The Red-Headed League

by sherlock221Bismymuse

Summary

Retroactively gifting this to LadyGlinda because one of her comments on another fic changed the direction of this one halfway through!

Sherlock and Mycroft love each other but cannot be together. Gregory saves the day. There may be a few twists in the tale along the way....

1st Sept 2019--this fic is now complete! The chapter list is ridiculously long but each chapter is short, so go for it :) Hope you enjoy it cos its a bit of a mad ride but I had a blast writing it and I hope you have fun reading it too!

Notes

Title inspired by the original story of course! It first appeared in The Strand Magazine in 1891.

Chapter 1

Mycroft has been working undercover for a month and is even living in rented rooms despite having his own small flat in London.

They have been tracking a child trafficking gang for a while and they seem to be close to cracking it.

He has been hanging around in a pub where one of their key informants was going to meet him if possible…..when he saw something that made him do a double take.

It is…is it? It is Sherlock.

His mind stuttered to a halt. Sherlock is barely 19. What is he doing here??

He looked so lost and sad that it breaks Mycroft’s heart.

He tried to move closer without being identified. He has changed his hair colour since he was recruited by MI5 and is currently also wearing a wig and lenses and some kind of dentures and cheek pads but he feels absolutely sure that Sherlock would suss him out in seconds.

He needs to be very cautious, so he moved in just a bit closer and observes.

The bar tender seemed to know him. So Sherlock must be coming here often?

Just then a red haired man came and sat next to him and asked for a drink. Sherlock looked up so hopefully and then looked away, almost in tears.

Mycroft was completely baffled and before he could start processing the meaning of this he got a call from another agent asking him to leave right away and meet them at a warehouse a few blocks away.

The next two weeks were too hectic to even get enough sleep, let alone spend time in his Mind Palace where he had stored that wisp of a memory for further analysis.

The first day that he was freed from the task at hand, (the ring leaders of the trafficking gang having been found and locked up), he promptly went back to that bar.

He was exhausted, weary to the bone at the thought of all the evil that still existed in his beloved city and in the world at large and feeling, as he did sometimes, like a very, really very small cog in a very large, unfeeling, inexorably moving machine.

But he could not rest because every time he closed his eyes he would see Sherlock’s face, the deep disappointment, mixed with longing and sorrow that he had glimpsed on his face that day.

He remembered the little boy who would come running to him for every tiny hurt and cut and bruise and want him to kiss it better and trust him to always be there to save him protect him, keep him safe from all manner of bad things—bullies, red ants, exploding chemistry experiments and punishments meted out by teachers and Mummy.
Mycroft had been his shield and his cloak for so long …..and yet…. here they were now.

Sherlock had been resentful and furious when he had left for university and did not seem to have forgiven him. He had rebuffed every attempt at reconciliation and rejected every effort that Mycroft had made to make things better.

Mycroft’s heart ached and he patched up the broken pieces after every attempt and told himself: Alone protects me.

Sometimes when he was on a mission and not sure how it would end, he would look at the photo of the beautiful angel who had been born as his brother and he would kiss that photo before they went charging into whatever danger they had to.

*Goodbye Sherlock. I love you.*

He would say it just in case the universe was listening and could find a way to let him know.

Sometimes he wondered what Sherlock would think if Mycroft really did die during one of these jobs and they found his photo in his personal effects.

He would shake himself out of these morbid thoughts and carry on with his work.

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Today he waited at the pub with a heavy heart and wondered what Sherlock was doing. He sat for four hours and then finally left.

He came again and again and finally on the third day his heart leaped up as he saw the familiar figure standing at the door, looking around, the same sad and hopeful expression on his face as he loped to the bar and asked for a drink.

A few minutes later a man slid onto the stool next to his and started talking to him. It was apparent that they had planned to meet. Sherlock looked at him and seemed to have attempted some conversation but then suddenly stood up and shook his head and left abruptly.

Mycroft was genuinely mystified and observed the other man look at the bartender and shrug.

Hmm…..this man was also a red head.

Two days later they had a repeat of the same situation. Sherlock came in, another red haired man came in, Sherlock tried to talk to him and then left abruptly.

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Mycroft knew that Sherlock was using drugs and he had been helpless against it.

He had found him more than once in the past year and when he did then Sherlock would be so vulnerable and clingy but would push him away as soon as he sobered up. He would yell at him to leave him alone and not touch him and that he hated him.

As he remembered all that he wondered if that was some new kink.
Were these people drug dealers? Was this some kind of a...a red-headed league?!

Was Sherlock in some deep trouble?

He suddenly felt as lost as Sherlock had looked and his heart was cold with fear. He needed to figure this out.

He came two days later and went to the bar and asked for a drink. After two drinks he started a conversation with the bartender.

After a few random, hopefully innocent sounding back and forth Mycroft asked casually if there was anyone interesting who came regularly. He shrugged as is to say he didn’t care either way but it had been a while since he had been on a date and ..........he trailed off as the bartender raised an eyebrow and just looked at him.

“Mate I don’t know what’s going on but you have had your eye on that fey young thing who has been coming for the last month.”

Mycroft had to really struggle to keep a blank face while making a mental note to recruit this young woman as their informant because clearly she had amazing observation skills.

“Which fey young thing? Surely you don’t serve drink to underage persons in this bar do you?”

The bartender snorted. “I saw the way you have been looking at him. Sorry mate, he went home with someone last evening.”

Mycroft felt his stomach drop out. He had never expected that Sherlock was a virgin but he went off with someone he met at the bar??!

He cleared his throat and tried to sound casual. “Oh ok. Well, not that I care but do you know who he went with?”

“You are kidding me right?!” the bartender said looking affronted at this insult to her intelligence. “You lot need to coordinate better. He wanted to go with some red head, seems to have something for them. Nothing but red-heads all month long, but then this other bloke came along. Older. Grey haired. Good looking chap. And if you ask me-- he was an undercover cop--- doing a better job at it than you are.” She smirked. “But hey I am just a bartender here. And the boy is old enough so.........” she shrugged.

Mycroft’s head was reeling. How was he going to find him? Was he safe?

What the HELL was a cop doing picking him up at a bar??
Mycroft goes looking and ...well...seek and ye shall find.

Mycroft was not yet senior enough to have too many resources at his disposal but he still managed to set some wheels in motion and by the end of the week he had a name and an address.

That Saturday he found himself in front of an ordinary door in an ordinary apartment block. He checked the name on the door.

Yes. Gregory Lestrade.

This was the right place.

He knocked.

When the door was opened a few seconds later by a handsome grey haired fit man, Mycroft assessed him in three seconds. He already knew that he was a cop and had had a reasonably decent career so far but the files hadn’t told him that his eyes looked kind.

He felt himself let out a breath he had not realized he was holding since the day he had found out that Sherlock had gone off with this man.

Surely this man could not have harmed Sherlock in any way?

“Sherlock Holmes was last seen in your company, leaving The Red Lion pub in Bloomsbury.”

“Are you asking me or telling me mate?” Greg asked, slow smile, still friendly, hand on the door but obviously now alert.

“Let’s just say that Sherlock is a Person of Interest and questions are being asked about you.” Mycroft said ominously. “Files have been opened.”


Mycroft stiffened. This man was not only not intimidated or guilty but he was challenging him? Not aggressively but confidently.

Mycroft wasn’t sure what more he could say without making any obvious allegations…..so he was grappling with what to say next when Sherlock himself came out of the bedroom.

He was wearing pajama bottoms and a too- loose T- shirt, clearly not his, yawning and stretching. He ambled in, barely awake, (or so it seemed), and came to Greg, wrapped his arms around his waist and gave him a kiss on the lips.

“Morning bad boy.” Sherlock mumbled as he wandered off to the kitchen, rubbing the sleep out of
his eyes, calling out over his back. “Tea for your visitor? I need something really strong cos you barely let me sleep last night.”

Mycroft just stood there, blinking, rendered utterly speechless for once. He seemed to have been made of stone.

Greg was staring at Sherlock’s retreating back like he had seen a ghost.

When Mycroft cleared his throat, Greg turned so fast to look at him he almost gave himself whiplash. Mycroft asked, with one eyebrow raised in enquiry and a wintry smile on his face.

“Friends? Hanging out?”

“Close friends.” Greg said in a strangled voice. “Maybe we were playing Pictionary all night. Not sure that it is any of your business really Mr. …?”

“Holmes. Mycroft Holmes.” Mycroft said with a sour expression on his face. “Sherlock’s older brother.”

Greg’s eyebrows shot off his forehead and he almost choked as he tried to say something in response. “Uh…ok…” He managed finally. “But how did you know he was here?!”

“Means and ways Detective Sergeant. Means and ways. I needed to know if he was safe. He seems to be and while I am not sure I approve of the police in *Her Majesty’s Service* picking up young men from pubs, I suppose he is of age, even if barely so, and he seems to be here willingly so perhaps I had best go.” With that pronouncement Mycroft turned to leave. He looked back once and said quietly.” But I will be keeping an eye on things and if a single hair on his head is harmed, you will answer to me."

Greg stood there open mouthed and bewildered, still holding the door open and staring at the space where Mycroft had been standing, as though hypnotized when Sherlock came out from the kitchen.

He shook his head in exasperation and took Greg’s hand off the door knob and shut the front door.

“Lestrade!” He hissed in his ear. “Some warning that he was at the front door would have been helpful. I TOLD you he would find me somehow.”

“He ….but you said you were IN LOVE with Mycroft. There is NO way there are two people with that name on this entire planet! And he just said that he is your…your older brother??!” Greg said, still dazed and pointing at the front door.

“Yes genius!” Sherlock said sarcastically. “That is *precisely* why I can’t tell him. I can’t change how I feel but I can protect *him*. And please don’t be so *boring*.” Sherlock said, rolling his eyes.

Greg looked at this scrawny crazy brilliant kid who wanted to protect his older brother. Who was clearly The Man. Someone with connections. Power. Probably working for the Secret Service.

“Oh yeah, I can see that he needs to be protected. Totally.” Greg said sarcastically. “And are we going to keep kissing now that he has gone?”

Sherlock snorted. “Don’t get too excited.” And he ducked from Greg’s hand but got his ear boxed anyway.

“But Sherlock……”
“Oh stop being so BORING Lestrade. Yes, I am in love with him. No, he doesn’t care. Never will. End of story. Moving on. We have more interesting things to discuss. I read the case files you brought home yesterday and I think that you should either retire or you should hire me. You have missed at least 7 clues in the case of the stabbed jewel thief and overlooked three obvious lies in the witness interviews about the apparent suicide from Thor Bridge. Oh and you have a prize idiot on forensics who doesn’t know his tarsals from his carpals because……

Greg raised his hand to stop him and shook his head. “Hey, relax. I need some breakfast before I can deal with all this Sherlock!!”

“Food! Sleep! Food again! You are just a slave to your transport. I am a brain Lestrade. The rest of me is a mere appendix.” Sherlock said in an annoyed tone.

“Yeah yeah. You are only a brain…….sure……. Bastard. In freaking love with his own bloody brother and preaching to me…”Greg muttered and cursed under his breath.

In just six days this young man had fit into his life as easily as if they had known each other forever. He remembered finding him in that pub, while he was undercover, waiting for an informant. Something about his body language made Greg think that it was a danger night. He was on the edge. Greg had seen too many cases of suicide in his short career so far and had taken the decision to haul him in, pretending it was for underage drinking and eventually ended up bringing him home.

He looked like a waif and undernourished and miserable. Greg could have no more left him to fend for himself than he would have kicked a puppy.

And now? Six days in and the brat was lording it over him. Yes obviously he was a super genius and a super brat too. Greg grinned and shook his head and he listened to Sherlock talk nineteen to the dozen about the case and the clues. He was destined to be a great man.

Greg was going to make sure he would be a good man too.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

An impromptu picnic leads to confessions and reflections......and consequences

A quick trip to the crime scene later that day and Sherlock had proved to be absolutely right in his deductions. He strutted around looking so pleased that Greg felt something warm inside him. This young man, just a kid really, was truly special.

Ergo, the man he was in love with must be equally special. Worth it.

He wasn’t sure if he could help him fix it, or how he could help him fix it….but he was going to try.

As they were driving back to his flat Greg asked Sherlock, really casually. “So, tell me more about all this falling in love business.”

Sherlock promptly stiffened. “Not your division Lestrade. My messed up heart is not one of your crime scenes.”

Greg smirked. \textit{Bastard was making it sound like poetry. Well…well….well…..he also knew an interrogation technique or two, didn’t he….}

“Ok never mind. Listen, it’s a lovely weekend and I haven’t been able to get out of work for simply ages. Do you want to drive down somewhere for a picnic?” And before Sherlock could reject the offer with his usual disdain, he suggested. “Let’s not leave London if you don’t want to but if you come along and behave yourself this weekend maybe I will arrange for you to visit the Black Museum sometime soon.”

\textit{Oh the radiant glow on the boy’s face was something totally worth it} Greg thought with a grin.

“Really?!?” Sherlock said breathlessly. “We could do that?!?”

In that moment he looked so much younger than his 19 years that Greg’s heart ached for him. He wanted him to be happy like this. Excited. Grinning. Not brooding and lurking around in pubs and trying to hook up with dodgy men.

\textit{What the hell was it with him and all those red- heads anyway?}

Sherlock glared at him. “Stop thinking so loudly Lestrade.”

Greg smiled.

\textit{Yes, offence is the best defence isn’t it? I did my Masters in Psychology kiddo. Let us see how you enjoy the silent treatment.}

So, he did not say a single word to him till they reached the Chelsea Physic Gardens. Sherlock was almost beside himself with joy when they got there. He looked as though he might actually turn cartwheels because he was so giddy with excitement. Greg laughed and found them a lovely spot
under an oak tree and sat there with the bag of sandwiches, some packets of crisps and the bottles of lemonade he had picked up on the way.

Then he lay down under the tree and spent a good half an hour in thought as Sherlock went to explore. His mind flitted from contemplating the purpose of the universe, the potential for crime on Mars if humans did start living there, the hope that Sherlock hadn’t run away with a red-head and such other random musings before his eyelids became heavy and he dozed off.

Sherlock woke him up almost two hours later by tickling his face with a blade of grass. Greg woke up clutching his chest and cuffed the brat for almost giving him a heart attack.

Sherlock just giggled and called him an old man and showed him the notes he had taken of all the poisonous plants as Greg attempted to calm his panicked heart and wake up a bit more. Then they ate their picnic under the tree, with no protests from Sherlock, who was, not surprisingly, ravenous after his field trip.

“This was lovely.” Sherlock said with a sigh, as he lay down next to Greg. Greg smiled, still not saying a word.

Sherlock was also quiet for a minute and then he spoke. Slowly, his words heavy with longing and the warmth of the afternoon sun.

“It was always him.” He said.

Greg almost stopped breathing so as to not interrupt.

“I did not realize what it was when I was younger but when I recognized it for what it was, it was so obvious. I spent so many years hero-worshipping him, thinking that I wanted to be him, when what I really wanted was to be with him. To be his. Not that I wasn’t. Every happy memory of my life has been with him or about him in some way or another. He colours his hair now because he does undercover work but he is a red head. Ginger actually. A warm shade of auburn. The beacon of my childhood. I saw my first glimpses of the world in his arms, from his shoulders, or on his back, my chin resting on those auburn curls, soft and springy, my arms around his neck. Whenever I was in a crowd and afraid, as soon as I saw those auburn locks approaching me, it was like seeing a lighthouse in a storm. When I was lonely and bored and I saw his red head enter the house or peep at me from the door to my room, it would feel like the sun had come out. Like my heart and mind could come out of hibernation. I would sit in the library almost hypnotized by his voice as he read out poetry to me, his hand tugging and twisting at those curls. There were times when I was unwell and I would wake up to see was those curls, resting on his arms as he slept on my bed, or on the chair, having watched out for me all night.”

Greg lay next to him, listening intently but not moving, not saying a word, for fear of spooking him.

“My love for him grew beyond the boundaries of what it should have been. I don’t know how or when. When I realized what it was, it was already there. It had taken root in my heart. I tried to hide it. I really did. But it just bubbled over sometimes. I was more terrified that he would hate me for it than I was desperate to have it reciprocated. But he really is so much smarter than me. I think he deduced it. I think he saw it in my eyes. I tried really very hard not to show it but sometimes just the sight of him would take my breath away. I wanted him. So badly. I wanted him to touch me. To kiss me. To say he was only mine. That we could be together forever. I dreamt these million fantasies Lestrade. But I think he realized it…and distanced himself. I saw fear in his eyes. He was afraid of me and my disgusting love. He had left for college which was bad enough but when he came back he also became……cold. Aloof. He started saying things like ‘Emotions are a chemical
defect’ and ‘Alone protects us.’ I know he was trying to tell me that he knew how I felt and that I had better keep my distance.”

Sherlock was silent for a half a minute.

“Have you ever used a blotting paper on a drop of ink Lestrade? I was like that. I was completely absorbed into my love for Mycroft. Bleeding out at the edges of my desire for him. Soaked up into non-existence outside of him.”

He huffed a bitter laugh. “I have never had greater appreciation for poets than I did after I fell in love. It was like they knew my pain and my yearning and carved it out of my heart and bled it out in ink onto their paper.”

“Both of us would go to church till I was ten. He out of duty, me out of a chance to be alone with him. To worship. Not the divine being they put in front of me but the one by my side. Have you ever felt this kind of love Lestrade that turns you inside out and tears you apart? If you did then you would understand why I take drugs. Why nothing short of oblivion can dull this ache.”

Greg was holding his breath, listening to this cascade of poetry and tragedy pouring out of these young lips. So young. Too young. He felt a riot of emotions inside him that he had never thought possible. He felt deep affection and protectiveness towards this incandescent creature. He felt envy for his depth of feelings. He felt jealous of the man who had inspired it. He felt relief at never having suffered that level of pain.

But he also felt an odd longing to experience that for himself someday. He had simply never been that much in love.

And he wondered if Mycroft did reciprocate the feelings, but could not confess to them.

Hell, he felt half in love with this crazy brat and he had known him for all of six days!

He didn’t believe in destiny or fate or god but in that moment he was willing to believe in them all. If only to convince himself that he had found this young man in order to help him. Save him and keep him alive. And he silently vowed that he would to that to the best of his abilities.

When Sherlock spoke again his voice was a bit choked.

“I can’t have him the way I want to so I thought I would deconstruct him and try to find things which might substitute in some ways. Something to fool my mind with. Distractions. Diversions. Games. So I bought the cologne he uses. But it made the craving worse. I bought books of the poems he would read to me and I read them aloud to myself. They made me miserable. I set up a profile on a dating site to meet red heads. But when I saw them in the flesh, I couldn’t even bear to look at them let alone talk to them. After one of these ‘dates’ I even ran out and threw up because it just wasn’t him. I was trembling from the yearning and the utter and complete lack of him. That day the world seemed so bleak and empty because I realized to the core of my being that it would never be him and that I would rather cease to exist than live this half destroyed tormented life. That was the evening you found me.

It was a foolish idea I know. But I was desperate. The only thing that makes me forget or at least not crave him all the time is the drugs. Replacing one addiction with another….I know I know…I should not be telling you all this but I need you to know. I am not what you have seen of me. I could be better. I was better. If unrequited love is hell then I am driven by the hounds of hell Lestrade. They chase me all day and all night. They never let me go.”
Greg slowly turned to his side now, to look at Sherlock’s face, twisted and bitter in his misery. He wanted to just scoop him up and comfort him but he knew better than to try. So he just stayed where he was and listened.

“He was …he still is ….my… everything …you know. He is inside my Mind Palace. He is my heartbeat. He is my home. My happiness. My memories. My refuge. It is all him. Only him.”

Sherlock also turned now and looked at Greg and smiled crookedly. “Apparently my first word was My. Mummy still tries to convince herself that it was an attempt at saying Mummy….but I think we all know the truth.”

Greg propped himself up on one elbow. “Your father….”

Sherlock snorted and rolled his eyes. “Stop with your Freudian analysis and useless psychology degree Lestrade. It is not a father figure fixation nor did I have a repressed childhood. My uncle used to attend dinner parties in women’s clothes for heaven’s sake. No. It is what it is.”

He paused and took a deep breath. “And Mycroft loves me. I know he does. He practically raised me. He cared for me. He protected me. He read to me, he taught me everything I know. Deductions, patterns, formulae, languages. But he loves me only as a brother. And now that is not enough. Now that I want more, so much more…..it will never be enough…..”

They were both silent for a while.

“No Lestrade I will not grow out of it, no, it is not a crush and no, there will never be anyone else.” Sherlock said snippily. “I don’t know how you interrogate any criminals if you can’t stop yourself from thinking so loudly.”

Greg just sighed and lay back down again. *This was going to be tougher than he imagined.*

*Did he dare*…..and he stretched out one arm in invitation.

To his eternal surprise, Sherlock hesitated only for a second before shuffling closer and resting his head on it. Greg wrapped his arm around him, bringing him closer and then pretended for the next few minutes that he had not noticed the skinny trembling arm thrown around his chest nor could he feel any of the tears that were currently drenching his shirt.

Mycroft was looking at the photos the next day. Grainy and black and white and taken from a safe distance, but the body language was coming through rather clearly.

*Not quite Pictionary at all, now was it? And in public too.*

He had left the D.S’s flat that earlier day with a fire churning in his belly and the flames licking at his already bruised heart.

Sherlock had kissed Gregory. On the lips. And then gone into the kitchen to make tea.

Mycroft would never confess it in a million years but he was an utterly old-fashioned romantic at
heart. He always felt that he had been born in the wrong century. He would have been so happy in the Regency period. Or even during Victorian times.

He would have worn lace and frills and velvet with delight and so would Sherlock. How mesmerizing his beautiful brother would have looked. Far more enchanting than any muse that Shelley or Keats or Byron had ever found.

His fantasies around Sherlock mainly involved sitting at his feet and reading poetry to him as he rested his head on Sherlock’s lap. They involved feeding Sherlock with his hands……and have him lick his fingers. Slowly…deliberately……and maybe there would be a few kisses in between. Kisses that he would plant softly…..on Sherlock’s delicate rosy lips.

His daydreams involved gazing at Sherlock as they both went down a slow moving stream in a boat, dappled sunlight falling on that angelic face. They involved holding Sherlock’s hand as they went for a long walk. They involved listening to Sherlock play the violin as the sun was setting.

There were no grand gestures, no extravagance and drama.

His fantasies mostly involved slow, soft, easy domesticity……where they would lay in each other’s arms as they woke up and the rest of the world would disappear for all that it mattered. Where he would look into those captivating eyes and Sherlock would look back with his delicious smile. Where he would worship this captivating god and where Sherlock would say to him ‘I love you and I am yours’.

What more could even heaven possibly have to offer?!

He had seen a glimpse of that heaven in those few minutes at the D.S’s door. A peek at a life he would never have. At the only life he had ever wanted.

Sherlock for his own. Not just as a brother. No. Not as a brother at all.

Well, Greg was not Sherlock’s brother. Did he realize that he was the luckiest man in the world?

Sherlock was in his bedroom, in his kitchen, in his home. And now he was apparently also in his arms, in public. Maybe he was over–interpreting but Sherlock looked so vulnerable and yet so comfortable. The man was holding him so tenderly and possessively.

This had to be love.

Whether he liked it or not. This looked like love.

So Mycroft took that photo home and stuck it up inside his closet, where he would be able to see it every day. A reminder of reality. Harsh reality.

His reality.

He had tried so hard to hide his feelings from Sherlock for fear that he would laugh at him or be disgusted by it. He had pushed him away deliberately and ruthlessly. For his own good.

It had pained him to see the confusion and hurt in Sherlock’s eyes the first time he had done it. It had twisted a knife in his heart to see that change to uncertainty and doubt and finally be replaced by the same cold snark that he had taught himself to wear as a shield.

All lives end. All hearts are broken.
Caring is not an advantage.

*How could he possibly allow himself to have these feelings?!* He was meant to care for his younger brother and protect him. Not have these depraved cravings and illicit longings. Not have fever dreams and desperate desires.

He would never allow even a glimpse of his filthy longings to touch his brother. He himself would stay in the shadows and protect him, care for him, but never ever allow him to know the satanic greed of his heart that wanted to possess him, grapple him to his soul with hoops of steel.

So, he would carry his guilty burden in silence and with stoicism. After all, not all hearts who love can ever be promised by any power in the world that they will find love in return.

He would be strong. He could do this for Sherlock’s happiness.

He could do anything for Sherlock’s happiness.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Intimacy, possessiveness, despair, togetherness, yearning, accepting......so many kinds of love ......so many different ways to express.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Before Mycroft knew it, almost one year had gone by.

Containing within it two danger nights where he had Greg had sat in vigil as Sherlock barely clawed his way back to life.

Mycroft had spent all those hours by his bedside brooding on how he would not survive even a single day beyond Sherlock. He was heartsick at the irony of the fact that he was the one with a dangerous job but it was his brother, his beloved, battling for his life.

Thank heavens for Lestrade he thought, the old ache at seeing them together having been dulled into submission on most days.

The last time Mycroft had found out that Sherlock had overdosed he had barely managed to dial Lestrade’s number and send him the address, both of them reaching the disgustingly filthy doss house almost within minutes of each other, expressions of terror and despair equally writ large on both their faces.

The paramedics had given Sherlock chest compressions to resuscitate him in the ambulance and Mycroft had had the dubious relief of being the one allowed to ride with him as next- of- kin.

But he did feel a pang of sympathy for Lestrade as he was shut out and followed them in the police car. Maybe he should talk to Sherlock about formalizing their relationship in some way. Maybe register the man as Sherlock’s next- of- kin he thought even as his heart was squeezed by icy cold fingers and every synapse in his brain pleaded No! At least let us have this!

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When Sherlock finally opened his eyes at the hospital the next day and seemed to almost smile at him and lift his arm as though to touch his face, Mycroft thought he was going to weep.

But then as the waves of consciousness grew he saw the shutter came down behind his eyes and Sherlock had whispered Lestrade’s name.

The D.S had been standing by already and had moved to his side and taken Sherlock’s hand.

Mycroft left the room swiftly thereafter because there was only so much that even his agonized heart could cope with.
To Mycroft’s genuine surprise Sherlock had moved out of Greg’s flat after a couple of months and taken up a room elsewhere in some hovel on Montague Street. Then a few months later he had moved to Baker Street, renting rooms from some lady who owed Greg a favour.

Mycroft never quite understood what had happened but he knew that Sherlock still saw the Detective Sergeant almost every day. He was apparently a Consulting Detective to Scotland Yard now in some un-official capacity.

Sherlock seemed to have also taken over some space at the lab in St. Bart’s. Again in an un-official capacity. Mycroft thought fondly of the days when Sherlock wanted to be a pirate. He may not be riding the high seas now but he still loved living his life on the edge, in shadows and hidden spaces, just as much as Mycroft did in his own profession.

That young medical student who was doing her internship at the forensic pathology department seemed to have a soft spot for him and Sherlock seemed to spend hours and hours there.

Mycroft had kept some surveillance on Ms. Molly Hooper but stopped after a week when it became clear that she was no threat. Sherlock seemed fond of her in his own abrupt way but there seemed to be no danger of it becoming anything else.

And even if it did….Mycroft thought with a sigh….what could he possibly do about it anyway?!

Of course there was no real income from Sherlock’s work but Mycroft was so pleased that Sherlock had found something that genuinely made him happy that he had not been able to resist sending him a beautiful black coat.

Mycroft had not expected any thanks and he had not got any.

But he knew that Sherlock was never seen without the coat now, and that was enough. That had been more than enough.

What had almost staggered him the first time he noticed it though was the long deep blue scarf Sherlock seemed to wear every day. It had been his before he left for college and in fact had spent a couple of hours fruitlessly searching for it before he gave up and left home without it.

Perhaps it was a different scarf that just happened to look like his old one, Mycroft mused, as he watched the surveillance footage with tired eyes.

Since the last incident he had managed to increase the hours of surveillance although he was not yet senior enough to be able to assign anyone to watch it later, so that task had fallen to him. It was not really a hardship, considering that it gave him hours of indulgent viewing, looking at that beloved face--- frowning over a book, pacing around in the living room, sleeping on the sofa.

He figured that Sherlock and Greg lived separately so as to not have any questions about conflict of interest at work, because they did seem to spend almost every free minute together and were of course together at work.
He had to admit that Sherlock looked happier than he had seen him in the last few years. He smiled more often. He looked healthier. He had stayed away from drugs.

*What more could he ask for* Mycroft thought as he looked out of the window of his office at yet another wet and grey evening and decided to go to the Diogenes Club again rather than face the clawing loneliness of his house with the palpable absence of any loved one.

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It had been almost a year since Greg had found Sherlock and already he could not remember his life before that.

*What had he done without this insane genius who gave him these rapid fire deductions at work and spouted poetry and philosophy at home?*

Greg thought with a chuckle that he had probably heard more Shakespeare and Shelley and Keats in the past year than he had during his English Minor at college. *Posh brat.*

What would he do without this mercurial young man who seemed to guess his thoughts sometimes even before he had them? This overgrown boy for whom he had started buying chocolate digestives and ginger snaps while he also tried to persuade him to eat regularly and healthily.

“It’s just my transport Lestrade.” Sherlock would dismiss him airily whenever he brought up the topic of sleep, food and rest. “I am a brain. The rest of me is a mere appendix.”

Greg would grin and shake his head whenever he heard that, remembering the looks Sherlock attracted whenever he stepped out swishing that great big coat of his with the collar swept up. That ‘appendix’ of his made knees wobble. He recalled the almost pathetic attempts that some of his constables, both male and female, would make to catch Sherlock’s eye. They would be terrified of being ruthlessly cut down but they would be desperate to have his attention anyway.

Greg often thanked the lucky stars that had put Sherlock on the side of angels, even if he most decidedly wasn’t one. *Who knows what havoc he could have wrecked on this world if he had gone dark.*

Meanwhile Sherlock swanned around utterly oblivious of anyone’s glances and desires. For someone who made almost magical deductions and observed even molecules moving in the air, he had truly staggering tunnel vision when it came to relationships. It was as though he had limited space for it in that bloody Mind Palace of his. Mycroft seemed to occupy most of it and now Greg had been allocated some room in it. Maybe Molly and Mrs. Hudson had some distant corner.

And that was it.

He had no interest in ‘wittering’ as he called it and Sherlock’s face when his landlady turned up and tried to chat with him was a priceless study in horrified restraint as he clutched at the sofa arms like a Victorian lady might have clutched at pearls.

Greg had offered to buy him some smelling salts the first time he had seen this expression.

Greg himself had of course managed pleasant small talk and when Mrs. Hudson had finally left, taking the empty teapot and the cleaned out plates that had contained chocolate cookies, Sherlock glared at him.
“What?” Greg said with a shrug. “Conversation is an art, Sunshine. Goldfish like us need to fill up these spaces with white noise.”

Sherlock frowned. Not that he ever forgot Mycroft but this reference to goldfish made him miss him even more acutely.

He remembered the Christmas dinner when he had almost come to blows with some cousin and how Mycroft had defused the situation, like a born diplomat. He had taken a furious 12 year old Sherlock to the bedroom and calmed him down. He had explained to him that he should not have expectations from any of these goldfish. They were simply not capable of understanding their genius abilities.

And that is when Mycroft had told him that emotions and sentiment were a chemical defect on the losing side.

“Did you see how Siegfried lost the argument and started yelling? That is losing one’s face. You must maintain your dignity Sherlock. Never let the other side know how badly you want something. That is the key to winning at a negotiation.”

“Is that what you do Mycie?” Sherlock had asked even as he wiped his angry tears with the back of his hand.

“Yes, Sherlock.” Mycroft had said with a fond smile. “It is the only way to navigate these waters. We may be surrounded by goldfish and piranhas, but I am the killer whale.”

And he had grinned wickedly as Sherlock had laughed at the image.

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“Killer whales have no time for pleasantry Lestrade”. Sherlock snapped. “Now go away and leave me alone!”

Greg had left without much argument. He had come to tell Sherlock that he was meeting someone for dinner. It was not a date. And anyway, it was not as if he and Sherlock have any commitments to each other. But he still had this nagging feeling that he should tell him.

In fact he had no idea how one year had swept past. He did go to the pub with his team once in a while of course and still met up with his old boxing club pals, but that was few and far between and he just wanted to have a relaxed evening.

After Sherlock had snapped at him that evening he wondered if it would be better to not tell him anything, since he had no idea how he would take it.

*Least said, soonest mended*, he thought.

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She was smart and funny and while he wasn’t really looking for a relationship, he wasn’t really into one night stands either. So, it wasn’t a ‘date’ as such but it had been a fun evening.

Until Sherlock had turned up there of course. Utterly un-expectedly.
Greg had been laughing at something she said when he looked up and saw Sherlock standing there with the oddest expression on his face. Before Greg could react Sherlock had stormed out without saying a word.

Greg had quickly apologized to his bewildered dinner companion, kept some cash to pay for his share and left the restaurant to chase after Sherlock.

He did not find him anywhere.

He gave up trying to call him after the phone rang out three times and was cut the fourth time. He was about to go home when he thought of one last place. He went to St Bart’s and found him on the roof, sitting on the ledge.

Greg moved slowly, his heart in his mouth, as he approached Sherlock. He stood still when he was five feet away and took out a cigarette and lit it.

He was sure that Sherlock had heard him come up ages ago but since he had not moved from his position, staring out at the city sprawled under them, Greg had not wanted to disturb him with words.

As he took in a deep inhale of the cigarette and blew out the smoke, he saw Sherlock reach out behind him with two fingers outstretched. Greg leaned and put the cigarette in them, carefully.

Sherlock smoked and after a few seconds Greg came forward and stood next to him.

“These things will kill you, you know.” Sherlock said eventually.

Greg raised his eyebrows but refrained from pointing out that Sherlock was the one smoking.

“I don’t know what this is Greg.” Sherlock said with a frown and Greg almost got whiplash at the speed with which he turned to look at the younger man.

_He had called him Greg?!!_ This was serious. Whatever ‘this’ was.

Greg still had no idea.

Well…actually he did have _some_ idea but he wasn’t willing to accept it. He had his own silly superstitions and he was worried that if he named it, it would disappear. And now, despite his initial promises, he wondered really if this was something he had never expected.

“It is nothing like what I feel for Mycroft, which consumes me and defines me……but when I saw you with someone else today, it just felt wrong. As though……you had betrayed me.” Sherlock was saying, sounding distant, as though he was thinking aloud. “But how can you betray me when you made no promises. When we made no promises.”

Greg was silent next to him, unsure of where this was going and terrified that he genuinely had no idea which way he wanted it to go.

“I cannot do this to you Greg. I cannot be a burden to you. I cannot demand this of you. You are already putting your professional life at risk, well somewhat at risk, by having me at crime scenes, and I have no justification to hold you to any kind of personal commitment since I cannot offer anything in return.” Sherlock paused.

“I ……” Sherlock started to say, then he took a final deep puff and turned around, got off the ledge and ground the cigarette stub under his heels. “I just don’t know what I would do without you. I
can never have Mycroft and I can never feel that deeply for anyone else. But with you I feel safe. I trust you. I don’t know what it means but….”

“Hey, don’t worry about it Sunshine.” Greg spoke up. “All relationships don’t need a name. Hell, maybe they can’t have a name. If I had known it would trouble you so much I wouldn’t have gone out with her. But it was nothing. Just a dinner. Not even a date really. I know how much you hate socializing and small talk or I would have asked you to come along.”

He laughed as Sherlock widened his eyes in horror.

“Come away from the ledge now so I can breathe! And let’s go home.” Greg paused. “Come over and stay with me today. Like old times?”

Sherlock really did roll his eyes now. “Sentiment Gregory. A chemical defect on the losing side.”

“I have already lost to you, you possessive brat.” Greg said with his warm smile, waggling his eyebrows at Sherlock.

"Be thou the rainbow in the storms of life. The evening beam that smiles the clouds away, and tints tomorrow with prophetic ray.” Sherlock quoted dreamily.

“Yeah and here I thought you were my sunshine.” Greg said as he pulled Sherlock closer and linked their arms together.

That night Sherlock went home with Greg and fell asleep on the sofa watching TV.

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Sherlock stayed for three days and then on the fourth evening while Greg was cooking in the kitchen, he came from behind and slipped his arms around Greg’s waist.

Greg was quite sure he was going to die of a heart attack. He froze and sucked in a breath.

Sherlock snorted in his ear. “Seriously Greg?! Those are great moves.”

Greg swatted at his arm, kept the knife down and turned around.

“Sherlock.” He said, his voice fond but guarded. “You don’t have to do this. I know your heart belongs to someone else and I would never want to replace him. You don’t have to do this to keep me to yourself. Ok? Twisted and co-dependent as this might sound, I am not going to find anyone else until you are sorted out.”

“And if that takes forever?”

“Then I will be with you forever. However you want me to be. If you want me to be.”

“But why?” Sherlock asked, genuinely puzzled. “Why would you wait for me forever?”

Greg gave a half smile and ruffled that wild mop of black curls. “You idiot genius. For the same reason that you would wait for Mycroft forever.”

Sherlock looked in wonder at the love in Greg’s brown eyes and closed his own.
This was so unfair! The man he loved did not love him back and here was this wonderful man who loved him and he could not love him back.

He laughed at the irony and it almost sounded like a sob.

Greg held him close and soothed him, rubbing circles on his back. “Don’t overthink it Sherlock. All I want is for you to be happy. If that means finding a way for you to be with Mycroft I will do that. If it means being with you while you survive being away from Mycroft, then I will do that.”

“And what about you?” Sherlock asked his voice muffled inside Greg’s shoulder.

“Seeing you happy is enough for me.”

And as he said it, Greg realized it was true. It really was the absolute truth.

Mycroft did not know what was happening inside but he knew that Sherlock had stayed over at Greg’s house for four days.

Five days.

And then on the sixth day they had gone off somewhere. Probably for the weekend.

Mycroft had paused the footage at the moment when Greg had his arm around Sherlock’s waist and they were stepping out of the flat, bags in hand, both of them looking at each other with a fond smile.

Mycroft then spent the weekend reviewing the UN report of the Serbian atrocities and the proposed gas pipeline through Afghanistan. He also read the reports on the landmine survivors in Cambodia and the human trafficking of young women from Eastern Europe into London.

He really needed to find more and more examples of people whose life was worse than his own so as to give him the will to carry on.

Chapter End Notes

“Be thou the rainbow in the storms of life. The evening beam that smiles the clouds away, and tints tomorrow with prophetic ray.” Lord Byron
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Life goes on.....with or without us

Greg was sitting in his office and reading the file with growing worry. The Chief Super had asked him to help with a really odd Interpol investigation. That wasn’t his biggest worry. The real tricky part was how he was going to hide this from Sherlock.

In the past year he had managed to solve so many cases, both active ones and the cold ones that had been re-opened at Sherlock’s insistence that he had been promoted to Detective Inspector a good five years before he had expected to be. He still couldn’t believe it.

Sherlock had refused to take any credit for it and had in fact been exasperated at having to even talk about it.

“Stop it Lestrade. I don’t care for awards and accolades. I solve the puzzles but you and your team solve the crimes. Don’t get all sentimental on me.”

Greg had smiled and left it well alone.

Don’t get all sentimental?! Ha. As if he didn’t know that Sherlock still poured over a notebook which had poems written by Mycroft and photos of his brother and that he still carried a candle for the one true love of his life.

No matter that he managed to hide it so well that Greg had seen Mycroft being deeply hurt by his dismissal. He genuinely despaired at being able to do anything for the two of them because Sherlock had expressly forbidden it.

And then three months ago he had gone to 221B late one evening on a whim and found Sherlock just removing a tourniquet from his arm.

Greg had been shocked speechless and then furious. The rage on his face had actually drawn a mumbled apology from Sherlock.

When Sherlock had finally come down from the drug high and Greg had interrogated him to the best of his ability it transpired that it was his birthday. Greg closed his eyes.

Jesus. He hadn’t even known. How had Sherlock managed to keep this from him?!

And that still begged the question –why drugs today??
After much avoidance it had finally been revealed. Sherlock had waited all day and there was no text or message from Mycroft.

“I did it Lestrade.” Sherlock said with a high pitched laugh that had terrified Greg more than anything else he had done that day. “I managed to drive him away. I am such a bloody good actor….I managed to end my relationship with the only one who matters.”

Ouch…. that hurt like hell Greg thought. The only one who matters?! ….But he forgave Sherlock in the very next instant because ….well that was love wasn’t it? Un-conditional even when un-reciprocated.

“Come on Sherlock, let’s get you in the shower and then I am going to get some food into you. Come on,” and he hauled him up and shuffled him under the warm water. “Are you going to manage or do I have to take your clothes off for you?” He asked in genuine concern, and was startled out of his composure when Sherlock leaned into him and pressed hot lips against his neck.

“But you still love me don’t you Greg?” Sherlock mumbled and then he started crying silently. “I am sorry. I am sorry Greg.”

Greg wanted to tear his hair out and weep but one of them had to be strong and only one of them could be a Drama Queen at any given time, so he just ignored Sherlock completely and dragged him to the basin, washed his face and said “That’s enough now, come on. You can shower tomorrow. Just change into your pajamas and sit on the sofa. I am getting some food for you.”

That night after feeding Sherlock soup and toast, as he sat next to Sherlock watching him sleep and breathe, Greg decided he had had enough. He was not going to let Sherlock kill himself. If all was fair in love and war then his love for Sherlock had to be his excuse.

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The next morning he had gone to go to work after requesting Mrs. Hudson to check in on Sherlock. He had left the Yard early and gone to meet Mycroft at his office.

The woman who met him there was tough as nails and somehow faintly familiar.

“I need to see Mycroft Holmes.”

“He is busy.”

“It is about Sherlock.”

“He is not in the country.”

Oh. That made sense. That is why he hadn’t messaged Sherlock.

“When will he be back?”

At that the woman looked up and gave him a look of pure disdain. Was she really going to tell him that?

“Well tell him I was here and to call me when he gets back.”

Greg went to Baker Street, picking up a takeaway because the chance that Sherlock would have anything edible was less than zero. He was weary at the helplessness seeping into his bones. How
was this ever going to work?

Mycroft himself may work in the shadows but he was too important a person to get away with being in a relationship with his brother. Besides, he didn’t even know if Mycroft felt the same way for Sherlock.

What could he possibly do to stop Sherlock from killing himself?

He had hoped that the cases would help. That his own presence would help. But who could pacify an aching heart with mere distractions all the time? There would always be moments when the abyss would open up and maybe someday it would swallow Sherlock.

He felt himself shudder at the thought.

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He heard the violin playing even before he entered the building. His own taste ran more to rock and roll and reggae but he recognized this tune. It was Sherlock’s composition and Greg had mentally named it The Mycroft Rhapsody. It always started off with soaring, joyous notes, moved to a poignant middle and depending on Sherlock’s mood, it would end with a playful set of notes or a sombre rather melancholy part.

Greg entered 221B flat using his key and Sherlock stopped when he heard him. That was unusual.

He looked at Greg expectantly and Greg knew at once that Sherlock had anticipated that he would have gone to find about Mycroft even though he hadn’t said so and never would have.

“He isn’t in the country.” Greg said, setting the food out on the table.

Sherlock gave the tiniest nod to acknowledge the information. “Is he safe?”

Greg shrugged. “Are you?”

Sherlock looked away, chin up in the air in defiance.

“Look Sherlock.” Greg said in an even tone. “The things is……this is life. People do it all the time you know. They fall in love with someone who cannot or will not love them back. Or they are loved back but it all turns sour anyway. You have to let this go. I am not asking you to forget him. Far from it. But I will not allow you to kill yourself over it. Not on my watch. Do you get that?”

Sherlock looked back at him flint eyed and angry. “You don’t get to tell me what I can and cannot do.”

“Oh yeah? Really?” Greg replied with a challenging tone. “You really expect me to just observe your descent into hell do you? This is not my first rodeo, Sunshine. People come into your life and people go. Those who stay are the ones who matter. Tell me you want me out of your life and I will leave. Tell me you don’t care for me and I will turn my back on you, no arguments. Say it. Just say it.”

Sherlock and Greg stood there eyes locked in a battle of wills and then Sherlock turned away.

Greg took a deep breath and closed the distance between them. “Sherlock, let me help you. Let me tell him.”
“No!” Sherlock exclaimed. “Absolutely not. Do you have any idea of how much worse his hatred for me will be if he finds out about my sick desires? At least this way…he will forgive me for pushing him away because that is how he is. But if I break these rules? This final taboo?” He shook his head. “No, Lestrade I will carry this to my grave.”

Greg looked at him wondering how soon that grave would be filled if he carried on like this. He decided to change the mood.

He grinned at Sherlock. “Ok, since you haven’t told me to get out of your life I guess you will be sharing my dinner now. Come on, let’s eat. I am starving.”

Something had shifted that day. It was as though Sherlock had decided to break down some of the walls he still carried around his heart.

Now he spoke to Greg often and at length about Mycroft. Told him all the stories of their childhood, the poems, the reading, their bedtimes. The way his love had grown, colouring outside all the lines, spilling over any ‘normal’ brotherly desires.

Greg would listen, envious of this love, but grateful to be the one who was being bestowed with these confidences. It was kind of like being an opera and listening to a tragic love story. You could cry and yearn even if the songs were not being sung for you.

One day Sherlock was telling Greg about how exquisite Mycroft smelt and Greg had groaned.

“Too much information lad! And I don’t smell too bad myself if I say so.”

Sherlock snorted. “You smell like a cop.”

“What is that supposed to mean?!” Greg said with a quirk of one eyebrow.

They had been sitting on the sofa at his place, Sherlock lying with his head on Greg’s lap, allowing Greg’s fingers to gently card through his wild curls.

Greg’s heart would always melt at being allowed such small intimacies. He never remarked on them for fear of jinxing it but he had watched cautiously as Sherlock had become more tactile around him, bumping shoulders, once even linking his arm around his.

“You smell of stale tobacco, cheap leather seats, coffee in styrofoam cups.” Sherlock said laughing at him. “You smell of London.”

“I ought to clip you regularly for your insolence you know that?” Greg said half-heartedly.

“You won’t.” Sherlock said confidently.

“Oh yeah? Really? And why is that? Cos your big brother will come and beat me up?”

There was a sudden silence. *Oops.* Greg thought. *Bad move.*
Sherlock was still for a moment then he shook his head.

“No. You won’t because you would rather do this.” and he pulled Greg down by his shirt and gave him a fleeting kiss on the lips.

Greg felt his entire world tilt on its axis.

Sherlock whispered in his ear. “You know that I love London.”
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Love may not be a zero sum game but doesn't it often feel that way?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Greg looked at him, at his soft lips and half smile and dilated pupils, and it took an entire lifetime of willpower to pull back.

“Sherlock.” He said tenderly. “I have never hidden how I feel about you and believe me-- there is nothing more I would like than this……but you know, even hostages fall in love with their kidnappers sometimes, and you……you may be a genius but I have seen what a rebound relationship looks like. If we do get together…..I want it to be for the long haul. So don’t misunderstand me.”

Greg bent down and kissed him back on the lips. Softly. “It is killing me to stay away from you but if you hate me later for taking advantage of your vulnerability……..then that will break my heart even more.”

Sherlock looked into his eyes and recited “A rebound is an undefined period following the breakup of a romantic relationship. When a serious relationship ends badly, these partners suffer from complex emotional stresses of detachment. If a rebound were to occur, it will happen on average about six weeks after a break up. Someone who is "on the rebound," is popularly believed to be psychologically incapable of making reasonable decisions regarding suitable partners due to emotional neediness, lingering feelings towards the old partner, or unresolved problems from the previous relationship.”

Greg looked at him in exasperation. “Yes, sunshine. Have you been memorizing my old textbooks?!”

“Those and more.” Sherlock said seriously. “I cannot really be on the rebound because my previous relationship has not ended. This is more of a polyamory situation, isn’t it? The desire for an intimate relationship with more than one partner. It reflects non-monogamous, multi-partner relationships and reflects the choices of the individuals involved, but with values, such as love, intimacy, honesty, integrity, equality, communication and commitment.”

Sherlock ticked off the last few items on his fingers as he spoke. “Love, intimacy, honesty, integrity, equality, communication and commitment. Tell me where we are falling short right now? Or in the foreseeable future? Tell me you realistically see me and Mycroft together the way you and I are right now?”

Greg was silent, not sure if he should be negotiating his way out of what he longed for so deeply and was being handed to him on a platter.

“Can you work with that Greg? With me still being in love with Mycroft but also loving you? I love him like a wolf loves the moon Greg. With all my being and with a desperate hunger. But the
moon will always remain in the sky, out of reach. Unattainable.”

“Sherlock…..I am the only one you are close to. You are mistaking trust for love, comfort for romance. It could just be because I am the only one you spend so much time with.”

“And isn’t that in itself a choice Greg? I choose to spend time with you. I choose to give you my trust. I choose to take comfort from you.”

Greg was silent, still unwilling to take the plunge.

Then Sherlock lifted his hand to touch Greg’s face and said “I choose you Greg.”

Greg was too choked to even speak as he pulled Sherlock up and kissed him with all the pent up passion of months.

This beautiful enchanting young man who had burrowed his way into his heart ages ago, telling him he was choosing him?! Even the hounds of hell could probably not keep him away now.

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However, Greg woke up with a heavy heart the next morning had spent the entire week in an agony of indecision.

Mycroft never had got back to him after his impromptu visit to his office. He had probably figured, quite rightly in a way, that if it was urgent or critical that Greg would have contacted him again.

He was obviously keeping his distance and Greg couldn’t really blame him at all.

Either he knew how Sherlock felt or he didn’t. Either he reciprocated or he didn’t.

Even in the best case scenario where he knew and reciprocated, what possible outcome could this relationship have?

But Gregory fought on the side of justice. He always looked out for the underdog. He would always stand up for what was right. That was what made him who he was. And he thought wryly that by a strange turn of events, Mycroft seemed to be the underdog in this strange situation.

Greg needed him to know what could be his and for him to make a choice to step away after knowing that. He wasn’t sure Mycroft would listen to anything he had to say and Sherlock sure as hell wasn’t going to reveal anything.

While he was trying to find a way to resolve this, Sherlock took off behind a suspect that week and got himself seriously injured with the man’s knife.

Greg was at his bedside in the hospital, furious.

“Sherlock what is wrong with you?! Do you know how badly you could have gotten hurt?!”

“He would have gotten away.”

“I don’t care Sherlock! We have officers whose job it is to chase and catch these criminals. I won’t have you risking yourself like this.”
“Why? So you can keep me safe and hand me over to Mycroft at the earliest opportunity?” Sherlock asked bitterly.

Greg just stared at him. “What?! Where did that come from?”

“Seriously Greg?! I practically asked you to…for us to be together and since that day you have been keeping your distance. You look guilty and stressed out. You think this is a mistake don’t you? You don’t trust me enough to accept what I am saying. It satisfied your saviour complex to look after me and protect me and claim to love me when you knew this wasn’t going anywhere. But now that it is, you are running away.”

Greg wasn’t sure whether to laugh or cry. “Oh Sherlock! You are such an idiot for a genius! It is nothing like that. I just don’t want you to do anything or commit to anything that you might regret.” He laid his hand over Sherlock’s which was twitching on the bedsheet. “I love you. You know that don’t you? And if you need me to say it every day I will.”

Sherlock looked away, still angry and miserable.

“Hey, sunshine. Don’t be angry with me. And seriously? Don’t pull a stunt like this again!” Greg got up and went to Sherlock, tilted his chin and kissed him. “I love you ok? Believe me?”

Mycroft had of course been informed that Sherlock was injured and in the hospital. He had left a rather critical meeting to go see him right away. He opened the door gently and from the tiny gap he saw Greg standing there comforting Sherlock and he saw Sherlock look up and give a half-smile and then Greg kissed him.

Mycroft wasn’t sure how long he stood there, maybe a few seconds, maybe a few eons.

Maybe the universe got destroyed and re-made. Maybe he got destroyed and could never be re-made.

He closed the door and left the way he had come.

When Sherlock was released from the hospital Greg had dropped him off at Baker Street but he couldn’t get himself to leave that evening and one day became two days and then one week and then two weeks.

Eventually he decided to move back to his own place because wonderful as it was, they needed to maintain some distance in order to avoid conflict of interest issues at work.

“You worry too much Greg.” Sherlock said as they were sleeping in late that Sunday morning. “No one cares. Your team is loyal. The media is happy. The Chief Super is ecstatic.”

Greg sighed. “Sherlock no one cares when the going is good. One mistake and they will be on us, on you, like piranhas. They will tear apart everything. Your deductions, my authority, our relationship. Everything.”
“So you mean we can’t get married?” Sherlock said casually as he traced a line down Greg’s cheek and chin and down to his chest.

Greg’s heart almost stopped. “Very funny Sherlock.”

“Is it?” Sherlock asked innocently. “I keep saying I am married to my work. Might as well make that real don’t you think?”

Greg managed to distract him in happy ways and the topic wasn’t raised again. At least not that month.

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Greg had been waiting for Mycroft to get back to him and say something. Anything.

But as time went by he realized that it was futile.

His own motivation had changed now because once he had committed, he could not believe that he had tried to resist. No matter how noble and honourable the reasons.

Sherlock was the love of his life. He truly was his sunshine and his days were brighter and nights lighter for having him. He was brilliant and passionate and they never had a single boring moment together. Even their silences were meaningful and he really could not remember what his life had been like before he had found Sherlock.

He thanked his lucky stars every single day that he had been at that sleazy bar when Sherlock had been ‘consorting’ with his red-headed league.

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Now, almost exactly a year since he first met Sherlock, Greg was staring at the file sent to him by the Chief Super about the oddest case of his career so far, and he sure had seen some odd things!

Someone had been targeting red heads. Only men. They were using a dating site and when they met them alone they would have sex with them and then drug them and take their blood. There was a suspicion that they were taking their semen also but it was not as easy to prove. It was all very odd and Greg wondered why they couldn’t just pay them for these samples.

God knows people were willing to sell their own souls nowadays, hell, even give it away free if promised their 15 minutes of fame online!

What could possibly be the motivation behind this really odd crime wave?!

The Chief Super had deputed him to be part of the Interpol team and he needed to get to Edinburgh next week to check out the annual convention of red heads that would be gathering there.

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Greg had never been more conflicted in his entire life.
He had absolutely no desire to lose what he had now but he simply felt…somehow tainted….knowing that the first place in Sherlock’s heart belonged to someone else. Who may not even have known it.

This case of the red heads felt like a sign. A reminder that he ought to do the right things.

Although Sherlock had been completely honest with him and he knew exactly what he was getting into, the shadow always lurked. This week the shadow had become darker and more real. He knew that Sherlock had a journal full of handwritten poems and some photos of Mycroft. He had found it one day by accident and once he realized what it was he had put it away un-read.

*What if the news of the red heads reminded Sherlock of how they had begun and what if it made him re-think their relationship?*

*But then again, of course, he would never have forgotten it in the first place isn’t it? Genius and Mind Palace and all that. Like a wolf at the moon he had said.*

*Also, he knew he would probably wait his entire life for the other shoe to drop really wouldn’t he?*

*But the ways Sherlock had said ‘I choose you’…..surely that was worth something?*

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So he had a ridiculous number of arguments and counter-arguments with himself and if Sherlock hadn’t been so keen on finding out what Greg was hiding in terms of the case, he would have certainly been more accurate in his suspicions of what was troubling his lover.

As it was, he simply figured out what the case was all about and deduced, quite rightly, that it had been troubling Greg because he was afraid it would remind him of Mycroft and therefore maybe make him re-think their relationships and so on and so forth into that rabbit hole of insecurities.

So, of course, Sherlock solved it in his own way by pretending to believe Greg when he said he needed to go away for a case and feigning indifference and then showing up minutes before the train left and settling down in the seat right next to Greg.

Almost giving him a heart attack.

“Sherlock!!” Greg gasped in alarm as he realized what was happening. “What the hell are you doing here?! Are you trying to kill me?!”

“Hmm… not really.” Sherlock said coolly looking outside the window as though he was just another co-passenger. Then he turned and gave a half smile. “But I could give you mouth-to-mouth resuscitation if you need it?!”

Greg flushed a deep red, both from the public flirting and from his own guilt and thanked his lucky stars that Sherlock had been so busy getting to the station that he had obviously not known where Greg had gone just prior to getting there. So he just fake punched him and settled down in his seat trying to calm his racing heart.

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If Greg thought Mycroft had been hard to get earlier, in recent weeks it had become nigh impossible. He was either away or busy or just simply un-available.

So, that afternoon Greg had bundled up Sherlock’s journal with all its loose papers and photos and newspaper cuttings and all and put it in a sealed packet. This certainly wasn’t meant for any other eyes.

He took himself to the Diogenes Club this time and was ushered to Mycroft who was sitting resolutely in the silence zone and did not offer to invite him to the inner room where they could talk.

Greg took a deep breath, handed the packet over and said as softly as he could. “Sherlock may never forgive me for this but I may never forgive myself if I don’t tell you because I think we both want what I best for him and I think what is best for him is to be with the one he loves.”

Mycroft felt his stomach drop and his blood run cold.

*Sherlock should be with the one he loves. Of course he does!*

He has seen the photos. He has seen them kiss. He has already stayed way. He knows that Greg was going away to Edinburgh for the weekend and for a case and that Sherlock also had tickets to go with him.

*What more do they want from him now? His blessings??!!*

Mycroft took the packet and watched Greg leave. He held it like it was a live bomb and eventually deposited in his safe at the Club.

He didn’t want to take it home where he may be tempted on some lonely drunken evening to damage his already shattered heart by looking at more proof of Sherlock’s love for Greg.

Chapter End Notes

So this takes place in Ireland, but you will see in the next chapter why I wanted them in Scotland instead :P


Also the sex and stealing blood and body parts is a nod to Orphan Black!

Ooops. Sorry!!!! But this is in keeping with the tradition of period novels, especially Thomas Hardy’s where the most crucial piece of communication would usually get lost under the carpet or delayed just enough to change everything.
Chapter Notes

So...THIS is why the convention was shifted to Scotland by yours truly. Yup. You are welcome :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes
The links for the two kilt images are

https://aminoapps.com/c/rupertgraves/page/blog/rupert-as-a-warrior/x3oP_gDS2uwV5QG1VrVqelBGkGQ3kJWWQ5

https://twitter.com/cumber_love/status/329314162838732800
Sherlock had of course been busy reading up everything he could on news updates on redheads.

As the train sped through England and took them to Scotland, Sherlock was rattling off facts and information that Greg could scarcely make sense of.

“Did you know that redheaded women emit a particularly distinct aroma? That of ambergris.”

“Hmm…” Greg said, only half listening, still a bit stunned that Sherlock was travelling with him.

“They are taking men.” He reminded Sherlock.

“Yes, I saw that.” Sherlock confirmed. “Redheads are a mere 2 percent of the population but they also have higher thresholds for pain. It takes 20 percent more general anesthetic during surgery to put a redhead under. They also need less vitamin D than the rest of us, because of the MC1R gene mutation.”

“That is all very fascinating.” Greg said with a sigh, rubbing his face in frustration. “But it doesn’t make any sense why someone is doing this. What could they possibly want?”

“We will figure it out. “ Sherlock said confidently and Greg’s heart clenched at the use of the word ‘we’.

He wondered for the hundredth time that day whether he had made the biggest mistake of his life by giving that journal to Mycroft.

Greg went up the narrow stairs to the bedroom in the quiet B&B in Edinburgh. He had booked it expecting to be alone of course and now he couldn’t help grinning at Sherlock who had spread himself sideways and was occupying the entire single bed.

He had never felt more conflicted about anything.

He was wondering what Mycroft was thinking as he went through the journal, probably right now even as he and Sherlock were sharing a room. He was quite sure that Mycroft may well share the same feelings for Sherlock and even if he did not, he felt sure he would at least acknowledge the way Sherlock felt. Maybe find some way to ease his younger brother’s pain.

He felt acutely the sense that he was currently living on borrowed time.

He decided to push all those doubts away and decided that till that call came Sherlock was his, at least for now, in whatever tenuous, temporary, transient way.

Still his.

“You brat! You can never listen to instructions can you?! I leave you at the counter for one minute while I got the bags……we need two beds or a double!”

“They didn’t have any Lestrade.” Sherlock told him loftily, managing to sound regal even sprawled all over the mattress. “I have no desire to spend the night at such close quarters with you either.”
“Oh you don’t do you, Your Highness?!” Greg said, laughing as he pulled Sherlock off the bed by his legs and then tackled him to the ground.

They didn’t hear the door open as they scuffled on the wooden floor and pulled apart when they heard someone giggle and clear her throat.

“Just some fresh towels for you and ….” she giggled behind her hand, “One room with twin beds just got free but I guess you don’t really want it?”

“Yes we do!” and “No we don’t!” they both yelled at the same time and she fled, still giggling.

Sherlock sat up on the floor and stared at Greg. “Is something the matter?”

Greg looked away, a red flush creeping up his face. He was terrified that somehow Sherlock would figure out what he had done with his journal and he needed to delay the inevitable for as long as possible.

“This is an important case Sherlock.” He said, rubbing the back of his neck uncomfortably. “Can’t afford to be distracted. That’s all.”

Sherlock looked at him curiously. “You are hiding something from me. You do realize that I will find out eventually?”

Greg smiled. “I have no doubt that you will. Till then –let us enjoy. We have two days before the convention starts. Let’s do what we never have time for in London. Sightseeing, touristy stuff. Sounds fun?”

“Sounds like one of the seven circles of Hell.” Sherlock grumbled. “The things I do for love.”

Greg never knew he was capable of pulling off such amazing acting as he ruffled Sherlock’s hair and kissed him breathless while hiding a trembling heart, already counting down to the moment when all this would be in the past.

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They enjoyed the anonymity, because Sherlock was already a bit famous in London and Greg was always conscious of being a Yarder, so they were never really truly free.

But here? They could walk holding hands, doing touristy things, sight-seeing, asking questions at memento shops, trying to figure out if something big was likely to be going down.

Sherlock was also giving Greg information on red heads, non-stop.

“How the hell was he supposed to solve this ‘crime’ when they had no idea of the motive or the means?!

Sherlock carried on, talking mostly to himself. “Britain has the most numbers of redheads per capita in the world. In Scotland around 13% of the population have red hair, but over 30% are
unknowing carriers of the redhead gene. In Ireland about 10% have red hair, but as many as 46% are carriers.”

“Very interesting.” Greg mumbled. *And very useless in all probability*…

“Did you know that Richard the Lionheart, Henry VIII and Elizabeth I were all redheads? The ancient Briton Boudica, Queen of the Iceni, was described by as being tall and terrifying in appearance, with a great mass of red hair over her shoulders.”

Greg had enough. “Sherlock I will make you eat haggis for breakfast, lunch and dinner if you don’t sit quietly for five minutes now! Look at the Edinburgh Castle, enjoy its beauty.”

“*Beauty* is a construct based entirely on childhood impressions, influences and role models.” Sherlock said promptly, looking very serious but Greg knew him well enough by now to see the teasing glint in his eyes. “But yes we MUST go inside the castle because they have one of the few functioning camera obscuras in the world!!”

Greg groaned and followed him inside.

When they came out 2 hours later he was grinning and Sherlock had a face like thunder.

“Hey, lighten up!” Greg said, elbowing him gently. Sherlock responded by digging his hands into his coat pocket and sulking even more.

Greg sighed. Well at least they had two genuinely memorable photos. He used to do theatre in college and always loved dress up, so there was no way he was going to pass up the chance to wear a kilt. He was surprised when Sherlock had agreed and they had posed, separately and together.

Then a group of women tourists had come in and one of them had whistled at Greg and he had blushed furiously, completely un-used to such blatant overtures. He was too embarrassed to focus but he thought he heard one of them say Silver Fox and wink at him.

Then Sherlock had moved in front of him rather possessively and angrily and stood there with his hands crossed in front of him, glaring at the women as though he would burn holes in them with his eyes. It had made Greg’s heart flip flop inside his chest. Then he almost went up in flames himself as the women giggled even more at this territorial display.

Sherlock did not even wait till he paid for the prints. Greg went out to search for him and found him sitting on the stone wall, glaring at the world in general.

“Hey sunshine, it was all in jest.”

“They wouldn’t have done it if you had a ring on your finger.”

Greg’s heart gave a jolt again. Sherlock was going to be the death of him for sure. One way or another.

It was 24 hours since he gave the journal to Mycroft. Surely he had read it cover to cover by now and memorized every page and word and letter.

*Why had he not called Sherlock yet?*

Of course! Greg almost slapped his forehead in frustration. This was Mycroft Holmes they were talking about. Diplomat par excellence and suave strategist. Of course he was waiting till they got back. Such conversations are best had face to face.
Should he breathe easy because they had the next few days for sure?! Or was this worse because now he would never know how it was going to unfold till he got back?

He managed to pull Sherlock off the wall and now they had been walking down the high street, holding hands, but Greg was miles away already saying his goodbyes to Sherlock in his mind, figuring out how he would need to learn to carry on without his presence in his life.

He wasn’t even going to think of the sex and the kisses he would have to give up on. Even he wasn’t brave enough.

But he was going to have to learn how to wake up without the wild curly head on the pillow next to his whenever the genius did stay over at his place. Who was he kidding……the wild curly head most likely on his chest as Sherlock hardly ever kept to his side of the bed.

Learn how to cook for one and not have the pleasure of watching Sherlock refuse the food and then steal everything from his plate as he spoke animatedly, describing some theory or deduction or telling him some supremely esoteric facts about unsolved crimes or scientific theories.

Learn to not stare into those magical galaxies trapped in his eyes. Learn to not ruffle his hair and cup his cheeks and place his hand on the small of his back as they walked together. Learn to have the shower all to himself. Learn to drink tea without having his mug stolen halfway. Learn to not buy ginger nuts and chocolate digestives and feed him when he was too distracted by what he was reading or thinking.

Learn to do without all those small intimacies.

Learn how to keep his hands to himself when they were together at a crime scene. No casual touches just because he could and because even that was hardly enough anymore, having gotten used to Sherlock the human cat, sitting on his lap, or curled up into his side or sprawled all over him in bed. As demanding and self-centred as a cat. Not to mention as snooty when it suited him.

But Greg knew better now. The sociopath mask was not because he didn’t care enough. It was because he cared too much. Too deeply and too hard. The mask was self-preservation. It was not meant to keep the entire world out as much it was to keep his heart in.

Greg had found him at a vulnerable time and had seen the real Sherlock or he would have also been kept at an arm’s length.

Was it truly better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all? No matter how dark the abyss he was looking into Greg couldn’t find it himself to wish that he had never had this. That he had never loved Sherlock so much that a separation would now break him in ways he had never thought possible.

He remembered what Sherlock had told him about his love for Mycroft.

“Have you ever used a blotting paper on a drop of ink Lestrade? I was like that. I was completely absorbed into my love for Mycroft. Bleeding out at the edges of my desire for him. Soaked up into non-existence outside of him.”

He remembered how he had felt envy for such depth of feelings. He had felt jealous of the man who had inspired it. He had felt relief at never having suffered that level of pain.
Well…he had walked right in with open eyes hadn’t he? Knowing that this could happen. He had no one to blame but himself. But blame suggested a mistake had been made. This was not a mistake. No. This was a beautiful chapter in the book of life that he had been fortunate to read. To be someone Sherlock had chosen. Even if as a second choice. It was still choice. He would never not want that.

Sherlock said he loved Mycroft like a wolf loves the moon.

But surely Sherlock did love Greg like a wolf loves a wolf? He could live with that.

Now he would be at an arm’s length away soon. The mask would be off for Mycroft to see all the love that Sherlock had carried in his heart for so many years. He had a sudden image of Mycroft holding Sherlock’s face in both hands and kissing him….

The pain he felt inside his chest at that vision made him gasp and he realized that he had no idea where he was. He stopped and looked around wildly.

Sherlock was standing there, leaning casually against a lamp post, an amused expression on his face although it didn’t fully mask the worry in his eyes.

“Welcome back?”

Greg shook his head. “Sorry! Was miles away. This case…..”

Sherlock just looked back with an eyebrow raised as if to say really Greg? You are trying to fool me? Me?

Greg grinned at him. “Maybe I was just wandering inside my Mind Palace. You aren’t the only one with a brain you know! Come now, let’s get something to eat. How long have we been walking? I am famished.”

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After an early dinner they wandered down to some shops selling souvenirs.

Greg was looking at some snow globes and shot glasses and remarked to Sherlock. “All made in China.”

“Yeah.” The man behind the counter said with a shrug. “But that’s the economy mate. The odd thing is they seem to have come over personally this year. Not too many of them if you count I guess, but just seen more of them that ever before in these last 30 years of running this business.”

Sherlock frowned. He recalled listening to someone speak in Mandarin on the sightseeing bus that morning. They had been talking about dragons and supermen and endgame. He had assumed it was some pop culture related stuff.

But something in his Mind Palace was rumbling. Some connections were being made. Some clues were emerging.

He grabbed Greg by the sleeve. “Greg, we need to go back. Right away. I need to think. There is something ….something big that I am missing here. Something obvious. There is a pattern and a
method and a motive….”

The man behind the counter had raised both eyebrows at this. “Any trouble coming our way mate?”

“Oh no. No worries.” Greg reassured him. “He is a writer and often gets plot ideas like this. We better get back so he can figure it out. Thanks!”
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Sherlock pulls all the whispers and odd happenings together and makes his deductions. Greg has very mixed feelings about having solved the case.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They sat in the taxi, Greg silent and trying not to even ‘think too loudly’, knowing exactly what Sherlock needed when he was like this, on the edge of a breakthrough.

He was happy for an excuse to sit quietly and apart, since a lapful of Consulting Genius would not exactly help his almost-breaking heart.

When they reached the B&B Sherlock leaped out and ran upstairs, leaving Greg to pay the taxi driver and give a smile and nod to the man who opened the door. Greg walked up slowly, making a deliberate attempt to switch off his emotional meanderings and to focus on the case at hand.

What could have tipped Sherlock off? He was quite baffled since he did not think he had heard anything that was a clue.

He sighed.

What would he do once Sherlock went to be with Mycroft and maybe found it too uncomfortable to work with him? Maybe he would work on cases with someone else at the Yard?

The thought of being at the Yard or a crime scene without Sherlock flapping at his side like a giant and cranky raven made him sink against the wall for a moment. He closed his eyes in pain. No. He would not be able to do this. Maybe he could ask for a transfer? Surely there were places he could go to. Maybe a country posting. Somewhere far away from London. He would get a house with a garden. Keep a dog.

Just then the door of their room was flung open and Sherlock was standing there, wild eyed and frantic.

“Mycrof!!” He said in an agitated voice. “I need to get to him. Right now!”

Greg blinked. What?!

“Greg!! We need to go back to London right now! I have to talk to Mycroft.”

“Woah woah!” Greg said holding his hands out to calm him down. “Sherlock! Sure! But can’t you talk to him on the phone? Wouldn’t that be faster?”

Sherlock looked at him as though at a stranger and Greg felt a cold finger of sheer terror run down his spine. He was not prepared for this. Not so soon. Not today. Not now. Please.

Then Sherlock shook his head. “Yes of course. Sorry. Yes. I can call him! Give me your phone.”
“Don’t you have your phone?” Greg grumbled, not wanting this call to be on his phone as a permanent milestone. Something he would look at in his call record for the rest of his life and know. This was the day. This was the time. This was when it all ended.

Sherlock had his hand out in his usual imperious way and Greg, never able to deny him anything, put his phone in his palm.

Sherlock found Mycroft’s number and called him. “Mycroft? Stay where you are if you are in a secure place. If not then get security cover and go somewhere safe. Also tell Prince Harry to do the same. And whatever you do, don’t go to China.”

Mycroft hadn’t even had the chance to say hello before Sherlock gave him all these rapid-fire instructions. His first thought was to ask if Sherlock had taken anything but that thought disappeared almost instantly because --- how did Sherlock know?!

This was a very last minute diplomatic visit to persuade China to shut down its tiger farms. Since Prince Harry had recently lent his name to conservation programmes in Africa, their Ambassador in China had requested his presence if possible.

There were fewer than 4,000 wild tigers left on Earth – a decline of 96% since the start of the 20th century. The main reason for this decline was poaching to feed Chinese demand for their skins, bones and other body parts. Prince Harry had confirmed that he was willing to be there and then in some odd way Mycroft had been wangled in. He may be the most dangerous man in Britain, but there were occasions when even he found it difficult to say no or give plausible reasons for avoiding travel. It’s not like he had anyone waiting for him at home anyway.

As far he knew an extremely small circle of people were aware of this plan because the Chinese government was notoriously allergic to bad press in the international media and they were going for a diplomatic mission.

So how had Sherlock found out and why was he telling him not to go?!

They were already on their way to the airport where the royal private jet was waiting.

“Sherlock?” Mycroft asked. “Why? What is going on?”

“First promise me you won’t go.” Sherlock said, reminding Mycroft of their younger days when a stubborn Sherlock would not give in once his mind was made up about something. He could visualize him as the petulant child, lower lip pouting, an adorable scowl on his face as he tried to will Mycroft into doing something he wanted.

Mycroft had never let him know that he would have never refused him anything. All those decades ago and nothing had really changed.

But this?! How could he stop the royal entourage without any valid reason?

“Sherlock.” Mycroft said calmly. “I have no idea how you know this but I am on the way to the airport right now and the royal jet will be taking off for Beijing in an hour. So please give me a valid reason to stop the Prince from boarding.”

“Both your lives are in danger.” Sherlock said quickly. “The CRISPR baby, tiger farms, red heads. They are looking to create a genetic high breed with superior powers. Super men. Dragons. For whatever Middle Kingdom imperialist aspirations they want to fulfil. The red heads they have been taking blood and probably semen from? It isn’t good enough. They need the most superior of the
species. You are the most intelligent man on this planet and the Prince is royalty. The entire mission is a decoy.”

Greg was listening to all this with his mouth open. What?! Had he fallen asleep and into some science fiction dream? Was it a side effect of all that haggis?

He rubbed his eyes.

Nope this was real. For some reason Sherlock had deduced that China was behind the red headed blood sucking and what in the hell were crisper babies?! And did he really say ‘dragons’?

Sherlock was done with the call and was standing there looking at Greg. “He believed me. He is going to stop the travel.”

Greg smiled at him. “Ok. So now, how about we sit down and you explain to me what just happened? In English please.”

Sherlock spoke, waving his hands in the air as he pulled together various strands of the clues and patterns and deductions and explained how it had all fallen into place. A scientist from China had managed to ‘create’ a gene edited baby last year. Then he had mysteriously vanished. Then had come rumours of CRISPR twins whose brain had been enhanced.

“CRISPR is an acronym Greg. For a gene editing technique.” Sherlock said impatiently when he saw the baffled expression on his face. “And China has been breeding tigers in farms for many years now. There has been a growing interest in creating what Nietzsche called the ‘ubermensch’ or the Superman. Like Captain America in Avengers.”

Greg’s eyebrows shot up. “You know the Avengers?!”

Sherlock gave a thunderous scowl. “Yes Greg. That’s the most important statement in everything I just said.”

Greg was still looking at him with an amused expression so he rolled his eyes.

“Molly made me see it with her as payback for….. borrowing…something from her lab.”

Greg snorted. That Molly wasn’t as mild mannered as she looked.

“Anyway. If we are done laughing at my knowledge of popular culture….should I carry on?” Sherlock asked sarcastically.

“Yes, yes by all means. This is more entertaining than anything in the cinemas.” Greg said, amused and grateful at the same time. There is no way in hell he or anyone else from the Yard would have pieced this together.

He smiled fondly as Sherlock continued to elaborate on the whole conspiracy theory and how he had deduced that Mycroft was in danger.

As soon as he said Mycroft’s name, Greg stopped day dreaming.

Mycroft.
Now that they had solved the case, they could go back to London and surely Mycroft would have reason to meet Sherlock now and then maybe he would have other things to tell him in person.

Chapter End Notes

3. 200 tiger carcasses are kept in freezers at large-scale facilities including Harbin Siberian Tiger Park. Many facilities that keep captive tigers in China have been exposed trading products made from tiger parts. The Harbin Siberian Tiger Park and Xiongsen Bear and Tiger Village have both been documented on multiple occasions trading ‘wine’ made by soaking tiger bones in alcohol.
4. China’s tiger farms are a threat to the world’s last wild tigers. A parallel legal trade in products made using captive tiger body parts raises serious concerns about the impact of such trade on wild tigers. https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/2017/06/07/chinas-tiger-farms-are-a-threat-to-the-species/
5. CRISPRs (clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats) are sections of DNA, while CAS-9 (CRISPR-associated protein 9) is an enzyme. They are found in bacteria, which use them to disable attacks from viruses. They have led to the creation of patented "GloFish" that shine under UV light, the eradication of horns from certain cattle species, manipulation of crops and attempts to produce hypo-allergenic cats. Artist Eduardo Kac even commissioned a French geneticist to create Alba, a genetically modified glowing rabbit. http://www.ekac.org/gfpbunny.html#gfpbunnyanchor

It’s all so very Baskerville isn’t it ?!
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Truth and consequences

Chapter Notes

If anyone is still reading this :P sorry for the delays in updating!! The outlines are ready till the end but the muse can be moody while filling in the details!

It had been a week since they got back. Of course Sherlock’s deductions had been, bizarrely enough, absolutely right and the Palace had been incredibly grateful to him for saving the fifth in line to the throne.

They had wanted to bestow a Knighthood on him, the offer of which he had dismissed like one would shoo away a pesky fly. Sherlock still lived at Baker Street but spent many of his days in and out of Greg’s flat so that is where the envoy had found them. Greg had been sprawled on the sofa, reading a book, his feet tucked under Sherlock who was sitting at the other end tuning his violin.

“Give it to Greg if you must.” Sherlock had said as he spoke to the envoy who was standing in the living room. “’Sir Gregory Lestrade’ has a fine ring to it.”

Greg had snorted. “Yeah, and how easy would it be for me to continue working at the Yard afterwards?! Forget it.”

The envoy had kept a straight face during all this but he was clearly baffled by these reactions and had blinked rapidly before realizing that the two men had gone back to what they were doing earlier and he had effectively been dismissed.

Ten minutes after he left, Greg put his book down and asked, casual as can be. “So have you met Mycroft yet?”

“Nope.” Sherlock said as he continued to pluck at his violin.

Greg had no idea what to say to that so there was a silence in the room.

Sherlock looked up from his violin tuning and asked, a strange look in his eyes. “Should I have met him?”

“Well.” Greg shrugged. “You saved his life. I thought he might at least invite you over to thank you. For dinner…or something.”

Sherlock put his violin down and stared at Greg, the gears turning. “He did invite me as a matter of fact. He invited both of us. I sent regrets.”

Greg nodded, no longer making eye contact.
Sherlock continued to stare at Greg. He was missing something. Something was wrong. He went back into his Mind Palace and flipped through the last month or so of memories, conversations, facts.

Things said and things unsaid.

He turned pale and spoke in a flat voice. “You gave him my journal.”

Greg was so shocked at this deduction out of the blue that he didn’t even have the ability to hide his reaction and then of course there was no possibility of denying.

The tension in the room could have been cut with a knife. Greg could feel his face flushed and his pulse thudding in his ear as loud and desperate as though his heart wanted to leave the ribcage and run and hide under the bed.

“Gregory.” Sherlock said in a voice more white-hot angry than Greg had ever heard or imagined him capable of being. “You betrayed me. I trusted you. I …I loved you. And all this time you have been….You gave it to him before we went to Edinburgh didn’t you? That is why you were behaving so oddly.”

Greg closed his eyes. This is exactly what he had feared. The worst case scenario. Why is it that those were the ones that always came true?

He tried to speak as calmly as possible, unable to hide a fine tremor at the shock of being found out as well as at Sherlock’s demeanour. “Sherlock….. I am so sorry. Please forgive me but I honestly could not bear the thought of you not being happy and not having what you want.”

Even as Greg spoke he could actually see the walls go up and the drawbridge pulled in. The windows were boarded and the door was closed. The fortress was in lockdown.

Sherlock spoke in a soft flat voice that sent chills down Greg’s spine. “I was happy Gregory. I already had what I wanted. Maybe you need to decide what it is that you want. You gave him my journal. Good. Well he isn’t exactly falling over himself to come and declare his love for me is he?! So now he knows how I feel and probably genuinely hates me even more. Thank you.”

He paused. Then he spoke again. “Goodbye.”

“Sherlock…..please…”

But Sherlock had swept up and packed his violin and taken his coat and left the flat already.

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Sherlock stood staring outside the window at 221B Baker Street, a taste of ashes and regret in his mouth.

This is NOT how it was supposed to end.

It was the end, wasn’t it?

Mycroft had been right after all. Emotions are a chemical defect on the losing side.

And he had lost.
Again.

Mycroft had the journal. His journal.

Mycroft had read the journal and not said a word to him about it. He had thanked him on the phone offered one invitation to dinner and. He had not made any further attempts to contact him.

Of course he had never expected Mycroft to reciprocate his feelings. Why would he?!!

He was perfect at everything he did. The smarter one, the powerful one, the dutiful one. He was handsome and erudite and sophisticated and well settled. Why in heaven’s name would he want to have anything to do with his college drop-out, sometime drug using renegade kid brother?! That too romantically, in a damagingly taboo relationship?!

Sherlock felt enough rage and pain to set London on fire. He would have loved to set the Thames ablaze too. He wanted everything to burn. Burn the heart out of it, the way his heart was burning, to turn to hot ashes, to be destroyed.

What was the point of breathing anymore? Of existing? What would he do tomorrow when the sun rose and the day began and he had to live through it knowing that Greg also probably hated him now?

Mycroft had rejected him. Greg had too, in his own way, by trying to push him to Mycroft.

He slid down to the floor and screamed soundlessly, pulling at his hair.

And almost two years after the day that Greg had found him shooting up, he pulled out the loose tile in the bathroom, tied a rubber tourniquet and injected himself in order to silence the mocking voice in his brain.

Idiot. Falling in love with your own big brother! As if that were not spectacularly stupid enough, then giving your heart to a man who does not want to keep it.

Mycroft was right as always. Alone protects us.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Tearing down a palace, brick by brick.

Chapter Notes

Franken-writer strikes again :) Some parts of this are re-purposed from an earlier Sherlock/ Greg fic I wrote!

Before he lost consciousness, Mycroft was already on his way. He had, as always, been watching and as soon as he saw Sherlock fall to the floor and pull at his hair, he had called for his car. 

Danger night!!

Mycroft felt a cold pit in his stomach. Why had this come on now?

He had thought he and Greg were happy. He had tried to keep his distance although he had not called off the surveillance.

By the time he stormed into the 221B flat using a key he had kept with himself for exactly such an occasion, Sherlock was on the floor, barely conscious.

“Please Mycie.” his little brother pleaded. “There is too much pain. Too much noise Mycie.”

“Sherlock!! Can you hear me?” Mycroft asked him frantically. “The ambulance is on the way. Please hold on! Hold on!”

Barely seconds after that he heard the paramedics race up the stairs.

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When they all finally left after half an hour, taking Sherlock with them, Mrs Hudson was waiting downstairs, wringing her hands.

Mycroft went over to her and explained that he was going to take Sherlock away for a while. He knew from the last experience that this could take long and he offered her a six month advance on the rent and asked her to keep the flat.

“Is he ok?” she asked him, almost in tears, because she had really grown fond of him over the last two years and thought of him as her boy.

Mycroft didn’t know how to answer this.

But she was already speaking again. “They must have had a bit of a domestic I think.”
He nodded. *A lovers' quarrel. With Gregory Lestrade.*

“Don’t worry Mrs Hudson. I will take care of him. Hope to see you again soon under better circumstances.”

Two days later, Mycroft sat in his own bedroom, looking at Sherlock who was curled up on his bed.

He could not bear to see the pain on his little brother’s face. He had an uncomfortable flashback to the time all those years ago when Sherlock had been in a similar gut-wrenching agony of pain at losing Redbeard and Mycroft had found it un-bearable to look at. Would have done anything in his power to make that look go away.

“How are you feeling?” He asked softly. “What can I do for you?”

“You can go away.” Sherlock replied bitterly. “I don’t want anything from you.”

The next morning Mycroft woke up to find that Sherlock had left. Disappeared. He did not seem to have returned either to Baker Street or Greg’s flat.

By the time Mycroft had managed to track him down through the homeless networks, it was too late and he found himself once again in an ambulance, heart in his mouth as the paramedics carried out chest compressions on Sherlock.

There was an agonizing moment where it seemed as though they had given up, but then suddenly the monitor beeped and Mycroft felt as though his own heart had re-started.

Three days later Sherlock found himself being sent to rehab.

He had remained defiantly silent and refused to speak to Mycroft even to argue his way out of this.

In the rehab centre, with all that time on his hands, he decided that the best way to treat the pain was to take away its source.

The Buddha had been right. Just like Mycroft.

Attachment was the root of all suffering.

Alone would protect him.

So he set about deleting Mycroft and Greg from his Mind Palace.
He walked himself through all the rooms, in fact an entire floor dedicated to his lover. It was full of warmth and safety and a lingering sense of honey and caramel, smoke and tea. He barricaded the windows to prevent them from reflecting a slow smile. He put down barbed wire to stop himself from reaching out to strong arms around him at night. He deleted any reference to sunshine. Including the fact that the earth revolved around the sun.

He eliminated all memories of a firm hand holding his own with fingers intertwined. He got rid of all the evenings where they were sat in simple intimacy, reading books next to each other and he erased all the mornings of slowly waking up curled into someone.

He shut down all the doors, double locking them for safety and creating a diversion route to make sure that he would not wander down those corridors even by mistake.

It took him all of two months while the rehab centre did its own thing.

At the end of that period, he had deleted Greg.

Then he started on an even bigger project.

Operation Delete Mycroft.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Just another brick in the wall...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mycroft had visited the rehab centre once and Sherlock had refused to meet him.

His attempts to delete him had been frustrating to say the least. Mycroft was inside his Mind Palace too deep and too pervasive and too...just simply too much.

Sherlock had tried all kinds of tricks. He had twisted and turned the memories and used smoke and mirrors. He squashed one facet only to find it popping up somewhere.

He was everywhere and he had been there from the beginning. His presence was steeped into the very foundations of his Mind Palace.

He was the first word and the earliest memory. He was the swing and the slide and the merry-go-round. He was alphabets and numbers and patterns. He was dance and music and plays. He was safety and comfort and love.

He was the moon to his wolf and the blood to his shark. He was the earth below and the sky above.

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All Sherlock eventually managed to do, after weeks and weeks of hair-pulling and impotent rage, had been to end up with a simmering frustration at Mycroft’s very existence.

‘Out damned spot’ he had grumbled and muttered as he tried to exorcise those memories.

Despite his best efforts they had not gone, but he had managed to distort them. Like a fun house mirror.

He had warped them into something he could no longer recognize. He had managed to deform the protectiveness into intrusion and warp the rescues into condescension. He had convinced himself that Mycroft was a fat annoying git who he could not tolerate. He was now disgusted and repelled by Mycroft, the Ice man Big Brother who poked his nose into his affairs and made his life a misery.

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The day Sherlock was finally released, no one was there to pick him up and he had taken a taxi back to Baker Street.
He switched on his phone and checked for the latest updates on crime in London.

Suicides. More than one. He wondered when Scotland Yard would call him. Of course he remembered Detective Inspector Lestrade and all the cases they had worked on.

*What was his first name again?!* He tried to recall but he couldn’t. He shrugged. *It didn’t really matter.*

Chapter End Notes

"You can erase them from your mind, but getting them out of your heart is another story."

Quote from Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind.
https://www.scoopwhoop.com/Eternal-Sunshine-Of-The-Spotless-Mind-Quotes/#.pd5rlqy71
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Back to that fateful day: Greg POV

Greg had sat in his flat, his mind reeling in the aftermath of the confrontation. He got up and went to the door.

*Should he run behind Sherlock? Stop him? But what would he say? What could he say?*

*And in any case would Sherlock listen to anything in the state he was in right now?*

He had looked at him with such cold fury that Greg had no doubt of what would actually happen if he went back into that flat. That would definitely be a point of no return.

*But if he did not follow him, then what would happen tomorrow? Damn Mycroft for not saying anything to Sherlock.*

He hated himself for having caused so much pain to the one man he loved beyond all reason. Unconditionally. Despite knowing that he was and always would be in love with someone else.

He groaned as he fleetingly wondered if this was not possible to remedy at all. *Was this truly the end?*

He pulled at his hair in frustration, more than a little terrified and angry.

There was too much emotional turmoil to allow him any sleep. He could not even get himself to lie down and spent the entire night sitting on the sofa, working through all the possible ways he could even initiate a rational discussion with Sherlock.

*But what then? How long would this last? And how would it affect their working relationship? What would happen if things went wrong and they often do?*

*What would Sherlock do then?*

He would never want to see Sherlock get hurt. He needed to think this through calmly. He needed Sherlock to be calm enough to allow a conversation.

He would call him first thing in the morning.

He would apologize. He would beg. He would do anything for Sherlock to stop hurting.

. .

Greg dialled Sherlock’s number at 7 am.

“This number is no longer in service” said the automated voice.
He just stared at his mobile. *Sherlock must have switched his phone off.*

When he reached his office he called again.

“This number is no longer in service” said the automated voice.

So, as soon as the morning update meeting was done, he left the Yard and drove down to 221B.

He unlocked the front door and climbed upstairs slowly, not sure what to say when he met Sherlock but he found the flat empty so he went down and spoke to Mrs. Hudson. She seemed relieved to see him and explained that Sherlock’s brother had come and taken him away last night.

Greg was taken aback. *That was fast!*

He had a sinking feeling in his heart.

*So …it had worked. This was what he had wanted…hadn’t he?!!*

Mrs. Hudson was still talking. “The paramedics were also with him. Oh and he offered a six month advance on the rent.”

*What??! Paramedics?? Six month advance on the rent?? What had happened?*

He cursed himself.

*He should have known better than to leave him alone like that.*

*FUCK.*

*What had he done?! Had he overdosed?? How was he??!

He thanked Mrs, Hudson and left and just before he walked out of the front door, he sagged against the wall and stood there for a minute, wanting to punch something. Wanting to go back in time. Change the way the evening had gone.

*Oh Sherlock, sweetheart, what have you done?? Where have you gone??*  
*I am sorry love. So so sorry. So terribly sorry.*

He barely realized how he got back to the Yard, his mind still stunned by how fast things had gone so wrong.

He considered calling Mycroft.

But that seemed like a spectacularly bad idea at this point so he just left it at that.

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Greg missed Sherlock every single day. He woke up looking forward to the day and within seconds he would remember that what he actually looked forward to was gone. It felt like half of him was missing.

It felt like a punch in the gut when he would turn to remark on something or smile at something odd or funny and find that he was looking at a stranger’s face or most often at nothing.
As the weeks passed, a sense of melancholy and guilt enveloped him that he could never quite shake off.

*He had lost what he never wanted to lose. He had hurt the one person he always wanted to save from being hurt. The one precious thing had been shattered to pieces.*

*What could he do now but regret?*
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Serial suicides. Everyone at the press meet gets a text message saying 'Wrong'. You know what happens next!

Chapter Notes

Sherlock's thoughts are in italics. Greg's thoughts are in italics and underlined.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Three months had passed since that fateful day and Greg was at a press conference. Greg hated doing these and Sally always made sure she was at his side since she knew that.

She read out the press note that the department had prepared, “The body of Beth Davenport, Junior Minister for Transport, was found late last night on a building site in Greater London. Preliminary investigations suggest that this was suicide. We can confirm that this apparent suicide closely resembles those of Sir Jeffrey Patterson and James Phillimore. In the light of this, these incidents are now being treated as linked. The investigation is ongoing but Detective Inspector Lestrade will take questions now.”

A reporter asked the most obvious question of course. “Detective Inspector, how can suicides be linked?”

Greg looked frustrated. He knew that somehow they were linked but he wasn’t a sexy genius in a black coat was he, who would swirl about the crime scene, find clues in air molecules apparently and come up with deductions. He was just the half who had been left behind.

Alone.

Swallowing his anger and regret which still flared up every time he thought of how badly it had ended with Sherlock, he replied, “Well, they all took the same poison; um, they were all found in places they had no reason to be; none of them had shown any prior indication of. ... “

The reporter interrupted him asking incredulously, “But you can’t have serial suicides!”

Greg sighed. “Well, apparently you can.”

Another reporter chimed in “These three people: there’s nothing that links them?”

Greg confirmed,” There’s no link been found yet, but we’re looking for it. There has to be one.”
Everybody’s mobile phone trilled a text alert simultaneously. As they looked at their phones, each message read: **Wrong!**

Donovan looked at the same message on her own phone. She looked up and said “If you’ve all got texts, please ignore them.”

The reporter was baffled. “Just says, ‘Wrong’. “

Sally said brusquely “Yeah, well, just ignore that. Okay, if there are no more questions for Detective Inspector Lestrade, I’m going to bring this session to an end.”

The reporter persisted “But if they’re suicides, what are you investigating?”

Greg tried to explain. “As I say, these ... these suicides are *clearly* linked. Um, it’s an ... it’s an unusual situation. We’ve got our best people investigating ...”

Everybody’s mobile trilled another text alert and again each message read: **Wrong!**

The reporter said “Says, ‘Wrong’ again.”

Greg looked despairingly at Sally.

A third reporter asked “Is there any chance that these are murders, and if they are, is this the work of a serial killer?”

Greg tried to be careful. “I know that you like writing about these, but these do appear to be suicides. We know the difference. The, um, the poison was *clearly* self-administered.”

The reporter persisted “Yes, but if they *are* murders, how do people keep themselves safe?”

Greg snapped “Well, don’t commit suicide.”

The reporter looked at him in shock.

Donovan covered her mouth and murmured a warning. “Daily Mail.”

Greg said “Obviously this is a frightening time for people, but all anyone has to do is exercise reasonable precautions. We are all as safe as we want to be.”

Again the mobiles trilled their text alerts, and once more each message read: **Wrong!**

But Greg’s phone took a moment longer to alert him to a text and when he looked at it, the message read:

**You know where**
**to find me.**

SH

His head was spinning.

*Sherlock??! Sherlock was messaging him??*
He put the phone into his pocket and looked at the reporters as he stood up.

“Thank you” he said and left.

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He almost raced his car to 221B and stepped out of the car.

He stood on the pavement for a second, his heart beating double fast, looking up at the flat he had not entered for over three months now. He saw Sherlock standing in the window, looking down. He took a deep breath, used his key to let himself in and went up into the living room, not knowing what to expect.

Sherlock barely turned around and asked him, “Where?”

*Yes, hello to you too Sunshine.*

He said,” Brixton, Lauriston Gardens.”

Sherlock asked “What’s new about this one? You wouldn’t have come to get me if there wasn’t something different.”

*No, I wouldn’t have come to get you because you would have been WITH me when the case was called in.*

He said “You know how they never leave notes?”

“Yeah.”

“This one did. Will you come?” *Will you come to crime scenes with me again?*

“I need an assistant”.

*Really? Since when??*

Greg just asked him again. “Will you come?”

Sherlock replied “Not in a police car. I’ll be right behind.”

“Thank you.” *Thank you whatever runs this universe. For bringing you back to me.*

Greg turned to leave and saw John and Mrs Hudson. He nodded a hello to both as he leaves.

*Who is this man? Maybe Mrs Hudson’s nephew is visiting?*

Sherlock turned up at the crime scene, with that man from 221B.

*What the fuck?? Why did he bring Mrs Hudson's nephew along?*

Greg asked “Who’s this?
Sherlock replied “He’s with me.”

Greg looked really annoyed now. “But who is he?” **Seriously Sherlock who the fuck is he??** Sherlock replied, even more annoyed. “I said he’s with me.”

Greg narrows his eyes at him. “I’m breaking every rule letting you in here”. **After you bugged off and disappeared from the face of the earth, the Chief Super wouldn’t let me hear the end of it.**

Sherlock looked at him with that haughty expression only he could pull off “Yes ... because you need me.”

Greg stared at him for a moment, then lowered his eyes helplessly. “Yes, I do. God help me”. **And I can’t even tell you how much Sunshine.**

Later that day Sherlock hurried up the stairs, John following him and found Greg sitting casually in the armchair facing the door. Other police officers were going through Sherlock’s possessions.

Sherlock stormed over to him “What are you doing??!”

(Somewhere in his Mind Palace one floor wobbled, like a mild earthquake had hit. Low on the Richter scale but.......isn’t this where Lestrade always sits? But.....why would he have a habit of sitting here inside Sherlock’s flat though? It makes no sense......)

“Well, I knew you’d find the case. I’m not stupid.” Greg said sharply.

“You can’t just break into my flat.” Sherlock snapped back.

“And you can’t withhold evidence. And I didn’t break into your flat.” *(I have always had a key remember?)*

Sherlock looked at him, outraged. “Well, what do you call this then?”

Greg looked round at his officers before looking back to Sherlock innocently, “It’s a drugs bust.”

The new man almost laughed.

*(What was his name? Oh yes, John. Dr. Watson.)*

Dr Watson said “Seriously?! This guy, a junkie?! Have you met him?!

Sherlock turned and walked closer to John, biting his lip nervously. “John ...”
The new man turned to Greg and said “I’m pretty sure you could search this flat all day, you wouldn’t find anything you could call recreational.”

Sherlock said “John, you probably want to shut up now.”

Greg turned around and spoke to the officers. “Keep looking, guys.”

Then he turned to Sherlock. “Or you could help us properly and I’ll stand them down”.

Sherlock spoke angrily. “This is childish”.

Greg laughed. “Well, I’m dealing with a child. Sherlock, this is our case. I’m letting you in, but you do not go off on your own. Clear?”

(You know that the Work has always been by my rules.)

Sherlock stopped pacing and glared at him. “Oh, what, so-so-so you set up a pretend drugs bust to bully me?”

Greg looked at him in the eyes and said softly “It stops being pretend if they find anything”.

Sherlock almost yelled at him “I am clean!”

Greg nods. Then he asks “But is your flat? All of it?”

(You think I don’t know what you did on that last day??)

Sherlock still protested. “I don’t even smoke.”

Sherlock felt the need to unbutton the cuff of his left shirt and pull it up to show a nicotine patch on his lower arm.

Greg felt irrationally pleased to see it. He pulled up the right sleeves of his own jacket and shirt to show a similar patch on his arm. Sherlock rolled his eyes and turned away and they both pulled their sleeves back down again.

Sherlock felt something stir inside his Mind Palace again.

(This was important. That they both had patches. Something about the two of them. Together. Something like that….But what was it??)

Greg shrugged. “So let’s work together. We’ve found Rachel.”

Sometime later as John realizes that Sherlock has walked out of the flat and taken a cab, he turns to the D.I and says “it’s Sherlock. He just drove off in a cab.”
Sally Donovan standing beside Greg, tuts in irritation. “I told you, he does that. He bloody left again.” She looks at him significantly and says “We’re wasting our time!”

John calls the phone which rings out.

Sally marches in and confronts the D.I. “Does it matter? Does any of it? You know, he’s just a lunatic, and he’ll always let you down, and you’re wasting your time. All our time”.

He stares at her for a long moment as she holds his gaze, then he sighs. “Okay, everybody. Done ’ere.”

Back at the flat, as the other police officers leave, Greg picks up his coat and turns to John.

He speaks, almost to himself. “Why did he do that? Why did he have to leave?”

John looks bemused. “Why do you put up with him?”

Greg sighs. “Because I’m desperate, that’s why. You cannot imagine the depths of my desperation Dr Watson. And because Sherlock Holmes is a great man. And I think one day, if we’re very, very lucky he may even be a good one.” And I will always believe in him.

Much later that evening when the cabbie had been shot dead Greg arrived at the scene, ridiculously terrified at the close shave the younger man had had. He had been praying to every god new and old as he almost lost his cool and drove down like a madman.

He had watched Mycroft step out of his car and have words with Sherlock and John. He was very puzzled by the way they interacted. This did not look any different from Before.

If he and Mycroft were not together then…why had Sherlock …why had he not come back to him? Greg was so perplexed by this thought that he almost did not realize that Sherlock was attempting to deduce who may have shot the serial killer.

When Sherlock stopped half way and asked him to ignore him, Greg was taken aback. “Sorry? What? Where’re you going?”

Sherlock walked towards John and said “I just need to talk about the-the rent.”

Greg tried once more. “But I’ve still got questions for you.”

Are you back for good? Where do we go from here?

Sherlock turned back to him in irritation. “Oh, what now? I’m in shock! Look, I’ve got a blanket!”

Greg looked at him thoughtfully for a moment, unsure why Sherlock was pretending that they had
nothing in common other than the crime scene. “Okay. We’ll bring you in tomorrow. Off you go.”

He smiled sadly as he watched Sherlock go.

*I can wait till tomorrow. Your new friend just killed a man to save your life. I guess things are going to be different now.*

Chapter End Notes

Transcript from the amazing Ariane De Vere
https://arianedevere.dreamwidth.org/30257.html
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Sherlock tries to figure out why the sight of Mycroft sitting in his flat causes so much pain. And why it is even worse when he leaves......

Chapter Notes

The muse is obliging and I have travel coming up so I am going to try and update as often as I can!

“Oh for heaven’s sake!” Sherlock exclaimed in exasperation as he looked at the front door. The knocker had been straightened. Mycroft was here.

He felt a stab of pain somewhere deep inside. It was not quite ‘pain’ pain but it hurt and it wasn’t really anything else he could name. He had yet to deduce what it was precisely, but he knew that he never felt this for anyone else.

He went up the stairs, impatiently tugging his scarf off and ready to fling the door of the flat open. As he charged up the stairs he could smell that spicy cologne his brother favoured. It gave him yet another twist in the gut. It made him irritable, itchy, frustrated.

He had no idea why.

And by the time he actually faced him, sitting there, elegant and put together, lips pursed in what was meant to be a smile, he was ready to yell and throw things. He snipped at him and made his violin screech because he didn’t want to stamp his feet and roll on the floor in a tantrum which is actually what he felt like doing.

He had also recognized that as much as he hated seeing Mycroft in his flat, he hated even more the pit that opened up in his chest when he saw him leave.

Why?? WHY??!

There were no clues, no hints, no memories. Nothing. There was no explanation for these things… feelings? Were they feelings? Emotions?

No. NO. He didn’t do those things. He wasn’t supposed to succumb to them. In fact Mycroft had taught him that.

Emotions are a chemical defect brother mine.

Death comes to us all.
Caring is not an advantage.

Alone protects us.

Frustrating as their real life encounters were for Sherlock he knew that whenever he was troubled or in danger his brother appeared. In person as well as in his Mind Palace.

Cool and collected as ever. Unflappable. Brilliant beyond his own genius abilities.

Always there to answer the most difficult question, to analyse the most twisted facts. To offer the most elegant solutions with a mild arch of one eyebrow that said *Obvious, Brother mine.*

That thing he said. ‘*Brother mine.*’ It bothered him.

It made him feel things which always stayed at the periphery of his consciousness. Soft shadowy whispers of something beckoned him but he couldn’t see enough to follow. There was always something warm glowing in the distance which looked tempting. Very tempting.

It seemed to offer the promise of comfort and safety…. even peace.

But he couldn’t find the way to go there.

It was like Alice’s garden in Wonderland. The more he looked for it, the further it seemed to recede.

It drove him crazy sometimes and he had to play the violin for hours before his Mind Palace opened up some rooms where he could sit quietly and have some kind of tranquillity.

He didn’t know why he felt the need to, in fact the positively burning desire to annoy his brother. But he was aware that this desire took the edge off an even deeper desire which scared him a little.

He also wanted to hurt him. He would see himself sometimes, larger than life, shouting and crying while a smaller Mycroft cowered beneath him, begging forgiveness. This dream always left him disturbed and he acted out on those days, doing things like the street chase which he knew would show up on his brother’s surveillance cameras saying *FUCK OFF,* or teasing him about his weight (when in fact the evidence in front of his eyes showed him an elegant and suave man without a single extra ounce on him) or turning up at the Buckingham Palace in only his sheet.

He would never ever let Mycroft know this but when he saw him all put together, not a hair out of place, not a thought out of line, coolly appraising him and all the other ‘goldfish’, always at least twenty steps ahead of anything they might say or do, he felt like just going up to him and mussing his hair up, ripping his perfectly tailored coat off him and throwing it on the floor in a heap and pulling his tie off and ………but his imagination usually stopped him there.

He knew there was something more he wanted to do but his mind wouldn’t allow him to process it.

He screeched the violin some more when that happened. He wanted to annoy him. He wanted to paint over that perfection with his own chaos and drama. He wanted to trample all over the pristine
snowfield and leave great stomping footprints on it.

He wanted to take that impossibly balanced house of cards and scatter it all in every direction.

He felt like he was the waves crashing against a rock. They recede, they return, they crash and when they are done with their drama, they are murmuring and lapping at the edges of the rock and the rock just smiles. Eventually all that pounding will cost them both as the rock is slowly turned to sand.

But still the waves crash because that is what they do.

And still the rock stands there because that is what it will always do.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Greg watches and observes and stays in the shadows.

Soothes his broken heart with knowing that the one he loves is happy.

Until one day he is called on to arrest him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In the coming days Greg wondered often how one can feel betrayed when you were the one who opened that door in the first place.

How do you listen to the sound of heartbreak, every day, one piece at a time?

Even in the chaos and noise of a crime scene, it rings loud in my ears.

How do you find the strength to cope with the hurt every time he forgets your name like he deleted it? Deleted you. Deleted those precious moments you had together.

Maybe they were never precious to him.

No, he knows that is not the truth. They were equally precious to him.

He has cut them off like a wild animal in a trap would gnaw off its own leg to save its life.

For the hundredth time he regrets not having run behind him that night.

What you get to do now is to watch as he glows in the company of someone else. Waltzes in and out of your crime scenes.

Gives someone else the half smile that was once yours. Shared on the quiet evenings when you relaxed on the sofa and he played the violin.

You atone by allowing him to order you about at crime scenes.

You take whatever you can get just to know he is alive and well and safe.

And then suddenly one day he isn’t.
A kidnapped child screamed at the sight of Sherlock. That started a slippery slope which eventually led to the Chief Superintendent asking for Sherlock to be arrested. Sally was triumphant. *Freak had it coming.*

Greg was stunned at this turn of event. “With all due respect, sir ... “

The Chief Super thundered at him. “You’re a bloody idiot, Lestrade! Now go and fetch him in right now!”

Greg hesitated. *Arrest Sherlock? Arrest SHERLOCK?? How could it possibly have come to this??*

Greg stood up and left the room. Greg ran his fingers through his hair in frustration as he stood outside the Chief Super’s office trying to make a quick phone call which would probably result in him losing his job if he was found out.

He has never quite warmed to John Watson but he has had to maintain a friendly front because it seemed that he and Sherlock were joined at the hip and well, that was that. He could hardly call Sherlock directly so he called John now and warned him that they are coming to arrest Sherlock.

When they reached 221B Mrs Hudson was also upstairs.

Greg greeted her as John tried to block his way. “Have you got a warrant? Have you?”

Greg was irritated. “Leave it, John.” And he stood in front of Sherlock while one of two armed officers attached handcuffs to his left wrist. “Sherlock Holmes, I’m arresting you on suspicion of abduction and kidnapping.”

Sherlock blinked and tried to clear his head.

*Lestrade. Arresting him. Lestrade not standing up for him. This was wrong. A heavy door creaked open slowly somewhere inside the forbidden floor of his Mind Palace. There has been something between them. Something difficult. Even painful. What was it?! He feels a dull ache. Not on his wrists where the handcuffs are digging in. But somewhere deeper inside. Why?? *)

The officer marched Sherlock out of the door. Mrs Hudson just stood there in tears.

John said to Greg in outrage “You know you don’t have to do ...”

But that just made Greg very, very angry. He stepped close to John and points at him sternly “Don’t try to interfere, or I shall arrest you too.”

Then he turned and left the room but as he was waiting downstairs suddenly there is chaos.

John has been handcuffed for punching the Chief Super and Sherlock pulls a gun and holds John hostage and suddenly they are both fugitives.

*What the bloody HELL Sherlock!!* Greg thought to himself.
The Chief Super is yelling “Get after him, Lestrade!”

Greg glared furiously at Sally as she began to head in the direction the two men have gone. He himself was lot slower in moving.

He saw Sherlock hold out his hand to John, who took it and they ran.

Greg just watched as Sherlock seemed to disappear from his life once again.

Chapter End Notes

You need to know the details of the BBC episodes to stay with the plot here, so to speak
Many thanks to Ariane De Vere for her fabulous transcripts of all the episodes!
https://arianedevere.livejournal.com/31651.html
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Planning for the Fall.

Chapter Notes

Short chapters because they are dealing with different POVs

It was clear that the threat posed by Jim Moriarty needed to be taken more seriously than they had imagined.

Mycroft had been in discussion with Sherlock. Thirteen contingencies have been planned for. Some of them were likely to require Sherlock to fake his death and go into hiding for a long time. Possibly not ever return if the dangers facing him later become too great.

Possibly not ever return if…….

Mycroft is well aware of this and has never had his mask as the Ice Man threatened the way it has been currently, by the very real possibility of losing his little brother. The only man he has ever loved. More than his own life.

But as ever, he must be the one in control and remind them of their duties and tie up loose ends to the best extent they can.

Only he knew how much it took for him to remind Sherlock about Lestrade. He had no idea what had gone wrong between them but it has gone wrong spectacularly, that much was obvious. He knew that asking would gain him nothing and the other man had not bothered to get in touch either.

Who could blame him? All those declaration and proof of love he had tried to show Mycroft and this is how it had unravelled.

Mycroft reminded himself. *All hearts are broken. Caring is not an advantage.*

However, it was his duty to make sure that in case, just in case Sherlock found himself unable to come back…for whatever reason, he would not blame Mycroft for not having given him this chance.

“Sherlock?” Mycroft asked. “You know that Lestrade called John to warn you and delayed arresting you and delayed going after you when you ran."

He continued carefully when Sherlock showed no expression on his face. “Perhaps you want to let him know what we are planning. After all Molly does know already. I understand that John needs to be convincingly mourning, but maybe we can tell the Detective Inspector.”
“No.” Sherlock said sharply. “Lestrade cannot know.”

(Once again something in his Mind Palace is sneaking out of a closed door. He can see a warm glow emerging from the gap. The thoughts trail along ‘He will keep you safe’. ‘He will have your back’. Who is the ‘he’? Lestrade? That doesn’t make sense......why would he do that....)

When he saw Mycroft’s expression he sighed in frustration. “Somehow I know that I can’t tell him because he will never let me go through with it. He will move heaven and earth to stop me or somehow try to protect me. And you know that the endgame is not my safety but it is to stop Moriarty.”

Sherlock was silent for a beat. Then he said “He does not deserve to be given a false hope that I may come back.”

(Because if I don’t come back then I think that may truly destroy him ----knowing that he could have stopped me. Why do I think that?! What sense does that make??)

Mycroft only nodded but his heart was heavy.
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

“The stars are not wanted now; put out every one, 
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A few days later, Sally hesitated outside Greg’s door.

“Sir? There has been a suicide at St. Bart’s…”

“Not our division Sally” he said, not even looking up from his file.

When there was no response from Sally he looked up and saw her face.

What he saw there made him feel like a black hole was opening up under his feet and he was being sucked into it, slowly but irrevocably.

Sherlock he tried to say but he couldn’t get any sound out.

She heard him anyway and nodded.

Greg felt as though the entire planet had tilted for a moment. Sounds were distorted and everything was blurred. His blood was ringing in his ears.

“Sir! Sir!!” He heard Sally calling him in a panic. Someone was shaking him.

“Stop it” he said, blinking. “Stop it! Take me to him.”

Later he sat at home, numb with shock, unable to even understand what had happened and if it was real. He did not attend the funeral and he did not visit the graveyard.

It was all his fault!!

He had rejected the love being offered by this brilliant madman. He had let him LEAVE and then left him alone and then suspected him and even arrested him.

Was there a special place in hell for him?

He hoped there was because there was no punishment great enough.

The skies were always grey now. Relentlessly grey. Overcast. There never seemed to be any
sunshine. Never any sunshine now that he was gone.

“The stars are not wanted now; put out every one,
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;
For nothing now can ever come to any good.”

Chapter End Notes

Funeral Blues
Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message 'He is Dead'.
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now; put out every one,
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

W.H.Auden
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Greg navigates the destruction and the aftermath

Greg had often wondered if Sherlock and John had been something more than friends. Everyone seemed to think they were and the man was certainly grieving as though they may have been.

But then one year had turned to two and one day he had seen him in the company of a woman. Seemed to be a charming blonde and he seemed enthralled by her.

*Good for you Dr Watson I suppose. Moving on.*

As for him, the thudding of his pulse was just a reminder that his broken heart was still beating. There was the taking of a sudden deep breath as though he had forgotten how to breathe. And when he did, he wondered why he needed to.

His heartbreak was like the Stonehenge of his life, sitting there on display, unmoving and mysterious but essentially meaningless and probably without purpose, as people pass by in their cars and point it out to each other.

Not even recognizing what you have lost because they never knew you had it in the first place.

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It had taken three months for Greg to even realize that he was still alive, that he had been demoted, that everyone looked at him like he was an alien.

Going to the pubs had become impossible. Anyone else’s company intolerable. He was grateful, in a way, for losing his rank, since it stopped him from going to crime scenes and waiting with bated breath for a great black coat to come swishing its way in.

He had taken to talking to himself in the evenings, over a drink that he nursed at home, alone. He would hold broken conversations with Sherlock asking for his forgiveness. Explaining to him that when he had come to 221B for the arrest, he had genuinely thought this was all part of the drama and chaos that always seemed to surround him. He was convinced that this would eventually blow over, and surely Mycroft would step in to save him?

It had never occurred to him that it would lead to this……….this shattering of all their lives into so many pieces, on the pavement, stained red with blood from the smashed skull of a genius who made life about more than just living.

Whose very existence made his own life worth living. Whose brilliance shone brighter than the sun and who had sparkled through the prism of his lives and scattered so many rainbows in his wake.
What had possessed him to throw away the love being offered by this man?!

If he lived to be a hundred he would not understand it.

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He wondered if he should talk to Mycroft.

But what was left to say? What conversation could he possibly have?

How are you? Devastated.

How is work? I hate it.

Do you miss him? With every breath.

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And so he carried on, with an aching void inside his universe, which was slowly sucking away everything.

The debris of his broken and shattered heart, stormy days and crazy nights, cups of tea, bottles of alcohol, swirls of cigarette smoke, the sound of footsteps pounding down the streets of London, 243 types of tobacco ash, insults, deductions, clues, chemicals, strains of a violin, gloves thrown on the sofa, and a long blue scarf, all slowly tumbling down the rabbit hole……latitude…..and ……..longitude…………falling further and further down……but there was no place for a landing.

Probably that is why he was still alive. It’s not the fall that kills you after all.

So he went to work and he sat at his desk, like a proper adult, doing his assigned work, doing his duty, walking down the streets, eating, breathing, surviving, talking to people who were alive.

He gave no hint of the screaming agony he held inside his heart.

He ached to have someone to talk to about Sherlock but he had to walk through the misty graveyard of memories, all alone.

He had no one to tell ‘Remember the way he solved the case of the ……..’ ‘Remember what he said to…..’ ‘Remember how he ……..’

Greg laughed bitterly as he remembered Sherlock telling him that he was thinking too loudly.

What would he say now to those screams of agony from inside his heart and mind as Greg sat in the thick silence of his lonely flat.

Remembering.

All the layers and interlocking details of their lives being teased out in the slowest possible post-mortem.
Cut open the chest slowly. Easy does it.

Remove the heart. Careful with the broken fragments. Gently weigh it. Heavy isn’t it?

Slice open the lungs that forgot to breathe sometimes.

Dissect the brains and scoop out the memories. Examine them under a microscope. Twist them around to make sure you see all the sides.

Then stitch it all back again.

But keep it clean and presentable for the public viewing.

For they will never know.
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Greg has a chat with Molly and decides find a way to redeem himself. Mycroft watches. Of course Mycroft watches.

Greg wondered how long he could mourn.

What could possibly fill the emptiness left behind by Sherlock? He had tried work. He had tried alcohol. He had tried more work. And then he had tried more alcohol.

Sometimes, when he wanted to really punish himself, he would try to imagine if this was worse than Sherlock really being with Mycroft. He would imagine what it would make him feel to see Sherlock and Mycroft together. It would be agonizing. Searing pain. But at least Sherlock would be alive!! He would be happy.

And with those thoughts Greg would fall asleep, as always, his tear stained face resting on a cushion on his sofa.

He had been simply unable to sleep on the bed they had shared. He had gone into the bedroom the day of the Fall. He had stood there for half a minute and then had to run out and throw up.

He had slept on the sofa that night. And every single night since. He was unable to even enter and open his cupboard, because it still had Sherlock’s clothes.

So he had gone out and bought himself some clothes and kept them in a bag in the living room.

*How could this be a home when his heart was buried six feet under??*  

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A few months later he needed to go to Bart’s for following up on some paperwork. He was reluctant but he didn’t have a choice really. He met Molly. He remembered that she and Sherlock had been friends.

Hesitantly, he talked about Sherlock. And then once he started he couldn’t stop. There was no one else he could talk to anyway.

He told her about the agonizing guilt he felt at his role in the disaster. He knew exactly how he had helped with the cases. He had taught him for fuck’s sake. *How could anyone believe these lies?*

He had sat there holding his head in his hands, frustration and anger radiating from every pore.

Molly had listened to him patiently and with sympathy. She was more than a little terrified that he would somehow figure out her role in the Fall. After all he had proved again and again that he truly had been Scotland Yard’s finest. But fortunately for her he was too wrapped up in his own misery.
She had finally said “Greg if you want to do right by him, if you want justice, well…. you do still have access to all the files. Find the evidence. Maybe all they need is proof.”

That made perfect sense to him and so he had spent the next one year doing exactly that. It had given him a purpose.

*Perhaps there was some redemption possible for him after all.*

It was difficult since this was not his official assignment but he worked like a man possessed.

And slowly his old team regrouped around him, in solidarity.

They had known this man their entire career and they had trusted his instincts and they had put their faith in him. He had mentored them and he had had their back and slowly people remembered again. Slowly his task became easier as old friends went just that *little bit* out of their way to get him the papers he needed, copies of lab results, cross checking of alibis, scans of photos appearing in his email from unknown random IDs.

Mycroft watched all this with growing admiration and curiosity as the former D.I seemed to be on a one man mission to clear Sherlock’s name. He hardly went home, he hardly went out, he hardly met with people socially.

He was mourning like a lover and Mycroft wondered again about what had gone wrong between him and Sherlock and whether it would ever get better

He wondered if things would go back to what they were if...when... Sherlock came back.
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Two years after the Fall, the first poster appeared.

I BELIEVE IN SHERLOCK HOLMES

Greg saw it on his way to the Yard as he turned the corner from the Tube station. He stood there, hands deep in his coat pockets, freezing in the cold wind, looking at it.

I BELIEVE IN SHERLOCK HOLMES

That evening after work he visited Sherlock’ grave for the first time. It was as though he had felt he did not deserve to mourn this man he had loved and betrayed and led to his death. But now he could at least beg for forgiveness, having finally done right by him.

He looked at the name on the headstone and at that moment all he wanted to do was to be buried, right now if possible, under there with the man he had loved.

It had finally taken him an hour to find the strength to walk away from it.

That same week Anderson had had the courage to speak to him and share his theories. Greg felt sorry for the man. But none of this penance or this repentance was going to bring Sherlock back. Greg truly felt un-anchored in this world. Listening to Anderson’s conspiracy theories had somehow made it even more crystal clear that this was over.

Sherlock was redeemed but gone.

He looked at himself in the mirror the next day and stared at his grey hair.

After he got ready, he picked up the nicotine patch box as usual and suddenly was filled with an insane and irrational rage.

He had saved Sherlock. He had mentored him, loved him. All he had wanted was for him to be
happy. He had made a mistake trying to push it with Mycroft but surely the Universe had levied too
heavy a punishment for that!

Is this how it would end?

Standing here alone, in a small cold flat, looking at a box of nicotine patches that reminded him of
the one true love of his life.

They said ‘better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all’.

What kind of shit person made that up??

Had they ever fucking REALLY lost what they had loved??

He threw the box of patches against the wall. And just for good measure threw his empty tea cup
against the other wall. The sound of that shattering gave him a fleeting moment of peace.

Fuck this universe. Fuck doing the right thing.

He marched out and bought a packet of cigarettes. And just to show the universe how much it
could go fuck itself, he refused the low tar filtered ones and asked the disinterested woman behind
the counter for ‘the ones that would kill him faster’.

He went to get his car from the car park and decided to light up there and then.

He put a cigarette in his mouth, cupped his hands around it and started to light it when suddenly he
heard a voice.

“That things will kill you.”
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Greg watches as the Sherlock-shape walks towards him.

Greg stood in the car park, with the cigarette in his hands, wondering if he had finally gone mad with sorrow.

Sherlock stood there like a dream made into substance by the sheer power of desire. As though the Sherlock-shapped hole in his life had just filled itself out by absorbing him back from his thoughts and his heart and his memories.

He wasn’t sure how long he stood there.

He saw the Sherlock-shape walking towards him out of the darkness.

Greg had no idea how he found the strength to move but he found himself grabbing onto this apparition like his life depended on it.

“Oh..... You bastard!!” He exclaimed, shocked when the Sherlock shape did not disappear into thin air at the contact.

And then his hand touched skin. On Sherlock’s face. The smooth skin that had made him hungry for contact for so long. So long.

It had been so near and yet so far away.

With movements as slow as in a dream, he touched his thumb to those lips.

*Married to my work* these lips had said.

And here he was now. Fantasy made flesh and blood.

Greg was still not sure if this was real or a particularly spectacular hallucination.

*Was this the final explosion of his brain before it gave up on any pretense at surviving Sherlock?*

Had he crossed some kind of emotional threshold beyond which his brain was incapable of coping with reality?

Tears were streaming down his face.

‘Sherlock? Is that you?” he whispered. “I have missed you so much. So much. Are you really back?’

Sherlock was stunned speechless for a minute. He had never expected this reaction. He was bracing himself for one more punch like the one John had landed on his face.

Greg looked as though he was going to caress his face instead. It made him feel weird. Like his insides were melting or something. He had to grimly fight some force inside him which was
making him lean further in, closer to this man. He wanted so badly for those arms to hold him that it terrified him.

*Why would he want to do that?!* They were not close at all. In fact he didn’t even know his first name.

He spoke. “It’s time to come back. You’ve been letting things slide, Graham.”

“Greg!” Lestrade said, automatically.

“Greg.” Sherlock said as he looked at him.

They both stood and looked at each other in silence for a few seconds before Sherlock turned away and walked off.

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Greg looked at the retreating figure and then looked down at his hand. He had actually touched him. He had touched that beloved face.

“Oh sunshine,” he whispered and he put into that one name a lifetime of longing and desire and a begging for more. “Thank you for being alive!”

He closed his eyes as a tidal wave of feelings threatened to drown him. Sherlock. His lover.

His former lover.

He was not dead.

Sherlock was not with him. But he was not dead.

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He looked at the cigarette that had fallen out of his hands ages ago.

He pulled out the rest of the packet from his pocket and threw it in the trash.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Sherlock is back in his former life but feels like he doesn't really know anyone any more.

Sherlock had been so excited to meet John after he had returned. He had barely been able to contain himself as Mycroft made sure he was looked after and his injuries tended to, shaved and dressed.

He had been puzzled that Mycroft had sat with him through all that. Surely he had more important things to do?

Sherlock remembered how he had tried to show off his deducing skills to Irene (but more to antagonize Mycroft) and had ended up shamefaced when he realized that his older brother had been, as always, ten steps ahead of the game and that he had done more harm than good for Queen and Country.

He had made up for it by unlocking the damn phone but the damage had been done. Another black mark against him in whatever logbook Mycroft probably maintained for him.

He wondered how come his older brother didn't despise him for all his failings. For the drugs and the delinquency and the devastation he caused in all their lives.

He was sure that Mycroft was often disappointed in his little brother (why did that thought make him feel slightly sick to his stomach……..) but he had never ever left him defenceless. He had never ever disowned him.

He wondered fleetingly why that was so, Surely, despite his usefulness in solving complex crimes and legwork he could surely have cast him off in order to keep his job and sanity safe.

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Now he was even more confused.

His encounter with John had been anything but a happy reunion. He had been beaten up and yelled at and he could see that John was really very angry with him. Weird. He thought he would have been happy to see that he was alive.

But then he had never really understood how the goldfish navigated relationships.

Something in his Mind Palace prodded him. He needed to go meet someone else. He braced himself for another round of violence but something told him he need not worry.

He wondered why.
So he had gone and revealed himself to Lestrade. The man had stared at him like he was the Ghost of Christmas past.

When he had stepped closer Sherlock had tensed, waiting for the blow that was sure to come.

He had been utterly baffled when the man had pulled him into a hug.

A hug?!!

Huh.

Consulting Detectives don’t do hugs.

But some faint memories, some faded echoes were reminding him that this was not new. This embrace was something familiar. He wanted to hold him back but he didn’t know why. He stood inside those arms, stiff and awkward.

Then he had forgotten his name again and finally left him standing there.

He didn’t want to leave but he had to. It made no sense to want to hang out with Lestrade in a car park did it?!

He shook his head. This business of being Not Dead was very confusing, and sometimes almost as painful as Being Dead.
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Sherlock and Mycroft re-learn how to be with each other. Guarded and watchful. Wondering what lies underneath it all.

Sherlock knew that when he planned the Fall he had to trust Molly and Mycroft to make sure that the landing didn’t kill him and that he could continue to survive his mission. As he had hoped, Molly rose to the occasion remarkably and put herself and her job on the line for him.

He had also assumed nothing less than perfection from Mycroft in the handling of the entire game but he had never expected that Mycroft would go so far above and beyond and actually enter the prison where he was being held and to rescue him under the noses of his captors.

Sherlock never said as much but he had been impressed by the way Mycroft had done it. So coolly, in a laidback way, as though bored by the entire enterprise. Three hours to learn Serbian while Anthea got his outfit together and voila, he pulled Sherlock out of the rabbit’s hat.

While he had watched him enter the lion’s den and risk his own life to save his little brother, something had stirred inside Sherlock’s Mind Palace, but he had been too exhausted and in too much pain to try and figure out exactly for what it was.

Later Mycroft had even come to visit him at 221B.

Sherlock was puzzled by that. There had been no purpose to that visit as far he could see. If it was anyone else he would have suggested it was out of sentiment.

But with Mycroft?! Sentiment was never a part of his plans.

Was it?

Sherlock had felt as though it was all a strange dream. They had played a game. It was almost like being back at home as children, when they had spent every waking hour in each other’s company. Sherlock usually hanging onto every word said by his beloved older brother who seemed to know everything. Who was so fascinatingly knowledgeable and so happy to teach him and answer his endless questions.

The brother who took care of him and comforted him and loved him.

Loved him.

He had, hadn’t he…… back then.

And his little brother had loved him back. Deeply and infinitely.
When had they stopped? Why had they stopped?

Why were the voices in his Mind Palace saying angry and garbled things at him?

Mycroft had spent a long time with Sherlock that day. With no agenda. He just wanted to feast his eyes on his brother. To know that he was safe and alive. He wanted to, as the goldfish said, ‘hang out’ with him and just take comfort in his company. Not that he would ever allow himself to accept that.

He just couldn’t get himself to leave. He agreed to play childhood games, he bickered with him about broken hearts and who was smarter.

When Sherlock had worn that silly hat and asked him about finding a goldfish because he had been away, Mycroft had had to grip his umbrella till his knuckles went white.

He could barely stop himself from holding Sherlock and kissing him senseless.

If Mrs. Hudson had not interrupted with perfect timing, Mycroft would have destroyed both their lives with the most foolish and dangerous thing he could have ever done.

Mrs. Hudson had been more perceptive than usual and observed that they were both pleased to see each other.

Mycroft’s heart broke when he saw Sherlock’s confused expression.

What did it mean?

He was not pleased to see Mycroft?

Or he was puzzled because he could not understand why Mycroft would be pleased to see him?

Mycroft needed to leave now. Sherlock was safe.

He could go back to the old ways. He had not been lying when he told Sherlock I am not lonely. He had just not told him the entire truth.

He should have said ‘I am not any more lonely than usual.’
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Greg’s happiness turns to despair as he seems to have fallen down a rabbit hole.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Greg couldn’t believe that the universe had conspired to give him this.

Sherlock back from the dead.

He had hugged him like his life depended on it. Which it did really.

And then the bastard had called him ‘Graham’ and walked away.

*It’s fine. He could live with that.* He grinned fit to break his face in two. *YES he could live with that!!*

He should have known that the madman would have pulled off some such IDIOTIC trick. His heart plummeted when he realized a moment later that surely Mycroft must have known…..

Hell. He didn’t care what tricks they played.

Sherlock was alive.

That is all that mattered!

*And he didn’t seem to be ‘with’ Mycroft anyway……so maybe the universe was giving Greg another chance?*

This time he would not blow it.

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Of course, it was hard watching Sherlock continue to have eyes only for John and to behave as though Greg was a distant acquaintance. But it was fine. *It was all fine.*

Greg had now been reinstated and had his team back. Sally was promoted but still working with him. They had been so pumped up about arresting the Walker brothers for their bank robberies and just as they were going to make the final arrest, Greg’s phone chirruped. Twice.

He couldn’t stop himself from looking at the message.

HELP.
Greg paused less than one second to let Sally know that she should go ahead and make the arrest because he had to go. NOW.

“It’s him isn’t it?” asked Sally, disbelieving at the audacity of the man to do this to Greg and appalled at Greg for letting him do it.

"I have to go " He told Sally, aware of the horrified looks she was giving him. "You make the arrest."

"No way!!" Sally said, aghast. "Jones’ll get all the credit if you leave now! You know he will!"

Greg hesitated only for a moment. This could make or break his newly reinstated career. But on the other hand...Sherlock.

" Yeah," he said. " But it doesn’t matter. I have to go."

Because it was inevitable really wasn’t it?

In which universe would Sherlock send a message saying ‘help’ and Greg wouldn’t respond with the full cavalry?

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A few minutes later he stood in 221B watching Sherlock hold up a book on ‘Speeches for the Best Man’, even as the rotary blades of the chopper chugged outside the window.

Greg didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

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He met Molly for drinks later that day.

“It’s poetic justice I suppose,” he told her. “When he wanted it I pushed him away. Now I want it but he is not interested.”

Molly fought a battle inside her mind.

Surely it need not be a secret anymore now that Sherlock was back? Gregory Lestrade was a good man. He was in pain. He was lost. He deserved to know more didn’t he?

“Greg,” she asked hesitantly. “Did you know that Moriarty had snipers trained on people whom Sherlock would die to protect?”

“Yes. I heard he was threatening to kill John.”
Molly looked at him and said softly, “And Mrs. Hudson. And you.”

“What?!” Greg was stunned. And suddenly angry. “What are you saying Molly?”

“It’s true Greg. You were one of the three he had threatened to kill.”

Greg had had no idea. He was furious. “Sherlock had no right to choose my life over his. Why didn’t Moriarty threaten to kill you Molly?”

And so Molly had haltingly explained the entire deception and her role in it. Greg had sat there and listened with shock turning to disbelief and then to rage.

Molly had shrunk back at his expression and he had explained hastily, “I don’t blame you Molly. You did what he wanted you to. I may have done the same if I was in your place.”

NO he thought to himself. NO I BLOODY WELL WOULDN’T HAVE. I would NEVER have let him go off alone to bring down an entire bloody criminal syndicate. I would have moved heaven and earth. I would have had his back. Two of us against the world.

And he slammed his fist against the table.

Molly almost jumped out of her skin.

“Sorry Molly. I am sorry” he apologized. “I just…I can’t. He did this to protect the three of us? Including me? It doesn’t make sense. I don’t blame you Molly. Not at all. I am angry with him. Maybe his brother. Not you.”

“I understand Greg,” Molly said. And she really did.

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Greg was seething with rage at the thought of what Mycroft had done to Sherlock. Sure, he knew that Sherlock could be a stubborn pain in the ass when he was convinced of something, but surely Mycroft should have known better?!! He had far greater resources at his disposal than to allow his own brother to go out and do this ridiculous intervention?! Sherlock could have really died during those two years and Greg really wanted to confront Mycroft and land him a solid punch.

Invariably of course good sense prevailed and while he still wanted to punch him, he decided that he would rather spend the rest of his years in London, keeping an eye on Sherlock, than rotting in some prison in Siberia for assault of the British Government.

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Greg felt like he was falling down the rabbit hole. So many insane things happen over the next few months that he was left reeling.

John had met him once at a pub and told him how Sherlock had responded when he asked him to be Best Man.

He snorted as he recounted how Sherlock had suggested Billy Kincaid as the Best Man and when
John had said he would rather not have a garrotter, Sherlock had told him to consider ‘Gavin Lestrade.’

John was still laughing, not really noticing that Greg’s smile was not reaching his eyes at all.

“He’s a man, and good at it.” That is what the genius said. John told him.

Greg laughed back, hollow and polite even as he felt a swirl of emotions in his heart. Sherlock had not remembered his first name but he had suggested him as the ‘Best’ man to John?! Surely that was a hopeful sign.

Greg watched as Sherlock made a wonderful speech as Best Man at John’s wedding to Mary. He said he never expected to be anyone’s best friend. And then he stumbled over his words.

Sherlock stumbled in his speech

(\textit{The Mind Palace has been giving him trouble of late. Some padlocks are failing and some doors have been sliding open. Memories and feelings are seeping out. Tendrils are growing down the passages and blocking the diversions paths. He never expected to be anyone’s best friend. That was true. But he had been more than that to someone. I have had something even better than a best friend…..he remembers somewhere. It was closer. It was stronger. It was deeper. It was safer. It was my sanctuary. Why can’t I remember it? It’s just outside my grasp.})

He looked into the distance as though in search of an answer and saw Molly and Lestrade sitting together. He blinked.

Greg and Molly looked at each other and looked away.

Chapter End Notes

A huge thank you to Ariane de Vere's amazing transcripts!

https://arianedevere.dreamwidth.org/45631.html
Greg tries to tell Sherlock what love and commitment are.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the never ending chapter count but these are all short and I am hoping to reach the end soon, so thank you for sticking with it and hope you are still enjoying the ride :)

Sherlock had panicked when John had asked him to be his Best Man.

What was he supposed to do?

He had found some books and done his research but he needed help. He needed someone he could trust who would hold his hand through this. As if on instinct he opened his phone, found Lestrade’s number and texted him before he could even think it through.

He had hoped that the man would respond soon but he had not expected to see him racing up the stairs at 221B.

He had been so relieved to see him and immediately confessed. “This is hard.”

Why was Lestrade looking around wildly as though some kind of attack was imminent?

“He picked up the book and showed it. “How to write an unforgettable best man speech”. And asked him. “Have you any funny stories about John?”

Lestrade was just staring at him in disbelief. Sherlock heard police cars sirening their way into Baker Street and screeching to a halt. Now he could also hear an ambulance and then a helicopter.

“Didn’t go into any trouble did you?’” He asked Lestrade, baffled by this level of response.

He almost expected to be punched but Lestrade just closed his eyes in exasperation. Then he pulled out his phone and called everyone off and sat down heavily on the chair.

“Oh. Let’s do this.” He had said. ”Tell me what you want.”

Sherlock had spoken rapid fire and told Lestrade what he wanted to say. He spoke about marriage and love and the futility of it all.

He wondered why Lestrade had looked at him with that odd expression. He had rubbed his face
and then sighed and helped him re-write some parts. When he finally got up to leave, he had touched Sherlock on his shoulder. Patted him and said “All the best Sun…Sherlock.”

Sherlock had frowned at the front door as it closed behind the man.

Why had he called him Son? Surely he wasn’t old enough to be his father. He couldn’t possibly have called him Sun…someone used to call him that. He couldn’t remember. Was it John? He kept on and on about the Sun going around the Earth. Oh wait, was it the other way around? Huh. Who cared?! As if it helped solve any crimes.

*Or write any speeches* he thought as he stared at the notes he had taken while Lestrade had been talking.

*What had he scribbled here?*

"Be thou the rainbow in the storms of life. The evening bean that smiles the clouds away, and tints tomorrow with prophetic ray."

He knew that quote.

His Mind Palace offered up some misty recollection. He had said that to someone. And that person had smiled back and said “You are my sunshine.”

He wished he could put his hand inside the Mind palace and clean that window. It was misted over and he couldn’t make out whose face it was. He clenched his jaw in frustration. He peered and glared and thought he could make out a slow warm smile but there was no other clue.

He looked back at the notes and glowered at them. *What was all this sentimental tosh that Lestrade had babbled about?*

'Love, intimacy, honesty, integrity, equality, communication and commitment.'

'Marriage is a meeting of true minds.'

'To someone not only for what they are, but for what you are when you are with them.'

'A soulmate is someone who has locks that fit our keys, and keys to fit our locks. When we feel safe enough to open the locks, our truest selves step out and we can be completely and honestly who we are; we can be loved for who we are and not for who we’re pretending to be. Each unveils the best part of the other. No matter what else goes wrong around us, with that one person we’re safe in our own paradise.'

Sherlock glared at the notes.

It had all made so much sense when Lestrade had been talking, in his warm deep voice, looking at him with those brown eyes. He had felt something stirring inside him. He had this odd desire to ask him to stay and speak some more. Tell him more about love. Commitment. Intimacy. Of course he had not because that would have been just crazy.

*But now? These notes made no sense.*

He crumpled the sheet and threw it away and started writing on a fresh one.
A soulmate is someone who has locks that fit our keys, and keys to fit our locks. When we feel safe enough to open the locks, our truest selves step out and we can be completely and honestly who we are; we can be loved for who we are and not for who we’re pretending to be. Each unveils the best part of the other. No matter what else goes wrong around us, with that one person we’re safe in our own paradise.

Richard Bach
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

Sherlock felt as though he had been running on empty for so long. A gnawing aching emptiness inside him. Eating away at him, slowly but relentlessly.

Ever since he fell off the roof of St Bart’s it was as though he had never landed.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He tried. He really did. He spoke to people. He smiled. He even chatted with the bridesmaid who was more interesting than the usual goldfish.

But suddenly he felt overwhelmed. He was not sure if he could do this alone and he looked at his phone. He started to text Lestrade but he wasn’t sure what to say. And after the way the man had reacted the last time….he wasn’t sure it was wise.

He started to text Mycroft and then remembered that as much he preferred texting, Mycroft preferred calls. He was sure it had something to do with not being able to interpret the tone of the text.

The phone rang twice before it was picked up and Mycroft spoke. “Yes, what, Sherlock?”

Sherlock walked through the wedding reception room as he talked into his phone. “Why are you out of breath? Either I’ve caught you in a compromising position or you’ve been working out again. I favour the latter.”

Mycroft did not respond to the taunt and asked him “What do you want?”

Sherlock was no longer sure exactly what he wanted to ask Mycroft or even what he needed. So he just said vaguely. “I need your answer, Mycroft, as a matter of urgency.”

He figured that Mycroft would understand what he needed. Somehow he always did.

“Even at the eleventh hour it’s not too late, you know.” He continued.” Cars can be ordered, private jets commandeered.”

He heard Mycroft sighing. “Oh, Lord. It’s today, isn’t it? No, Sherlock, I will not be coming to the “night do,” as you so poetically put it.”

“What a shame.” Sherlock said. “Mary and John will be extremely d...”

“... delighted not to have me hanging around.” Mycroft said dryly, shuddering at the thought of being in that crowd. “So, this is it, then. The big day. I’d better let you get back to it. You have a big speech, or something, don’t you? Cake, karaoke ... mingling. Have a lovely day, and do give the happy couple my best.”

Sherlock rang off feeling oddly comforted by this banter with Mycroft but also oddly bereft.
He had found some companionship with John and now he was also leaving him. Moving on.

He would miss him of course, though he did like Mary a lot and wouldn’t mind meeting her more often. But he knew that the married couple would be tied up in their own lives now. No time for him.

John would have someone to go home to. Someone waiting for him. Someone to sleep next to. Someone to have fun with.

He frowned at these thoughts. *It is not as though he had one any of this with John! So why did his mind make him feel a sense of loss?*

There was something just beyond his grasp. Something nebulous, not quite there but still there.

His Mind Palace helpfully supplied a vivid memory of a smell. He heard himself laughing. “You smell of stale tobacco, cheap leather seats, coffee in styrofoam cups.” He was saying. “You smell of London.”

*He had been laughing with someone?!* He had not laughed in three years.

*Who could he possibly have been laughing with?!!*

He seemed to remember a kiss after that. That made absolutely no sense.

*Who would he kiss?!*

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It was with these odds and ends floating around in his Mind Palace that he started his speech.

He started off by saying that he never expected to be anyone’s best friend. And then he stumbled over his words.

*Strange thigs were happening in his Mind Palace. He never expected to be anyone’s best friend. That was true. But......I have had something even better than a best friend...... It was feeling that was closer. It was stronger. It was deeper. It was safer. It was my sanctuary. Why can’t I remember it?*

He looked into the distance as though in search of an answer and saw Molly and Lestrade sitting together. He blinked.

He saw them both look at each other and look away.

He finished his speech and solved the murder. He managed to even get Lestrade to arrest the murderer.

Then he played the waltz he had composed and even diagnosed Mary’s pregnancy.

He was done now.
It felt as though he had been running on empty for so long. A gnawing aching emptiness inside him. Eating away at him, slowly but relentlessly.

Ever since he fell off the roof of St Bart’s it was as though he had never landed.

His body may have been rescued by Molly and patched up and then whisked off by Mycroft. His body may have been tracking down Moriarty’s network and killing his minions off. His body may have been eating, drinking, smoking, resting, fighting, scarring, stabbing, throbbing, hurting, burning, shivering, living, dying…………… but it was all happening while he was still falling.


Tumbling, rolling, spinning.

Whether he was awake or asleep it mattered little now. He was always falling.

There were never any hands close enough to reach and touch, catch and hold. There were no hands to save him.

It was the look in John’s eyes the day he fell, the look in Molly’s eyes the day he left her flat, the look in Mycroft’s eyes as he left the country.

Every coloured iris guarding an abyss and a little tiny inverted image of Sherlock on all those brains, spiralling, falling further, deeper, every spin taking him closer to the bottomless deep where no one could hear him scream.

He was still in freefall when he came back and realized that what he had thought would be a soft landing next to John turned out to be the edge of another precipice. He could not even rest his feet there before he went tumbling off again. Spinning and circling and folding napkins into swans, choosing colours for the bridesmaids, writing speeches……and yes, Mrs Hudson, it was indeed the end of an era.

And away and away went Sherlock, spinning away.

*When would he finally land? Would he ever land? Or would he just spin away and soon be beyond the solar system?*

*Would he just tumble many, many light years into the distance?*

And by the time the people on this planet saw the light from his reflection, he would have been long gone.

He would no longer even be alive.

Alive.

Why was he still alive?

Maybe that is the puzzle he should be trying to solve.

Solve. Solution. 7% was a useful solution.

He wore his coat and quietly slipped out of the wedding hall.
No one was looking at him. No one could see him.

He should slip out now, turning cartwheels in the dark, un-anchored, un-moored, like a kite with its strings cut. Like a wheel rolling downhill. Like a falling star on the horizon.

When suddenly a lifeline snaked its way through the dark and held him.

‘Sherlock? Where are you going?’

He wobbled but it held. It hauled him in, gently, ever so gently, but backwards from the abyss.

‘Sherlock! Are you ok?’

He turned around to see Lestrade standing there, looking worried.

He stood still, not sure what he should say.

This man behaved in mysterious ways. He had given him a hug when he came back. Almost crushed him in his arms in fact. He had responded to his text with the full force of Scotland Yard. And now he was here again, hauling him in from the edge.

Why?? Why did this man do so much for him? Why did he care?

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“Hey? Sunshine. You ok?” Lestrade was asking softly as he came closer.

Sherlock was startled out of his ruminations.

Sunshine! Lestrade was the one who called him sunshine?! But….. that made no sense.

Lestrade came even closer and placed a hand on his arm, gently, as though he knew that Sherlock did not really like being touched. But firmly as though he had touched him before.

Sherlock took in a deep breath. He was overwhelmed by the smell of stale tobacco, cheap leather seats, coffee in Styrofoam.

He blinked. “You smell of London.” he said slowly.

He felt rather than saw Lestrade freeze.

“You smell of London.” he said again, and as though in a trance, he leaned in towards this man…..and kissed him on the lips.

Greg moved in closer and held that beloved face in his hands and kissed him back.

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Neither of them noticed a slim elegant man who had been standing in the carpark, leaning on his umbrella. He hated weddings but when Sherlock had called him he had not liked the way he had sounded.

But he would never leave him alone on a danger night like that and had come and waited to take
him away if needed.

Now, as he saw the scene unfolding in front of him, he just gave a wry smile, got into his sleek black car and purred off into the dark night.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to the amazing transcripts by Ariane de Vere
https://arainedevere.dreamwidth.org/45631.html
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Mycroft remembers.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mycroft saw everyone else weaving the fabric of their lives with relationships.

Warp and weft and in and out they moved.

Falling in love, out of it, hatred, indifference, greed, desire, power, control, boredom, sorrow, regret. The eternal pointlessness of it all.

While he stood alone, looking at it from a distance.


And inside that steaming swamp of goldfish, the only one he looked out for, had always looked out for, and would always look out for, with his last breath--Sherlock.

He shook his head when he remembered the way Sherlock had asked him if he had found another goldfish.

Another?!

Sherlock was no goldfish. He was not as smart as Mycroft, but then hardly anyone was.

But no matter what Sherlock was, the one certainty was that he was irreplaceable.

Mycroft smiled softly as he remembered all the wonderful moments they had spent together as children. He remembered that worshipful smile with which Sherlock greeted him every morning. Those many, many nights (almost all in fact!) when Sherlock would find some excuse to run into his bedroom at night and cuddle with him. Those idyllic mornings when Mycroft would wake up to find that tousled curly head on his pillow, the soft curl of those beautiful eyelashes and the pink lips curved in a smile from a happy dream.

When he wandered through these memories, he almost forgave himself for falling in love with Sherlock. How could anyone not? That perfect beauty, the razor sharp mind, the instinct for justice and fairplay, the wit, the innocent candour, the passion.

Those golden years where they were each other’s world in its entirety where no one could intrude. Those days in the library, reading and reciting. Those afternoons in the garden helping him with all the experiments that Sherlock adored. Then those ethereal evenings, lying on the grass watching the stars emerge.

Those whirlwind days that Mycroft could recall down to every second, including the mind melting moment when his feelings crystallized into something he recognized.
The sharp agony of awareness when he went from looking upon that face with brotherly adoration and suddenly feeling a swoop of desire in his gut. Want.

He had blinked. His thoughts had come to a stuttering halt even as Sherlock kept on talking to him.

Sherlock had smiled, waiting for a reply and when none was forthcoming he had tangled their fingers together and tugged at him. “Mycie?”

And Mycroft had flinched and backed away, terror struck at the heat that had spread through his entire body from that touch.

Sherlock had looked at him, frowning. Confused. Puzzled.

Mycroft had turned and fled, feeling the hurt radiating out from Sherlock.

It was a mistake. A colossal, un-forgivable mistake. An error. A flaw.

Surely it was not acceptable for the feeling that was threatening to drown him? The overwhelming desire to hold the thing of beauty and to cover him with kisses?

To rest his head on Sherlock’s lap. To gaze at Sherlock as they both went down a slow moving stream in a boat, dappled sunlight falling on that angelic face. To lay in each other’s arms as they woke up and the rest of the world would disappear for all that it mattered.

To worship his new God and hear him say ‘I love you and I am yours’.

*What more could even heaven possibly have to offer?!*

That flash of lightening that had rented his entire world asunder had shown him a glimpse of that heaven. A peek at a life he would never have. At the only life he would ever want.

Sherlock for his own. Not just as a brother. No. Not as a brother at all.

Mycroft had been left shattered by that revelation and had scrambled to put as much distance as he could between them, so that Sherlock would stay untouched by this vile poisonous desire of his. He had succeeded rather well it would seem.

And now? Now Mycroft seemed to be constantly torn between trying to hate Gregory Lestrade and being grateful to him for loving his brother.

Truly, he probably could not have found him a better partner for Sherlock if he had tried. Loyal, trustworthy, kind, loving. Perhaps a bit of a goldfish, but he could be forgiven for that. He was everything Sherlock needed as a buffer from the harsh world.

Mycroft wondered what had gone wrong between them earlier and why Sherlock had deleted him. But he knew that true love was almost impossible to delete.

He should know. He had tried so often.

Love always won. It always came back. Sometimes softly, like a dewdrop, sometimes sweeping in like a storm, destroying everything in its wake.

But it always came back.
Mycroft sat back in his armchair, loosened his tie and picked up his drink.

What will hold back the flood of loneliness today? He wondered. Should he read Plato’s Symposium?

“Love’ is the name for our pursuit of wholeness, for our desire to be complete.”

Or TS Eliot’s poetry?

“This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.”

Chapter End Notes

1. The Symposium is a philosophical text by Plato dated c. 385–370 BC. It depicts a friendly contest of extemporaneous speeches given by a group of notable men attending a banquet. The speeches are to be given in praise of Eros, the god of love and desire.

2. The Hollow Men. By TS Eliot. Eliot’s characters often undergo a journey – either physical or spiritual or both. The Hollow Men seems to follow the otherworldly journey of the spiritually dead. These "hollow men" have the realization, humility and acknowledgement of their guilt and their status as broken, lost souls.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hollow_Men
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

After Sherlock leaves the wedding early....

Greg was not sure how long they were kissing for. It could have been any amount of time between a moment and eternity.

When it ended, he moved away to gaze upon that beloved face, in awe at the universe that had given him this second chance. Not just brought Sherlock back from the dead but given him this moment. This kiss. This possibility to unlock the old doors again.

Not all doors though, he realized with a sudden cold dread sweeping over him. Not that one door at least.....

Sherlock was looking as dazed as he felt and when Greg put his hand on his back and guided him out, the younger man allowed himself to be led. They sat in Greg’s car and when Greg drove them back to his own flat Sherlock simply followed him in as though the last 3 years had not happened at all.

Greg watched with a barely concealed sense of panic as Sherlock moved around the house like he had never left. He stood at the door to the bedroom and saw Sherlock go in and open the cupboard like he had done a hundred times before, and take out his pajamas.

Then, with his heart in his mouth , he saw Sherlock stop and stare at them. Then he turned to look at Greg and frowned. “Why are my clothes here?”

Greg had been steeling himself for some such query ever since those lips had found his and the pieces of his broken heart had started to find their jagged edges to fit together.

How long would this last? How much would he remember? Would he be unforgiving once again?

“Greg?” Sherlock asked, still waiting for an answer. And then he blinked. “Your name is Greg.” He said slowly.

Now Greg could be accused of many things but a coward was never one of them. But when they said all is fair in love and war, surely this is what they meant? Didn’t they?

Yeah sure it was better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.

But what were the rules for having loved and lost and found again?!

How far would you go to make sure you never lost it again??

So Greg cleared his throat and spoke. “Sherlock, can we sit down and do this please? Let me get something for us to drink.”
Two minutes later, with a glass of whisky in his hand and a cup of tea at Sherlock’s elbow, Greg took in a deep breath, a large swallow of the drink and began. Hesitantly but clearly.

“Sherlock, we lived together. We were in a…….relationship. I loved you. I still do. We were happy Sherlock. At least I was. Very happy.”

Sherlock was looking at him in the same piercing way he did at crime scenes. As though he could make deductions from the very molecules around him. His expression gave nothing away.

This business of being Not Dead was causing ridiculous amounts of turmoil in his Mind Palace. The way John had reacted was confounding. The odd behaviour by Mycroft when he had come to meet him at 221B had prompted him to ask about goldfish. Where had that come from?

And now this. This man. Lestrade. Greg.

He had had the most bizarre reaction to his return. With that hug and then bringing the helicopter. The way he had looked at him during the Best Man speech. He had obviously been observing him because he had followed him out of the wedding right away.

They had come to this flat and it felt so familiar that he had gone straight to ‘his’ cupboard and pulled out his clothes. ‘His’ own clothes.

Now he was saying they had been in a relationship. What did that mean?!

He was too tired for all this. He just wanted to sleep. Not have any dreams. Then wake up and solve crimes.

No you don’t. Some part of his brain whispered. You want to sleep with this man. You want him to hold you and whisper to you. You want to wake up with him and you want to hear him call you Sunshine.

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Ugh. How was he supposed to solve this when the crime scene seemed to be inside his own damn Mind Palace?!

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Greg looked at Sherlock sitting there with a mask like expression. No response.

Ok….Greg sent out a silent prayer to every force in the universe and said the one thing he knew could ruin all this before it even started.

“I made a mistake Sherlock. While we were together. It made you angry. Very angry. You left. Before I could come find you, you had gone into rehab. When you came back, you didn’t remember me. I have no idea how you did that, but you did.”

Sherlock was looking at him with narrowed eyes, trying to judge how true all this was. Something was stirring inside him, telling him to trust this man. To believe this man.
But how could he have actually lived with this man and completely forgotten him??!

*What kind of a mistake deserved such a severe punishment?*

“We were in a relationship?” He asked.

Greg nodded.

“For how long?”

“We knew each other for a year. And then we were together….in a relationship…for almost a year.”

“What did you do?”

Greg’s brain was on full alert as he chose his words very carefully. This could change everything.

“I made a mistake Sherlock. One of those ‘means justify the ends’ kind of things.”

Sherlock was frowning again, not sure what all this meant.

Greg continued. “But I did not cheat on you Sherlock. I would never. Even when we were not together…..these last three years…there has been no one else for me. There can be no one else for me.”

Greg took a deep breath and looked at Sherlock whose confusion and disbelief at all this was now clear in his expression. He slid off the sofa and went on his knees in front of the younger man.

He took Sherlock’s hands in his own and bowed his head. “I beg your forgiveness Sherlock. I meant well. I have no idea how you managed to forget everything, including my name, but it does not matter. It is better this way. We can create new memories. And I promise you that I will never do anything to hurt you again.”

He looked up and saw Sherlock staring at him, not breathing, probably deducing things a mile a minute, his eyes piercing into his very soul.

“I love you Sunshine. I love you so much.” Greg whispered. “Please let me love you again.”

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Sherlock was not sure why there was so much turmoil inside him. So many emotions. Sentiments. But when he tried to focus on them, there was just a blur.

Like a water colour painting that someone had wiped down in haste, leaving smears and suggestions of outlines and hints of the original shapes but too much of a chaotic mess to understand what the artist had been trying to convey in the first place.

There was anger there. He could feel it in the powerful wiping strokes. But there was warmth in the base colours. There was intimacy in the blurred outline of the shapes. There was love. There truly was love. He could feel it in the embers of the memories. He could sense it in the smudges and streaks.

He hated not knowing everything down to the minutest detail but if those two years away being Dead had taught him anything it was how precious life was. How fleeting relationships were. How
few people on this planet would he trust with his heart or his safety.

He remembered those cold lonely nights when he had been away. Those silent mornings and those absent moments. He remembered those half forgotten dreams full of yearning and longing. He remembered turning to talk to someone when he wanted to share something interesting and finding a bed full of nothingness. Reaching out to hold a hand and finding empty air. Cleaning his own wounds and finding a shadow of a memory of someone else's gentle hands.

He remembered the punch that John had given him on his return and winced. He recalled the hug this man had given him. How good it had felt. How comforting.

How it had felt like coming home.

Somehow, something at the very core of his being was telling him, reminding him that this man was one of those precious few he could trust. Something in his subconscious must surely have known it or else why would he have sat in his car and followed him into this house without hesitation?

He had kissed this man today for heaven’s sake. Of his own volition.

Surely there must be truth in what he was saying?

In what Greg was saying.

“Greg.” He said out loud, remembering and wondering. “Greg.” He said again, as though still getting used to that word, but knowing somewhere deep down that it had been his to say, often and in many ways.

He looked into those brown eyes and there were echoes of happy memories somewhere in the mist of all the forgetting. There was a promise of a lifetime under than sheen of unspilled tears.

Sherlock’s hands moved forward as though they remembered doing this often. He stroked that cheek, a day’s stubble making it rough under his fingers.

“I don’t remember anything Greg. But I think I want to. Maybe we can start over again?”
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.”
— Marcel Proust

Chapter Notes

This story was planned with an arc which then got waylaid by someone's comment and now has left me a dithering mess as to which end will work better :P

Hence the delay in updates! So now I am going to share both endings (like Black Mirror's Bandersnatch but with less agency for you as readers!) The next few chapters will end with one arc and then I will add a note when the second pathway chapters go up ;)

Although Greg wanted nothing more than to go back to the way they were, he was aware that the wise route would be to take it slowly.

Sherlock had clearly taken a torch to the memory of their life together. And now, keeping the huge secret that had led to the rift meant that they were building their new castle on a fault line.

This could still go wrong. Spectacularly wrong. It could all shatter into a million pieces.

And this time neither of them might survive long enough to pick up the remains.

However, just knowing that he could have this again made Greg feel secure enough to be patient. He could wait. They could find their way back again.

So they took it slow and easy. They got to know each other again.

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Greg still remembered every minute that he had spent with Sherlock, while Sherlock was starting off with a near stranger. So, for a change, Sherlock was trusting his instinct and not his intellect and willing to believe Greg enough to build a whole new relationship with him.

Every time Greg realized the enormity of what that kind of a commitment from Sherlock meant he would become breathless with panic.

Sherlock was the man who had said ‘emotions are a chemical defect’ and ‘alone protects me’. This was a man who always claimed that his mind was everything. But Greg also remembered that this was the man who had held his hand when they walked down the Edinburgh high street and this
was also the man who had proposed marriage, even if as a jealous reaction.

They could make it work. He had to make it work. The alternative was too terrible to imagine.

He was not sure he deserved this second chance but he was going to hold on to it. He was going to love Sherlock with everything he had.

So he did.

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The first time he came to Baker Street to pick up Sherlock for a weekend away, he almost cancelled the plan five times.

It was meant to be a surprise but at the last minute he panicked and texted Sherlock to let him know.

{Only if you want to. Sorry I didn’t ask earlier but I wanted to surprise you! GL}

Sherlock looked at the message for a long minute, some memories stirring. Just then his phone buzzed again.

{We don’t have to if you don’t want to. It’s ok. GL}

He smiled and texted back.

[It’s fine Greg. Let’s go. SH]

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An hour later Greg turned up wearing a linen shirt and khakis and driving a hired open top.

Mrs Hudson opened the front door as Sherlock came down the stairs with a small bag.

“Oh Inspector!” She said in her breathless adoring way, hand on chest, as she batted her eyelashes at Greg. “If only I was 30 years younger!”

Greg found himself blushing furiously especially as he could see Sherlock’s raised eyebrows and sardonic expression. Gallant as ever however, he replied with a tip of his head. “Oh Mrs Hudson if only I would have been that lucky.”

“Yes.” Sherlock added in a dry voice. “Your YouTube videos don’t leave much to the imagination.”

“Yes.” Sherlock added in a dry voice. “Your YouTube videos don’t leave much to the imagination.”

“Sherlock!!” Both Greg and Mrs. Hudson exclaimed in exasperation.

Then Mrs. Hudson giggled and patted Sherlock on the arm.

“Oh go on you. Have a lovely weekend.”

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Those were heady days even though Greg was constantly waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Sherlock had the dedication of someone re-learning a forgotten language. But so much of it came back so easily. The casual intimacy, the passion, the shared laughter.

Greg didn’t hold back in letting Sherlock see how much he loved him. How much he cherished him. How lucky he felt that they were together. Again.

Greg always woke up early by force of habit. But he knows that Sherlock can’t help but stay awake on many nights because sleeping is just SO boring sometimes. The best days are when both of them could sleep well and also lie in because they have nowhere else they need to be but tangled up with each other, warm sleep-soft limbs under the cool morning breeze, seeing each other’s eyes as the first thing they wake up to.

Greg had always loved reading and can get completely absorbed in his book but the best days are when he can look up from his book and see a curly head peering down a microscope or tapping away at his laptop. Then he would read out something from his book and get a grunt or a laugh in reply. Sometimes he would wake up at night for a glass of water and see Sherlock lounging on the sofa reading the same book. He thinks that is the best way to read a book. To share it with someone you love.

Greg used to enjoy cooking but in recent years he simply could not be bothered to do it for one person. Now he loves to cook, especially when he knows that Sherlock will be around to eat the food. Sometimes his Consulting Detective sits on the countertop and talks to him non-stop as he cooks. Deductions, facts, old unsolved mysteries, interspersed with random ridiculous instructions on the cooking process that make Greg laugh. Later as they are eating Sherlock even hums in enjoyment and takes a second helping.

Greg thinks he couldn’t possibly love him any more than he already does, but then he surprises himself.

Greg loves his work even if it does make him weary at times to see the profusion of negativity, hostility, violence and occasionally pure evil. He will fight to solve every crime and hunt down every murderer and obtain justice for every victim. He knows that Sherlock claims not to care for the victim but he is driven by the obsessive need to solve the puzzle. The best days are when Greg can call him to the crime scene and watch him pluck the clues out of thin air and somehow identify the perpetrator so that his team can make an arrest.

Greg likes holidays. Who doesn’t? But travelling alone isn’t really as exciting as the magazines make it out to be. He has not taken a holiday in the last 3 years.

Of course Sherlock dislikes travel because it involves too many interactions with idiots and causes him to be in far too much proximity to far too many goldfish. So Greg makes sure to be his shield and protect him from the crowds and noise. He also carries a few cold case files along in case his resident genius gets too bored during travel.

When he plans that first weekend to the countryside Greg surprises him by booking a cottage homestay, far from the madding crowd. The best thing is that they even have beehives in the orchard down the garden slope.

That holiday is perfect.
Greg never thought he would get lucky enough to find someone he wanted to spend the rest of his life with. Again.

He can never help wondering how long it will last.

Sherlock remembers many things from the past few years. The fun he had solving cases with John. The madness of Moriarty and the insane lengths they had both gone to win that Game. Those terrible and terrifying years that he had spent alone, fighting, running, hiding.

He did it to save Mrs. Hudson. And John.

And Greg.

He wonders what Moriarty knew about him and Greg that made him a target. And if the depth of their relationship was so obvious to outsiders, he wonders what went so wrong that he felt the need to erase the man from his memories?

Greg had explained that he had not cheated as though that was the worst possible deal breaker in a relationship. Sherlock wonders then what could have been worse.

Would things be different if he remembered? What if he had deleted it all not only as a punishment towards Greg but also as a safety measure for himself? After all, covering a raw wound is simply logical self-preservation!

What if remembering meant that he would again be unable to forgive? And then have to go separate ways. Be alone.

No. After those painful lonely years, he has no desire to continue a painful lonely existence. Alone may protect us but we are not constantly in a war.

What protects us when we are in peace?

Unbidden he suddenly thinks of Mycroft and wonders if he is ever lonely. He is certainly alone enough.

That day when Mycroft had come to Baker Street and they had chatted and even played that silly board game like they used to, Sherlock had felt something strangely familiar. Something about the way Mycroft looked at him, almost with fondness. The way he had seemed reluctant to leave him and when he had joked about Mycroft finding a goldfish because he had been away, Mycroft had gripped his umbrella till his knuckles went white.

Sherlock had noticed and had tried to pull him into a game of deduction. Something made him uneasy and he couldn’t understand it.

Mrs. Hudson had come in just then and broken the tension by observing that they were both rather pleased to see each other.

Sherlock was perplexed.

How could other people deduce such things so easily when they were otherwise literally clueless
about which kind of ash and what sort of fingerprints and the blood spatter patterns?

There are things in his Mind Palace that make him feel as though he needs to just lift a veil and things will be seen clearly. Or wipe clean a foggy mirror. But he can’t. It all too messy and blurry and unclear. He wouldn’t know where to begin.

He knows that he has done this to himself, in a rage and while recovering from drugs. So no one else can really help undo this mess inside his memories. Not even Mycroft.

He has a niggling doubt that he may have tried to delete something about Mycroft too and cannot remember or understand why. There is no point trying to ask Mycroft because if he wanted him to know he would have told him. And he knows from experience that no one can keep a secret the way Mycroft can. So if he does not want him to know then no amount of questioning or even coercion and threats would work.

He finds himself in the extremely odd situation of worrying about Mycroft. He wonders if it is because he is so happy with Greg that he wants Mycroft to know something similar for himself.

He is making new memories with this wonderful man who loves him and cherishes him. They are now living together off and on and he finds it surprisingly easy to fall into a pattern of togetherness.

He himself has no diurnal rhythm and sleeps only when really fatigued or when immensely bored. With his work and with Greg around, neither happens as frequently as it used to. Greg doesn’t allow him to push his body beyond reason and being with Greg is ….well it’s Not Boring that’s what it is.

He used to find the entire process of meals so boring and tedious. Planning, grocery shopping, cooking, eating….He would happily live on fish and chips or takeaway all his life. While Away he subsisted on whatever food was available and after his return Mrs. Hudson took it upon her to make up for all those missing years and made sure he was well fed.

But Greg enjoys cooking, so nowadays he asks for some favourite recipes once in a while, just to see Greg’s face light up. It is decidedly odd but somehow he doesn’t like to be away from Greg for a minute if he can help it so he sits on the countertop and chats with Greg, watching him almost ‘perform’ in the kitchen , because he is just that skilled.

Greg chops and stirs and does all kinds of ridiculous fancy things while peeling vegetables into odd shapes and sizes. Juliennes and shreds and whatnots. So he asks him to make a zucchini corpse floating in the French onion soup and maybe shape the mashed potatoes into a dissected brain. Greg snorts with laughter at these suggestions and threatens to smack him with the ladle. That usually ends in a lovely snogging session while they are surrounded by delicious food smells. Sometimes they need to take a break and go to the bedroom before they can sit down to eat. Too many hot and dangerous things in the kitchen make sex a bit tricky. Later as they are eating he hums in enjoyment and takes a second helping of the food. He doesn’t need to look at Greg to know that he is beaming with joy.

Truth be told he hates holidays. Why would anyone want to get away from The Work?!!

Also, there are too many interactions with idiots and far too much proximity to far too many goldfish. But he agrees to go on one with Greg and he can see that Greg has been almost bursting with some secret surprise and he tries very hard not to deduce it. He is genuinely delighted when he finds that Greg has booked a cottage homestay, far from the madding crowd. The best thing is that they even have beehives in the orchard down the garden slope! Then he discovers that Greg has got
along cold case files and they can discuss those after dinner.

Sherlock reconsiders his perspective on holidays and decides that if all holidays were like this, he would not mind being on one the whole time.

He wonders if this is what the goldfish would call romantic.
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

“Love is a striking example of how little reality means to us.”
— Marcel Proust, In Search of Lost Time

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ten years later

Whenever Greg looked back on these last ten years he still wondered if this was all some elaborate dream.

He had never been so happy in his entire life and he was convinced that no one in this entire universe was as happy as him. How could they be?! He had Sherlock!

It was like a light had been switched on and flooded his life with magnificent colour and warmth and joy. He felt almost giddy with joy sometimes.

Of course they had their regular squabbles over crime scenes (fortunately the Powers That Be had seen sense and allowed them to continue to work together in that informal way since Sherlock flatly refused to work with anyone else and the crime rate in London never really goes down much does it?! Moriarty or no Moriarty).

Of course they had disagreements and differences of opinion. Of course there was much eye rolling and huffing and on one memorable occasion a coffee cup had come to an untimely end against the kitchen wall.

But really these occasions could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Or maybe two. Certainly not more. No. Greg was acutely aware of what the loss had meant to him and Sherlock was more invested in Not being Alone than he used to be.

Greg remembered what Sherlock had told him about his feelings for Mycroft.

“Have you ever used a blotting paper on a drop of ink Lestrade? I was like that. I was completely absorbed into my love for Mycroft. Bleeding out at the edges of my desire for him. Soaked up into non-existence outside of him.”

He remembered feeling envy for the depth of those feelings and an odd longing to experience something like that at least once in his life.

Now he did.

It was like the entire earlier part of his life had been just a way to reach this milestone. To be with Sherlock.

What he had now? This life enmeshed with Sherlock? This was the purpose of his existence. To love this man with everything he had in him. And to wake up every morning with the thrilling
knowledge that Sherlock loved him back.

They worked together and they spent most of their time together even though they still maintained separate residences.

Whenever Greg stayed over at Baker Street, Mrs. Hudson never tired of reminding him that he need not go back to his own flat and tried to bribe him with the promise of hot meals and pies and puddings.

Greg would be charmed every single time and Sherlock would huff and roll his eyes.

One day when Mrs. Hudson had been rather persistent, Sherlock had told her sharply. “He sleeps till noon on Sundays Mrs. Hudson. He has ridiculous ideas of how good he really is at detective work. He loses his temper at work.” Then he gave Greg a leery look and a lush wink. “The less said about lust the better.”

Mrs. Hudson swatted Sherlock on the arm with her dish towel and Greg turned as red as a beetroot.

Sherlock carried on talking. “You are now enabling his greed and gluttony and sloth also. Do you really want all the deadly sins to be completed so that my handsome man will go to Hell?”

Mrs. Hudson had looked horrified and muttered something about talking to his mother and Greg had looked daggers at Sherlock who had wrapped his dressing gown around himself and wandered back to his bedroom while waving goodbye to Greg.

Yeah, being in each other’s pockets the whole time was sometimes difficult for the both. Sherlock had been alone out of choice for too long and Greg had also become used to his private space, at least for some time.

Of course usually such days apart ended with one of them texting the other about dinner or a take away and they rarely spent the night in separate homes. It was more the principle of the thing really….

So when they finally did decide to buy a place together, Mrs. Hudson was the first one they informed.

Mycroft knew already since half the money was coming from Sherlock’s trust fund. He had handed over the control to Sherlock many years ago but as the lead trustee they still needed his clearance.

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In the golden glow of these happy years there was a small black box, locked away and wrapped in chains and hidden in plain sight in Greg’s heart. On some days it cast a long shadow. On some days he almost forgot it existed.

The first time they met Mycroft after He had renewed his relationship with Sherlock, Greg had been convinced he was going to die of a heart attack. He had no idea what to do.

Should he tell Mycroft not to say anything about the journal? Should he hope that he will not mention it? But if he does then just accept it as fate and then let the chips fall where they may? Surely Mycroft would not mention it now since he had chosen to ignore it all these days. Right?? Right?!
Fortunately (and as expected—now that Greg could breathe and think) Mycroft was his usual cool collected and diplomatic self. They had a reasonably civil dinner although the two brothers did trade the usual snide remarks and a few barbs about the each other’s diet and habits and intellectual capacities, but things never veered off into any dangerous territory.

It is not as though Greg was going to ask Mycroft for Sherlock’s hand in marriage, or permission to court him. Neither was it a ‘coming out’ kind of dinner. It was just three adults having a fairly cordial meal together even if each one was wondering why they had done it and to promise themselves that they would never do it again.

Greg felt ten years older by the time they got home and Sherlock was looking bored and annoyed enough to go out and commit a few murders himself.

After dinner Mycroft saw them out with a polite nod and wondered, as always, if the non-existent gods he did not believe in were somehow looking out for his younger brother in some mysterious ways.

As much as it pained him to see Sherlock in love with someone else (and it still did, even though with long years of habit he could now tamp it down to something more like an early forest fire than a nuclear combustion), he was actually glad to see that whatever had gone wrong with Greg seemed to have been mended.

He did make a note to ask Anthea to make sure the D.I had a complete cardiac assessment done. He looked like he was going to keel over with a heart attack during dinner. The last thing he wanted was for Sherlock to be alone again.

Those two years when Sherlock was away from him had been almost too much for him to bear. The thought of Sherlock sleeping alone every night with no one, not even Mrs. Hudson around to make sure he had tea or food--it was enough to make him want to break every single protocol and put aside every ounce of hatred he had for leg work and go to him and take care of him.

Mycroft had woken up in terror and sweat almost every night that Sherlock was away. The nightmares varied. They ranged from Sherlock being hurt or hungry or ill to being grievously injured, kidnapped, tortured, in pain, taking drugs again. The entire gamut of everything that could go wrong.

There was of course the unnamed absolute worst thing that could happen and Mycroft could not get himself to imagine it even vaguely. Let alone articulate it.

He had had plenty of time and occasions to ponder on that eventuality in the early years when Sherlock had, for some inexplicable reason, followed him to London, despite obviously hating him with every fibre of his being. Those days of the drug dens, the rescues, the withdrawals, the way Sherlock would cling to him when he found him and the way he would bitterly push him away once he regained consciousness.

Mycroft had spent plenty of those hours wondering what he would do if Sherlock never woke up from one of those episodes.

Since he had locked up his desires and feelings for him and thrown away the key, how much more would it hurt to know that the one he loved with his entire being was not even physically on this planet anymore?

He had spent many painful hours imagining how many days after that he himself would last.
How many days would the sense of duty to Queen and country sustain him? What about his parents if they lost not one son but two? Would he force himself to continue living for their sake? But he worked with MI6. It is not as though he was perfectly safe anyway. Surely they were mentally and emotionally prepared for the eventuality.

He had filed away all these morbid ruminations when the D.I had arrived on the scene and found Sherlock and finally seemed to have settled him.

But then had come the Fight, then the Fall and now the Return. He smiled to himself wryly. His life was divided into phases based on what happened to Sherlock more than what happened to him personally.

*What could happen to him personally that was worth a chronicle anyway?*

He would live, he would work, he would die. He would take the secret of his love to his grave, which is where it belonged.

Perhaps he could leave a legacy contrary to what Shakespeare said.

Maybe in his case the good that he did would live after him and his evil sinful thoughts would be interred with his bones.

Chapter End Notes

“The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones.”

— William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar
Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

“The true paradises are the paradises that we have lost.”
— Marcel Proust

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the short chapter but it needed to be separate from the earlier narrative!

Greg was now closer to 50 and Sherlock had been increasingly worried about him ever since the cardiac profile results had shown him to be at a higher risk for a heart attack. He had been on medication for his blood pressure for 4 years already.

Of course at Mycroft’s behest the best physician in London was managing him.

But Sherlock was unhappy.

One day after a particularly mind-bending case involving a Member of Parliament, a counterfeit currency ring and a trapeze artist that had led them on a chase as well as a close brush with a runaway car, Sherlock had declared. “That’s it Greg. This was your last case.”

“Really?” Greg asked with a slow smile. “And who made you my boss?”

Sherlock gave him a look which conveyed that he had always been his boss and really, he was going to fight him on this?!

“We will both go stir crazy Sunshine.” Greg tried to protest.

“Nope.” Sherlock said with that gleam in his eye that he got when he had an ace up his sleeve. “We are going to move to Sussex to that cottage where we went on our first weekend away. I am going to keep bees and you can…help out with whatever they do there in villages and walk the dogs and…” he waved his hands vaguely.

Greg had laughed and agreed at once. It seemed that he continued to be rather incapable of saying no to Sherlock. (Except for one thing which Sherlock had been unable to get him to say yes to. Yet.)

So they went down one weekend and finalized the deal on the cottage.
Mycroft had looked at the paperwork meticulously as always and signed with a flourish that did not betray the agony of the closing of one more door.

They were moving to Sussex.

*None of us is getting any younger Mycroft. I want Greg to take early retirement. I want to keep bees. He wants to garden. Walk dogs. Whatever rural fantasies he has been nurturing.*

Sherlock had shrugged when Mycroft had conveyed with his eyes rather than asked in words- won’t you get bored?

*I think I have had adventures enough to last me a lifetime. I never imagined I would live this long in the first place.*

Mycroft had nodded and hidden his pain. He had not expected Sherlock to live this long either, what with his propensity for attracting danger when he wasn't actively throwing himself at it.

But now he would not have the opportunity to see Sherlock even as rarely as he did. He would have no excuse to drop in at Baker Street when he found himself missing Sherlock, armed with some case file or another to ‘ask’ for his help.

This would be the end of an era.
I am back !!! Huge apologies for the VERY LONG GAP but Real Life has this way of giving you a whammy once in a while and you just have to deal with it. Lots of OTT drama in real life, at work, etc etc. Had absolutely no bandwidth to even read much let alone write! But here we are again. I am hoping to wrap this up real soon because I have some other WIPs and I ALSO have a few more fics that I do want to write up too!! Fingers crossed :D
A HUGE Thank you to whoever is still reading this fic!!!

Now that Sherlock had taken the decision, he was, as always, too impatient to wait for it and wanted to go there and get started right now!

They did have a few pending cases that needed to be resolved, despite Sherlock’s desires to stop it all. And then of course the protocols for Greg to take premature retirement took some time and there were notice periods and handovers and a lot of annoying paperwork that Sherlock wanted to burn and then throw into the Thames.

Three months later Sherlock had finally started moving some of his books to the cottage and he and Greg had gone down every weekend over the next month to supervise the renovations and the bee hives.

Greg had watched in fond amusement as Sherlock had twirled around the space, his excitement and impatience making him almost crackle while planning the layout, deciding where things would go, changing things around completely every other weekend, spouting non-stop ‘deductions’ and observations to the baffled moving men like it was a crime scene.

Once in a while Sherlock would pause and look at Greg questioningly and Greg would just nod his approval. Honestly, he was too old and a bit jaded to get excited over such details. The only thing he wanted in this house was Sherlock. Full stop.

The rest was semi-colons and oxford commas and such other utterly insignificant details as far as he was concerned.

He had nothing of any importance to move down here anyway. A bag with some of his clothes and another of his own books. His stuff and Sherlock’s was now too mixed up with ten years of intermittent cohabitation to make any separate sense.

On the fourth weekend he finally got Sherlock to relax and sit with him on the porch and have something to drink after dinner.

As they sat in the chilly air, Sherlock moved closer and rested his head on Greg’s shoulder. Greg smiled down at him and stroked his cheek.

“Happy, Sunshine?” He asked.

“Hmm.” Sherlock hummed, contented and tired. Then he grumbled that the desk needed to be
moved again because of some complicated reason involving the changing angles of sunlight in the winter and the lab room needed more cupboards and the ……. 

“Shh.” Greg said, trying to soothe him. “It will all fall into place.”

“Easy for you to say.” Sherlock scoffed. “You don’t care if the kitchen sink is not symmetrically placed or there are an odd number of hooks on the wall. Or….”

Greg turned to look at Sherlock and gave him a soft kiss.

“The only thing I care about is you. Ok? If you are happy that’s enough for me.”

He grinned as Sherlock rolled his eyes and muttered something about incorrigible romantics and then winked and said. “So …that new mattress you chose for the master bedroom after checking out only 26 different types ……. Do you want to check if it really works?”
Then the week before the planned retirement party at Scotland Yard, Greg was shot at. Fatally.

It was not even his crime scene. It was random. Out of the blue. Devastating.

But as Mycroft’s cynical soul had always expected, when something seemed too good to be true, he was always waiting for the other shoe to fall. But even his hardened heart had to admit that this was not the way he had thought the end would come.

This was not the way he would have ever expected it to happen, although in the early years it had been a high probability.

*But now?!* Between the two of them, they had survived all these years of actively chasing criminals, all those drug dens, all those blood pressure tablets and even Moriarty for heaven’s sake….and now this??!

After the initial shock and disbelief had passed, all Mycroft wanted to do was tear the universe apart for putting that look on Sherlock’s face. That blank mask behind which he was clearly freefalling. That frozen expression behind which he always hid his emotions from the rest of the world.

Mycroft knew that look only too well because that is exactly what he himself had done. So very often.

Alas, no matter how powerful he was, there were some things that even he could not control. He hated himself for that.

*What was the use of all his power and all his control and all his….all his life….if he could not protect Sherlock from such a blow?*

All he could do now was to increase surveillance on Sherlock and cancel all his travel plans. These were all danger nights and there was no way he was going to be outside of London for a single minute if he could help it.

He had no words to say besides clichés and platitudes and he knew that Sherlock had no patience to hear any of them or anything else. From anyone.

He was not terribly surprised when he got a terse text from Sherlock the next day after the funeral that he was going to move to Sussex right away.

Mycroft read the message. Then he sat there for a good ten minutes, twirling the phone in his hand, wondering what he could possibly do to help.

Clearly, negotiating with Sherlock to ask him to stay back in London was impossible at this point. He was grieving like he had never done before. Mycroft remembered what it had been like with
Redbeard and this must be a thousand times worse. He knew that Sherlock had thrown up walls to protect himself and he knew too that those walls would crumble someday. The idea of Sherlock sitting alone in a dark empty house far away from him when the shock finally hit him made Mycroft extremely unhappy.

He had a word with Anthea. She was now officially the head of MI6 and while Mycroft was far, far more powerful now than he had been a decade ago, much of his mastery and command was exerted at a distance. Not just legwork but even desk work had become redundant. He could do what he did from anywhere in the world. His presence in London was not really needed on a regular basis and Anthea had been trying to persuade him to take a break or move out into the country for a while.

Thus it was that almost to the minute that Sherlock pulled out of Baker Street with his bags, Mycroft left his office building and followed at an even but reasonably close distance.

When they reached the cottage Mycroft simply asked his driver to keep circling. He wasn’t sure what he could do without incurring Sherlock’s wrath at interference and fussing but there was no way he was going to leave him alone.

Eventually, on the fifth go-around his phone vibrated with a message.

[Mycroft go home. I promised Greg once that I would never do drugs again. He may not be there but the promise stands. Go home. SH]

Mycroft read the message with mixed feelings.

He was proud that Sherlock was still able to observe, slightly disappointed that he had allowed himself to be found out. He was also moved by the fact that while he been unable to keep Sherlock off drugs despite threats and rehab, apparently a promise to Greg was unshakeable even from beyond the grave.

The car was on its seventh circumnavigation of the cottage when Mycroft looked outside the car window at the rapidly gathering dusk and came to a decision.

Sherlock was not at all surprised to see him when he opened the door to Mycroft’s knock.

“I am surprised you waited an entire hour after my message.” He remarked dryly.

Mycroft observed him without saying anything, his heart breaking all over again at the obvious signs of suppressed mourning.

He removed his coat and put his umbrella in the stand and went to the kitchen. He had brought along a hamper full of food, knowing that Sherlock would not even notice if there was no food for days on end.

That night he made sure that Sherlock ate something. They didn’t talk. They didn’t need to.
Despite all these years apart, despite all the difficulties and differences, when everything is stripped bare, they know each other in a deep and abiding way that no one else ever has and no one else ever will.

Sherlock may throw up walls against the rest of the world but now, with the burden of his sudden grief he does not hide from Mycroft.

Mycroft can almost feel every thought travelling through every synapse till the raw anguish seems to have permeated him too. He may have envied Greg his role in Sherlock’s life, but he did respect him and he genuinely appreciated the way he had allowed Sherlock to be more open, more vulnerable, more accepting of others. Above all, he had made Sherlock happy and for that alone Mycroft would owe him a debt forever.

So he is grieving too and if this silent sharing is all he can do to help Sherlock, he will do it most willingly. When he had told Sherlock ‘I will always be there for you.’ He had meant it as truly as any vow.

_In sickness and in health. Till death do us part._

After dinner he poured them both a drink and settled down on the sofa to read. Sherlock sat at the other end and after a long ten minutes asked.

“What staying the night?”

“If you don’t mind?” Mycroft said, knowing that the answer to the question ‘if you want me to’ will almost certainly be ‘No I don’t.’

Sherlock didn’t reply but when he did get up half an hour later he nodded at Mycroft and said “See you tomorrow.”
That night Sherlock slept for an entire four hours and was already looking much better when Mycroft woke up and saw him sitting still as a statue looking out through the living room window.

Mycroft made tea and cooked breakfast and called Sherlock to the dining table. Sherlock came and sat, still looking outside the window. Mycroft waited but as two minutes turn to six and then ten, he held up a fork in his hand and made as though to feed Sherlock. To his surprise, Sherlock just opened his mouth and ate. Mechanically. Half way through the meal he focused and stared at his plate.

‘You made hashbrowns.’

‘Yes. It used to be your favourite’. Mycroft said casually.

‘He cooks these for me.” Sherlock said in a hollow far away voice.

Mycroft has nothing to say in reply. He notes the present tense and reminds himself of the five stages of grief.

*Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance.*

He needs to be with Sherlock and support him till he finds acceptance.

If he finds acceptance.

He reminds himself that it has been 30 years since he realized his forbidden love for his own beautiful younger brother. He is not sure if he has still accepted that it can never be his to have. Not in this lifetime.

So he just watched in silence as Sherlock pushed himself away from the table and went to sit in the garden.

The housekeeper came in at noon and did the dishes and some dusting and made the beds.

Mycroft talked to her while she was in the kitchen. She is one of the many retired undercover operatives he has engaged to ensure that Sherlock is not left alone. After all, Sherlock may have wanted to retire from solving crime but the criminals and their associates who may want revenge are unlikely to retire.

That evening after tea when Mycroft carried his cup into the kitchen he was startled by a loud crash. He rushed out to find Sherlock standing there shaking with rage, shards of porcelain on the floor.

“Why him Mycroft?! Why him?? It should have been me! My life was always more dangerous than his. Why him?? Why him?!?”

And so Mycroft ticked off the anger and bargaining stages and stood there as close to him as he could and waited till Sherlock regained some control. He knows how much Sherlock hates being touched and especially more so when he is like this.
When Sherlock sat down on the floor exhausted by his outburst, Mycroft also sat down in front of him.

“Sherlock. I cannot even imagine how much you are hurting right now. But I am going to sit here with you and if you want to talk I am here to listen.” Mycroft told him in his most soothing voice. “I will always be here for you.”

By the third day Sherlock had still not spoken to him about Greg, or anything for that matter, but the silence had never once been hostile or uncomfortable. Mycroft has never put much regard into this whole touchy-feely New Age let’s talk about our feelings thing. Too much vulnerability. Of course he understands that the goldfish simply love it. To the extent that they have hours upon hours of TV time devoted wholly to such things.

He sighs. He will never understand their feeble minds and the desire to overwhelm themselves with emotions.

Then he wonders if he is being a hypocrite because being here, alone with Sherlock, without any interference from the outside world, and even more importantly, without any hostility between them, has reminded him of his long suppressed emotions.

Of the beautiful and brilliant young brother who hero-worshipped him and whom he loved back with everything in him. A love that had threatened to transcend and blur social boundaries. A love that he had given so much of himself into that it had been impossible to find anyone else ever again who could inspire even a fraction of those feelings in him.

He often wondered if they would have been completely different persons if he had been able love and be loved back, all those years ago.

But real life intrudes as always and Mycroft needed to make a trip back to London just for a day. He was reluctant but there were some loose ends he really needs to tie up in person before he can move back…come back here.

That evening as he is leaving Sherlock finally looked him in the eye and Mycroft looked back at that beloved face, gaunt in its sorrow and it takes every ounce of willpower to move away and leave.

“I will be back tomorrow Sherlock. Please eat your meals.”

Mycroft didn’t even bother telling him to sleep. He knows it is unlikely.

Sherlock nodded, unable or unwilling to speak and closed the door behind him.

Mycroft called the housekeeper as soon as he got into the car.
“Mrs. McAllister? Yes, I am leaving now but please drop in after an hour and at 10 am tomorrow. Keep me informed both times. Yes. Thank you. Much appreciated. I will be back tomorrow evening.”

Then he asked the driver to turn the car back to London. It was only for a day. He needed to make some calls and tie up some loose ends and take care of this in a better way.

He could not …would not…did not want to stay away from Sherlock any more.

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.

The next afternoon as he packed a bigger bag to take down to the cottage he had rented next door to Sherlock’s he remembered to carry with him the packet that Greg had left with him all those years ago.

“Sherlock deserves to be with the one he loves” Greg had said.

Mycroft knows that, no matter how much his own heart aches at the fact, Sherlock had truly loved Greg, and Greg had clearly loved him back.

He should be happy about it. He has tried. He will continue to try.

He never did open the packet, never had the courage to be faced with tangible proof of that love.

But now he should hand it over to Sherlock. He figures it probably has something which would have fond memories for the two of them.
Chapter 36

Chapter Summary

Sherlock thinks about love and loss

Sherlock’s Mind Palace has been in overdrive since the moment he got the news of that bullet that changed his entire life. That destroyed his entire life in fact. The life he had built with Greg. Unexpected but filled with so much happiness. The dark years of the Fall almost wiped away by the unconditional love this man had given him. The indulgences, the caring, the desire, the intimacy.

He wishes he had told Greg more often just how much he meant to him. That he had told him more often that he loved him. That they had spent more time together just the two of them. That he had………but what was the point of these regrets and ruminations?

It was what it was.

And he knew that Greg knew exactly how deeply he felt for him.

He knew it. He knew it and accepted it for what it was despite knowing that Sherlock had been in love with Mycroft and probably always would be.

Despite all his attempts at deletion, he had not really been able to delete his feelings for Mycroft. He had managed to twist it and distort it for a while but when he stepped back into his relationship with Greg, some of those memories had come back. He had never shared them with Greg and most certainly had kept them away from Mycroft.

He remembered writing lovesick poems in Mycroft’s old journal. Thank goodness that journal has disappeared. It would be mortifying if Mycroft found it somewhere among the stuff from their parents’ home.

He remembered thinking then that he would always be in love with him. He wondered if that was still true.

_Had it been the hubris of youth or the desperation of his feelings that had made him believe in such eternal love? Had the fact that it was and would always be unrequited and forbidden made him cling to it with even more possessiveness?_

Sherlock knows that he is no longer the same person he was that day in the pub when Greg first rescued him and saved him. And then continued to save him, so many more times. He grounded him and anchored him. He loved him unconditionally and loyally.

Those feeling of warmth and comfort and desire had survived the deletion from his Mind Palace even if he had managed to delete memories and even his name. It was the lingering emotions that had finally helped him make the decision to not attempt to find out why he had deleted him all those years ago.

He remembers every word that Greg had said to him that day, after John’s wedding. After their ‘first’ kiss.
“I beg your forgiveness Sherlock. I meant well. I have no idea how you managed to forget everything, including my name, but it does not matter. It is better this way. We can create new memories. And I promise you that I will never do anything to hurt you again.”

Sherlock gave a bitter laugh.

You died Greg. You promised you would never do anything to hurt me again. But you left me. I am now exhausted by the sheer physical effort of getting used to moving around inside a home without you in it. I miss hearing you say Good morning Sunshine. I miss the smell of your cologne. I miss your touch and your warmth and your smile. I miss your joy. I miss who I was when I was with you. I was safe. I was happy. I knew who I was before you and I don’t want to go back there. Who will I now be without you? Who should I be? How should I be? I anticipate seeing you at every corner. I wake up in the morning and want to call out to you. I look up from my book and miss seeing your grey head across the sofa.

Now? When I look up….well, there was Mycroft for the past few days. But for how long? He has the world to run. He can’t be baby-sitting me forever.

He stops when he realizes he has been talking to himself. He wonders how long he can carry on like this.

They say it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.

He is getting to be a bit of an expert on the ‘lost’ part and isn’t sure if the pain is worth it after all.
Chapter 37

Chapter Summary

The packet (or Pandora's box) is opened.

When Sherlock finally came back in from inspecting the beehives, he found Mycroft there, waiting for him. They nodded at each other in greeting and Mycroft offered him a cup of tea that he had just made and some cookies he had brought along.

They finished their tea over five minutes of a comfortable silence.

Then Mycroft cleared their things and opened his bag and handed over a sealed packet to Sherlock.

“Greg had given me this. A long time ago. You may want it back.”

Sherlock looked puzzled and started to open the packet.

“Greg gave this to you? When?? What did he say?”

“He said you deserve to be with the one you love. I figured it was some kind of proof of your relationship.”

Sherlock opened the packet and looked inside and turned pale and almost stopped breathing. _No! This could not be!!_

And all those memories came flooding back.

_Oh Greg!! What did you do!!_

But now seeing it here was even more devastating than the knowledge of what Greg had done. Now it was even worse because it meant that Mycroft had never even seen it!

Sherlock sat holding his head in his hands, looking as devastated as he felt. Mycroft looked at him in alarm and moved closer, worried.

“What happened Sherlock? What is it?!”

“Oh Mycroft.” Sherlock groaned. His head was reeling from the flood of memories unleashed by the sight of the contents of the packet.

“Greg died believing he was second best. I wish you had looked at this and told him he was wrong. That is why I deleted him!! That is why he never said yes to me. I asked him to marry me every year. And every year he said _let us see how you feel about it next year sunshine_. I finally stopped asking him five years ago. He was waiting for you to come and claim me.”

“Me?!” Mycroft asked, utterly baffled. “Why me?!”

Sherlock wordlessly turned the packet upside down and dropped the journal in his lap.

Mycroft picked it up and recognized it instantly. It was his own leather bound poetry notebook
from college.

“But this…this is mine………” He picked it up and saw Sherlock’s handwriting and read the fragments as he flipped through the pages. He stopped when an inserted photograph stuck out. He pulled it out and looked at it. Looked at himself.

The 24 year old redhead who had just finished college and the scrawny (beautiful!) eighteen year old brother of his scowling next to him, hands wrapped around himself.

He remembered the exact moment at which this had been taken.

The dappled sunlight on the porch, the smell of apple pie baked for his farewell supper. The expression of pride on his parents’ faces as he was about to leave for a very prestigious position. (well, a starting position really but with great promise, as Uncle Rudy had explained).

He remembered the way he had forced himself to say goodbye to Sherlock and ignore the agony he could see in the boy’s eyes. The still fierce anger at the betrayal of their separation. He had barely been able to control himself from holding him close and ‘kissing it better’ the way he used to in their childhood. He had wanted to tell him how badly he missed him and how much he wanted to not leave him again. His throat hurt with unspoken words and his arms ached with ungiven hugs.

He remembered that day as though it was yesterday.

But……..but why was this photo in a notebook where Sherlock seemed to have written out romantic poetry…..a lot of romantic poetry.…

He blinked and in an instant all the shards of all the memories over all the years fell into place and Mycroft almost sagged under the weight of his deduction.

“Oh Sherlock!” He said in a voice laced with despair. “I am so, so very sorry. This is why you were meeting with the red heads that day in the pub.”

“Yes Mycroft.” Sherlock said in a neutral voice, looking at something far away on the horizon. “And then I found Greg. I loved him. I wish he had known…..that you did not…..I wish you had seen this and told him that you did not love me that way.”

Mycroft was silent for a minute, grappling with himself before he seemed to have come to some decision.

“Sherlock.” He started to say, softly. Then he waited. Sherlock seemed to be listening. But would he want to really hear what he had to say?

But would he want to really hear what he had to say? Mycroft knew that he had to say it though.

“Sherlock.” He started again, this time more firmly. “That would not have been the truth. Why do you think I wrote those poems in the first place? They were for you. I have always loved you more than as a brother. That is why I put the distance between us. But the truth also is that all those years ago , even if I had seen the journal , when Gregory gave it to me, my answer would have been no. It would not have been the truth. Certainly not. But it would have been the right thing to do. It would not have been safe for either of us. And finally what I wanted for you was happiness, always. With me or without me. And I could see that you were happy with Gregory. So very happy.”

“I was.” Sherlock said softly. “I truly was. Look at us now Mycroft. Old broken men and my heart is buried six feet under. He was my refuge Mycroft. The way you used to be. He was soft, he was steady. He used to call me his sunshine but he was my sun, moon and stars.”
As you were mine Sherlock. As you have always been and will always be. Death is not the only way you can lose someone you love…. Mycroft thought sadly.
Chapter 38

Chapter Summary

Sorry for this endless saga !! The full outline is written up all the way to the end but the filling it out is taking time !! Work and real life in competition with the muse is not a good battle alas....

Chapter Notes

“They do not die for us immediately, but remain bathed in a sort of aura of life which bears no relation to true immortality but through which they continue to occupy our thoughts in the same way as when they were alive. It is as though they were traveling abroad.”
— Marcel Proust

They sat in silence for a very long time.

Mycroft was trying to make sense of this new and devastating piece of information.

Would he really have said no all those years ago if he had found out that what he thought was a sinful and forbidden love was actually reciprocated?

Or would he have appeased his own conscience with all the tales of incest from Greek and Norse and Roman mythology? Not to forget the Egyptian, Indonesian and Venetian myths. In fact it would seem that the gods rarely married non-siblings! Zeus and Hera were siblings and consorts. As were their parents! The Indian God of Death was also the consort of his own sister.

Those relationships had even led to children.

His mind was whirling with a sense of deep loss. A complicated sense of loss because he had already come to terms with never being able to have what he had wanted. But now to find out that he could perhaps have had it after all? What would it have done to both of them to have had their love fulfilled? Returned in full measure? It would have kept Sherlock away from drugs, he was quite sure of that now.

Would the hiding and the potential impact of the discovery of their relationship been worth it?
What would it have done to their parents?

No, Mycroft reminded himself. He could not have had what he wanted. He would never have done that to his parents. And certainly not to Sherlock. He loved him more than anything in the universe. He still did.

Those old dreams, naïve and romantic perhaps, still resonated with him. All those old longings were starting to slowly surface. Sherlock and him. Living together in easy domesticity and intimacy. He would look after Sherlock. Read poetry to him. Gaze upon his beautiful face. Hold
him in his arms. Keep him safe from the world of goldfish that did not understand or deserve him.

But he had to admit that he had been proved wrong in his estimation of the goldfish. Well, Greg may have actually been marginally better than most goldfish but he was far from being a genius like them. Despite that he had made his way to his brother’s heart and looked after him with as much love as he deserved.

Surely it was wrong of Mycroft to wish that things had been different? That Sherlock had had those years with him instead of with Gregory? That they had been together but forced to hide from the world? That all the dangers of his life would befall Sherlock? (although he had shown himself to be more than capable of attracting his own dangers!)

Could he really wish for things to be different?

Mycroft sighed. The answer was a firm no. Alone protected him and also protected Sherlock from him. His loneliness and his unrequited yearnings were a price worth paying.

And now? Now it may be too late to expect that the fervour of young love would have survived all those years of suppression. For either of them.

But perhaps they could at least go back to being good brothers?

They had done well with that. They had been the best of brothers, until his despicable desires had reared their ugly head. And then like the hydra, they had grown new heads every time Mycroft had tried to cut them off.

His beautiful brother whose first smile he had seen and whose first word had been My. The angel of his delight whose razor sharp brain almost matched his own. Whose laugh was truly a thing of joy forever. (Now Mycroft couldn’t even remember when the last time was that he had heard it!)

Sherlock’s impish behaviour had been transformed almost overnight into an evocative charm and Mycroft had fallen before he even realized what he was feeling.

When the horror of it all had become clear he had tried hard to put a distance between them. He had repeated a mantra of sentiments and emotions being chemical defects. He had created an armour of ice around himself and reminded himself that alone protected him.

He remembered having entertained a half-baked idea of finding someone he could be with so as to be able to forget Sherlock. He remembered that sinking feeling in his heart when he realized that there was no one else. There could be no one else. Ever.

He had spent a scant minute mourning that and then dedicated himself to his work. Being married to his work. That could be a solution.

Eventually that had been the solution.

He was not as celibate as people liked to believe. In the early days, with the Cold War having given way to an even greater mess, sex had been a valuable currency of trade, especially in the Middle East where gay men could hardly find someone they could be with without fear of death by beheading. Of course, such close encounters within diplomatic enclaves were assured of safety. Mycroft had done his duty to Queen and Country on more than one such occasion. But as soon as he was able to move on from what was euphemistically referred to as ‘leg work’ he had done so.

It had now been over two decades that he had been intimate with anyone. He knew that many religious orders held celibacy in very high regard and he wondered at the irony of it all. A lifetime
of enforced celibacy because the only body he would ever touch of his own volition would be the one that was forever forbidden to him.

He was lost in the veritable storm of these reflections and ruminations when Sherlock interrupted him.

“That day at the pub when Greg found me, I was planning to kill myself.” Sherlock stated, so matter-of-fact that Mycroft almost missed the import of what he was saying.

He listened, stunned, as Sherlock continued. “Because I was so much in love with you and it was impossible and unattainable. I tried to find replacements. Red heads. So I could fool my eyes. But my heart and mind knew that you were irreplaceable.”

Mycroft closed his eyes then because he simply could not bear to look at Sherlock like this. So miserable and gaunt and his face etched with a profound sadness.

But Sherlock was still talking. “I spoke to Greg about you. All the time. After we grew close he accepted that he could never replace you in my heart but he hoped that perhaps we could make a life together. He accepted that he would be second best. My first and true love has always been you. Like beauty is a social construct, I think you imprinted on my mind and soul too deeply for there to be space for anyone else.”

Sherlock gave a wry smile. “That is the reason why he hesitated for us to be together for the longest time. Always believing that it was his duty to somehow find a way for you and me to be together. Giving you this journal was his greatest act of courage. And stupidity. If you had said yes he would have lost me. As it turned out, he lost me anyway. Since you had not said anything about it I assumed that you had read it and chosen not to say anything. In a rage at his indiscretion as well as your rejection, as I believed it to be, I deleted him.”

Mycroft murmured. “The day I sent you to rehab.”


They sat in silence once again, the very air in the room weighed down by these revelations.

Sherlock spoke up again, as though he needed to unburden himself. As though the sight of that journal had unlocked something deep inside of him that could no longer stay hidden or silenced.

“But I chose him Mycroft. I could have stayed like you. Alone. But I chose him.” Sherlock shook his head slowly. “He never really accepted that I think. He had that ridiculous saviour martyr knight complex. He would have given me up for my happiness. He tried to. On more than one occasion.”

As did I Mycroft thought to himself. As did I.

“That is what true love is I suppose.” Sherlock murmured, as though to himself.

Yes! Mycroft wanted to tell him. Yes it is!

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Later that evening, after dinner, Mycroft asked Sherlock. “Do you intend to continue staying here?”
“I think so.” Sherlock replied, looking outside the window in the direction of the orchard and the beehives. “There are too many memories of Greg in London. At least here there will be some peace. Maybe make new memories.” He sighed sadly. “I seem to keep having to learn to do that!”

Mycroft leaned on his umbrella and looked at the floor. Sherlock's revelations of the love he had felt for him gave him the courage to wonder, even if extremely cautiously, that they may still have a chance at making this work. Slowly and patiently. Without any expectations. But he would never forgive himself if he didn't even try this time around.

“Well…I have also been considering retirement." He said to Sherlock."Perhaps I could find a cottage nearby and we could find a way to be ….brothers again?"
Chapter 39

Chapter Summary

Mycroft allows himself to hope.

The look in Sherlock’s eyes tells him what he needs to know.

He has already rented out the neighbouring cottage in anticipation of just wanting to (needing to!) be there for Sherlock. As a brother. As a guardian.

But now? After these revelations and revived emotions, he allows himself just a flicker of hope that perhaps…just perhaps he could be there for more.

The next morning Mycroft drops in after breakfast and sits and reads while Sherlock makes some kind of scientific tour of the hives and writes down many notes on a chart in his study.

After lunch they discuss the future of bees and the future of the planet.

Mycroft wonders why he had ever thought that the world was important. Its rules and its politics and its power. He should have given it all up for what really mattered.

But alas, he knew that was the usual wisdom in retrospect. It was easier to imagine the romantic outcome, like one of those swashbuckling heroes of yore. Heathcliff from Wuthering Heights maybe. Or Alastair from These Old Shades. He would come galloping on a white horse, hoofs beating on the cobbled stone pathway. Sherlock would be quick to jump on behind him, curly locks wild in the wind, velvet cloak flying being them as they went off into the sunset. Happily ever after.

He sighed and nodded ruefully to himself. If only….

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Over the next few days they fall into a comfortable pattern.

When he reads out to Sherlock from his book or Sherlock talks to him about the flight patterns while waving his hands around almost sending the magnifying glass flying, Mycroft feels as though the past few decades never happened. They might as well be back in their old library back home, with him reading and teaching Sherlock while he lay on the carpet at his feet ‘observing’ some poor insect under his magnifying glass.

Truly, the more things change the more they remain the same.

Sometimes they listen to music. Mycroft is pleased to find that they still have the same tastes in music. He finds himself humming when he is clearing the dishes after their meal. He pauses when he realizes that. It is a good feeling. Sharing a home with Sherlock is a surprisingly gratifying experience. He feels a twinge of regret at the lost years.
So the days pass and after six long weeks one evening Sherlock brings out his violin. He touches the bow to the strings and the melancholy tune that pours forth would have taken a heart of stone to not cry.

When he is done playing he just stands there and Mycroft is up and near him before he makes any conscious decision.

He cannot do this anymore. He cannot bear to see Sherlock in so much pain. He puts his arms around him gently and Sherlock buries his face in his shoulder and weeps like it was the end of the world.

That day something shifts. It is as though Sherlock is finally able to accept what has happened.

The next week when Sherlock makes a snarky comment at Mycroft he is almost dazzled by the smile Mycroft gives him.

Sherlock refuses to visit Greg’s grave but Mycroft goes when he makes a short trip to London a few days later. He places flowers and bows his head at the sacrifice this man had been willing to make.

He wonders if he himself would ever have been able to give up Sherlock if he actually had him and finds himself wanting.

Thank you he says to Greg and walks back.

That night he reaches late and Sherlock is waiting on him for dinner. Sherlock is in a sober mood. He knows where Mycroft has been. Mycroft tries to cheer him up a bit by sharing childhood stories.

By the time they have had a few drinks and remembered the happy days gone by, they are both in a mellow mood.

“It’s getting late.” Mycroft says, getting up from the sofa. “I should go.”

“Stay.” Sherlock says, looking at him. “There is a bed made up in the spare room.”

The next morning Mycroft wakes up with a strange feeling inside him. It takes him a few minutes to recognize it.

It is happiness.

He swings between panic and relief. The slow easy domesticity and the intimacy that he has craved forever is in his grasp. But he is so used to sacrifice that he does not dare believe this could actually be his.....

Only time will tell. And he is a man of infinite patience.

After breakfast he clears the dishes and then tells Sherlock he needs to go back and shower.

Sherlock has gone back to his beekeeping journal already but he looks up and says quietly. “Why don’t you bring your things here Mycie?”

Mycroft pauses, hand on umbrella, unwilling to even breathe lest this fragile moment should shatter. He finds himself unsure of his words and asks with his expression—are you sure.
Sherlock gives the smallest of smiles. Yes.

As Mycroft walks back to his cottage he mulls over the amazing cycle of life.

*What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the butterfly calls the beginning.*
Chapter 40

Chapter Summary

Mycroft contemplates. Is his life a symphony or a five act play?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

So Mycroft moves in that afternoon.

Sherlock watches him, leaning against the door frame, as he unpacks his clothes and hangs everything up methodically.

When Mycroft has finished, he looks up and sees Sherlock sigh. It is a deep sigh as though a long wait is over and he has finally come home.

Mycroft goes down to the kitchen and makes them both a cup of tea. They drink in silence. Sherlock is silent because he has always been more a man of action than words. Mycroft is silent because he is still trying to sort out what words would be safe to not shatter this fragile world they are building slowly around themselves.

That evening Sherlock starts talking to him over something he has been researching. Turns out that Mycroft knows more about it than anything the internet has to offer. So Sherlock listens as Mycroft explains and the silence is no longer a heavy presence, like a third awkward guest.

The silence becomes a light and pleasant interlude between interesting and satisfying conversations.

As the days pass, the silence gets filled with Mycroft humming or Sherlock typing away or even playing the violin.

The tunes have shifted from melancholy to wistful and even mildly cheerful. Optimistic.

Mycroft can read the language of Sherlock’s violin and he can see the composition in front of him as clearly as if it were written on the wall.

Sherlock started with his young life and played the first movement brisk and lively, passionate, often angry, alive. So alive. Hungry for more. Riding the waves. On top of the game.

Since Gregory’s passing he has been playing slow and lyrical, mourning, remembering, wrapped in memories.

But now Mycroft can sense a lightness in his music. The unbearable lightness of being. The possibility that the road hasn’t ended, just taken an unexpected turn. And there may be treasures and riches and pleasures unknown just round the next corner.

Mycroft is waiting for them both to turn that corner.

He is a patient man, especially now that he knows that the steps they have been taking have moved...
them closer to that corner. The grand finale. The magnum opus. It is there, right there. He can almost hear it, taste it. But he will wait for it because it is still to be given, not taken.

He has always been a man of infinite patience and now that he is almost there, he feels an odd sense of calm. Of confidence. Of faith. It will be theirs to have and to hold. And he can wait.

This magnum opus has been in progress all his life. This symphony has stretched out over his entire adult life and now, he can hear the triumphant swell of the joyous finale. Almost. It is coming.

Sometimes he contemplates this and wonders if it is a classic five act play instead, like the ones Shakespeare wrote all his life. The first act is introduces the characters and the setting. The second act takes that action and complicates it. In the third act there is a climax. In the fourth act the results of the climax are played out.

Perhaps that is where they are currently and hopefully soon there will be a fifth act which will wind it all up and present the ending, the finale tied up in a grand bow, to enthusiastic applause and maybe some roses thrown at the stage in appreciation.

Truly, all the world’s a stage and all men and women merely players….Mycroft thinks to himself for the hundredth time in his life. He has been so used to writing the script of this play on the stage of world politics. He had written entries and exits for powerful men and women and even entire countries on occasion.

However for this particular performance he is waiting in the wings, waiting to be called out and take his rightful place.

The script is in someone else’s hands this time.

Chapter End Notes

1. With rare exceptions, the four movements of a symphony conform to a standardized pattern. The first movement is brisk and lively; the second is slower and more lyrical; the third is an energetic minuet (dance) or a boisterous scherzo (“joke”); and the fourth is a rollicking finale.

2. The German critic, Guystav Freytach (1816-1895), attempted to rationalise the five act structure. In his model the first act is the exposition, introducing the characters and the setting and ending with the play’s significant piece of action. The second act takes that action and complicates it: that’s the complication. In the third act there is a climax, where the fortunes of the character or characters are reversed – either good to bad or bad to worse: that’s the climax. In the fourth act the results of the reversal are played out, putting the final outcome in doubt. This is the resolution. The fifth act winds it all up by presenting the consequences of the resolution and tying up loose ends. That is the denouement.
Chapter 41

Chapter Summary

Anthea brings news.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

While their domestic life has been moving at its slow rustic old world pace, Mycroft has not yet fully retired from his former life. He still keeps tabs on the outside world and once in two weeks Anthea comes over to update him on things which cannot be spoken on the phone or written down anywhere.

It has been a routine followed unvaryingly over the past two months.

But this Saturday she is late. Mycroft pulls the pocket watch out to check and raises his eyebrows. Almost an hour late. Catastrophic! What could possibly have caused this?

The China Sea crisis had been resolved and the Boko Haram vanquished. Had a new crisis emerged in the past 24 hours that he was unaware of? And why had she not called?

He tapped his fingers nervously on the arm of the sofa as he waited, suit and tie and umbrella in place, professional as ever even if they were meeting in the living room of a cottage he now shared with Sherlock in Sussex.

He finally heard the purr of the car as it drew up into their driveway. Three seconds later he heard the car door open and shut and he stood up to let Anthea in.

This evening Sherlock had gone off to the village with the honey he had recently harvested. He managed to find something to do in the village every other Saturday so that Mycroft was all alone when he met with Anthea. But today, since Anthea was late, he was on his way back when he saw the car come in.

When Anthea came in and sat down, she looked at Mycroft with such an odd expression in her eyes that he did not know what to make of it. Surprise, amusement, shock, bewilderment.

“What is it Anthea?” He asked her. “Sherlock….is he in danger?” His first thought being that of course. The Consulting Detective may have retired but the criminals he helped put away may be out on parole or having completed their terms and seeking revenge.

No. Anthea shook her head. She looked like she was searching for the right way to open this conversation despite having rehearsed it during the entire drive.

Mycroft waited. If Sherlock was not in danger, he could wait for this.

Just then Sherlock came in, took off his coat, nodded at Anthea and went to make tea. He saw that Mycroft had already kept everything ready so he just picked up the tray and brought it out and sat down.
Anthea looked at both of them and asked. “Do you remember that case of the Red Headed League?” There was an odd inflection to her voice, with many unsaid conversations happening in the under current.

Sherlock stiffened. *The case he had solved with Greg in Edinburgh. The day that some women had flirted with Greg and he had gotten jealous and possessive and angry and wanted them to be married so everyone would know who Greg belonged to. The day he had saved Mycroft from being kidnapped by Chinese rouge scientists.*

Mycroft nodded and sighed. *Yes. Of course he remembered. He also recalled the dinner he had invited Gregory and Sherlock to as a thank you afterwards and had genuinely thought that Gregory was going to have a heart attack. In retrospect it was obvious that the journal sitting in his cabinet was what was literally killing Gregory with the stress of it all.*

They both turned and looked at Anthea, myriad questions in their eyes. It was more than 10 years now since that case. What could she possibly have to tell them now?

“Well…” Anthea started to say. “Well, it turns out that they did manage to swipe some DNA from you after all Mr. Holmes. Perhaps it was from the laboratory which did your annual blood tests or some other way.”

She tipped her head to be discreet and Mycroft flushed as Sherlock turned to look at him, eyes narrowed.

Mycroft cleared his throat and replied. “There was no ‘other way’ Anthea. But I wonder if it was the tooth extraction I had around the same time? Stem cells from the roots could have been used.”

Anthea nodded. *Yes of course! That made perfect sense. The dental work used to be outsourced to a private clinic. It was certainly not semen from an indiscreet encounter.*

Sherlock looked away then, awkward on behalf of Mycroft but feeling lighter at the knowledge that Mycroft had no one else he had been intimate with. He knew he ought to feel guilty for being happy that Mycroft had no one else when he himself had had Greg. But he had always been ungodly possessive about Mycroft and now that he didn’t have to suppress that feeling the entire time, that desire, that want, that urge to claim him and say Mine, knowing that Mycroft knew how he used to feel about him….and perhaps it was time to tell him that he still felt the same way……….but Anthea was talking again, saying things about their sleeper cell in China and something about human trafficking from the Tibet region and tiger farms…..and she concluded by saying “So….Siobhan Sadler has managed to smuggle them back to England.”


“Umm….. the children.” Anthea said.

Mycroft and Sherlock both stared at her as though she had gone mad. As though she was a shape shifter or an alien occupying the body formerly known as Anthea.

Mycroft opened his mouth to speak and closed it again. Sherlock was just staring at her without blinking.

Anthea suppressed the urge to burst into hysterical laughter. She had allowed herself to indulge while in the car much to the utter shock of her driver.

But now she needed to keep it together, for the sake of these two fine men. Who may understand world domination and solving the most obscure murders, but who had never managed to navigate
simple interpersonal relationships without causing chaos and trauma worthy of the most dramatic operas.

Mycroft had never mentioned it and Sherlock probably did not remember, but she had been the bartender who had talked to Mycroft the day after she had seen Greg take Sherlock away.

Mycroft had come back and recruited her soon after even though he never mentioned what had happened between him and Sherlock. In fact when she had first realized they were brothers she had been shocked. She had been certain there was unrequited love between these two and had often wondered how different things might have been for her boss if that fey young thing had not been picked up by that handsome grey haired cop.

When she found out that Sherlock was Mycroft’s brother she was surprised at herself because she prized her ability to read people. It was many years later that she realized she had been right about the unrequited love after all, brothers or not.

Now she took a deep breath. “There are 4 children.” She said. “All age 10. They are here and in need of a home and a family.”

Mycroft and Sherlock were still staring at her speechless.

“They are yours.” Anthea said slowly, looking at Mycroft. “Clones. No other DNA was involved. They are Holmes.”

Chapter End Notes

My tribute to Siobhan Sadler from Orphan Black--the most badass foster mum ever!
Chapter 42

Chapter Summary

Mycroft and Sherlock step into new roles with elan

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Mr. Holmes?”

“Mycrof?”

Anthea and Sherlock were calling him. He could hear them from somewhere far away. Through a wind tunnel.

*Maybe he could move to Namibia* he thought. *Or the Antarctic Research Station. How far away was Elon Musk’s Mars ride?*

Sherlock and Anthea stared at him with increasing worry as he grinned at them and then laughed. He slapped his thighs and tears were streaming from his eyes.

Mycroft wondered when he was going to wake up from this dream. It was so very very funny. Truly funny. Hilarious even. Maybe Sherlock had picked some magic mushrooms by mistake. *Look at his face* he thought as Sherlock’s face swam into view, looking very worried. *Don’t worry!! he wanted to tell him. It’s all a dream! It’s insane and silly but I am going to wake up any time now.....*

“Mycrof!!”Sherlock said sharply and shook him by the shoulder. Mycroft abruptly stopped laughing and looked around. *Oh. He was already awake.*

His genius mind offered up a deduction as a result of this observation.

*He was awake. Which means what Anthea had said was not a dream.*

*He had 4 children. 4 clones. Made in China. Like all the souvenirs in the shops in Piccadilly Circus.*

Nothing in his entire life had prepared him for this.

Someone was holding his hand. He looked down at it, too stressed at this point to even recognize his own body. Sherlock’s hand was holding his hand. He seemed to be patting his hand. Anthea offered him a glass of something. *Whiskey. Yes that made sense.*

As he was drinking she discreetly left the room to ‘take a stroll in the garden.’

When she left, Mycroft took a deep breath and actually felt his entire Mind Palace shift in its foundations.
He could not do this. Anthea needed to find some other home for them. She needed to keep them far away from him. Never let them see him. What was wrong with her?!

He was about to say all this when Sherlock spoke up. He was still holding Mycroft’s hand and looking at him with a soft smile. “You will make a wonderful father.”

Mycroft lifted one eyebrow and gave a wobbly smile. “Your faith is charming but perhaps misplaced.”

“Nope.” Sherlock said right away. “I remember the way you were with me when I was a child. Why do you think I fell in love with you? I worshipped you. You taught me everything I knew.”

Mycroft took a sip of the drink and wondered in amazement at how far they had come to be able to bring this up so easily in conversations. This love they are fallen into almost too long ago to remember any ‘before’ phase. It had just felt like a seamless transition from a sibling love to worship to a romantic attachment. But this new bombshell meant re-calibrating everything all over again. Once again he needed to out someone else’s needs before his own. Children needed a parent.

A parent. He was the one they needed. Sherlock seemed to think it was totally fine. He could manage but he didn’t think so.

He looked at Sherlock and told him that. “I don’t think I can do it Sherlock. And 4 of them?! Not at my age!”

Sherlock nodded in commiseration. “Of course. But you will not be alone Mycie. I will be doing this with you. I think we should home school them and I would be more than happy to have someone to plan experiments with. Between the two of us I doubt there is any topic in which their education would lack.”

Sherlock was still holding his hand when Anthea came back in.

Thus it came to pass that two days later there were 6 Holmes family members sitting under one roof.

Anthea had handed over the files on all four of the children of course and given Mycroft and Sherlock an overview of whatever information they had so far.

“Geniuses. All of them. Way off the scale.” She had said with a smile. “Not at all a surprise. They know more about the UK and China than most veteran diplomats. What is interesting is that the team which was handling the cloning and world domination strategy seemed to have rival factions and a power struggle, with some falling out, back stabbing, theft and eventually murder and anarchy. Yes, I know. Quite the Shakespearean drama.”

“But how…?” Mycroft started to ask and then realized he had no idea what he wanted to know really. “How ….””

“Do we need to brush up on our Mandarin?” Sherlock asked, before Mycroft could frame his thoughts. He seemed to be taking all this very much in his stride. “Are there any security issues we need to deal with?”

“The plans were very complicated and ranged from having them infiltrate the Royal Family in
England to having them be then interbred with Chinese genetic material to help re-create the Middle Kingdom on another planet.”

She shrugged at Mycroft’s dazed expression. “What can I say Mr. Holmes? It was Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon meets Star Trek meets the X men. Or something. It was all wildly out of control even before it was carried out. Anyway, as a result of all this, these children were raised with English tutors and speak impeccable English, as well as have exhaustive knowledge about this country as well as the one they were born in. They have also been named after famous Kings and Queens of England. It was quite incredible to see their understanding of their dual heritage during the tests we conducted last week.”

“Good. So they have been educated and they speak English. That makes our work easier.” Sherlock replied, since Mycroft was still in some kind of shock. “How did they escape?”

Turned out to be a complicated story worthy of its own TV drama. One of the tutors, Siobhan, was in fact a long forgotten secret agent, extremely deep undercover and married to a local. It seems that 160 clones were attempted, since that is considered the ideal number to repopulate the planet. Some clones were attempted with bizarre crossovers to tigers, some attempted to be grown in space labs, some underwater spliced with fish genes to allow breathing dissolved oxygen. It was like a mad scientist story times thousand. Eventually only 16 zygotes had survived and only 8 had been born.

Four were still whereabouts unknown and these 4 children had been guarded more closely than the Kohinoor diamond. However, when the leading scientist of the program was murdered a year ago, Siobhan had taken her chances and explained what she could to the children and had escaped with them. They had spent a year in hiding, crossing to the India-Nepal border where there were a surprising number of red-heads for them to merge with (something to do with Scottish and Irish tourists as well as the red headed gene brought in with Alexander the Great’s armies as well as Melanesian routes.)

Sherlock was fascinated by all this information and felt something he had not felt for a very long time. Not since he had come down here with Greg and planned the work on the house and the bee hives. He was excited. Pure and simple. This was surely a 10.

Mycroft felt only anxiety and almost wild panic initially but had taken only 24 hours to think it through rationally and accept that these children had essentially been raised as orphan lab experiments and weapons of war and deserved far better than that now. They did need a home and a family and bolstered by Sherlock’s commitment, he would do his best to provide it for them.

Them. His children.

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Today, Sherlock was assessing them all with his quick eyes while Mycroft was measuring everyone in his usual calm, almost disinterested way.

The four children, all red –headed, were sitting there seriously, assessing the older Holmes brothers right back.

Edward had been trained in Artificial Intelligence and worked on codes for humanoid robots. He was a slightly plump solemn young man, practically a spitting image of Mycroft at the age of 10. Flaming red hair, freckles and a tendency to bite his nails. He had been working on a thesis on
singularity before they escaped. Uploading consciousness to robots was his special interest.

Henry also had red hair but his face was more like Mummy’s. Sharp nose and a high brow. He was a musician and a linguist and was fluent in 26 languages and could play 6 instruments to maestro level. Apparently he knew 12,500 different songs and tunes. He had been working on potential languages that humans may encounter with alien civilizations.

Richard had been tutored in plant genomics. Specifically on growing plants in zero gravity but he also knew how to splice and work with CRISPR technology. He had wild curly hair just like Sherlock’s but deep red. He had been working on a complicated biochemical genomic experiment on growing starchy plants in tubes that could be harvested to table directly.

Elizabeth, the only girl among them, had been trained in spatial cartography and had learned the entire continent of Asia and Africa by the time they had escaped. She could draw a map from memory of any square kilometre in either of those regions. Her files said that they had tried some further gene editing with her when they attempted the XX from Mycroft’s XY and the double X had somehow enhanced her ability to read people to such an extent that it was almost like mind reading.

Sherlock swept his eyes over these four children, dressed like they were about to go to Eton any minute now, and he had a brief acute pang of wishing that either Mrs. Hudson or Greg were around to take care of this bizarre domestic tableau. To break up the tension with either an offer of a cuppa tea or maybe just a laugh and a wink.

Sadly, neither of them were around anymore. It was up to him and Mycroft to deal with this the best they could. So, eventually, there were conversations. Arrangements were agreed upon. Bedrooms allocated. Daily schedules confirmed.

Slowly as the trust and rapport built, the children revealed their secret hobbies and likes and dislikes. Turned out that Edward was a brilliant artist, Henry liked collecting clouds, Richard wanted nothing better than to sit and knit and Elizabeth had the most angelic singing voice.

Her mind reading abilities were almost terrifying in their accuracy. Mycroft had always been able to recognize patterns and predict behaviours with uncanny accuracy and had taken special care to work with her on interpretations and revelations.

Barely three days after they had moved in, Elizabeth had asked Mycroft after their lesson on the geopolitics of the Middle East had concluded. “Why don’t you tell him you love him?”

Mycroft had smiled at her gently and said. “He knows.”

Elizabeth frowned. “But then why don’t you ever kiss him?”

Mycroft had sighed. “It’s not like that Elizabeth. It’s complicated.”

The young girl nodded. Even in her short life so far she understood very well what that meant. “But he does want to kiss you. Very much. So maybe you should find a way to un-complicate it.” And then she had gone off to play, leaving behind an unsettled Mycroft.

Wisdom from the mouths of babes. True. But he had barely moved in when the children had turned up and the resulting chaos and disruption of their lives, the re-writing of their very identities in fact,
had been too much to deal with without adding incestuous romance to the picture.

Mycroft groaned and covered his face at the thought that they currently had four rescued clone siblings sharing a roof with their biological parent. And his biological brother. Who loved each other. In a non-sibling way.

He wondered if there was any website or helpline that could possibly have any answers to offer.

He wanted to blame Anthea for everything.

As the days passed they found that Henry was the one who had been stealing cookies at night and that Richard hated swings with a fierce passion. Edward was always up before dawn painting his masterpieces and Elizabeth had taken to singing to the bees. All of them wanted to have stories read to them at night and Sherlock had to play lullabies on the violin before they slept.

Mycroft remembered how Sherlock had been at 10, just before he himself had to leave for college. How precious and brilliant and adorable he had been then. The way he had hero worshipped his big brother and the way he himself had been so devoted to his baby brother.

He remembered the way he had fallen in love with him when he was 16 and he had seen him for the first time in almost 2 years. He remembered the way he had wanted to flee the face of this earth so that he could never ever cast that evil shadow on his beautiful Sherlock.

And now? Now Sherlock was a man. Not even a young man any more. A mature and brilliant man, whose sharp edges had mellowed and whose fiery hunger for solving puzzles and crimes had gradually been surpassed by a passion for something deeper. He had always been a great man and now he had also become a good one. A fine human being. Who still loved Mycroft. Who had asked him to come over and stay just before this new madness had descended into their lives. Whose inherent kindness had blossomed into a loving care for these children.

Mycroft’s children. That he was co-parenting with Sherlock.

Those were sentences he had never imagined saying in his life!

*Truly, there are more things in this heaven and earth than are dreamt of in my philosophy*…

Mycroft mused.

So, between bedtime tales, midnight snacks, poetry recitals, musical evenings, beehive experiments, trips to the nearby doctor for first aid after those experiments, and lots and lots of the ceaseless and exhausting chaos that accompanies child rearing, before anyone realized it, two entire months had passed.

Anthea had left from her last visit absolutely beaming with joy at the progress the Holmeses had made. (The children were doing well too!)

It was barely a month later that someone from the village turned up with two more children during the summer break and asked if they could also be taught some ‘genius things and all that.’ As
Alexander and Zoe settled into the routine, a week later there were a couple more children at their doorstep. Jasmine and Raj joined in. Little Caroline arrived the next day and before they knew it they were running a full-fledged academy.

Mycroft’s former cottage had become the hostel for his four children with Mrs. McAllister as the resident matron. The home that Sherlock and Mycroft now shared was a buzzing feverish noisy academy during the day.

Mycroft was ridiculously delighted in having these children to teach as much as he was thrilled to see Sherlock become more of his former self. The sarcasm had come back in full force, but so had the sudden smiles. He had always known the soft heart that Sherlock hid successfully from most of the world. He had seen his kindness towards the homeless and his rapport with children even in his earlier life as a detective in London. He had seen him with Greg as a happy and loving partner.

He was now watching Sherlock blossom into the role of a parent more effortlessly than he would have ever imagined.

As for himself, Mycroft realized that if anyone had asked him what would be his perfect life, he would never in his wildest dreams have imagined this. But now that he had it? He could not imagine that heaven would provide anything better.

While he was sitting and grading some of the essays written by the older children on the Nature vs Nurture debate, he could hear Sherlock talk and laugh with some of the children in the other room. Something delicious was being cooked by Jeff- their full time cook. The older children were studying or reading or composing.

Just then little Caroline came and sat on his lap and asked him to read to her from her favourite book-- Outside over there.

He tried to negotiate for something else because this book frightened her every time he read it and still she was helplessly fascinated by it. When his attempts to dissuade her were met with a wobbly lip and almost tearful eyes he gave up in a panic and started reading exactly what she wanted. Faint memories of political negotiations came to mind where he had never ever had to back down. Those memories seems to belong to a life having been lived by someone else altogether.

Caroline snuggled into his lap when he started reading and she was fast asleep by the time he was done.

What could possibly make his life more perfect?

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That evening at tea time the children suddenly fell silent as Henry started to play something on the silver flute, Richard on the piano and Elizabeth started to sing. It seemed to be a new composition and it was wonderful.

Sherlock joined in with his violin. Soon all the children were clapping and there was a lot of off key singing and suddenly it was a party!

At a signal from Elizabeth, Edward came in with a painting that was an abstract mosaic kind of style but Mycroft could identify lots of hearts and brains and maybe some smiles, angels, rainbows.

“Happy Birthday. Father.” Edward said to Mycroft shyly, as he leaned in and kissed him on the
cheek.

Mycroft felt as though his face had gone up in flames. He felt faint and moved and so full of joy he thought he might explode.

The other three children came and kissed him one by one as the others clapped and cheered.

Mycroft was in a huddle with all four of the children when Sherlock stepped forward and gently wiped the tears streaming down his cheek.

“Thank you!” Mycroft said, knowing that Sherlock had orchestrated this.

“You are welcome”. Sherlock said with a smile. “Can I also kiss you now?”

Mycroft barely had time to process that before Sherlock held his face and kissed him on the lips. The world melted away as Mycroft brought his arms around Sherlock and kissed him, tenderly and with the yearning of four decades of longing and loving and hurting and denial.

This. This was beyond perfect.

This was more than his heart could possibly hold he was sure.

After the children had stopped shrieking and giggling and dinner was had, Mycroft found time for a quick word with Elizabeth. ‘Thank you.” He said.

She nodded happily. “He understood that you would never ask because you didn’t want him to feel he had to say yes. But it’s ok.” She told him wisely. “Sometimes it’s ok to ask for what you want.”


That night as they lay in bed, wrapped in each other, Mycroft felt as though it was truly the day of his birth. Of his new life. Today, with four children who had accepted him as their father and with Sherlock who had reached out to him as a lover, his life had truly begun.

Chapter End Notes

https://www.technologyreview.com/s/612997/the-crispr-twins-had-their-brains-altered/

https://wfpl.org/how-many-songs-can-our-brains-actually-hold/

https://www.brainpickings.org/2011/05/27/cloud-collectors-handbook/
Chapter 43

Chapter Summary

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Epilogue:

6 months later

Mycroft placed his umbrella in the stand by the door and took a minute to enjoy the sight. He could smell the dinner cooking. Sherlock was sitting on the sofa with their four children lounging around him as he read to them, the soft light gleaming off their red heads and his salt and pepper one.

Mycroft smiled. Elizabeth was looking up, always able to sense his presence even before she could see him. She was asking a question with her eyes. He smiled back and gave a small nod. Yes.

As she slid off the sofa to go inside, Sherlock had also looked up and seen him and smiled. It was a warm welcoming smile with the promise in his eyes of some tender loving once the kids are asleep.

Mycroft wonders, as he does every day, at the twists of fate that have given him everything he could ever want from life. After all those years of misery and torment and longing, he now had this beautiful man and his magnificent love.

He thanks Greg as he does every night for having saved Sherlock and kept him safe during those years when he could not have.

Today he has a surprise for Sherlock. But he can’t wait till after dinner so he goes in and hands it over right away.

Sherlock looks at him, curious, and unwraps the soft covering and looks at the engraved black plaque with golden letters.

“The Lestrade Holmes Academy”

Sherlock runs his finger over the engraved plaque thoughtfully. “What a wonderful surprise Mycroft. “ Sherlock says softly. “He wanted children you know. But I think he was worried about tying me down. I guess he decided that his work would be his only legacy.”

“And you.” Mycroft said with a half-smile. “You are his legacy. Alive and clean and brilliant and caring. He saved you. You saved me. That is what made all this possible.”

“Thank you Mycroft.” Sherlock said, still looking at the plaque. “You have no idea how much this means to me.” Then he handed it over to the children who were curious to take a look.

He looked up at Mycroft and grinned. “I suppose the Holmes in this name is me considering that I
teach the children way more than you do?”

“Well. About that.” Mycroft said, going down on one knee as Elizabeth came closer carrying something on a velvet cushion. “If you agree to be mine, I will even take your name and then it could be for both of us.”

Sherlock sat there, shocked speechless as he looked at the rings Elizabeth was carrying very solemnly. They were made of white gold with a twisted strand of red hair embedded through its centre, tied into a truelknot.

He laughed, half amused, half dazed.

“Well….since you asked so nicely, maybe I will take your name instead.” Sherlock said, picking up the larger ring and slipping it on Mycroft’s finger. Mycroft held Sherlock’s hand and slipped a ring onto his finger too.

As the four children created a mad ruckus around them and they sat there hand in hand, admiring their matching rings, Sherlock smiled and winked.

“So, Mr. Holmes.” He said, in a thoughtful manner as befits a gentleman who has taken such a serious step in his life. “I was thinking of taking you upstairs for our honeymoon if you would be so willing?”

“Certainly Mr. Holmes.” Mycroft replied, tipping his head like the perfect gentleman. “Your wish is my command.”

And so hand in hand, by the edge of the sand, they danced by the light of the moon.

Or whichever way one says ‘lived happily ever after.’

Chapter End Notes

Tribute to and inspired by Louisa May Alcott’s Little Boys and Jo’s Men (part of the Little Women series), Goodbye Mr. Chips, X men, The Umbrella Academy and Orphan Black.

https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43188/the-owl-and-the-pussy-cat

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!