how sorry I am.*

-Greg Lestrade

Woefully not enough, he knew. Not enough by half. At the bottom, he added as an afterthought,

*John’s last words were for your brother. He loved him.*

He got back up then, leaving the paper on the desk and walking to the bed. He took off his shoes and set them aside, crawling up next to John as though they were going to go to sleep.

"I'm sorry," he whispered as he took off his belt, fingers numb and shaking. He affixed the leather slowly around his bicep and then, before tightening it, fished a picture out of his wallet. His children grinned up at him from the ink of the photo, carefree smiles and messy faces. He leaned over John's body and set the picture on the stand behind him, then eased on to his side to lay flat as he pulled the buckle tight. He was not skilled in finding his own veins, and had to try several times, sobbing at each miss, before the plunger finally drew back a swirling mix of blood into the morphine. Carefully he let the buckle loose and began to press the plunger, looking between John's grey features and the colorful picture of the life he'd lost.

It was warmer than he'd been expecting.
It was just a few minutes later that someone monitoring the cameras noticed the needle. Before, the occasional glance hadn't shown much. John crying, Greg holding John, John asleep against Greg, Greg crying. It had been routine. But now that Greg had a needle in his own arm, it was called.

Mycroft looked at his phone and kept the sheer and utter terror off his face for his brother's sake. "Sherlock, I've got to go for a moment. I'll be right back. I'll come right back. Just give me a moment."

Mycroft's men were working to open the door, hopefully to save Greg.

Greg's fingers grew very heavy as he attempted to push the last of the syringe. There was commotion at the door, but he kept his eyes on John.

His breathing slowed, he could feel his chest go numb with the sort of warmth that he instinctively knew was fatal. He pulled in an intentional breath, and then another, each more shallow than the last.

*He brushed his son's hair back and kissed him goodnight.*

*A kiss from his daughter on his cheek, sticky with cream and light on the sound of her laughter.*

*John tossed his head back, laughing his arse off as Greg struck out with yet another woman.*

His eyes grew heavy as he heard Mycroft somewhere in the background, a small part of him twinging with guilt.

*I love you, too.*

He looked to John once more, recalling how light he'd sounded just before the lights faded from his eyes. With his focus on his children's picture, his own shut slowly, heavy and calm, surrendering to the growing darkness as chaos exploded around him.

Mycroft sprinted into the room as his men swarmed in and shouted for Miller. "Greg! Greg! Dammit! GREG!" He grabbed Greg's face between his hands and felt for a pulse. Weak. Far too weak. Faltering. And John-

Mycroft swore and reached to check John's pulse before his hands fell away. The man was ashen, his lips too pale, and above all that, the tortured man looked peaceful, more peaceful than he'd ever been even in sleep. "Oh, god," he gasped, "Oh, god...god...no, no..." He took a few steps back and his entire plan fell to pieces. John was *dead.*

"Save him!" He shouted to Miller, who'd rushed in. "Save them! Please!"

---

Sherlock had shifted to his side, his door slightly ajar, listening to the chaos with his fingers to his lips. People were running, the rattling wheels of carts over professional, clipped voices fading down the hall.

In the corner, John got up off the floor, blood dripping down his arms despite the exceedingly normal way he walked forward, fearless and without any sign of pain. Sherlock grabbed at his blanket, holding it up like a child would to defend himself, staring wide-eyed and frightened at the battered
man. The bed did not dip as John rest his hip against it.

"J-John," Sherlock breathed in question over the backdrop of controlled chaos down the hall. John said nothing to him. Sherlock watched as John's focus returned to the corner, looking along with him.

Moran sat down on the floor, leaning back against the wall with a shrug as he lit up a cigarette. Sherlock looked back to the man on his bed, tentatively reaching out a hand to touch him.

His fingers went through John without making contact. John smiled gently at him, keeping silent.

"N-No," Sherlock whined, looking back to the slightly cracked door. The scream of a defibrillator clicked off with a thudding shock.

Sherlock closed his eyes, his heart thundering in his ears. "J-John," he sobbed, turning back to the image his mind insisted on handing him. "D-Did you leave m-m-me here?"

---

Miller stepped back from the bed, turning to face Mycroft. He glanced at the clock, speaking softly the time of death to the team with his eyes on Mycroft, adding a very quiet, "I'm sorry."

Mycroft swore and shoved Miller back towards John. "Do something! Fucking DO SOMETHING! That is SHERLOCK there! That. Is. My. Brother. He put his heart in that man, don't you DARE let it stop!" Mycroft grabbed one of the other doctors and shoved him towards the two dead men as well. "DO SOMETHING!"

Miller shook his head, pointing to John. "He's in rigors, Mycroft. He's gone."

Paul jogged into the room. He stopped short, only having known a code was called. It took him a moment to absorb what he was seeing.

---

Sherlock tried to sit up as John remained quiet. A small, very Sherlock voice whispered at the back of his mind. He's dead. Sherlock whimpered and reached out again for the image of John, fingers curling uselessly in the air. Moran cracked a laugh from his lounged position on the floor, exhaling a ring of smoke. He fucking killed himself you idiot. He's dead. Why do you think he's not screaming?

Sherlock went very still, straining his ears for information. The chaos down the hall had stopped, but there had not been a single cry for help in all that time. John could hardly stand a door being shut with too much force. All that activity would have had him climbing the walls in panic.

He stared at John, who silently stared back at him. Sherlock shook his head. "No. N-No. Y-You wouldn't...y-you wouldn't l-l-leave m-me behind. Y-You wouldn't. Y-You're m-my only...n-no, John n-no," his words broke down to heartbroken tears, reaching for John again, closing his eyes as he brushed against his own thigh. "Y-You wouldn't l-l-leave m-me. Y-You w-wouldn't j-just...J-John wouldn't l-l-leave me. I'm...I'm o-ok-kay," he whispered to himself, gripping the blanket in a bloodless fist.

---

Mycroft paced the room, occasionally casting his eyes to the cold, dead men on the bed. Not only was he grieved for the loss of Greg and John, who he'd counted as the few he could trust, but there
was also Sherlock. "I...I need to get back to him..." Tears were in his eyes, and he backed up to the opposite wall as if hiding from the door. "I should...Jesus...Paul, what do I do? What DO I DO?"

Sherlock watched as John stood up without a word. He stood next to Sherlock, inexplicably in his corded jumper, fleshed out once again and smiling at him.

"No, private ambulance," a random voice in the hall said to another, the fast footfalls of unknown men rushing past, one clearly on a mobile, "both, I know it. Yes, it's been called. Murder suicide. No, Mr. Holmes is not going to have it investigated, it's on film for god's sake. Yes, Watson and Lestrade...to Saint Bart's...yes..." the voice faded down the hall as Sherlock stared unblinking at John, tears streaking down his cheeks.

"Y-You...you l-l-left me," he breathed, hardly unable to articulate under the crushing weight, as though he'd personally become the core of a collapsed star, the fabric of spacetime unable to support his impossible weight. "J-John you...y-you...you l-left me?"

He pushed himself to sit up, ignoring the way his back screamed at him, stitching buckling as he torqued himself. John stepped between Sherlock and Moran, blocking his view of the horrific man. Still he said nothing, just standing next to Sherlock in the same sort of silence they'd shared when both were occupying the same room for hours on end.

---

Paul took Mycroft by the shoulders, turning him from the macabre scene on the bed. "Breathe. Stop whatever is going on in your head and breathe," he instructed, trying to pull Mycroft out of his panic as Miller helped the others pull a heavy sheet over John and Greg in an attempt to tame down the scene.

---

Sherlock raked his hands through his hair as he sobbed John's name, panic stealing his breath away. "H-How...how am- wh-what am I s-s-sup-p-posed to do w-without y-you," he cried, breaking apart as John said nothing, simply stepping a bit closer. His expression was calm and steady, not at all reacting to Sherlock's distress.

"I- oh g-god...y-you left m-me! You left me! W-What am I s-supposed to do? You're- it- n-no, John no...no..." he began to tear at the stitching on the side of his neck, attempting to rip it open, unable to find the strength to press past the pain of it in his weakened state. "J-John no," he wept, watching as the image of his only friend began to fade from the room. "NO! J-JOHN NO W-WAIT," he cried out, reaching into the open air for the specter of a dead man.

His drip line caught on the side of the bed and he started to tug at it until John's fading blue eyes glanced down at the thin plastic tubing. Sherlock went suddenly still, looking to his hand and following the line up to the hanging bag. "W-Wait for m-me, John, w-wait!" He began frantically wrapping the tubing around his neck, eyes locked to John as it tore from his hand, cutting off blood and air as he managed a knot. He could not get it tight enough, fingers too weak. John was fading, and Sherlock was in a complete panic to stay with him. Moran laughed in the background and Sherlock suddenly lunged, trying to grab hold of John before he was gone.

The force had him pitch forward off the bed, legs without a chance of supporting him. The knot when tight as the drip pole crashed over. It caught on the edge of the bed and the pressure was just enough to strangle him. Pain seared across his body, but his focus locked on John, who crouched just
in front of him, resting his hand on Sherlock's knee as darkness began to flood up around him, brain screaming for oxygen.

Darkness had closed in around him as Sherlock watched John.

'Wohoo, boys! Tea and nibbles for you!' Mrs. Hudson carried in a tray as Sherlock's bow glided over the strings, fingers nimble as they played out John's favorite melody to read to.

'Look Sherlock!' Mycroft beamed down at him, tucking a very fancy feather in Sherlock's hat, 'now you're a proper pirate. Let's go find us some better wood for your ship.'

'Of course you're my best mate, Sherlock,' John said in that beautifully exasperated tone.

He reached out, covering John's hand on his knee for a moment before instinct kicked in and he began to claw at his throat. John never took his eyes off Sherlock, holding close and still. The strength bled out of him swiftly, already so terribly weak. His bloodied fingers dropped away, lips working in a natural bid to try and pull in air as John shifted closer.

Sherlock watched as John's hand reached toward him, the familiar scent of linen and laundry soap wrapping around him, calming him as his body jerked and twitched for want of air. Again he flung his arm out, trying to reach John and missing.

Wait! He screamed, watching John close his eyes and slowly fade away, leaving Sherlock to himself moments before the darkness took him. Fear surged hard across his mind and he again tried to claw for freedom at his throat, crying out soundlessly for Mycroft.

His foot twitched as his heart felt as though it would burst, hearing and vision going out, leaving Sherlock in nothing but darkness.

--

Mycroft's chest heaved and he fought past Paul. "I need to g-go to Sherlock," he shouted even though he knew every man in the room could hear him. "He can not know! Nobody tell him!"

Mycroft would deal with breaking the news to him later.

Security seemed to take longer than usual, but in reality Mycroft's flight was quicker than usual due to his running down the halls.

When he came to the door and found it guarded from a few feet away, he began to shout. "Have you not been watching him? For god's sake, he could have-

Mycroft's heart came screeching to a stop in his chest and he froze for a fraction of a second in the doorway. "SHERLOCK!" He cried and dropped to his knees beside him. "Someone get Miller! GET MILLER! HELP!"

Mycroft was in a panic. He'd dealt with Sherlock's near death before, when he'd overdosed and been found in the street. He'd been horrified and struck sick, but that had been nothing compared to Sherlock's body, lying on the ground, with crashed medical equipment all around him.

Mycroft got the drip line off of Sherlock's throat and cast it aside. "He isn't breathing! Miller! MILLER!"
Everything was a blur. Things were moving incredibly slow, but at the same time, far too quickly. Mycroft caught the occasional phrase.

*There's nothing we can do.*

*He's gone, Mycroft.*

*I'm so sorry for your loss.*

*Would you like me to call an ambulance?*

Even after it was confirmed that there was nothing that could be done, Mycroft screamed for them to do more.

It was only when Sherlock's time of death was called that he wrapped Sherlock up in his arms and cried. He held Sherlock's head up to his shoulder in an attempt to remove some of his limp, lifeless state, but even then Sherlock was starting to grow stiff.

---

Paul leaned in the doorway an hour later, watching Mycroft with his sibling. Miller held the team back, keeping them away from Sherlock until Mycroft was ready to surrender him.

--

Mycroft wept and rocked Sherlock back and forth. "It's okay," he whispered to his dead baby brother. "I've got you. My's got you. No more pain, my little 'Lock. No more pain. I've got you."

"My!" Sherlock's childish, gleeful voice rang out just before Mycroft was grabbed about the legs by his little brother. "How wa' school?"

Mycroft bent over in front of Sherlock and rolled his eyes. "Horribly boring. Nothing like the adventures we have! But..." Mycroft got his bookbag and opened it up. "We had an arts and crafts time, which I thought was boring, but turns out..." He pulled out a miniature treasure chest made of popsicle sticks painted brown and gold. Felt allowed it to open and close, and Mycroft had even made a hinge lock on the front with a paperclip he'd found on the floor. "Now we have something to hide treasure in!"

Sherlock squealed in delight and reached for it with his chubby little hands. Mycroft handed it over, then looked to his mother. "Could we bury it behind the garden where Redbeard digs? It'll just be one more hole."

Their mother contemplated it for a moment, but looked fondly on her two sons playing so kindly together. "Of course. Go on!"

Mycroft and Sherlock raced out to the backyard to dig, both laughing, with Redbeard following close behind.

Mycroft held Sherlock as he grew cold and stiff. "You aren't like me," he whispered. "You found someone you loved. I'm so sorry I couldn't protect you. I'm so sorry I did this. You're my little 'Lock. I'm sorry I couldn't protect you." He pulled Sherlock as much into his lap as he could with his back against the bed, but was growing weary, and the presence of the doctors reminded him that he'd need to hand Sherlock over soon. But how could he? How could he just hand his brother's body over to people he hardly knew? How could he put his brother in the ground and walk away?

Mycroft made absolutely no move to release his baby brother. He would sooner allow his own heart to be ripped from his chest.
Paul shifted out of the doorway when Miller murmured to him that things would soon be much more unpleasant for Mycroft if they did not take Sherlock's body.

He crossed over the detritus of medical wrappers and other refuse used in the second code of the day, crouching down in front of Mycroft without touching him, lacing his fingers between his knees.

"Mycroft," he called out softly, avoiding looking down at the body of his second patient. "You can see him again at the wake." His tone was very soft, gentle as he could be, "but it's time to let him go. You've done every single thing you could have for him, and now it's time to let him go."

"I was supposed to protect him," Mycroft whispered in a flat tone and brushed Sherlock's hair off his face. "I was always supposed to protect him. You know what? The first time my parents ever took me seriously, the first time they ever gave me a serious charge, was the day Sherlock was brought home. They very clearly told me that I was supposed to take care of him. I was six. I took it very seriously. You know psychology. Tell me, what does it do to the mind to have failed at something that one has worked for nearly forty years to keep up with?"

Paul was quiet for a moment, watching Mycroft spend his last moments with his baby brother. The tragedy of the day was nothing short of stunning.

"You were pivotal in shaping the sort of man who laid his life down for another. Your brother walked into hell to save the man he loved from further suffering. You shaped the sort of man who, despite it all, was utterly selfless. He walked willingly into this, and you pulled him back out. I do not see this as a failure, Mycroft. Now," he gentled himself again, finally reaching out and touching the back of Mycroft's hand where it cradled Sherlock's head, "he won't be alone," he whispered, trying to meet Mycroft's eye, "he's going with John and Greg. He won't be alone. There is a stretcher outside. You can carry him there, if you'd rather. It's time."

"Don't coddle me, Paul. He isn't with Greg and John. He didn't go to some mythical place where the neurons in his mind somehow form a collective conscience without the cells or the synapses. He is dead." Mycroft looked at Sherlock one more time and kissed his forehead, which was much too cold.

Slowly, he stood. "Move," he whispered. Sherlock was cradled in his arms, but his legs were growing stiff, and stayed unnaturally straight. "Just move. Please."

There was not a person in sight who failed to move out of Mycroft's way. Medics at the door moved forward, closing the distance that Mycroft had to carry the body of his sibling. Mycroft lowered Sherlock down onto the stretcher and arranged his long limbs as best he could. He pulled the sheet up to his neck, as if to tuck him in for sleep, but after a moment's pause, pulled it up over his head as well. "Goodbye, 'Lock," he whispered. "I love you. I wish you knew that. I love you." Mycroft kept one hand over the body of his baby brother for one more moment before withdrawing.

He took a few steps back then and simply stared. "I suppose you'll have to take him to Bart's now. Could you take him with John?"

Miller drew in a slow breath, putting a hand on Mycroft's shoulder. "It's been hours, Mycroft. They've already taken John and Greg. I'm so sorry."

"Right. Yes. Stupid...Sentiment. It doesn't matter now, does it? Nothing matters now."

Paul kept a concerned eye on Mycroft, wondering if they would be adding a forth body to the count. It was just before midnight. Perhaps if Mycroft had the responsibility of his family, he'd push through. "I can contact your family for you, if you'd like," he offered gently.
Mycroft blinked at Paul. His family? Wasn't his family being rolled away on a stretcher? "Oh," he gasped. "Mother and father. Of course. Right. No...No...I'll...I'll do it. Thank you. I'll...I'll go home." Mycroft didn't want to be in this place a second longer, the place where his baby brother had stopped.

--- Six weeks later ---

The form of Mycroft Holmes was not difficult to make out, standing in the graveyard, looking down. Martha Hudson made her way through the scattered graves and approached the three newest, all in a neat row.

She came to stand beside the elder brother, staring down at the cold markers that stood as placeholders for lives far too vibrant for the stones to mark.

For several moments she was silent, eyes watering as she read over the names, the inscriptions on each well known to her already. "Every day I tell myself I'm not going to come," she said quite abruptly, "and every day makes a liar of me."

"Yes," Mycroft drawled. "Myself as well. It's a strange custom to hold on to, visiting him even though he has no idea I'm here." He paused for a moment, then looked sadly at Mrs. Hudson. "He cared a great deal about you. All three of them, really, but Sherlock most."

Mycroft looked at the markers again. The grass had yet to cover the fresh graves, but it was sprouting in little chutes in odd patches where the seeds had been scattered. Mycroft hadn't gained back the weight he'd lost, nor had he caught up on the sleep. His eyes were ringed with perpetual red, and the dark circles under his eyes were tattooed in place.

He was damaged. But of all those involved, he was the least so.

"I had Moran killed yesterday," he muttered to Mrs. Hudson. "I thought it would be more...satisfying. I ordered a messy kill. Had him shot in the stomach by a sniper, then in the leg, then the chest. He bled out in the street, alone, and in pain." Mycroft blinked in surprise and looked to the small, aging woman beside him. "I'm sorry, I don't know why I'm telling you this."

He cast his eyes to the graves once again. They were cold, just as Sherlock had been. The silence was deafening, and Mycroft wished to drown it out with Sherlock's childhood laughter, his humorous bickering, or any sign of life. He wished the sounds of Sherlock's violin would float into the still air from behind him, that he could turn around and see Sherlock grinning there, claiming this had been all some sort of trick to get rid of some unseen enemy more deadly than Moriarty. He longed for Sherlock to walk from behind a tree and shout that he was bored, or that people were idiots, or that Mycroft was an incurable snob.

He would have killed for the bickering of the blogger and consulting detective, to see the way Sherlock looked at John and John at Sherlock, or to watch them go home, all smiles and happy stories, after a case.

But he could have none of those things, because Sherlock and the two men he'd let into his life were in the ground with him.

Mrs. Hudson was quiet for quite a while, breaking the silence with a deep breath and nodding. "I'm glad to hear that horrible man has been put to an end," she said in her harshest tone, which really had
no bite to it at all.

She looked to Mycroft then, glancing up at his face before looking to Sherlock's grave.

"He adored you. Hated it, but he did. You never stopped being his big brother. I think, for Sherlock, you were a bit larger than life." She paused for a moment, touching her lips as she took in the graves. "They were like sons to me. My boys."

She brushed away a single tear that had collected on her lashes before it was allowed to fall. "John's sister came and collected his things earlier this morning. I'd never met her before. Didn't seem right handing them over, but what could I do? Everything of Sherlock's is still there, untouched, waiting for you. I think, once you've come to take them, I'm going to move. It's so quiet without them. Sometimes I swear I can hear him walking about, playing in the middle of the night." She shook her head, gently touching Mycroft's elbow.

"I wish there was something I could do to help, Mycroft. You need feeding up." She studied him quietly, noting all the features he and Sherlock shared. "You were a good brother to him."

"I could have been better," Mycroft whispered. His posture, at least, had corrected itself, and he stood tall. "I hear him play as well. I have tapes. That one he played for John all the time...I'll send you copies."

Mycroft turned and faced away from the graves. "I've got to go. I'm sorry. They were good, your boys. Goodbye, Mrs. Hudson."

She did not stop him, watching sadly for a few moments as Mycroft walked away from her.

It was the end of an era. The papers would soon forget, and the grass would grow. Those that knew them would go on to form new memories, occasionally thinking on them but little else.

She walked right up to John's headstone, carefully sweeping a leaf from the marble. A few short steps later she repeated the motion on Sherlock's grave. "You were good, both my boys," she whispered, gently patting the top of the dark marble.

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A month later, Baker Street sat uninhabited. Dust began to settle where two chairs had been, the mantle cleared away, the shelves emptied. The wall was darker in the shape of a bison head, leaving only the yellow face, smiling in memory of what had been, but never would be.

Baker Street was silent.

It was a deep silence, not the violet silence of a quiet room, or the light purple silence of a pause in a conversation. Nor was it the rich, satin purple silence of a sill night. This was the near-black, ebbing silence that stole the life from one's bones and rang in the ears, bringing madness and depression.

Had Sherlock been alive, there would have been music, laughter, brilliant remarks, witty retorts, and no end of enthusiasm.

Had John been alive, there would have been strong, calm words, bubbling laughter, and wonderful stories.

Had Greg been alive, there would have been recounting of fantastic escapades, constant, lighthearted banter, and the happy ease of being surrounded by friends.
But they were all dead in the ground, there were none of these things, and so, the silence remained.

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