In Memoriam

by the_bedheaded_league (giantflyingskelesnurtle)

Summary

After suffering a severe head injury in an accident, John Watson returns to Baker Street with no idea who or where he is. A strange man named Sherlock Holmes, who claims to be his dearest friend, is determined to help him recall his memories in any way possible. But can his memories truly be recovered? Or have they been lost forever?

Notes

Thanks as always to my amazing beta, sans_patronymic! You're the best <3
I awoke slowly and gradually realized that was in what seemed to be a hospital. This was my first coherent thought. My second was that I did not know why I was in a hospital bed. My third was that I did not know where I was – not which hospital, not which city, not even which country I was in.

My fourth was that I could remember nothing at all.

It is difficult to describe the absolute terror of reaching backwards in one’s mind for a memory, any memory, and finding only an endless blank space. I felt as though I were grabbing desperately at air in a terrible void. My name… I didn’t even know my own name.

I didn’t know if I was a man or a woman. I didn’t know what I looked like. I had no idea who I was.

An unspeakable panic gripped me, and I tried to sit up. As I did, a throb of pain shot through my skull like a bolt of iron, and I fell back against the pillows with a moan.

A nurse turned towards me, seemingly realizing that I was awake. “Careful there, sir,” she said. She reached over to apply a damp cloth against my forehead. “You mustn’t move too quickly. You’ve got quite a concussion there.”

A concussion? “What happened?” I asked, and the voice that exited my lips was dry and hoarse. It was also entirely foreign to me. I suppose it sounded male – was I a man?

“You were in an accident. Just a few streets away, over by the church. You were crossing the street when a carriage came ‘round the bend, horse whipped into a mad frenzy. Damn near ran you over.” She tut-tut-tut ed. “It’s a wonder you weren’t crushed to death, sir, if I may say so. But the cab did a number on you still. Way I heard it, you were thrown backwards against a stone wall. Nearly fractured your skull.”

“I…” My eyes fell shut as I tried to recall the incident. Nothing. “I don’t remember…”

“That was three days ago,” the nurse continued. “You’ve been out since then. The doctor wasn’t sure you’d even wake up! So glad to see you pulled through.”

My head ached and spun. I felt nauseous, which the nurse seemed to anticipate, as she placed a bowl under my chin. I took it from her, staring at the hands I saw holding it. They were large, strong hands, with calloused fingers. Not young, but not old – middle-aged, then.


The nurse turned away and returned with a glass of water. I accepted it gratefully. “You’re at St. Bart’s, sir.” I nodded, although the name meant nothing to me. “Drink up, then. You should be awfully thirsty by now. Your head won’t hurt quite so much once you’ve got some fluids in you. I’ll send for some bread and broth from the kitchens.” She paused on her way out the door. “I can bring you some tea, if you like. How do you take it?”

I opened my mouth to answer and found that I did not know. The taste of tea… the vague memory of it seemed to remain, but as to my preferences, I found nothing.

“Black,” I said. “Thank you.”
The nurse nodded and left. I finished off the glass of water and shoved the blankets down until only my hospital gown covered me. I needed to see this body more closely.

I was indeed a man, and my earlier deduction on my age also seemed likely. I was sturdy and muscular, although a plump layer of fat covered most of my stomach. There was a gruesome scar on my left thigh. I ran my hands over my face and head – I had a moustache, a fair number of wrinkles, and short hair. All of it, entirely unfamiliar to me.

The nurse returned with food and tea. Over the next few hours, I ate and drank slowly until the blinding pain in my skull faded to a dull ache. When the nurse finally decided I was ready to be discharged, she left to fetch the doctor. “Your clothes are on the table over there,” she said. “You may leave the gown on the bed. I will collect it.”

Slowly, I stood, feeling nearly every one of my stiffened joints pop. I stumbled over to the table and examined the pile of clothing. A pair of tweed trousers and a matching jacket; an undershirt, vest, cravat, and an assortment of undergarments; a pair of worn leather shoes. Once dressed, I began to search the pockets of my clothing.

In one pocket I found a crumpled receipt for ink and paper. In another, a wallet with a modest sum inside, and a set of keys. In my jacket, I found a golden pocket watch. It had several soft scratches on its cover, suggesting age, but shone brilliantly, indicating great attention given to its upkeep. I flipped open the lid.

On the inside of the lid I found a small photo of a man. He had dark hair, a widow’s peak, a hooked nose, piercing eyes. He seemed far younger than me, but the picture itself was yellowed with age. On the back of the watch I found the following inscription:

To J. W.

From S. H.

I stared at it for some time. Was I J. W.? Was the man in the photo S. H.? What was his relation to me?

The door to the room opened and a man in a doctor’s uniform stepped inside, interrupting my thoughts. “Ah, Dr. Watson!” he said, stepping over quickly and reaching out to shake my hand. “So good to see you awake!”

I nodded, speechless.

Dr. Watson.

I was a doctor? A doctor of what? And if my surname was Watson, then what of my Christian name?

The doctor ushered me towards the door. “Your nurse says you seem fit to go home, which I’m sure you will appreciate. Your concussion does not seem to have done any lasting damage, but if the pain persists for too long, you are welcome to return. Although, I’m sure you could diagnose yourself just as well as I.”

“Yes,” I said absently. The hallways of the building were utterly unfamiliar, but several members of the medical staff gave me a friendly smile and a nod as we passed. It occurred to me that I did not have nearly enough in my wallet to pay for any medical expenses, and I hadn’t even an idea of where the hospital might send a bill.

“How much do I owe you?” I asked. The doctor waved dismissively.

“Nothing at all, my good man! You are one of St. Bartholomew’s proudest alumni. It was our pleasure to care for you.” He opened the door and ushered me out into the street. “And please do
give Mr. Holmes my regards.”

Mr. Holmes. The man in the photograph, perhaps? S. Holmes? Before I could ask, the doctor was gone. I stood in a busy thoroughfare that I did not at all recognize, but which couldn’t have been anywhere but London. Somehow, I had a vague concept of the city of London, but I could not recall any great detail of the city. A river – it had a river, I believe. The Thames. And a clocktower… a rather famous one…

I likely lived somewhere in the city. It was possible that I had been visiting, but even so, I would have had a place to stay. I resolved to find my home first, if I had one, although I didn’t know quite how I would do it.

I gave my pockets a second search but found nothing new. The wallet, however, had several pockets inside, which I had not searched through. Upon opening it, I realized that I had missed something: an inscription in the leather.

If found, please return to Dr. John H. Watson of 221 B Baker Street, London

An address. My address, it seemed. And a Christian name as well. I stepped towards the street and hailed a hansom quickly, and we set off for Baker Street.

Dr. John H. Watson.

I rolled the name about in my mind throughout much of the cab ride. There was no familiarity in it. A cold panic once again gripped my heart. My name… how could my own name be so foreign to me?

At last, the cab pulled up to a pleasant row of buildings and announced our arrival. I paid him and stepped out onto the cobblestones, gazing up at the door that I assumed must be my home.

I tried each of the keys in the lock. The third one fit, and I stepped quietly inside.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The hallway was well-decorated and comfortable, but any hope I might have had at recognizing my own home was in vain. I felt like a stranger, invading someone else’s rooms.

Voices echoed from the room just beyond the staircase. A man and a woman. Cautiously, I crept forward until I could see them: two figures seated in the drawing room, both obviously agitated.

The woman was older, her hair perfectly white. The man I instantly recognized from the photograph in my pocket watch. He was older by at least a decade than the photograph would suggest, and he looked ragged, as though he had not slept in days.

“I’ve tried the Yard,” the man was saying, “of course I’ve tried them, but none of them have been any help. I’ll find him on my own. I’ve got to, he has to be~”

I cleared my throat. Both of their heads snapped over to stare at me. The woman clapped her hands to her mouth and cried out; the man bolted up from his chair, his eyes widening.

“Watson!” he cried. He leapt over furniture to reach me and, before I could even react, enveloped me in a crushing embrace. “Oh Christ, Watson, you’re alright, thank God you’re alright.”

He pulled back and held me by the shoulders, studying my face. “What happened to you? Dear god, you’ve been injured. Where have you been?”

“I… ah…” I cleared my throat, attempting in vain to put my thoughts in order. “I beg your pardon, but are you Mr. Holmes?”

The man’s face turned to one of uncomprehending shock. He pulled his hands away and stepped back. “What?”

“I asked if you were Mr. Holmes,” I repeated. My face turned hot as I reached into my pocket and pulled out the pocket watch, flipping it open to show him the photograph. “I seem to have a photograph of you, and I believe your initials are engraved on the back.”

His expression morphed into concern, and then terror. “Watson... what are you... Watson, it’s me. You know me. God damn it, man, you know me!”

I shook my head, heart racing. I glanced from the man to the woman, feeling as though I had made some terrible misstep. “I’m sorry. No. I don’t know you, I… I don’t know anything.”

“No.” The man shook his head. “No, that’s not possible.”

“I don’t remember anything.” I glanced around the room. “Is this where I live? Do you live here as well?”

The man did not answer. Instead he stepped backwards, as if I were a leper, horror overcoming his features. The woman beside him looked to be on the verge of tears.

“What’s my name?” the man demanded. “My full name.”

“I don’t know. When I awoke, even my own name escaped me.”
“Do you know anything? The year? The Prime Minister?”

I shook my head. “I was… informed at the hospital that I sustained a serious head injury several days ago. As a result, I seem to have developed complete retroactive amnesia. I… have no memories at all.”

The man sat down with a thud, his eyes gazing unfocused at the carpet. “Retroactive amnesia,” he muttered. “Watson… sit, please.”

I nodded and took a seat in an armchair. The woman’s eyes were brimming with tears. “I suppose you don’t remember me either, John?” she asked. I shook my head.

I cleared my throat awkwardly. “I’m… so sorry to have caused any trouble. Perhaps… perhaps I should leave?”

“You shall do nothing of the sort.” The man fixed his piercing gray eyes upon me. “My name is Sherlock Holmes. You and I share the rooms in this residence. This is Mrs. Hudson, our landlady.”

“I see.” Two men of our age sharing a residence seemed unusual. I had no wedding ring, but what of Holmes? “And is it only us two? Do you have a wife, Mr. Holmes?”

The blood seemed to drain from Holmes’ face. He turned to Mrs. Hudson, who also appeared stricken.


“Then you are a bachelor? Or a widower?”

He didn’t answer. His eyes gave me the impression that I was a subject in a petri dish, being pulled apart and exposed for all the world to see. It was deeply unsettling. “You stayed at St. Bart’s.”

I nodded, shocked. “I did. But how did you know?”

He ignored me. “You received several stitches and were treated for a concussion. Is that correct?”

“I believe so.”

“But clearly there was more serious head trauma that your physician missed.” Holmes shook his head. “No. It is shock – I am sure of it. Nothing more.” He stood and began pacing back and forth across the carpet. “Rest. You need rest.”

I became aware once again of the pounding in my head. “I… suppose some rest might do me good,” I mumbled. “Would you… mind showing me the way to my room?”

Holmes ceased his pacing and stared at me. “Your room.”

“Yes, if you don’t mind.”

“Your … room.”

I paused, more than a bit confused. “Yes, my room.”

After another moment of silence, Holmes seemed to reach a decision. “This way,” he said curtly, and he waved me towards the stairs.

Upstairs, I followed him to a door at the end of the hallway. He opened it for me; I stepped inside.
The room was sparse, with no personal items as far as I could see. Had I been an ascetic? Or perhaps obsessively tidy?

Holmes helped me out of my coat and jacket. When he reached out to unbutton my waistcoat, I stepped back in surprise.

“There’s no need to help me undress,” I said. “My fine motor skills seem entirely unharmed, I assure you.”

Again, Holmes stared at me in silence. Again, I felt as though I were nothing more than a scientific specimen. “I’ll have the kitchen send up some food and drink for you at eight. That is… when you normally take breakfast.”

I nodded, feeling awkward. “Thank you, Mr. Holmes.”

He flinched as though I had struck him. “Stop… stop calling me that,” he said. “Mr. Holmes. We are well past the point of honorifics, Watson.”

“I see… Holmes,” said I. His hands worried and fidgeted at his side; he refused to meet my eyes.

“Go to sleep,” he said. “Perhaps the shock of your trauma will pass by the morning.”

I nodded. “Perhaps.”

I did not feel nearly so hopeful.

My dreams were fitful and disjointed. Visions appeared to me in inscrutable fragments: a face in the dark, hot sand, voices I could not recognize. Several times I felt the warm touch of some figure, whether arms around me or soft lips against my skin… but I could not recall a single identifying feature of the bodies that appeared to me.

While deep in the middle of these fragmented visions, pain flashed through my skull as violently as if a railroad spike had been driven through it. I woke with a cry of pain, clutching my head. The world was spinning. I felt a warm, delicate touch on my arm. At first, I thought that I had drifted back into sleep, but the voice in my ear cut through the thicket of my dreams like a knife.

“Watson! Watson, are you alright?”

I blinked my eyes open. In the dim light from the window, I saw a figure kneeling next to me, on the floor beside my bed. As my eyes adjusted, I recognized the figure as that man – that Holmes fellow – and saw that he had apparently been lying on a bed of pillows laid out over the hardwood.

I tried to sit up and groaned as pain cracked my skull open again. “Lie down,” Holmes instructed. “Don’t strain yourself.”

“What…” I grit my teeth against the pain. “What are you doing?”

“You cried out,” he answered. “I thought you might be in pain.”

“No, what are you doing… sleeping on my floor?”

Holmes paused and looked down at his makeshift bed as if he had only just noticed it. “I… was concerned about your condition. I decided that it would be best if I stayed in close proximity, where I might observe you, should any complications arise.”

“Ah.” The pain began to subside. “That can’t be very comfortable.”
“I’ve slept in far worse conditions, Watson. As have you.” Holmes fell silent. “Besides, I… I found that in my own bed, I could not sleep for my constant worrying.”

Even in the dark, I could see the sincerity of his concern. It struck me that this man, whoever he was, cared for me deeply… and of course, it followed that I had also once cared for him deeply.

“Holmes…” I said softly, “are you someone I considered to be a very dear friend?”

Holmes grabbed my wrist and stared at me intently. “Yes,” he said. “Your dearest friend, without competition.”

“And were we… are we quite close?”

“Utterly inseparable.”

A wave of melancholy settled over me. “I wish I knew… I wish so desperately that I could remember you,” I said. “To think that I am looking at my closest friend, and not recognizing his face… a man who must have been like a brother to me, and yet is now as foreign as a stranger…”

Holmes released my arm and sat back quite suddenly, watching me with those piercing gray eyes. “Go back to sleep,” he said. “I will wait for you to wake in the morning.”

I nodded and rested my aching head back on the pillow. The sound of his steady breathing soothed my rattled nerves, and soon I drifted back into that quagmire of broken dreams.

Chapter End Notes

i walk this empty street
in the quagmire of broken dreams

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I awoke in the wee hours of the morning, when the sun was just barely beginning to creep through my blinds. My head hurt considerably less. Cautiously, I propped myself up on my elbow and glanced on the floor next to me. True to his word, Holmes lay there still, asleep.

As quietly as I could, I rose from the bed. Holmes had laid out slippers and a dressing gown, which I could only assume to be my own. I donned both and headed quietly downstairs to the sitting room. I had not paid much attention to the room itself the day before. Now, I made my way slowly around the furniture, observing all of the trappings of my forgotten life.

There were many small and miscellaneous artifacts strewn about the place: a morocco case, several antique knives, beakers and distillers, and even a jar containing a bound lock of hair. One wall had what appeared to be several bullet holes – remnants from an armed robbery, perhaps? I could all but guess.

I sat at the writing desk. It was something of a mess, with papers in haphazard piles and splatters around the ink bottle. There were a few bills and torn envelopes here and there, but what caught my attention was the unfinished document sitting in the center of the table.

_The Case of the_  
_The Adventure of the Abbey Grange_

_It was on a terribly bitter cold and frosty morning, towards the end of the winter of '97, that I was awakened by a tugging at my shoulder. It was Holmes. The candle in his hand shone upon his eager, stooping face, and told me at a glance that something was amiss. He rarely woke me without good reason. (Yes you do, and stop tampering with my drafts. - W)_

_“Come, Watson, come!” he cried. “The game is afoot. Not a word! Into your clothes and come!”_  

_Ten minutes later we were both in a cab, and rattling through the silent streets on our way to Charing Cross_

With the exception of the crossed-out sentence “He rarely woke me without good reason,” which was written in a swooping, elegant scrawl, the document had a stiff and short-lettered handwriting. It had to have been mine, of course. I stared down at my own hands, suddenly aware that I had no idea if I were right or left handed.

I closed my eyes and attempted to imagine myself reaching for a pen. When I opened my eyes, I saw that my right hand had instinctively leapt forward. I picked up the uncapped pen lying on top of the document and took one of the ripped envelopes from the pile. I wrote a few letters of the alphabet, first with my right hand, then with my left. As predicted, my right hand replicated the handwriting on the strange document, whereas my left hand left only an illegible scrawl.
My eyes moved to the crossed-out sentence. It must have been Holmes’ writing, given my scribbled response to it. His letters had something of an artistic flair to them. He had written quickly, with his left hand –

I stopped short as I realized what I had just thought. I looked at the smudging of the letters, the angle of their slant. The obvious marks of a left-handed writer… and the line width indicated light pressure, suggesting that Holmes had written quickly. I sat with this thought, momentarily baffled at how immediately I had made the inference.

I heard footsteps behind me, and turned to see Holmes entering the room, wearing a silk dressing gown. He glanced between me and the desk.

“I see you’ve found your papers,” he said. “What do you make of them?”

“Are you left-handed?” I blurted out.

His eyebrows raised in surprise. He stepped forward, his face alighting with hope. “I am! Yes! Have you remembered me, then?”

I shook my head, and regretted it as I watched his face fall. “No, I, er… saw your handwriting here and… well, I assume it must have been yours, and I… well, I…”

“You observed.” Holmes stepped closer again. The softest glimmer of hope returned to his piercing gray eyes. “And you deduced.”

“I… suppose I did, although I’m not quite sure why the deduction occurred to me.”

Holmes’ face spread into a smile. “Because you know my methods, Watson.” He gripped my shoulders, shaking me slightly in his excitement. “It is proof! Your mind is still intact, only locked deep within your subconscious. I shall do whatever it takes to draw your memories out.”

“I do hope you’re right,” I said. “But how on Earth do you propose to help me recall my memories?”

“We must approach the problem from several angles. The first, I believe, should be along the lines of your accidental deduction here.” He thought for a moment. “Watson, if you please, head down the stairs to the front hall.”

I nodded, walked down the stairs, as he requested, and stood patiently. The front hall was tidy, although something of a mess on the floor; muddy footsteps and small pieces of dirt covered the area just inside the door. The layer of dirt seemed recently fresh, and the floor underneath was in excellent condition, which suggested an unusual pause in housekeeping recently. With a sharp pang, I realized what must have caused such a lapse in cleanliness. During my mysterious absence, I doubted that anyone had cared much about the state of the floors.

“Alright, Watson!” he called from upstairs. “Now come back up!”

I did so, slightly perplexed, but unwilling to question his methods. He waited for me in an armchair and motioned for me to sit down opposite him.

“Well?” I said.

“How many steps were there in the staircase?” he asked.

I creased my eyebrows, only further confused. “Seventeen. But I hardly see how that has anything
Before I could finish, Holmes had leapt to his feet, grinning wildly. “Excellent, old boy, excellent!” He clapped his hands together in what I can only describe as delight. “Now come, sit by the fire with me.”

I did so, taking a seat in a large armchair. Holmes gave me an odd look.

“What did you choose that chair?” he asked.

“Ah…” I looked down at the upholstery awkwardly. “Should I not sit here?”

“No, not at all. Quite the opposite, in fact.” He sat down across from me, smiling. “That is your customary seat, after all.”

“Is it?” I examined the arms of the chair closely. The fabric was slightly worn and very faded, suggesting many years of use.

Holmes leaned back in his own chair. “It pleases me so to see you sitting in it once again,” he said. He looked away, his smile fading. “For a short while, I… feared that I may never see you take up your favorite spot by the fire again.”

He stayed quiet for a moment, and although I could not read his face, a grim darkness seemed to settle about him. Then he shook his head, and it was gone.

“Now then, Watson.” He leaned forward. “What can you deduce about me?”

“...deduce?” I repeated incredulously. “About you?”

“Yes, if you please.”

“From what data, precisely?”

He gestured to the whole of himself. “If you are still the Watson I know,” he said, “you should not need any more than what you see here.”

I paused, momentarily at a loss. Then I began to do as Holmes asked, and observed.

“I have already deduced that you are left-handed,” said I. “Could I see your hands, please?”

He held them out. I took them in my own, turning them over. They were exquisite things – long, delicate fingers, as fair as the moon. I found myself looking at them for a bit longer than I had intended. I coughed, embarrassed, and let them go.

“I see by the calluses on your right hand that you play some sort of string instrument,” I said. “And your left hand suggests… a bow? Perhaps a violin, or a cello?”


I continued to observe. “You take great care in your appearances, but treat your clothes roughly. The quality of your suit’s fabric contrasts with the small stains and tears about it… and your trousers are frayed at the bottom, clearly in need of a hemming. I might conclude that your clothes are simply old, and as you can no longer afford expensive clothing, you’ve held onto them… but your fine cologne and shoes suggest otherwise. Therefore, not frugal, simply careless.”

Holmes laughed. “You always do keep telling me to take better care of my clothes. I’m afraid I
quite forget to preserve my attire while I am preoccupied with an experiment or a chase.”

“An… experiment?” I glanced around the room, until my eyes fell upon a shelf stacked with beakers and test tubes. “You are a chemist.”

“Yes.”

“Professional?”

“Amateur. But a quite passionate one.” He smiled and held his hands together under his chin, fingers tilted together like a church steeple. “What else can you divine, Watson?”

I gave him another once-over. All at once, a realization came to me – “You are a widower.”

Holmes’ hands dropped, and his smile faded. “What?”

I felt somewhat pleased to have surprised him with my deduction. “It is simple,” I began. “When I arrived yesterday, I asked if you had a wife – you were clearly upset by the question. And last night, as you slept by my bed, I saw a chain around your neck, and caught a glimpse of what appeared to be a silver ring hanging against your breast, tucked away under your nightshirt. A ring that I can see you are still wearing.” I gestured towards his collar, beneath which I could see a snatch of silver. “Therefore, the natural conclusion is that you were widowed, and that you loved your late wife dearly, as you still wear her wedding ring around your neck.”

I sat back in my chair with a smile. Holmes watched me, his face growing dark. I realized with a start that he was gripping the arms of his chair so tightly that his knuckles were white.

“I’m terribly sorry,” I said quickly. “I have overstepped – I should have realized that this topic would be painful for you.”

Holmes stood so suddenly that his chair scraped back against the floor. He stared at the fireplace, his jaw and fists clenched.

“I have never had a wife,” he said through gritted teeth. “And no woman gave me this ring.”

He turned, his dressing gown swirling after him as he marched away.

“Holmes, wait–” I began, but he held up a hand.

“Enough of this,” he said, still refusing to meet my eyes. “We shall have to devise another method of returning your memories to you.”

With that, he stormed up the staircase, leaving me staring at his empty chair.

Chapter End Notes

Hi! Just thought I’d mention that you can also find me on my Sherlock Holmes Tumblr, https://bedheaded-league.tumblr.com
I did not see Holmes again for several hours. In the meantime, the housekeeper – Mrs. Hudson – came upstairs with a breakfast tray around eight, just as Holmes had said.

“Thank you,” I said as she placed it down on the table before me. “I am quite famished, and this smells splendid.”

“Well, it is your favorite breakfast,” she said, and although she smiled, I did not miss the sadness in her voice. “You’ve always loved your bacon and eggs, haven’t you.”

It wasn’t a question. She let her gaze linger on the plate she had prepared for me, and slowly turned to leave.

“Mrs. Hudson,” I said quickly, “would you be so kind as to take breakfast with me?”

She turned to look at me, obviously relieved. “Of course, John.”

*I frowned at the unexpected use of my Christian name. She seemed to sense what I was thinking, as she quickly corrected herself. “Dr. Watson, yes. Just let me grab a tray for myself, and I’ll be back up to join you.”*

She disappeared back down the stairs. I tucked into the warm meal and downed a cup of tea in one gulp. By the time Mrs. Hudson returned with another tray, I was already feeling rejuvenated.

“Have you remembered anything yet?” she asked the moment she sat down.

I shook my head and her face fell.

“Well,” she sighed. “I suppose it must be more complicated than that. Still, I must admit, I had a small hope that… that this was but a momentary affliction, and that a night of good sleep might cure it.”

“So did I.” I munched on a piece of toast for a moment. “Mrs. Hudson, I have a question about Holmes.”

*Her eyes widened. “Yes?”*

“I noticed that he wears a ring around his neck. I assumed at first that it was the wedding ring of a late Mrs. Holmes, but when I suggested the idea he grew quite upset. You wouldn’t happen to know why, would you?”

Mrs. Hudson fixed me with a sorrowful, silent gaze for a moment. “Oh, John.”

Again, my Christian name. She said nothing more. I cleared my throat awkwardly. “I don’t wish to pry, truly. But his reaction was so extreme that I have not been able to keep my mind off of it since. Is there some tragedy attached to the ring? If so, I should like to know what it is, so I may avoid bringing it up on accident again in the future.”

Mrs. Hudson worried her napkin between her fingers. “It is not my place to tell you, Doctor.”
“Of course,” I said quickly. “I shouldn’t have asked you, I apologize.”

She remained quiet for a long time, stirring her tea. “You are in need of a shave. You’ve grown quite bristly over the past few days.”

“I suppose I have.” I ran my hands over my chin and upper lip. “Have I always had a moustache?”

“As long as I’ve known you,” she said, smiling at last. “Although I do recall that once, you did shave it off for a particular disguise. You were hardly recognizable. Sher– ah, Mr. Holmes was awfully impatient for it to grow back. He does love that moustache of yours.”

She chuckled. My mind had fixed on one word from her statement: “Disguise?”

“Oh, my!” she gasped. “Dear Lord, I had forgotten – you must not know what it is that you and Sherlock do.”

I frowned. “And what is that?”

“Well, he’s a detective.” She smiled and reached out to pat my arm. “The finest detective in London, I should say! And you are his partner, and have been for many years. I am awfully proud of my boys.”

I stared blankly. “A detective?”

“Yes, dear. Consulting detective – that’s the phrase Mr. Holmes uses.”

My mind raced as I tried to take it all in. The Adventure of the Abbey Grange… I must have been writing the story of one of his… one of our cases.

“I found a curious manuscript on my writing desk,” I mused. “It seemed to be something of a journal. Did I often keep such records of our cases?”

“Oh, much more than records. You write up your most fascinating adventures and publish them in a popular magazine. Perhaps I should fetch some of them for you, to see if reading your own accounts helps you recall any of your memories.”

“I would advise against that, at least for the time being,” came Holmes’ voice from the doorway. He was leaning against the doorframe, looking slightly more frazzled than the last time I had seen him. His hair was tousled, as if he’d been grabbing at it in frustration. “I have been reading up on the subject of amnesia, and many seem to agree that there is a slight danger of implanting false memories by accident. If Watson reads his own accounts – which are largely fictionalized – it is possible that he may come to believe that he remembers the events therein, when in fact he does not.”

“That does sound sensible,” I said reluctantly, as I burned with curiosity as to what the pages of my own writing held.

“No, we must employ other methods first.” Holmes narrowed his eyes as he studied me. “Finish your breakfast, Watson. I have a few ideas to test when you are done.”

He left, and I continued eating. Mrs. Hudson had already finished her meal, and was gazing at me with that same melancholy in her eyes.

“You really don’t remember him?” she asked.
I looked at the spot where Holmes had stood and shook my head. “He said that we were very close friends. And yet… I find nothing familiar about him.”

She reached across the table and gave my hand a gentle squeeze. “I’m sure you will remember in time. I doubt any power in the world could erase Sherlock Holmes from your mind completely. You would not be who you are today without him.”

“That’s just the problem, Mrs. Hudson. I don’t know who I am, either.”

She managed a small smile. “He’ll figure something out. Have faith in him, Dr. Watson. I know I do.”

Some time after breakfast had been cleared away, Holmes returned with a notebook and pen. “We shall begin with word correspondences,” he explained. “It is possible that words and names with personal significance to you might help in triggering your memories.”

I nodded. “Alright.”

“We shall begin with names. I shall list them off, and you must tell me if anything comes to mind.” I nodded again, and he looked at his notebook. “Lestrade.”

I shook my head. Nothing came to mind.

“Gregson.”

Nothing.

“Mary.”

Still, nothing.


“Moriarty.”

I paused. Holmes leaned forward expectantly, his eyes shining.

“What do you remember?” he asked.

“It’s… not a memory, precisely. It’s a feeling.” I shivered. “Dread. Fear. That name… it makes me uneasy.”

Holmes’ eyes shimmered, and me made a note. “Excellent, Watson, excellent.”

“I suppose this is not someone who I look upon very fondly.”

He chuckled. “That, my dear Watson, is quite an understatement.”

He listed at least a dozen more names, but none of them struck me in the same way. When he was finished, he turned the page of his journal to a second list.

“Maiwand.”

“No.”
“Cognac.”

Nothing.

“Carbuncle.”

The list continued. Seemingly random words, rattled off one after another: Irregulars, seed cake, orange pip, Derbyshire, Sussex, the Strand, jezail, riesling, Reichenbach. I knew the definitions of most of the words, but none of them pulled forth any particular memory beyond simple recognition.

Once he had exhausted his list, Holmes set his book aside and fell back against his chair with a sigh. “This is getting us nowhere,” he groaned.

“Have you any other ideas?” I asked.

“Some notions, yes.” Holmes rose to his feet and walked over to his violin, grabbing it and shoving it ungracefully under his chin. “I need to think.”

He leapt into a piece that seemed to perfectly befit his frustrated mood. It was forceful yet melancholy; it was energetic, dramatic, and despondent. I watched him play, utterly enraptured. He was an entirely different being when he played; he became not only graceful, but fluid, as if the music was reverberating through his very bones.

His fingers danced over the strings and his bow slashed back and forth. I found myself once again staring at his hands… their complete mastery over the instrument, their speed, their strength, their exquisite beauty…

As I watched, I became slowly aware that I could hear something beyond what Holmes was playing. Not with my ears, but within my own mind – I remembered. I remembered the melody, and I remembered the swell of an orchestra behind it, echoing through a concert hall…

After a moment, I became aware that Holmes had stopped playing. He was staring at me.

“What is it?” he breathed.

It came to me as easily as breathing. “Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto in E Minor,” I said. “I know this piece. And I… remember…”

Holmes set his violin down and ran forwards, taking his seat opposite me, leaning forward with hope shimmering in his sharp grey eyes. “Yes?”

I closed my eyes and reached out towards the memory, grasping at everything I could. “A concert hall. A grand old place. Sitting in a private box, on the left side of the stage, with…” I opened my eyes. “With you.”

The happiness that bloomed upon Holmes’ face seemed brighter than the sun. Something in my chest ached at the sight of it, of his smile. I felt an echo of something I couldn’t name, and I knew somehow that making this man happy was more important to me than nearly anything else in the world.

What I didn’t know was why.

“Oh, Watson,” he said, his voice trembling. “My dear, dear Watson… I knew those memories were still within you.”
Finding my hope renewed, I returned his smile. “It seems that your violin holds the key.”

“My violin could only bring back some of your memories. No, I believe that the solution not in the violin specifically, but in the use of sensory stimulation.”

“Ah, of course!”

“I shall draw up a schematic…” Holmes said, rising to grab his notebook and a pen. “We must examine each sense: sight, smell, touch, taste, and sound. Taste should be the most straightforward, as we need only feed you your favorite – and perhaps least favorite – foods, along with the meals of your usual habit. The other senses, I’m afraid, will be more complicated. There are hundreds of sights and smells you might remember, and several hundred musical pieces in my repertoire alone, never mind sounds you’ve heard elsewhere. I shall write up a list…”

He trailed off, muttering to himself, absorbed in his scribbling. I watched him, then went to stand by the window, enjoying the sunlight. I felt reinvigorated; my first success in recalling a memory! Perhaps there was hope for me after all.

Chapter End Notes

Here’s the concerto Holmes is playing!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1dBg__wsuo&t=998s

Originally I was going to have him playing something by Tchaikovsky, because how can you not love Holmes’ favorite iconic gay composer? But this piece felt more fitting for Holmes’ frustrated mood. #tchaik4ever tho
Chapter 5

The day passed in a series of similar experiments, wherein Holmes exposed me to a wide range of both visual and auditory stimuli. He began by playing various pieces on his violin, several of which were indeed familiar to me. Although none of them evoked such a clear memory as that first concerto, Holmes seemed very pleased with my progress.

“You seemed to recall all of your old favorites,” he told me. “We can therefore hope that your mind’s collection of memories and data is not muddled, but only obscured.”

After several hours of playing, Holmes’ hand began to ache, and he was forced to stop. I applauded, to which he laughed and bowed dramatically.

“You play beautifully, Holmes,” said I. “Your devotion to the craft is evident in every stroke of your bow. It is a marvel to witness.”

At my words, he flushed a light shade of pink and looked away, obscuring a smile. He looked as a young lady does when complimented on her beauty. I could not hide my amusement. After clearing his throat, he turned back to place his violin back in its case. His eyes darted to me for a moment and crinkled in a fond smirk.

Once again, my chest ached at the sight. He had such a lovely smile, made only more beautiful by the ice-blue color of his eyes. As he stood, I examined the sharp angles of his face, the shine of the silver in his hair, the long lines of his lithe, slender body…

I realized that I had been staring and quickly looked away. My cheeks heated with embarrassment, although I couldn’t quite put a finger on why.

“We shall experiment with visuals next,” he said. “I suppose the simplest way is to let you wander around the rooms and take in everything you see. Perhaps some piece of furniture or household objects shall spark some recognition in you.”

I nodded, pointedly looking away from him as I did so.

“I shall follow you and take notes on any progress we might make.” He paused and looked at me for a moment. “But perhaps I shall ring for some coffee first. You look rather tired, old man.”

“I am indeed.” I sighed. “And I would very much welcome a warm drink.”

Within a few minutes, the coffee was brought up, and Holmes poured out two cups. He dropped two lumps of sugar into one cup, then paused, looking up at me.

“How do you take your coffee?” he asked.

The question was a test. I closed my eyes, trying to think. “I – I don’t know, Holmes. I am sorry.”

He handed me the plain cup. “Take a sip. Perhaps the taste will jog your memory.”

As I raised the cup to my lips, I caught the beautiful, dark aroma that wafted up from it. “I love this smell,” I realized. “It is one of my favorite scents.”
Holmes grinned, grabbing his notebook to scribble something down. “Excellent, excellent! And the taste?”

I took a sip and grimaced. “Far too dark. I think…” The answer came to me suddenly. “I take my coffee with cream, no sugar, I believe.”

By the look on Holmes’ face, I could tell that I was correct. He reached across the table to pour some into my cup. I watched the dark liquid lighten to a pleasantly rich brown and took a sip.


The fractured images came to me all in a rush. I took another sip, trying to catch hold of the string of memories.

*Paper spread out over the table. Toast with marmalade. Don’t like marmalade. Holmes loves marmalade. Reading paper to Holmes over breakfast. Sitting next to him on the settee, sharing a blanket and a cigarette before the fire, balancing a steaming cup on my lap. A hand on my shoulder. A quiet, comfortable conversation. The lovely aroma of fresh coffee.*

I opened my eyes slowly to find Holmes staring at me with bated breath. My head spun from the speed and ferocity with which the deluge of memories had crashed into me.

“Watson…” Holmes breathed.

“You…” I tried to gather my thoughts. “You love marmalade. Don’t you, Holmes?”

His eyes widened, and then he grinned. “I do. And yourself?”

“I hate the stuff,” I responded with a chuckle. “But that isn’t all I’ve remembered.”

I did my best to describe the deluge of recollections. “They were only partially memories,” I mused. “At times, less like memory and more like… feelings. Knowing things that I’d forgotten.”

“Wonderful, Watson, simply wonderful… we should continue to experiment with taste for the time being, it seems!” Holmes could hardly contain his excitement. He began to rub his hands together quickly, as though he was trying to start a fire between them, as he always did when he was exceedingly happy.

The thought stopped me in my tracks. He was prattling on about the variables in our experiment, but I hardly heard him. I could not take my eyes off his hands. I remembered… I knew, then, that he had certain movements that I had learned over time directly corresponded to different moods. He rubbed his hands when he was happy. And he tapped his leg when he… when he… Damn.

I couldn’t remember. Hopefully, I would eventually recall the code of Sherlock Holmes. I knew then with absolute certainty that I had been the only soul on Earth who fully understood the syntax of his unspoken language.

Which meant that I knew him better than anyone else in the world.

“Watson? Watson, what are you thinking of?” Holmes’ voice cut through my swimming thoughts. “Have you remembered something else, dear boy?”

I glanced down at his hands, still fidgeting. They were so beautiful, so delicate. The hands of a musician, a scientist, an aesthete. Hands meant for holding a bow or fluttering in elegant gestures or
I jolted out of my thoughts so violently that my shoulders fell back against the chair. My eyes were wide; my heart was racing. That thought – that image, that vision, had come to me so suddenly, and so easily… what did it mean? Another memory? No, it hadn’t felt like one. Not precisely. And then, only to my further confusion, I realized what it had been: a wish. A passing fancy.

Desire.

My thoughts began to spiral. I had looked at his hands and wanted him to touch me like that. I wanted to clasp his hand in mine and intertwine our fingers. I wanted to hold it to my cheek. I wanted these things so desperately that my fingers itched to reach out and cover his hands with my own.

I felt my cheeks heating. I… didn’t understand. It wasn’t at all unnatural to wish for physical affection from one’s closest friends. But the caresses that I so desperately desired just then seemed somehow to outstep the bounds of what would have been considered acceptable between two grown men, although I couldn’t have said exactly how.

At the gentle touch of Holmes’ fingers on my knee, I gasped aloud, so startled was I.

“What’s the matter?” His brow furrowed in concern. “Nothing, nothing,” I said quickly, resisting the urge to brush his hand away. In my shaken state, even such a delicate touch was nearly overwhelming.

To my relief, and despair, he removed his hand on his own and sat back. “I shall have the kitchen bring up an array of food and drink for you to sample,” he said. “No, no – I’d better go do it myself. I know better than anyone which tastes you associate with what, and which we ought to try first in this experiment.”

I swallowed thickly and took another sip of my coffee. “That… seems sound.”

Holmes gulped down the rest of his drink in a single swig. “Finish your coffee, Watson. I shall be back momentarily with a smorgasboard for you. I do hope you’re hungry.”

With that, he left me in the living room. My coffee grew cold.

Holmes returned soon after with a tray pile high with all manner of comestibles. One by one, he had me sample several jars of jam and fruit preserves, a piece of bread, a few slices of cold meat, and so on and so forth. It seemed to me that he had raided the entire pantry. Although some of the tastes were familiar to me, most evoked no strong recollection. The first breakthrough came with the honeypot.

I dipped my teaspoon into the golden liquid and tasted it. I paused, and then took another bite of the stuff. I closed my eyes.

“I see… a sprawling countryside,” I said. “It’s summer, I think… yes, I can remember the feeling of the sun on my face. I am… no, we are sitting on a picnic blanket, under a tree… and… you hand me a piece of soft bread and butter drizzled with honey.”

Holmes smiled and nodded encouragingly.
“I recall you… telling me something about the honey,” I continued. “Something about… the flowers it’s made from, I think, and the… the bees, yes, that’s it! You had brought a book with you, a book on beekeeping, and you were telling me about the particular bees of this area…” I saw the image as clear as day: Holmes, lounging on the blanket, one hand sticky with honey and butter, the other gesticulating in the air as he spoke rapidly, his face lit up in a smile as he spoke about hives and pollen and nectar consistency. I knew even before I felt that ache in my chest again that this was a fond memory, a treasured memory. “You were so happy.”

Holmes sighed wistfully, closing his own eyes. “Our first summer holiday in Sussex,” he said. “You were the one who dragged us there – you insisted that some fresh air and peace was vital for my health, which I adamantly contested – but in the end, I was the one who booked us passage back every subsequent year. That first summer, I discovered the wonders of honey and beekeeping. You thought it was rather… well…”

“Odd?” I suggested. “Yes, it’s beginning to come back to me… I believe at first I thought it rather a ridiculous hobby for such a dignified man.”

“Oh, come now,” Holmes scoffed. “You’ve never in your life made the mistake of thinking me dignified.”

I laughed. “But I also recall… The bees fascinated you so, and your eyes lit up when you spoke of them… And I did love the honey you brought back from the market for me.”

I looked back at the honey pot. Holmes nodded at my unspoken question. “Wild clover honey from the fields of Sussex,” he said. “After that first summer we made a tradition of bringing home a jar with us. Do you remember when we’d open it?”

I wracked my brain for a moment, and it came to me. “We saved it for the winter months. To remind us of the warmth of summer.”

With the fire crackling in the grate beside us, and with Holmes’ eyes alight with such tenderness, I felt that warmth of summer as clearly as if I were still on that picnic blanket under the sun.

Chapter End Notes

Despite school's best efforts to kill me, I have triumphed and finally finished this fucking chapter! :)

Holmes rubbing his hand together as a happy stim is a lovely idea that I shamelessly stole from a headcanon by two-nipples-maybe-more. Their headcanons are *chef’s kiss* delicious.


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