If the Wolf, then the Man.

by Humbuggy

Summary

John Watson did not know of the Norse Myths, did not know anything other than the fact that there, in the heat of Afghanistan, he found an abused puppy and made it his own; His prescribed future went parallel from there.

AU: Where John Watson finds Loki's wolf son, Fenrir, in Afghanistan and unknowingly took him back to base as his own.

Notes

I'm not even going to lie: This is still unfinished, but i've got about 8 chapters down and it's 23 000 words so far, so expect perhaps 7000 more. (Edit circa 2020: ahahah this is a blatent lie. I don't even know when this'll get finished, but it will. eventually.)

I don't think i've ever seen a crossover done like this before, so hey, originality! I do play fast and loose with Norse Myth and some MCU cannon (when it specifically comes to Norse myth), and basic military everything (i tried to reaserch, but hell, it's fucking hard if you haven't been in the army and know nothing of how it works). I've attempted to keep relatively close to the original time lines of both MCU and Sherlock.
Regular update schedule: once every two-three weeks.

Tags/triggers/warnings: Some pretty standard violence for both MCU and war/Afghanistan settings, but I will tag for triggers and warnings for chapters as I go along.

Humbuggy.

See the end of the work for more notes.
The Beginning

The wind shrieked loudly across the lonely, open plain. It bit viciously at exposed skin and flesh created by bonds so tight that they had rubbed away the fur of a great wolf and left his swollen flesh raw. The wolf did not struggle; he'd learned long ago that to do so would cause the golden magical rope to tighten further. When he was younger, in the first months of being bound to the rock upon which he lay, he had growled and thrashed causing the bonds to cut cruelly into the flesh and great pools of saliva to drip to the ground from the gaping maw kept open with the length of a sword. By all rights - the prominent ribs jutting from his sunken frame, and the wounds that striped him all over - he should be dead. But death was a mercy that the Æsir who'd bound him, had not seen fit to grant.

In the beginning, he had wondered what he had done to warrant such punishment or wondered if rescue would come soon, but now he did neither. Instead, he breathed shallow even breaths that were just enough, yet not enough, to give him air.

He waited for absolution.

It would not be long in coming.

The dawn was just touching the land, the sun kissing the edge of the horizon, lending the snow a touch of dawn pink when the figure appeared. Stepping out of a swirl of darkness not caused by a lack of light or colour, but by the absence of everything itself, hope came in the form of a trickster god.

Loki scanned the land with flicks of his bright green eyes, and his breath caught when he saw the wolf bound to the rock. He expelled it in a soft bitter swear. "Oh love, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

A few swift steps and a short jump of teleportation brought him to the wolf's side. At first, the wolf stiffened and gave a warning growl, but as Loki drew closer, bitter anger darning itself in lines over his body and soft terms of endearment on his tongue, a spark of recognition kindled in its eyes. The wolf whined in grateful yet miserable welcome and his tail gave a small feeble wag as Loki dropped the glamour hiding his appearance.

Loki sank to his knees before the wolf, pressing his face into the wolf's, in the hollow between his amber eyes. Salty tears leaked from the corners of his eyes, soaking into the wolf's matted fur.

"Oh Fenrir. Oh my son, I am so sorry." He brushed a careful hand over Fenrir's head. It had been so long, so many years filled with longing. He had taken Tyr at his word that Fenrir was fine, was okay, was living in the wilds hunting boar and living with a pack. That his son was happy despite being a monster.

"Never again." He vowed bitterly.

Fenrir gave a gentle whine, one that said all at once, I forgive you, I love you, don't leave me, Help me, it wasn't your fault.

If anything, Loki could be glad that his son is not bitter, not angry. It is a gift he'd not expected to receive and knew that if he'd been in his son's place, he would have crossed the line into hate filled madness long ago. He knew himself that well at least, but also knew at the same time that that lack of bitterness is due in part to the fact that Fenrir is still a puppy in mind whilst an adult in body. if he were not chained to a rock, he would still be romping in forests and playing in the sun.
Well no longer. Loki thought angrily, a glint of green magic glowing from his clenched fists.

He bowed his head to Fenrir's once more, and then set to work. An anxious whine came from Fenrir, What are you doing? Won't you get in trouble? Oh please, please, please. Loki couldn't actually understand his son, Fenrir was far too young to be able to speak coherently, and to be understood with the All-Speak. Nevertheless, the whimper is clear, and he can take a good guess as to the meaning.

Loki etched his green runes over the ribbon thin chain with an exacting hand; it would take a lot of magic to break these bonds and he couldn't waste a single spell. If his magic depleted too much, he would not have a way to protect his weakened son and himself if anyone came after him.

The sword keeping Fenrir's mouth open was next, the runes glowing and highlighting his son's cavernous mouth, scars ugly in the green light. Loki planned to break the chain and the sword at the same time, because if he knew anything about his people then Heimdell was bound to be watching. If that's the case, then they'll need to be able to move, and move quickly. Loki rocked back on his heels after he was done, considering his son's condition. He knew that it would be difficult for Fenrir to hide, heal or receive help in this size and this state. He would need to do something about it. Loki was reaching with his magic to heal his son when the sound of the Bifrost cracked across the plain and Loki knew he'd run out of time. With a sharp slice of his hand, he activated the runes, snapping the bonds and breaking the sword into four pieces. The metal fell to the ground, and his son moved slowly and jerkily off the rock he'd been chained to for so long.

Loki could hear the thrum of hoof beats – damn them to hel, they brought horses – in the distance. He moved swiftly, runes falling fast as he dared from his lips. He was weaving a blanket to hide his son from Heimdell's eyes, which meant it couldn't be half done, but the hoof beats were closer, closer, closer. Then with a gasp of relief, Loki finished saying the spell; Fenrir was shrinking before his eyes, de-aging but hopefully keeping his memories. It would be a bitter blow, albeit slightly deserved, if his son lost all memory of him. He was sorry that he has done this to his son but he doesn't have time for regrets now they're nearly here, he can hear Tyr's angry bellow. He has only enough time to open one of the paths between the worlds, to shove his son onto them and close up the rift in space again before he's drawing his daggers as he whirls to fight, his glamoured appearance firmly in place again.

He spared a brief thought for his son who is now travelling – falling - down the paths of the universe, and hopes that wherever he lands, that someone will love and care for him. He hoped that wherever Fenrir fell, someone would protect him, as Loki had never managed to do. Perhaps Loki would find him again, see his son happy and finally forgive himself for failing his son so badly.

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The darkness was not absolute; the stars gave light, but these flashes of brightness hurt him, so he closed his eyes and let fate take him where it willed.

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John Watson looked about him with narrowed eyes, land lying out before him, harsh, unforgiving, and war ravaged, automatically marking out spots that could provide the enemy cover or were too exposed. His eyes scanned the jagged cliffs and mountains that rose hazy and imposing, looking for glints of metal, movement, or hints of camouflage netting that would hide potential danger. While he and his squad were moving into land freshly cleared of insurgents by the American forces, he was wary from experience that often came at a painful cost. Seeing and sensing nothing he, turned and walked down for the observation tower, giving a nod to one of the women leaning on a Humvee and smoking. He recognised her; John had stitched her up a couple of weeks back after particularly narrow escape with a bullet. It had left a nasty graze that John had stitched tooth floss until he could get the woman to the med tent. Although he was trained as a doctor, he was also a soldier – and a dammed good one too. It also meant that he was a crack shot with a gun, good with snipers; good enough to be called in when they needed an extra man and not just a medic. That was the reason why John had been in the field with him, being shot at and resorting to tooth-floss for stitches when the surgical string had run out.

A tall fence with barbed wire and a single gate surrounded the small, makeshift British-American camp. The base was composed of semi-permanent tents and barracks; a few helicopters with a strip cleared for landing planes, two observation towers and plenty of room for movement. The camp was close to the front line, which meant that John saw a lot of action and spare watchers were never amiss. However, for the moment, it was relatively quiet. There were a couple of squads on patrol, and John would have been out there too, but his particular squad was on down time and he'd had a couple of patients that he didn't want to leave. They were stable now though, and he'd taken the chance to scan the area, telling himself it wasn't paranoia that made him do it. A cloud of dust appeared on the horizon, it was a squad coming in. From the look of it, they'd seen a little action, but had not called in a bird. So, nothing too serious, still, he hurried to the med tent. He might be needed.
Fenrir fell, but it was in a directed manner, as if down a slide, where the landing was certain. Stars roared past him, galaxies, planets, and darkness. There was a swirl of absence, and he was unceremoniously spat out on the other side. Everything was bright, and there were loud bangs and noises of battle. He dragged himself into small place, darker and perhaps safer. If he was quiet then perhaps no one will find him and hurt him. Perhaps his father would come soon. He whimpered slightly, licked his wounds and pressed himself deeper into the shadowy corner.

A few weeks later, John was out on patrol with his squad, about a hundred clicks from base camp. He was scanning the surrounds, a prickle of unease making its way up his back. When the sound of gunfire issued from a ruined and abandoned village, his instincts screamed; he dropped to the ground and instantly his squad did the same. What followed was an intense 20 minutes of fighting. Eventually the enemy fire was negated with zero casualties to him and his squad. They were scouting the village warily to make sure it was clear, when John heard his name called.

"Watson! Come here! We need your help." The call came from one of the ruined houses and John lifted his head and broke into a hasty jog. In the ruined house, the Captain and one of the guys were kneeling in the doorway, looking at a growling snapping creature back in the corner.

"What is it?" he asked, kneeling as well, looking at the small animal backed in the corner with a wildly frightened look in its eye as it growled furiously.

"Think you can help him, lieutenant?" The squad Captain, Angus Reaches asked. "I've got to check the other houses, Davies, you stay and help."

John frowned, "I can see what I can do, Captain." Reaches gave John a nod and jogged off, presumably to check with the rest of his men. John turned to Davies, "Got any meat on you?"

With much coaxing, they eventually managed to get it into the light. The creature turned out to be a canine with toast-rack ribs, starved and beaten. It would've been larger if it was well cared for, as it was, the animal was little bigger than a rugby ball. It approached the pair warily, drawn by the smell of the jerky John was holding out.

"Shit." Private Samuel Davies swore softly, "It's been fucking tied down. Look at the scars, they're freaking weeping, some of them are still raw. Have they applied freaking razorblades to it? That's
John frowned and checked the animal over with gentle hands. It trembled under his hands, ears flattened. He checked it's gender quickly, and nodded to himself when it found that the animal was male. "I think it's been like that for a while, he hasn't tried to bite, yet, so obviously hasn't been maltreated all his life, but it's close to it."

Samuel nodded, "He's still just a puppy. No fully-grown dog has paws that oversized, look at the size of them; they're outrageously large, completely oversized. He'll be huge if he survives."

"He'll survive," John said grimly, "I'll make him survive."

John pulled out his basic field med kit and gently, he began to disinfect the puppy's wounds; it snapped and yelped a little at the sting before settling when Samuel handed it a few more strips of jerky. He flattened his ears a little when John pulled out the needle and thread, but when he ran a soothing hand over the pup's head, which was mercifully gash free, it stilled and stopped moving. The puppy held still even when John started to stitch the gashes closed, through it remained stiff, a snarl wrinkling its muzzle and a warning growl shaking its small body.

"You are a brave one." John murmured softly as he pulled the thread through and tied a knot in the end.

Samuel nodded in agreement. "He is smart, knows we're trying to help him. Most pups would've struggled and run from us by now."

John smiled; he had a soft spot for dogs, especially ones with courage and brains. He tied the knot in the last bit of stitching and fed the puppy the last of the jerky. "Good dog." He praised, and in response, the puppy snapped at him. John jerked his hand away and chuckled. "He's got fire."

"Think we can keep him, John?" Samuel asked, pulling out his canteen and taking a long drink of water, before offering some to the puppy.

John looked at him, and then down at the puppy on the ground, "I reckon so." He said with a small wry grin, "I'll have to take those stitches out anyway. Depends if he follows or not."

When the squad moved off, a small stitched up puppy was following Medic John Watson at a short distance, occasionally tripping over its over-large paws.

When they got back, there were a few raised eyebrows; picked up strays weren't uncommon but never a puppy with more wounds than the ribs that protruded from his skin, and not an animal that was touchy and snapped at any given moment. The few dog handlers on base - men and women who had strong healthy animals trained to sniff out explosives – had hissed through their teeth and shaken their heads, telling John that he was bloody mad. Danny Verness, a man from a different squad to John, and whose family bred dogs gave him some pointers on how to care for him while also trying to take a stab at its breed. "It'll be a mutt, of course, but it's hard to tell what breed when they're so young." All had warned him that it was hardly likely to survive in its given condition and that John was unlikely to be able to tame it.

"Davie's found him, I fixed him up." Explained John as attempted to give the scrap of a thing a bath to remove the blood and grime smereared into its fur, as Danny Verness and one of the dog handlers looked on. "He's strong, he'll survive. Once he's fed up and I've taken these stiches out,
"he'll be right as rain."

"You got a name for it yet, Watson?" asked the handler, pausing in the cleaning of his gun.

"Not yet." Said John, quickly moving his hand out of snapping reach when he accidently touched a too tender spot. The puppy's teeth were sharp and it had a strong grip, something that John had learned very quickly. "I've been thinking, but nothing's quite right. And I'm sure as hell not calling him Fido."

Danny frowned and looked the puppy over, thinking to himself. "He's very fierce for a dog."

"You could call him Chulainn, after the famous Irish warrior, The Hound of Cullan." Said the handler. "He's got fight enough, for all that he's a puppy."

John considered it for a second before he shook his head. "It's not quite right." he chucked slight and said, "Besides, if I name it after an Irish warrior? My grandpa would roll in his grave."

"All right, no Irish warriors. What about Cusith, the Scottish moor hound? At the sound of his howl, all men lock their wives up. It's pretty fitting for you." The man said, grinning at this not too subtle prodding at John's 'three continents' reputation.

"Oh ha hah. Very funny." John replied, though he too was smiling.

"Call him Fenrir." Interjected Danny. "After the wolf in the Norse myths."

The wriggling puppy stilled at the sound of the name and John looked down at him, considering. "Fenrir." He repeated. "Yeah. It's good, Fenrir."

Not long after that, John cemented the name when he tied a handkerchief around its neck with 'Fenrir' scrawled on it in permanent pen. Eventually, John spent some of his pay for a proper collar with metal tags.

The animal healed swiftly and, once he'd filled out so that his ribs were padded with puppy fat, grew steadily. But he was still a little wild and untrusting. "You want to get that out of him as fast as possible," warned Danny, 'It's fine in a puppy, but once it gets to a size, then it's a problem."

John already had some of his trust; Fenrir would allow him to touch him with warning, but he didn't initiate or reciprocate contact. That is until one night, three weeks after John and Samuel Davies had found Fenrir. John was staying up late, keeping an eye on a patient's fever, when he heard Fenrir whimpering frantically in his sleep. Carefully, he knelt down and shushed him with his voice. After about thirty seconds of talking calmly to him, Fenrir woke up, looking disoriented and scared.

"Easy boy. Easy Fenrir." Staying very still, John held one hand out and with a bated breath, watched as Fenrir came close and nudged his palm. Slowly, oh so slowly, he stroked Fenrir with long movements until Fenrir stopped shivering. Then Fenrir did something completely unexpected: with a small wag of his tail, he licked John's palm. Ridiculously touched by this small action, John blinked back tears.

"That's a good boy." He praised and let his strokes move a little firmer as Fenrir continued to wash his palm, and felt absurdly un-manned. Here he was, an army man, blinking back tears because a tiny puppy licked his hand.

After that, John could rarely been seen without the rapidly growing puppy at his heels.
Fenrir went everywhere with John; he slept at John's feet, and ate when John did, and he went on patrol with John as well. He was whip smart and staunchly loyal, picking up commands almost before John had the chance to teach them. John also learnt that the puppy was almost foolishly courageous, John had seen him facedown bombs and bullets without flinching. He was also a terrific warning system as well. Everyone quickly learnt to grab the guns and prepare for trouble if Fenrir laid his ears back, lifted his hackles in a silent snarl and rumbled a growl deep in his chest. Fenrir had been with them for about a four months and was the size of a boarder collie (and growing), when John's patrol came across an ambush. Fenrir' growl was the only warning that they got before the attack. If the puppy hadn't been with them, the men would not have had a hope of knowing that the ambush was there. It was a deadly situation and their Captain needed to get them out.

It started with the bang and whine of a bullet as it sang out, and there is a yell of pain and shock as Captain Reaches flexes like a leaping salmon, them crumples to the ground, a red stain spreading from the wound to his side. There is a moment of uncertainty, of shock, and John knew that they had a problem. Reaches is down, perhaps out, and he won't be the only one unless someone takes control. There is a pause that takes all of a heartbeat; then John takes command. He had never gone to officer school, but he's spent long enough in the army, long enough making life or death decisions in surgery, and he's clever enough, a jack of all trades, to take command and step up to the plate that Reaches has just fallen from.

It was if that first shot was the signal for the rest of the ambush. The heat is on.

Bullets flew back and forth. John, adrenaline shooting through his veins, directed the men about him with the cool command that could only be forged with the experience of battle. Fenrir was next to him, keeping low to the ground like John taught him to. His ears were flat to his skull, but he was not afraid; Fenrir is fearless. Reaches is gasping like a fish, pained whoops of shock hiccupping out of his throat as Davies drags him out of the way while another man covers him. John was yelling at the men, "Go! Go! Go!" and there was the whine of the bullet and the world was in slow motion around him. Men's face twisted into caricatures of fear and anger, dust in clouds and bullets hanging in the air around him as John saw the bullet that was heading unerringly towards him. But Fenrir was moving, moving, moving, and then the world was sped up again as the bullet with John's name on it, misses, because Fenrir had shoved John out of the way with all of his 20 kilograms of weight. It was as if that near miss had flicked a switch in Fenrir and if John were ever scared of a dog it would've been then because Fenrir was terrifying. The animal was furious, fast and merciless. More of a wolf than a dog. The effect was that of a lion pitted against a herd of sheep and that was the frightening thing because Fenrir was really still just an oversized puppy.

The battle ended very quickly after Fenrir joined in, and the screams of those that he killed still echoes in the minds of everyone around him. But he could tell they're more thankful for Fenrir's contribution than afraid. At that moment, his puppy is still the plucky mascot who has, somehow, managed to kill more people in one go than the humans and probably saved one or more people from the squad. He wondered for a second how long that opinion will last. Fenrir was still worrying at the body of one of the dead, and John had to call him twice to come away as he took note of the casualties. Reaches was moaning softly on the ground, Davies has done the smart thing and immediately started to apply pressure to the wound, one man is bleeding slightly from a cut on his cheek, all of the insurgents are dead and Fenrir is painted in blood.
"John!" Davies said; panic edging his voice, "Captain Reaches."

John nodded and swiftly knelt at the Captain's side pulling his field kit out of his pack, "Ruben, call for a chopper. Captain Reaches is going to need more than what I have here, and quickly. Davies, help me with this, someone else give Fenrir water and see if you can sponge off the worst of the blood. I need a couple of you to scout, make sure that the insurgents haven't sent a message for help. " Then John switched into 'Doctor Mode', murmuring soothingly to his bleeding superior as he began to work.

The chopper arrived swiftly and by that time, John has managed to staunch most of the bleeding and the worst of the blood has been washed off Fenrir.

He and the men were shaking, still buzzed from the adrenaline when the chopper leaves with Reaches. John takes the moment to look at them all, "Don't mention this to the higher-ups." before he's washing the rest of the blood off of Fenrir. Unfortunately, John knows that the information won't stay silent for long; the official report still has to go through. There's no way the captain can't leave out information like that.

"Come one," John said to the rest of the squad after he'd finished checking the cut on Liam Stone's cheek, "We have to get back to base."

He got up and clicked his fingers for Fenrir to fall to heel. "Come along silly." He said, unable to keep the endearment from his tongue, and Fenrir fell into a prancing heel. He seemed pleased with himself, and John could only hope that the superiors don't decide that Fenrir is too dangerous to be around.

John had about a day or so of nervous reprieve – one case of heatstroke, four minor injuries, and one shallow bullet wound to take care of, before he was called to talk to the base commander. He tied Fenrir loosely to the pole outside the corrugated iron and fibre-glass H.Q at the barracks, knowing that Fenrir could easily break the rope and escape if worse came to worst.

"Doctor John Watson," Said Major Vincent Murray in greeting, his hazel eyes steady under thinning brown hair.

"Major." John said, saluting smartly.

"At ease." He nodded, "Take a seat Doctor."

Not completely losing the stiff spine and parade rest, though he did relax it a little, John sat in the indicated chair; a collapsible, khaki coloured polyester canvas one with 'British Army Core' stamped on the backrest. It creaked slightly under him, lightweight aluminium poles protesting under his weight.

His superior leaned forward and steepled his fingers together thought fully, elbows on the table. "You'll be pleased to know that Captain Reaches is now recovering in hospital at a main base; it looks like he'll make a fine recovery and be honourably discharged back to Britain. I heard about what happened on the patrol; apparently your quick actions saved both Captain Reaches and the rest of the men on patrol." Murray gave him a small smile of approval. "Good job Doctor Watson, or is that field-medic Watson? According to both the men you've served under and your records, you're quite the jack of all trades."

John frowned lightly, unsure of what the Major was getting at, "I help where I can sir, it's just luck
that I'm fairly alright at it."

Murray snorted and stood going to stand at the windows. "I've heard differently. In fact from no less than six various men in varying ranks of captain or above that you are a crack shot, able to both give and receive commands, are cool under fire with exceedingly good judgment in both battlefield and medical situations and you're also very good with the men. Not to mention that dog of yours; apparently any patrol who goes out with him has a higher chance of coming back intact than the squads who don't."

"Fenrir is very clever, he picks up commands easily, Sir, Samuel Davies and I were lucky to find him." He replied, fidgeting with the fabric of his trousers slightly.

The thud of helicopter blades slowly starting up throbbed from outside the office, muted slightly by walls and glass.

"Yes, and it's partly about your dog that I need to speak to you about." The Major paused and sat back down in his seat, before continuing with only slight hesitancy in his tone. "Ordinarily, after your performance in situations such as the one two days ago, the normal procedure would be to review your field performance and then promote you to Lieutenant or Captain. But it's your dog that complicates things. I am lead to understand that after a bullet nearly missed you, your dog lost control and killed the rest of the insurgents in what was described as a 'fucking terrifying display' and that they 'had never seen a dog kill like that.'"

John paled, "That is correct sir." He said slowly. "But I was nearly shot and he did stop when I called him off and he didn't hurt any of the other men, and we wouldn't have have gotten away with so little injuries if Fenrir hadn't, er, fought – uh. Apologies Major. " John shut up swiftly, fear mingling with embarrassment in squirm of nervous knots.

Murray guffawed lightly "Bloody hell Watson, don't look so scared, I'm not going to kill your dog. What kind of man would I be? No, the problem is that we would promote you, except your dog is too damned good at what he does."

"Major?"

Murray sighed and levered himself up, "We're not the Americans. They have the edge on us with not only weapons, bloody Tony Stark won't sell to the British, but also in dogs. We don't exclusively take dogs bred especially for use in the army which gives us an advantage in some ways, but limits us in others. I'm not sure if you've heard of the dogs that the Americans have that officially don't exist; trained to kill, to go into places where they'll need to perform in ways that most dogs cannot, trained to take down the enemy with friggin titanium teeth and what-not."

"Like spy dogs?"

"Like spy dogs," Confirmed the Major, "the super soldiers of the dog world, except on steroids and a hundred times more nasty."

'So where do Fenrir and I come into this?' Asked John, frowning.

"To put it clearly Watson, the higher ups want to see if Fenrir can be trained to the level of the American super dogs or above– of which I have no doubt. After which they'll move him into special operations to take down dangerous and high profile targets and to go deep into enemy territory if needed. In fact they want him so badly that they were going to take him on the guise of being so dangerous that he posed a risk, and then train him up to be their animal soldier while you mourned the loss of a dog." The major snorted, "I requested for you to be able to have a say in it.
You now have a choice Watson, to refuse the promotion to Captain and stay with your dog to join the response team as his handler and medic, or accept the Captaincy and give Fenrir away. It's your choice."

"But Fenrir isn't even an army dog!" John protested, "I found him in a hut! He doesn't belong to the army; there's no bond, no bill of sale. He's just a stray puppy who was lucky enough to be found when he was and subsequently adopted me. Can the army even do that?"

Major Murray sighed heavily, "I'm afraid that in my experience, if the army wants something, they can. And it appears that they want Fenrir very, very much."

"There's no other way, no other choice?"

"I'm afraid not Watson. I exerted as much influence as I could to get you to simply have a choice. I am sorry I couldn't do more. But I will say this, if you go with Fenrir as his handler, and perhaps even his owner, you will get to have greater say in some of the things that Fenrir will be forced to do. It will also be an easier transition for your dog. So, what do you say?"

John sighed. "I don't have much of a choice. When do we ship out?"

The Major broke out a small smile, "A soon a legitimately possible, Dog Handler Watson."

There was the scrape of chairs on hard ground as John and Murray stood to shake hands. "Better say your goodbyes and pack Watson, you'll be leaving in three days. Best of luck."

"You too Major, and thank you. I appreciate all you've done for me and Fenrir."

There was an exchange of salutes, then John turned on his heel to go. Outside of the office, he knelt by Fenrir, who had sat up to greet him, tail madly stirring the dust of the ground.

"I guess we're shipping off 'Rir." He said, pressing his face to Fenrir's, forehead to forehead. "I don't know what's going to happen, but I'll be damned if they try to take me away from you now."

Fenrir panted happily in agreement, giving John's face a gleeful lick.

"Thatta a boy." He gave Fenrir's ears a ruffle before reaching over to untie him from the post.

It was time to face up to the wind of change.

Chapter End Notes

Reviews always make all this writing so much more worth it.
Want any authors thoughts or meta or whatever, drop me a review!
H.
John shielded his eyes from the glare of the Afghan sun, Fenrir a solid, comforting presence by his side. He was back, and bloody hell, how'd he'd missed it. He hadn't even been aware of how much he'd actually missed being in Afghanistan, of the thrum of adrenaline that only a near miss and hard exertion could give him—it was a feeling that training could only try to replicate. John Watson was made for war— for both healing and harming— and now Fenrir could fight alongside of him. Fenrir grinned up at him, teeth flashing white. Some of the higher up's in command had wanted to replace them with titanium teeth, hard and sharp, but the veterinarians and John himself had been against it, the vets saying, "This dog is still growing, and with it his teeth, it would be unwise and a bad idea to replace his teeth when he is still growing. I've no idea about what breed he is, only that I have never seen the like. I'd love to see what would happen if we bred him."

There had also been a nasty moment when a vet had taken John aside to ask him about the scars that she had found inside of Fenrir's mouth, accusing him in a very subtle way of inflicting them on the animal himself. It had taken a little convincing to make the vet believe the truth and that John had no idea who'd caused them in the first place because of the way he'd found Fenrir. Eventually the vet had been convinced and let Fenrir, and John, through to training.

Training had been tough— Fenrir had picked up commands and ideas that took the other dogs in the class thrice as long and though he did the job, it was clear he was as bored with the training scenarios as John. Very little could come close to being out in the field, and both man and animal had gotten the taste of adrenaline in their mouths. John fumbled a bit at first, trying to learn things on the fly that the other handlers already knew. The other men in handler training had been slightly jealous of John's bond with Fenrir, while both Fenrir and John had chafed under the stricter rules of training. Fenrir disliked sleeping away from John, and John slept uncomfortably without the warmth of his dog beside him. It had been a relief when they'd graduated and then gone into the more difficult training. Fenrir had surmounted every obstacle and task, seeming to relish in the completion of each new challenge with teenage brashness.

He wasn't perfect however, Fenrir had some hang ups which led to a few hot water moments. The dog couldn't stand being bound, he was fine with a leash, but the moment a rope even came near wrapping around him, he lost his head. He was also dangerously protective, a trait which was usually encouraged, but in Fenrir was almost a fault. One time they were doing bite training, something that required the handlers to take turns using the thickly padded bite guard on their arms. Fenrir was fine, up until it was John's turn, where Fenrir flew at the other dog, nearly mauling it until John could get his dog under control.
The commando training had been tougher on John, but so long as Fenrir was there, John could wrestle past the point of defeat. But they'd both passed the training, and been assigned to a squad, and were now back on Afghan soil, back at the war, and both John and Fenrir could feel in their bones that they were back where they belonged.

John heard heavy footsteps behind him; Fenrir flicked his ears, but continued to look forward, body alert, tail twitching with contained excitement.

"You said you served in Afghanistan before." Grant Taylor, his new team leader says as he comes to stand next to John.

"That's right sir." John said, turning to look at Captain Taylor, "I was on patrol when I found Fenrir."

Grant nodded thoughtfully. "Your dog's seen combat before, I take it?"

"Yes sir, his actions in a skirmish lead to him getting noted by Major Vincent Murray. We were transferred to a different unit and trained for a new job."

"But he's not seen combat in the type of situations that we will be in. Neither of you, in fact, have been in special ops before." It's a statement of fact and John nodded in confirmation.

"That's correct sir."

"And your dog's even greener than you." This is said almost critically, and John can feel his hackles rise a little.

Fenrir, picking up on John's emotions, rumbled deep in his chest and John has to check him before he defends his animal partner. "Fenrir is fast, strong and unafraid. He was picked out for special ops and passed his training with high marks."

"I know, Handler Watson." Taylor said calmly, "I've seen his training reports."

"Apologies Captain."

"No harm done, Watson. Come on, it's time I introduced you to the squad you'll be serving with." The captain gave him a warm but tight smile and turned on his heel. John followed a step behind and to the side, Fenrir firmly at his side.

The squad is small, eleven men strong – twelve once John would join them, and comprised of elite members and soldiers, all distinguished for either their acts in combat or their extreme suitability to high danger.

Out of all of them, John thinks he likes Lukas Smith the best. Lukas is a stocky, red haired twenty six year old, quick with the jokes and quick with the work. He takes nothing seriously until it's time to work and then he's all action. Lukas was not the youngest on the team, nor the oldest, but he was the most unscathed. All soldiers, no matter what action they've seen, have some scars.
Lukas has next to none.

'Lucky Lukas' was what the guys on the squad had called him; he never got a scratch and always got the girls. Lukas had taken one look at Fenrir and went, "cor, he's scratched up bugger, aint he. Tells me you've lived to see the tale and I have a feeling that there are some tales." He then offered the back of his hand for Fenrir to sniff. John almost wet himself when Fenrir had calmly sniffed Lukas's hand and then licked him with a small tail wag. His dog could be notoriously choosy about who he liked. Fenrir had hated one of the trainers on sight, and nothing John did changed that. It was a pity because the man, who had lost a hand in combat, was friendly and quite a good guy as far as instructors went.

Fortunately, Fenrir accepts almost everyone on the squad, and John is ridiculously happy about this. He knows that he could get to like this new team, they are less anal about some of the army's rules and don't care that John doesn't always treat Fenrir like a working dog. Fenrir is John's best mate, his partner and the person on his six, all rolled into one.

In the first mission they do, Fenrir does credit to himself, pulling them out of a few tight spots, finding three IED's and alerting the squad to several lookouts who would've made life tricky for them. This is the start of a trend for John and Fenrir as they spend two and a half years where they go in deep and the come out mostly unscathed. John gets several more scars (one shallow gunshot to the meat of the thigh, a large starburst burn the span of his two hands on the lower back, one straight knife cut on the bicep and a scattering of other smaller scars). It nowhere near comes close to Fenrir's tally of scars; most are from before John found him, but some are new. The largest two consist of a curving knife wound along his ribs, and the other a gouged bullet wound across the shoulder. The training, difficult as it was, has done its job. John and Fenrir work closer together than they would've without it and they're now an integral part of the team. They've received recognition from both within and outside the squad for their work and aided in the success of several key high- or low (depending on the need to know basis) profile missions.

His dog is so intelligent, that John fancies that if his vocal cords allowed it, his dog would talk. In and off the field, John doesn't even have to give commands sometimes, they've reached an almost freakily telepathic connection. It's a good thing and comes in handy for situations where silence is paramount.

Fenrir, now the size of a large husky was still growing, and becoming strikingly more wolf like. Even so, John flatly refused anyone to entertain the fancy; Fenrir was a dog, a wolfish dog, but a dog. To do otherwise would be to invite interest that could only be trouble.

They're in mountain territory, on the tail end of a recon mission when Grant Taylor get off his communicator and swears viciously for a solid minute.

"What's the issue Captain?" Said Lukas, rolling off the sunny patch of ground where he'd been reclining.

"It's the bloody Americans. Tony Stark has produced new toys for them to play with and they're going for a fucking pissing competition. They're planning a mass fucking bombing of the
mountains where they think 'insurgent activity' is. Bollocks to that! There's activity fucking everywhere." Capatin Taylor swore viciously and spat to the side. "Fuck it. Fine. Fine. Get the guys, we move in an hour. I want us well away from the strike zone; I don't trust them to aim straight at all, fucking trigger happy bastards."

Fenrir lifted his hackles at the captain, showing his teeth. John soothed him with a hand down his back, "Easy 'rir, Easy."

The group moved through the night. Fenrir took point, ears twitching and walking with paws one in front of the other. The next day, around two in the afternoon, they're taking a break when they hear the scream of missiles far in the distance and the mountain saide erupts. Dust and smoke fly as the earth shakes, vibrations that shudder through the earth and can be felt even where the squad are.

Fenrir lay his ears back and growled deep in his throat in the direction of the blast before he swung around again, and moved to Johns side, pacing a little. Lukas grinned and went over to ruffle Fenrir's fur knowing that the canine will not bite him, as he's Fenrir's second favourite person.

The recon work they have done is now ruined and their captain decides to call it in. They've spent more than a month in the field, and it's high past time they went back to civilisation. Supply drops only go so far. John can only say that it is a god damned relief to have a hot shower.

They're halfway through 2009, the summer is hotter than John thought that he could ever stand, when they're assigned a new mission.

"The Ten rings." Grant announced to the group, "associated with several high profile bombings and associated terrorist activities. We're to go in, find their headquarters, and smoke some rats out. HQ want information, so it would be nice if we could leave some prominent members alive." He looked pointedly at several of his men, letting his gaze rest longer on John and Fenrir, who has the good grace to look a little ashamed.

They know it's going to be dangerous as almost every mission of theirs is; but on this mission, everything goes wrong. Two weeks in, they are attacked. In the tiny cabin where they've hunkered down for the night, where Fenrir's now massive bulk takes up an entire corner, he doesn't hear the whistle of the bullets that are their only warning before all goes to hell. John doesn't remember much, except the fact that he is hit and that Lukas, with the aid of Fenrir, pull him to safety. The rest is pain and, eventually, merciful darkness.

He woke up, much later, in the hospital room, with an arm quickly pronounced useless and a limp that won't leave him. It is the fact that Fenrir is not there that makes him worried, and it is because of this that he knew something was up.

He got no information from anyone until Lukas came and told him what he'd feared.

Lukas sat beside John's bedside with his shoulders slumped and his hands clasped together, recounting the tale in a low voice.
"Lukas. What happened?"

His friend sighed and ran a hand through his short red hair, just a little longer than what regulations allowed.

"After everything went FUBAR and you were shot, Fenrir basically went bat-shit insane. He slaughtered anything that he could get his teeth into." Lukas sighed again. "I knew your dog was protective, was dangerous. But hell John, he was basically insane. Even when we'd negated the enemy fire and fight was over, he wouldn't stop ripping into the bodies."

Lukas's face was a little haunted and John nodded at him to continue, the movement sent his head swimming, and he had to stretch a palm over his bed to steady himself.

"To stop him, we'd practically had to tie him down. It only made him worse, but it was better than letting him keep going."

"Did we loose anyone?" John croaked out. Lukas nodded in confirmation, slowly.

"Yeah. We did. Bill and Adam. Simon got shot in the artery. He bled out."

Even drugged to the gills, the grief and guilt still hit John with the force of a freight train. "Fuck. I'm sorry. I should've saved them. I should've been faster. I'm the god damned medic. I'm the damned dog handler. We should've known they were there. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck."

"Don't." Lukas interrupted firmly. "John, don't beat yourself up like that. You got shot. There was nothing you could do. With you down, we were fortunate not to lose more. It's a miracle that you haven't lost an arm, or a leg at the very least. By dint of some damned godsend, there was a base within 200 miles that could air lift us out. " His blue eyes were steady and serious, John couldn't hold his gaze.

"Where's Fenrir?" He asked instead.

"In his kennel. It took me ages to pry him away from you. He wouldn't leave your side."

"Has he been okay?" His hand trembled, and quickly John clenched it. It didn't help, but it made it look less noticeable.

"Yeah. He got out without a scratch. He hasn't been eating though. Barely sleeps. He's worried about you. Keeps looking in the direction of the med bay. Otherwise, he's fine. Just peachy." Even as he spoke, Lukas looked guilty about something and immediately John's suspicions were aroused.

"What's going on Lukas? What's happened?" John interrupted Lukas when the man opened his mouth to speak, "Don't insult me by lying about it. I'm in a fucking sick bed, and I haven't seen my dog. Don't fuck me about Lukas. Not about Fenrir. Not about this."

Lukas glanced about almost wildly, licked dry lips before he clasped his hands again and firmed his shoulders. This look is not unfamiliar to John, and his heart sinks; whatever Lukas says next, it is not good news.

"You still hadn't woken up even after a day after your surgery. I was worried for you mate, I was. When you did, you woke with a god damned limp and an arm that shakes. You're going to get invalided home: honourable discharge. I asked about Fenrir. I knew you'd want to know." John can hardly breathe as Lukas told him all of this in a low voice, angry for his friend, angry for Fenrir, and angry about the injustice that the army was committing.
"Captain Taylor came to me a day ago. He told me that the army consider Fenrir to be their property and 'will be sized.'" Lukas said the last few words with palatable quotation marks and John had to swallow back bile. He can't speak. He can't breathe. He wanted to throw up. He wanted to shoot someone. All he can do is keep listening helplessly, a raging sense of *betrayal* growing under his skin.

"I don't know what they're going to do with him John. I don't. After what happened in the field, no one's going to trust him. He's too dangerous, too unpredictable. They're probably going to try him with a new person, but if that doesn't work out..." Lukas rubbed his head and neck uneasily. "Hell. I don't want to think about it. There's stuff that even special ops don't know about. Likely what will happen to Fenrir is stuff that the army does not want us to know about." The low simmering fury undercuts all of his words.

"No."

It is a denial of the truth and Lukas didn't mince words when he replied. "They won't let you say goodbye John."

Stricken, John closed his eyes. He can hear the creak of the chair as Lukas stood up. Visiting times were over.

Before he left, Lukas hesitated and said, in a voice that John can just pick up, "Kirk and Horston are on watch at the second gate. There's a gap in the fence there, a human wouldn't make it through, but a dog just might."

John blinked up at him and knew what Lukas was suggesting.

"Thanks for visiting me Lukas, it's been a pleasure working with you."

Lukas saluted him, before clasping his arm in a goodbye. "You too John, be sure to keep in touch, yeah?"

"Yeah." Reflexively, his hand clenched, then unclenched, a tremor shuddering through them. Then, for the first time since he woke, it stills.

That night, John snuck out of the barracks. He was using a broom as an improvised cane and every step hurt. He can't stop however and the pain is worth it when he reached the place where Fenrir is being held. Fenrir practically wet himself when he saw John, his tail swept from side to side frantically and he let out excited little whimpers. John had to give the command for 'quiet' several times but even he is glad when he eases the metal chain gate open and Fenrir lunges onto him, lathering John's face with slobber.

Eventually, far sooner than he would've liked, John knew that he had to get a move on. Hauling himself to his feet with a grunting whine of pain, he made his laborious way to the gate, being sure to stick to the shadows and stay out of sight. Fenrir, never a dumb animal, follows his lead silently, with only a few concerned looks.

True to form, Kirk and Horston are paying no attention and John was able to sneak right up to the gap in the fence. Lukas was right; it would not have been any use to a human, but to a dog...

Kneeling down, once again trying to stifle a moan of pain, he faces Fenrir and places his forehead against his dog's. Curling a hand as tightly as possible into Fenrir's mane, he whispered fiercely to his dog. "You good boy. You're such a good boy. You've gotta go now. Don't let them catch you. Okay? *Don't come back.*" Fenrir stepped back and looked at him with such intelligence and
heartache that Johns eyes spike hot with tears.

"Go, now." He pointed towards the gap in the fence and repeated himself. Fenrir turned, looked at back at John just once more, before he was slipping past the chain link and was a lost shadow in the night.

John limped heavily back towards the bed he left earlier and felt a great and gaping loss inside him. He heard a mournful howl in the distance and knew without a doubt, that it is Fenrir and he is grieving.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for you kudos's and comments, - if there was anything you liked, or some author's notes you want to know of, drop me a review as they always make my day.
Loki sat on the ledge of his room, glaring darkly at the shining city laid out before him. A lie. It had been a lie.

More fool I, he thought bitterly to himself. He had known, *had known*, that they would have not have accepted his son, his freakish wolf son, the product of an fleeting tryst with a woman whose name he could not recall even now. All he knew was that she turned up suddenly with a tiny squirming wolf cub in her arms, him remembering her only for her distinct shade of gold eyes, and told him that it was his son Fenrir before she disappeared.

Loki had not been intending to share the truth of Fenrir’s origins, but the All-Father with his all-seeing eyes, his jotun-damned ravens and Heimdell at his call, had known the truth of it.

Even now, he remembered the sting of his father’s gaze as Odin sat on the throne and looked at him with solemn disappointment.

“He is just a hound Father, if I keep him with me, who is to know the truth?” His voice prickled with the unfairness of it; he could feel Fenrir pressing into his ankle with anxiety.

“It will grow too large. It cannot be over looked as merely a hound; it will be too intelligent, too wild to do so. It is a monster, Loki. I will not allow it in my court.” Odin’s voice was heavy with command, and Loki clenched his teeth and bowed his head at the weight of it. “It is a wolf, my son.” Odin’s voice softened, gentling, “It must be with its kind.”

“May I at least keep him until he grows larger; he is nothing but a babe in arms. If I let him go now, he will perish. For all that he is a wolf, he is still my son and I cannot let him die.”

Odin’s face cragged into a frown, reluctance split every syllable as he speaks, “Very well Loki. You may keep it until it reaches the height of your knee, and no longer. Then I will get Tyr to take it into the forests where it will live and stay until its span of years have passed.”

Relief burst in Loki’s chest; such a concession from Odin was unexpected and almost more than what Loki had been hoping for.

“Thank you father. Thank you.”
Odin nodded at him. As Loki turned to go, Odins firm voice made him pause. “And it is not your son, Loki. You would do well to remember that fact.”

A stiffening of the shoulders is all the response that Loki gave as he moved out of the hall.

That should have warned him about what would happen to his son, but he’d ignored that niggling feeling in his chest. Instead, he’d been grateful for the time Fenrir was allowed to stay with him. He is no father, he knows, fatherhood suits him ill, but he was not so cold as to let such a young cub go without some hope for it’s survival. If he felt responsible for its fate, well that was between him and no one else.

Thankfully, none other than his mother, Odin and Tyr, knew the truth of Fenrir’s origins. It was bad enough that Thor and his boorish friends had made jokes at his expense when they saw the puppy following him everywhere and the way that Loki himself talked to it. It would have been downright unbearable if they had known the truth.

Now Loki clenched his fists, green flickering’s of seidr showing as an aura around his hands as he thought about how he’d just handed Fenrir to Tyr.

“Worry not, my prince.” The words were just a shade off condescending as Try bowed before him. “It will be much happier in the wilds. It will chase boar and hunt bligesnipe. I will stay until it is settled into a pack.”

Loki had nodded coldly at him, “See that you do.”

He did not watch Tyr, his men and Fenrir leave, until at the last minute when the flash of the bifrost flickered out and he refused to allow himself to cry.

When Tyr returned, he had returned with one less hand and at the time, Loki had been worried for Fenrir.

“It is fine, my prince. It runs with a pack and howls at the moons. The hand was lost while hunting, see, I bring the pelt of a mountain cat to show my victory of my foe, it took my hand but I took it’s life!”

And indeed, the huge gold-stippled blue pelt of a cat was thrown over his shoulders, the paws twice the span of Tyr’s hand. It was a fearsome kill, with fanged teeth as long as the length of his arm.

Instead of pressing for more details, Loki let his face fall into a neutral mask and turned around sharply to head towards the library where he knew that he would be left alone. He did not question the truth of Tyr’s story, let himself mutter something acidic in his mouth about boorish hunters and refused to think of Fenrir again.

Now he knows with that bitter sharp twist in his stomach, that Fenrir probably bit Tyr’s hand off when Tyr chained him to that rock.

Seidr flickereded around his knuckles, stronger now and coldly barbed. A lie. Did Odin know? Did Thor? Did any of them? Had they ordered it, taken perverse pleasure in seeing the monstrous
progeny of Loki who-was-never-quite-right chained to a rock until Ragnarok? Or had Tyr done it under his own will, deciding that letting the son of Loki Lie-smith, Silver-tongued Loki, free to run was too much of a bitter pill to swallow?

He cannot ask them, he realised, because then they’ll know it was him who freed Fenrir from that rock.

In truth, he probably would have sat and brooded for many more hours, getting progressively dark and more moody, but he is interrupted.

“Loki! Loki!” The distinctive bellow of Thor came from the door to his chambers and the door thudded as he slammed his fist down on it.

He glared at the door and wishes that Thor would go away. It is an impotent wish because Thor only hammers harder and yells louder.

He stalked angrily to the door and yanked it open. “What do you want?” he demanded in a hiss, “what is so important that you must disturb me in such an oafish manner?”

Thor looks confused for only a second, before he steamrolled over it with his usual careless impatience. “We are going hunting, brother! Come!”

Loki narrowed his eyes at his brother’s stupid golden head. “No.” He said, and promptly slammed the door.

There was only silence for a couple of seconds before Thor was hammering on the door and bellowing louder. “Brother!”

Loki sighed and opened the door again. “What.”

“You must come Loki; I have your horse saddled already, and I have asked the cooks to pack food.” Thor was bouncing on his toes, and he had a look of pleading excitement written all over him.

“Who else is coming?” He asked, leaning on the doorframe. If it is any of Thor’s circle, he will not come.

“Just you and I brother.” Thor looked at him intently, eagerly. “So will you come Loki?”

He sighed and damned himself for a fool. “Very well,” He said and inclined his head. “I shall come.”

Thor cheered and grabbed his arm, towing Loki after him with exuberance as Loki struggled and spat at him for the indignity. Even so, he cannot stop the small smile curling at the corners of his lips. It has been a long time since he and his brother went hunting alone.

However distracting the hunt was, it did not stop the small part of Loki wondering how deep the betrayal had gone. That small thought festered there, and like a bundle of tumours, it grew.
Alright, hopefully the next one appears sooner.
As always, let me know what you liked and didn't like - and if you want any author's meta or extras just drop me a review. They always make my day.
He was lost to the heat under his paws, the sun that beat down and the blood between his teeth. Once again, Fenrir was adrift to the ties of fate and destiny; only hunger, his instincts and the last command given to him drove him. His father was not there to guide him. His battle-brother John had gone and told him not-to-come-back and to not-be-caught. He was lonely and he was alone. When the single moon rose high above him, only then did he raise his muzzle and howl out his loss. He missed the pack that he had come to call his own, where his battle-brother was always at his side, where Fenrir was both protector and protected.

A single stream of wind reached his nose, and he raised his head in its direction, pricked his ears and wrinkled his muzzle, his ruff bristling. He could hear battle. The smell of fighting - the strong iron-blood, biting-nose-smoke, stinging-sharp explosives, death-pain-anger-fear was heavy and close. He flexed his claws into the dust and growled deeply. His battle brother was far away, out of his ken and unreachable. If he were by Fenrir's side, Fenrir would follow his lead, but John was not there. The breeze was stronger now, Fenrir inhaled deeply and then stiffened. He recognised the man scents. Some of it was spices-sand-enemy and unfamiliarity, but the rest… That was his pack. That was the leader-calm-fury-steel Captain, and the wood-fight-stress-sniper of Laws, and the laugh-warm-play-battle of second best pack partner Smith; and they were all fighting without Fenrir to protect them.

No one was in hearing distance, but Fenrir's snarl would have quailed the hearts of even the bravest Asguardian.

Not even a minute later, even the dust kicked up by his furious sprint was a faint cloud in the distance.

He, the wolf, the half-blood, is the wind. He is fury.

#

"James is down! Medic! Fuck! Keats, Laws is down!" Lukas swore and called for help again, the sweat ran down his skin in sodden rivulets. He had to fire his gun in between trying to keep the pressure on James's stomach. The blood was already a dark and spreading stain. "Fuck it. KEATS!" He roared, trying to get his voice heard over the sound of the skirmish. "Medic! MEDIC!"

He was getting far too old for this ambush bullshit. He picked up his gun and swore again. He was out of ammo. Christ fucking shit. Fear crawled through him. He did not survive five and a half years of special ops to die in a skirmish like a rat. He fucking hated this kind of close quarter fighting.
He can hear Captain Taylor shout orders. The blood under his hands is sticky on his gun. The ground was hard under his knees. They do not have the advantage here. The medic isn't here yet. For a split second he hates that their handler and his dog did not realise they are in an ambush. He wishes that John were at his six. The man would have his shit together, stitching up Laws with one hand while controlling Fenrir with the other.

Laws was moaning, a yell of pain riding on every rough gasp of air. A bullet whined close to his ear and Lukas flinched as he reached for Laws's ammo. His fingers do not tremble as they stumble through the reloading of his rifle. He knows with a harsh type of desperation that the chances of getting out of this alive are bad and swiftly dwindling down to impossible.

He fired, swore, and knew that it was coming to the end of the line. He was looking straight into the dark eyes of the enemy. The enemy was looking at Lukas and all he can think is, *not like this, god, not like this.*

Then, something happened.

He does not even hear it at first. The sound started as a vibration and then rose until it was a snarling roar over all other noise. It reverberated in him, and the cowing fear was instinctive. Laid so deeply in his DNA, he didn't even realise he was frozen until he tried to move and couldn't.

That was the first sign.

The second was a blur of grey and the carnage that followed.

The insurgent went down with a scream. The gun flew from his hand. He was powerless to stop his own death. And *oh* that death came with a vengeance. The snarls would follow Lukas in his nightmares.

It is only when the man stilled that Lukas was able to move again. The massive animal pinning the insurgent down lifted its red stained muzzle from it's victim's neck and turned to look directly at Lukas.

He was pinned by the force of it's amber eyes, his breath caught in his throat and the recognition hit him like a lightning bolt.

It was Fenrir.

Lukas had never been so glad to see the dog in all his life and he had never been so afraid.

A growl rumbled toward him, radiating off the grey muscled bulk, and Fenrir wrinkled his muzzle in a snarl before he was moving with the force of a hurricane; setting Lukas free from his gaze.

In that instant, Lukas knew beyond all doubt, that the canine before him was a wolf, a wolf like the world had never seen before. Its entire existence so far removed by his sheer unnaturalness, that it was like something out of an old fairy tale. Or a myth.

Lukas could only watch as Fenrir, swift, precise, and merciless, left death in his wake.

When it was over, Fenrir looked around, at the squad around him frozen in fear or awe or both. Slowly, almost cautiously, he approached Lukas. The sound of a gun cocking made Fenrir tense, a warning snarl just crinkling the edges of his muzzle.

Lukas can barely croak the words out. "Stand down. Put the gun down."
Slowly in his peripheral vision, the rifle went down. He can hardly breathe.

The heat and dust grit his eyelashes. The before noon sun was a scorching brand across his shoulders.

Fenrir was so close now. Lukas can hear his breath; Fenrir's sides moved in and out in great huffs of air. He can feel the heat of him. He can smell the sand, blood, and fur of him. Lukas was once again pinned by Fenrir's gaze. It had barely been two months, and already, Fenrir was a completely different creature.

They were close enough that if Lukas stretched out his arm, his fingertips would just brush Fenrir's muzzle. Yet Fenrir kept coming closer and closer. Lukas closed his eyes, the air a thick soup in his throat. The tip of a warm nose on his cheek made him flinch. Heavy breaths blew moist across his face. Slowly, he moved his hand up, until it was resting on Fenrir's head, on the curve just below and behind his ears. Tentatively, he moved his fingers, curled the ragged dirty fingernails into the thick fur. Unaccountably, he realised that he was weeping.

A tongue swept out, and licked his face just once, before Fenrir was moving back again, out of reach. Lukas let his hand fall with sense of pervading loss. He knew without a doubt, that it would be the last time he ever saw Fenrir again.

The wolf looked at him once more, and then he was moving swiftly away. Picking up speed until he was a faint figure in the distance.

Lukas scrubbed away the tears on his face and hauled himself to his feet. He looked to Captain Taylor, standing over where the medic was desperately working on Laws to stop the bleeding.

"No one needs to know about this, right captain?" His voice is weaker than he would like, and he coughs, and tries to clear his throat.

"No one needs to know." Taylor nods his head. He looks around at his squad, voice firming in command. "That animal saved us all. If the brass ask, the animal was wounded. It ran off. It would not have survived. Understand?"

The men nod around him with murmured affirmations of "Yes sir."

"Good." Taylor said. He swept one hand over his face and firmed his shoulders. "Now let's get on with it. Casualties. How many?"

Even as the squad start to pick their selves up and pull their selves together, Lukas can't help but think of Fenrir, thank Fenrir, and hope that the wolf that had saved his life, would be okay.

#

Far removed from the blood, dust and all pervasive heat of Afghanistan, John Watson woke from a nightmare in his dingy bedsit. His shoulder screamed at him, and for a second, disoriented, he reached for Fenrir.

The dog isn't there. Of course he wasn't there.

Still wired from the adrenaline, John fell back on his mattress and breathed harshly, trying to calm himself.

Yellow lamp light streaked across his face, the city outside is a muted yet noisy whine. His apartment is much too quiet. He can only hear his own breathing. No snores from bunkmates, or
quiet sounds from the people who've drawn watch, no soft snuffling from Fenrir's warm bulk at his side. There is none of that, and John squeezed back tears.

*Don't cry. Don't cry.*

After a while, he lay back against his pillow and tried to get to sleep again. He will not, but it's how the pattern of his life goes at the moment. He's worked it out to a fine tedium. In the morning it is: get up, try to eat, often not eat, walk around London, try to find a job, don't find a job.

In the afternoon it's: don't think of the gun in his drawer, (Wednesdays) see therapist, try to follow her advice, don't follow her advice, limp home, use his laptop, try not to think about the gun in his drawer, use laptop some more.

The day rounds out: half-heartedly eat dinner, drink tea, watch porn, get bored, think about his life, think about the gun in his drawer, go to bed, sleep, wake from nightmares, try to sleep again, wake up in the morning.

Rinse and repeat.

Like a second undying beat underneath all the routine is the *missing*. He missed the heat and dust, the action of his old life. He missed the companionship of his squad. He missed being useful, having a purpose. Above all, he missed Fenrir as one would miss a limb. The kicker was that he would know: his hand trembled constantly and he had a limp that won't let him go faster than snail pace. He hated the way people's eyes would slide over him as if he was not there, but he hated the looks of sympathy even more.

That was how John Watson's life was now.

Until a voice called out in the grey of an afternoon asking only one thing, his name.

"John? John Watson? Is that you?"

And things all unfolded from there.

Sherlock took one look at him and *knew*. "That limp is partially psychosomatic – traumatic circumstances, so army, invalided home. Army doctor, or you were – you became a dog handler, indicated by the way you stand and where your hands fall – bit of strange combination but nonetheless. Hence Afghanistan or Iraq?"

The man was brilliant – spinning out around him bright and dizzying spirals. His presence was all consuming and being with him, with his almost supernatural knowledge of the things around him and the way John had to scramble to keep up in the best of ways is almost like being with the army again. It is enough to tamp down the hole at his side where Fenrir should be. But it was not enough to erase it.

Still, it is far better than what it was, and he can almost call himself *happy*.
Thanks for reading, as always, comments and reviews always make my day (legit), let me know what you liked/disliked, and if you want meta or author's note, drop me a line. I will legit babble on about it.

Sorry about the super super slow update; Uni took a hold of me and hasn't let go. (I made a silly decision, to try to keep one or two chapters written up before a new update, and uni. Assignments. A 16000 word teenwolf fic. Take your pick.)
Lukas shoved the earbuds firmly into his ears and turned his mp3 player up. It was a cheap one, easily replaced if broken or lost but held 20 gigs of music, so he didn't complain.

He and the squad were kicking their heels after a mission – one that, for once, actually went mostly to plan. No one died, and nothing was blown up that wasn't already supposed to be blown up. The reprieve was nice, and Lukas appreciated the down time; He was able to skype his sister in time for her birthday and wasn't complaining at all about the lack of action.

He's just pressing play on Nirvana when one of his bunk mates walks in and sits down heavily on his bunk, pale as alabaster. Senses immediately tingling, Lukas pulled the earbuds out and raised an eyebrow. "Is there a situation."

"Hah." His bunkmate laughs without humour. "Yeah. You can say that. Tony Stark has gone missing."

Lukas's blood runs cold. "Shit. When?"

He knew that the man was giving the American's a presentation on a new type of weapon, one that had the British very nervous about the way their own stacked up. Captain Taylor, after the narrow miss two- three years ago where they had to trek through the night and three weeks of on ground re-con had been lost, had insisted on knowing if and when the American's were testing out new weaponry. But for a weapons developer, for Tony Stark, arguably the most famous person in the world, to go missing on Afghan soil, was a really bad problem.

"As of four hours ago. Insurgents attacked the convoy he was in, total devastation. When the guys went through the bodies, everyone dead or alive was accounted for, but Stark wasn't there." The man runs a hand through his hair. "A mate of mine, in the American air force told me this. Called up. Fucking shit. People are going to be sweating bullets about this."

Lukas nodded in agreement and pulled a shirt on, he had a feeling that Captain Taylor would want to talk to his squad. "Thanks for telling me."

Giving the man a companionable nod, he jogged out of the room to find his leader.

He found Captain Taylor deep in discussion with several other members of their squad in the shade behind the back of some barracks, sitting on crates and boxes. Scuffling his boots on the dusty ground, he joined their circle as Captain Taylor spoke.

"They think he's been taken into the mountains. It's a rat's nest of caves in there, strategically they've made them self as safe as can be."
"Why are they bringing the British in to this, if it's an American?" One of the guys asked, glowering darkly.

"This is Tony Stark." Taylor stated with intense gravitas. "If the enemy have him, and he's making weapons for them, then we're all in serious shit. The American's want the best and they're willing to parlay with their allies to get them. Our status as being 'the best' with 'personal on-ground recon' gives us a very good – or very bad if you want to approach it that way- chance of being picked for the search."

Shifting on the spot, Luka's couldn't restrain himself from speaking up in disagreement. It gnawed at his insides to disagree with their captain, but he was wrong.

"The best. Bullshit. We're not. Not anymore." Lukas interrupted, continuing as faces looked at him sharply, some in offense and others in curiosity. "When we had John and Fenrir, we were the best. Without them, we're not." He paused and chewed at his lips a little.

Captain Taylor nodded at him to continue.

"We haven't a hope of finding Tony Stark if he's in those mountains. We might have, if we had Fenrir and John. But we don't."

"Lukas is right." Charlie Hill spoke out in his strong London accent. He shifted on his feet and crossed his arms, the bulging muscles under his dark skin tense. "Since we lost John and Fenrir is – "He hesitated, glanced at their captain carefully with dark brown eyes, "dead, we've not been the same. All of the other medic's and dogs that we've had, were – frankly speaking – shit."

The circle of hardened soldiers nodded their heads in agreement. They'd moved Keats to a different squad – as a field medic he was near about useless and Lukas had never gotten over the fact that they could've kept Laws in the squad if Keat's just been a little faster in the skirmish. One medic had died two missions in his stint and another had not been able to cop the work they did, the third had gotten on with them like dogs and cats. At the moment they were between both medic and dog team and it hindered them.

"Alright." Said Captain Taylor with a sigh, running a large hand over his face, "If we're assigned to the search, we've got something else. In fact, we've got something else as of now. We're not going AWOL, we're simply taking well deserved leave. He sighed, shook his head and gave a rueful smile. "As I recall, most of us have leave backed up to our ears. It's about time we took some."

"And Stark?" Lukas asked.

"The American's can deal with him. There are other teams that are better for this job; We go in there without a medic and a dog team that we trust, and we're all dead. Those mountains are crawling with insurgents, and we damn well know that."

There were glowering nods of agreement from the men as with back slaps and handclasps, the meeting unceremoniously ended.

Lukas turned and walked back to his bunk, already thinking of how his family would react when they found that he was coming back to visit.

#

Humming happily into a cup of tea, John settled deeper into his chair and groped for the remote control. He'd had a routine day at the clinic, mostly appointments, a handful of cold's and flues, a couple of old codgers coming for check ups and prescriptions, and one little boy coming in for a
broken nose and a spilt eyebrow courtesy of an afterschool tussle. John had given him a couple of butterfly stiches and a lollypop, by then longingly thinking of his five pm end of work cup of tea.

Switching the telly on, he flicked through a couple of mundane game shows, the plethora of shopping channels with eagerly cheesy American voices and one documentary about crayfish, before settling on BBC news. Sherlock was currently lurking in his room and John relished the opportunity to sit and watch telly without the many interjected comments from his flat mate. The top story, however, made him sit up in his chair, frowning deeply in concern. Tony Stark was missing.

John knew of Stark mostly through the army. Stark Weaponry was the best, and whenever the English and the Americans got together, there was inevitably much coveting done on behalf of the English soldiers. John himself had only used SI weaponry once or twice before. England only occasionally managed to wrangle a purchase from Stark, and it was always several models below the Americans.

He was only watching a minute into the broadcast, before he was up and reaching for his laptop. It booted slowly as he tapped his fingers and kept one ear on the newsreader who was currently telling him that search parties were being mobilised and a task force set up. Finally, the plain windows desktop was showing and John was able to start skype.

Scrolling down the tellingly short list of contacts, the little green signed on logo beside the profile picture of Lukas Smith was pleasantly surprising. He smiled slightly when he saw the picture; it was Lukas, him and Fenrir grinning into the camera as they sat on the roof of one of the base huts. He remembered having that photo taken. Having just gotten back from a mission, a couple of them had decided to watch the afternoon sun from the roof of his bunkhouse. A handy camera and Fenrir determinedly making his way onto the roof, following John as the dog was wont to do, ensured a photo opportunity.

When John clicked to start the conversation, a slick feeling of shock ran through him when he saw that the last time he'd messaged Lukas was two months ago. He hadn't realised that it'd been so long.

_Lukas, Mate, The news has just said that Tony Stark has gone missing in Afghanistan. This true?_

Clicking enter, he waited for a reply. The news had ticked over to the latest popularity poles of the current parliament before skype beeped to let John know that Lukas had replied.

_John! Long time, no write! Yeah. It's true and right fubar situ. I can't say much – you know how it is. But the squad was called up to help search for him._

Blinking, John typed back quickly, the telly completely ignored.

_So when are you moving out?_

The little typing image flashed for a couple of seconds before;

_We're not. Taylor made an executive decision that we were ill prepared and ill equipped to do any sort of fieldwork now. That and we all had leave backed up to our ears. So we're not._

_What? Why? We've walked the area he's gone missing in. Hell, we've done enough field work there to know those mountains like we know our own hands._

John took a sip of tea, frowning deeply. He knew Taylor had clout, but it was Tony Stark – it was a
serious problem and yet his squad weren't involved in the taskforce? It didn't make sense.

*Seriously, I don't get it.* John typed when Lukas still had not replied.

Then, finally, Lukas typed.

**We're in between both medic and dog team at the moment, and we're not going out unless it's a suicide run and nobody cares who gets hurt.**

*That's why Taylor decided to pull you guys out?*

**Yeah. That's why. You know him, he might be a tight arse when it comes to mission parameters, but he doesn't fuck about when it comes to our safety.**

John grinned slightly, he *did* remember. Taylor was a good man, a better one than most for the work that they did. It wasn't often that John could respect officers as both men *and* soldiers. Too often, the man was left behind for the soldier.

*So what are you doing now?* John typed.

**Waiting for our ride to get here. We ship out for leave in a day. It's been a while since I've seen good old England. Perhaps we might be able to have a beer when I get back.**

Grinning with approval, John nodded his head and typed back enthusiastically.

**That's great! Your family'll be pleased to see you. We definitely have to have a beer when you get back. Give me a message when you get here, and we'll sort something out.**

**Sounds great, sure thing John. Look forward to it.**

Halfway through his reply, Lukas's next quickly typed comment made him erase it.

**Right! I'm up. See you in London!**

**Enjoy your flight back. See you in London mate.**

Ending the conversation with a mouse click, a tall figure in the corner of John's eye shuffled into the room.

"Hello, Sherlock." John said, privately mourning the loss of his telly time, and at once pleased that he'd ended the skype conversation when he did. Sherlock had a habit of reading over his shoulder, and making loud deductions based on the conversation.

An inarticulate grunt followed by a gracefully languid face-forward flop onto the couch was Sherlock's only reply.

Then "boorre..." Sherlock's low drawl tailed off into a whine. "Johhnn... Borreed."

John twitched an eyebrow, looking over at his flatmate. "Tony Stark's gone missing. Did you know?"

Sherlock flapped a lazy hand, dismissing it. "Mycroft told me."

"Oh? Looking for the Great Sherlock Holmes's expertise?"
Snorting loudly in disdain, Sherlock flung his long limbs about, somehow managing to end up facing the ceiling. "Wanted to know if I could 'find him'. Hah! He's been kidnapped- not for ransom, but weaponry. Anyone could know that. Beneath my intellect. Boring!"

John could feel an eyebrow shooting upwards in surprise. "But it's Tony Stark!"

"Not interested." Sherlock said laconically.

At that moment, there was a knock on the door. "Boys, it's me, Mycroft is here." Mrs Hudson poked her head around the door.

In a flash, Sherlock leapt off the couch, grabbed his violin and then returned to the same place on the couch as if he'd never moved. Placing the violin delicately under his chin, he proceeded strain out an ear-flinching wail of sound.

Sighing, John nodded at Mrs Hudson. "Let him in."

Stepping neatly into the room, Mycroft nodded his hellos. "Sherlock. Dr Watson."

Sherlock did not greet him in return, instead sliding his bow across the violin's strings with a high whine of horsehair and wire. "I told you, Mycroft. Not interested."

Sighing again, John hauled himself out of his comfortable armchair. "I'll just leave you two to it then."

"Keep your seat Dr Watson; it's you I am here to see." Mycroft said dryly.

John raised an eyebrow, but sat himself back down silently. Sherlock, on the other hand, had no such compulsions. "John? You want to talk to John!" He demanded, sitting bolt upright, his violin protesting with a twang. "What could John possibly help you with? I mean – he's well. John."

"I am fully aware of what Army Doctor & Dog Handler John Watson of the 8th special operations "Fenris" unit, is. It is for his expertise I have come to solicit."

John stiffened. It had been a long time since he'd heard his martial credentials reported like that. "It's been a while since I was anything like that, Mycroft."

"I am aware. Just as you, I am sure, are aware of the disappearance of Tony Stark."

John nodded. "It was just on the news. I heard that they were pulling in units from the British."

Mycroft inclined his head in a practised, genteel, movement. "Yes, indeed they are. You may be interested to know that there was a request for your old unit to be involved in the search. Something that Captain Taylor refused all contestation, and flatly denied. The official reason was that they were overdue leave. The actual reason was that since you and Fenrir left the unit, they have not had a single medic or dog team that they trusted enough, or found competent enough, for the work that they do. Is this news to you?"

John swallowed heavily. "Yes."

"And in your opinion, is a lack of trust between medic, dog team, and the rest of the unit, a sound reason to not go into the field?" Despite Mycroft's usual, bland political mask, John could see a keen edge of reason, a stone gavel of judgement, behind his eyes. The man quirked his head slightly, a deliberate gesture of expectation.
Running a hand through his hair and refusing to look at Sherlock who was now in a deep funk on the couch, John didn't even need to think before replying. "Yes. The need for every member of the unit to understand how every other member works is imperative in any unit. Attempting to undertake special op runs without that knowledge is an easy way to get whole units killed." John said, clenching a suddenly stiff hand. "To go into the field without a medic, or a dog team, however, is basically holding the shovel for your own grave. So yes, Captain Taylor's refusal of the request was not made without very good reason. Is that all?"

"Yes. That's all I came for." A puff of a sigh was the only sign of Mycroft's disappointment. "It really is a shame that you were shot. You and Fenrir were in a league unto your own." Nodding a sharp farewell, he turned to leave when John stopped him.

"Mycroft. Wait."

Mycroft turned an attentive eye on John, "Yes Doctor Watson?"

"Fenrir – is he…" John trailed off, unable to finish that sentence. About to try again, Mycroft saved him the trouble. His bland mask gave nothing away as he said.

"I'm afraid I'm not privy to that information, Doctor Watson. And if I was, you would not be. Sherlock. Doctor Watson."

John watched Mycroft's retreating figure as the man left the flat. Mycroft's answer had told him nothing, and left him uneasy.

"Sherlock." John said, looking over to his flat mate who was draped across the couch, face pressed deeply into the cushions. "Do you think he was telling the truth? Sherlock?"

Sherlock said nothing, but remained in full and abject silence.

Sighing, John waved a hand in dismissal. "Fine. Don't answer me then. I'm going to bed. Try not to stay up too late researching spit or something." And with that, he stomped grumpily to bed, trying not to worry so hard over where Fenrir was, or how he was doing.

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Chapter End Notes

As always, thank you for your comments and your likes, your reviews make my day more than you know and mean more than you know.
If you'd like author meta or commentary, ask and ye shall receive.
A little heavy on plot & character this chapter, it's also been a while, sorry, I've been a little real life focused, also we got a puppy!
Get ready for the next chapter though, it's the longest and my favourite so far too.
The first thing he was aware of when he gradually came to consciousness was the cold. It seeped into his bones, he couldn't feel his fingers. Even his lungs felt every bite of the frigid air. Breathing in was like swallowing needles, a hand of ice clamped deep around the marrow of his bones, the muscles of his body. Then immediately after was the pain. A heavy weight lay upon his chest, a dull throbbing of wire wrapped around each rib bone in a crown of thorns. Panicking, he flailed around clumsily – the bomb, the fight. Dust and blood screaming through his mind with the force of a lightning strike.

It's dark and smells of cold earth and stone. A cave? It seems right, but everything is pain blurred.

Tugging at the tube down his nose, he pulled it out with hands that didn't work properly.

_Water, water._

He was dying for water.

With limbs that responded more like jerky puppets than human arms, he tried to reach the cup he saw on his left. Failed. Tried for the bottle. Failed again. It is then that he saw the thin dark man calmly shaving, face reflecting in a piece of dirty mirror. He paused for all of a second, before resuming trying to reach for the canteen that's just out of reach. Puffs of white breath hung in the air, and the other man's warning comment came just as Tony felt the restricting tug that reached from his heart.

Car battery, wires, hands chasing black plastic, worming into his skin, the metal, the weight. His lungs won't expand properly. There a fist punched through his ribs.

'There's something in my chest. There's _something_ in my chest. There's _something_ in my chest.'

#

Fenrir lifted his muzzle to the moon, the cat-claw crescent sharp against the silver studded shrapnel sky. Casting his head in wide sweeping motion, he searched for the scent of no-man-goat-livestock that had become his staple diet since John had left his _kenning_. Dead carrion would not sate him and the sharp emptiness of his stomach weighed urgently on his mind.

The wind prickled at him, a sudden change drifting over from distant mountains carrying fresh earth-death-smoke and he pawed at the ground uneasily at the smell of it. Yesterday he had felt a deep rumbling under his paws, the growling vibration stirring memories. Most of them were from when his battle-brother ran with him – the screaming danger, _bared-fang-fight, force-of-sky_, that
which he could not fight – and some even more distantly from his puppy-hood past of shard-light-bifrost-father-gone.

Even from a distance, the crashing mountain falling roar had been enough to spur him into a fast panicked run. Instinct and memory urged him on until the afternoon sky blended to sunset and exhaustion forced him to slow his flight. It was now night and he needed to both eat and sleep.

Wrinkling his muzzle; he turned and headed towards the mountains that rose tall on his left. Not the open desert he had been running towards, or the death-ridden hills he had been running from, but the tall mountains that carried chill winds and free ranging herd prey. Positioning himself so that his path would intersect with a long winding road and its possibility of carrion, he settled into ground-eating lop-e that could carry him indefinitely until he found water and food.

Miles of dirt sand rolled steadily under his paws, wind flowing in steady streams ruffling his fur the wrong way and coating it in a fine reddish dust.

He runs until something wrong stops him in his tracks.

A scent, less than a day old. The smell of dead soldiers. Allies, whispers John's voice in his mind, and explosives. There was the burnt smell of warped metal, the iron hot on his tongue, and the smell of a civilian. He raised his muzzle to the air, turns in circles to find the scent cone.

Injured civilian. Injured and captured civilian.

Fenrir shook his head vigorously in indecision, ears thwacking against his head with a soft noise. Civilians were always to be rescued- Him, John and Pack had done it many times before. Yet John had told him to stay away, to not-let-them-catch-you. To rescue the civilian would be to disobey John. However, he had disobeyed John before; at times when Fenrir had smelled something or had known something that John had not, and John had always trusted him. In this situation, John would have done the right thing, would've wanted Fenrir to do the right thing. And so, despite misgivings that rankled his muzzle and stiffened his ruff, Fenrir turned to follow the scent of injured captured civilian wherever it would lead him.

#

The awful smell of ammunition and enemy was all around him as Fenrir slunk around the edges of the mountainside camp where he had eventually tracked the civilian scent. The fetid smell of civilian anger-fear disappeared into the dank cold cave entrance in the mountainside. Eyeing the guards posted everywhere, and the heavy sharp smell of death and metal, Fenrir knew that he would not be able to get inside with a straight up attack. Even for all his speed, and with surprise on his side, the mountain would be a trod ants nest of people who would kill him as easy as snapping a fly. Huffing out a disgruntled breath, Fenrir positioned himself behind some rocks and scrub, to lay down and wait, thinking about what John would do. That bore no ideas other than: Go find back up, wait patiently, destroy them all. He thought about what his father would do, his father with the quick sharp smile, and the quick sharp mind who had not left him bound to that rock until the stars had died.

His father would trick the enemy, green glimmer of mischief and magic around his hands; then when the time was just right, he would rip into them savagely, twisting the knife with a fierce instinct to protect in the most vicious of ways.

Mouth curling in a wolf grin, saliva rushing at the thought of the fight that would ensue, Fenrir flexed his claws in pleased anticipation. Yes, he would become one of their camp; of course, he was not his father who could so easily slip unnoticed in to shadow, but he had a plan. And it was a
good plan. Resting his head on his paws, ears twitching, Fenrir fell into a light sleep.

He was woken by the unfortunate feeling of his ruff being grabbed; snarling and twisting in place, he stilled once he realised who it was. The ones who were holding the civilian- the enemy. Acting untamed would not help him in this; instead, he forced down the instincts that said to rip into their throats and squirmed onto his back, exposing his belly. Flattening his ears and whimpering in the most endearing way he knew how, he was the picture of a submissive, trying to please, tame animal. Sweeping his tail in small, fast, movements he felt a tiny spark of sharp glee when he saw how their faces changed and softened.

They talked to each other in their language Fenrir did not understand, the older of the two chattering and cooing at Fenrir, who pricked his ears and smiled guilelessly.

There was a brief debate between the two humans, the younger waving expansive hands while the older laughed and postured, throwing his rank with each calculated cross of his arms. Eventually, the younger gave in, leaving the older swaggering with victory. Fenrir knew this stance, knew the shape of victory and his grin turned sharp with the swell of it. He followed close to their heels, submitting to their touches and wagging his tail when they spoke of him.

He had his in.

The longest hunts had the sweetest kills, and Fenrir would enjoy his thoroughly when it came to the final chase.

#

Tony yawned and stretched in the dark cold confines of his luxury prison. It had been six days, six, since he had agreed to start building their bombs and three since he had dreamed up the schematics for a miniaturised arc reactor. He would not be stuck carrying that (heavy, heavy) battery, which weighed down his shoulder and screamed vulnerability to the world.

Even now, more water than what could fill a cup made him flinch; it only took a bucket innocently sloshing for him to break out in cold sweats. And he still couldn't (look, touch, think, feel) bear the alien wires worming its way into his heart though his chest without his breath rushing to choke him. He still couldn't accept it, couldn't accept this weakness in his broken ribs and his lungs that did not let him rest.

If sometimes in the darkness of the cave, where day and night suddenly became perpetually meaningless, he ran his eyes over cracks and crevices in the ceiling he could not see, that was for him to know. If he sometimes lay on his bed and thought that he felt the shards of his own creation slither and bite their way into his heart though his chest without his breath rushing to choke him. He still couldn't accept it, couldn't accept this weakness in his broken ribs and his lungs that did not let him rest.

His weakness was already there in the form of a makeshift battery powered magnet, there was no need to broadcast an already shouted reliance on it.

He did not like thinking about these things, between the constant-fear and the constant-pain, he did not want to think about the way that his mind was skipping and stuttering like a dead record.

Tony Stark was not weak. Tony Stark was invulnerable. Tony Stark was not losing his mind.

But Tony Stark was. He was all of that and more.

"Tony." Yinsen's soft voice came from the other side of the cave. "I have some food here. Do you want some?"
And because Tony was starving despite the tastelessness of the food, despite the fact he dreamed of burgers and fries and pizza when he wasn't dreaming of pain and fear and sand, he said yes.

Halfway between chowing down on rice and scraped burnt bits of meat, in between fiddling with schematics, a sudden shouting echoed from the outside of their locked cave. Tony scrambled to his feet, Yinsen doing the same but with far more grace, putting his hands behind his head as fists pounded on the metal door in warning.

His wonderfully generous captor paraded in, hands outstretched in a showman's parody. Tony knew the look, he had practised it himself many times; a grand swaggering of a man who knows he is the most important person in the whole room.

"Mr Stark!" He said, his accent colouring Tony's name as Yinsen translates, word for word. "We have what you need; it is now time to begin what you have promised to do."

Clenching his jaw, Tony nodded. A low slinking movement, just on the edges of the gathered toughs, catches his eye. It was a dog so large it almost looks like a wolf. Shaggy unkempt fur in a grey the colour of concrete dust covered its entire body and its giant paws splayed out heavy in the dirt. A heavy chain jingled around its neck - it should look every bit like a cowed animal but it is not, as if the obedience is simply a coat thrown on for convenience. It lifted its head and their eyes meet, burning gold meeting hard brown and Tony knew then that this is no stupid beaten animal. The dog's ears prick with focused intent and the barely contained wildness under his pelt softens to something entirely trustworthy, and unlike the forced humility of before, it is all believable.

At shouted commands, the moment is broken so Tony and Yinsen follow their captors out into the harsh Afghani light.

He kept an eye on the animal even as he made pushy demands, exerting whatever power he can over his situation. Someone staked the dog to the ground with a length of uncomfortably short chain. The dog's tongue lolled in the heat as it accepted the pokes of petty inhuman amusement from its prone place on the ground; it could not move even if it had seemed inclined to.

It only took until some idiot decided to start chucking stones that Tony snapped and did something he normally would not ever do.

"I want the dog." He found himself saying in his litany of stated requests, Yinsen is so caught up in simply translating that did not realise what he has just relayed until after the words have already come out of his mouth.

"What?" Yinsen said.

In for a penny, in for a pound and Tony steamrolled on. "I want the dog. I like it. American's are dog lovers, I want the dog."

And because he is Tony Stark, who wastes demands for better food and more blankets on an animal, he got what he wanted.

The head honcho laughs in amusement at Tony's western foibles and orders the dog unchained from the stake. He gets someone to pass the chain to Tony with a look of almost paternal amusement before he is ordering Tony to start work.

"I hope you realise what you are doing." Yinsen murmured quietly to him.

Tony kept up his smile as he replied. "Nope."
The dog sat by his side and looked up at him with a solemn gratitude. Despite his and Yinsen's misgivings, Tony was glad that he had at least done this.

This – as it turns out – is more of a blessing than he could have ever realised.

The dog was a steady presence by Tony's side; when Tony woke, trying to still shaking fists from nightmares, the dog lay down beside him in a grounding bolster against fear.

When Tony could swear that he felt the little bits of squirming metal, the dog would press an insistent head into him so that his heavy fur and warm body could distract from the ticking thoughts in Tony's head.

Of course, they ate less than before; found themselves cutting their small meals in half just to feed the dog. Yinsen managed to spin it so that the dog could go out twice a day to do its business. Sometimes, it would come back with a bloody muzzle - the only sign of a hastily hunted-and-guzzled meal.

It always, always, returned.

If it were Tony, allowed to run free of this place, he wouldn't return. He would have been hastily running dust in the distance, regardless of whom he left behind. You watch your own back, and look after your own self. Tony Stark doesn't go back for the man left behind.

But that was then- and looking at the dog when it returned, panting, he felt bad that he had inspired such selfless loyalty for so little.

I will be a better person, Tony promised himself, if I get out of here.

And he will get out of here.

He just needed something – like a weapon, like armour. Something that protected him when he was already so vulnerable.

It hit him then, as all of his brilliant ideas ever have – suddenly in a fit of genius, in wild whirling dervishes from alcohol and boredom, or desperation.

A way to get out, a way to fight his way free. It wouldn't be easy, but then, he never expected it to be.

The dog looked up at him then, as if sensing the sudden sparking of inner fire.

Finally, its expression says. It grinned up at him as if in expectation of the flames of bloody retribution, as if it could tell of the death to come and was eager for it.

The miniaturised arc reactor went in without a hitch, the dog close to his ankles and Yinsen steady over him as the whole thing goes into place.

Tony destroyed the schematics afterwards. Only he would ever know how to make this battery and a certain kind of vindication filled him as fire curled the thin trace paper to ash. The schematics are unnecessary; he will never forget how to make it, he had tattooed the design into his mind. It sits over his heart.

The schematics for the armour suit he kept carefully hidden, traced onto five separate pieces of paper, never kept together. They built it at night, only when they were assured to be left alone, and they assembled it in pieces.
When the time came to get out of there, and it did come; spelled out with a hot coal held over Yinsen's eyes, the dog growling in place, Tony with his fragile heart jumping up his throat.

When Tony was suited up, the shitty computer loading slowly, the dog would not leave his side, not even as Yinsen went ahead to stall them.

The moments that followed - well. Tony didn't like to think about the moments that followed.

Bullets flew and bounced off his suit. Nothing could harm him. Not now. Not ever again. There was an otherworldly snarling, it took him a second to realise that it is the dog making the noise. The sound scrawled up his spine, and from the looks on his captors faces, it was unnerving them much the same.

He killed one, a burst of gunfire rattles off stone and metal and then – there is a scream as the dog goes into action. It was a blur, one man's throat gone and then the other as dark bodies crumple to the floor. The last man raised his gun at the animal with a yell, but Tony charged forward and took him out.

Get your head in the game, Tony told himself.

Savage movement rippled the dog's fur, and its muzzle was slick with blood. The obedience had come off like a cloak and the unrestrained wildness now showed. It was fast, so very fast. Tony can't believe that this is the same animal who slept beside him and lent against his shins.

He couldn't dwell on this right now, at any minute ten more guys with guns were going to come charging down this rat hole, and all the armour in the world wouldn't be able to protect him. So instead, he charged forward. Find Yinsen, stick to the plan.

Except, except – Yinsen was dying.

"This was the plan." Yinsen said to him, breath bubbling wrong in his throat. Tony's not stupid, he knows what death sounds like. But standing there in makeshift armour, the dog pacing (snarling) impatiently behind him, he denied.

"Go." Yinsen told him. "Promise me you won't waste your life."

Tony did not promise; Yinsen cannot hear him. Not anymore.

He headed towards the cave entrance and the light blinded him. The hail of bullets stunned him, and it took long moments being pelted by gunfire before he was able to react. Of course, the dog got there before him, a snarling grey beast tearing throats and clawing at chests, and he had to be careful not to shoot it.

Eventually though, he burns everything, he burns every fucking weapon they stole from him and only hopes that the dog escapes. Rocket power provided freedom for him and he was gone, heavy suit shooting over fire and sand and dirt. He was gone. He was free. There was time for one last swoop of exhilaration in his gut before he was falling, falling, falling.

He hit the ground. He blacked out. Pain.

Chapter End Notes
reviews and comments always make my day - I love each and every one of them!

This was my favourite chapter, no joke. It was probably the most fun chapter to write and I hope you've enjoyed it!

If you want author's commentary or meta, send me a comment! I love going into depth about it, so pls do ask, I don't bite

Chapter summary:
First scene Tony wakes up in the cave, Fenrir comes across the ruined convey and makes the decision to follow and save 'the civilian' (Tony), he sneaks into the camp by allowing some of the Ten Rings to make a pet of him, cut to Tony recalling water boarding and then the Camp Boss telling him that he must make the weapons now that they have what he demanded - along with his demands, Tony spots the Fenrir staked to the ground and demands that he gets Fenrir as well, boss agrees, long paragraphs about Fenrir and Tony in captivity, Tony makes the suit, Yinsen dies, Fenrir and him escape, Tony blacks out, end chapter.
Fenrir was running away from almost certain death. Again.

Brash stupid civilian had set fire to everything, including boxes of explosive ammunitions. Panting furiously, fearfully, he stretched his legs in a flat out run. Fenrir wasn't stupid; the moment that flame thrower in the cold-iron-metal-danger armour came out, he was out of there. Tony-civilian-idiot-charge could get himself killed, not Fenrir. However, a civilian to protect was still a civilian to protect and Fenrir kept himself to a fast lope long past the point where the scorched flesh and touch of searing fire had been left behind. Tony-civilian had rocketed overhead not too long ago in his unnatural iron contraption and Fenrir headed unswervingly towards where Tony had crashed to the ground.

He would stay with idiot-civilian until everything smelled safe and O.K. How long that would take, he did not know.

Eventually he found the first scattered bit of debris, leading him on a trail until he found Idiot-Tony passed out and crashed waist deep in a sand dune. Beating his tail madly, he got to pulling Tony out digging, tugging, and alternately licking idiot-Tony to wake him.

Eventually Tony groaned awake and Fenrir let him grip around his neck as Fenrir pulled him from the sand.

"Good dog." Tony croaked at him repeatedly, "Good fuckin' dog."

Staggering to his feet, Tony stumbled and Fenrir was there to support him, nudging him steady. Wisely, the man lurched away from the mountains he just exploded, but he still headed directly into the desert. Growling in irritation, Fenrir had to grip Tony's shirt in his teeth to tug him in a better direction. Both need to drink and eat and Fenrir remembered a watering hole within an achievable distance.

"No dog." Tony said, trying to tug his already ripped tank shirt away from Fenrir's mouth. Growling again, this time in exasperated warning, Fenrir had to butt his head into Tony multiple times until dumb-idiot-civilian-charge got the idea and finally started heading where Fenrir wants him.

Sun-warmth-light beat down; after weeks living in a cold dark cave, the touch of the heat was
almost unbearable. Despite the fact that his tongue was lolling out of his mouth, Fenrir welcomed the warmth.

Together, they trudge at a slow pace. Every time Tony stumbled over, Fenrir helped him up and got him moving again. Fenrir would make better time alone, would be safer alone, and still he did not leave. Stay-safe said pack-partner John in his mind, protect-civilian. Fenrir will, he will.

They reached the water hole just before the very peak of the afternoon, and as hoped, the well is deserted. Tony-idiot-civilian stumbled forward and dropped to his knees, pulling the water up with snarling desperate breaths, sounding almost like wolf as he did. Idiot-Tony plunged his head full into the bucket, and it was only after he'd drunk a bellyful that he sat back on his haunches, breathing hard. Fenrir nudged him into the shade with one dry nose before he stuck his muzzle into the bucket, gulping down cold-earth-dirt water. He finished the bucket and has to nip the stupid man multiple times until idiot-Tony drew up another full bucket. Fenrir finished the half the water before he finagled it, tipping the bucket up and over his head, so the water can run into his fur, cooling him down.

In a rare show of thought, idiot-civilian pulled up another bucketful and poured it all over Fenrir's coat.

"When I get out of here," Tony said as he followed Fenrir's example and dumped a bucket over his own head, "I'm feeding you steak every day. Or getting myself tested. You're too smart to be real."

There was a scent like longing, relief and desperation that rolled off Tony-idiot-civilian and Fenrir leaned all his grey bulk against idiot-civilian's side, trying to send out his own scent-thoughts to calm idiot-Tony down.

Tony-idiot stumbled upward to set off again. Rumbling displeasure at man who was intent on moving at the hottest part of the day, Fenrir moved forward to take point. He had smelt the metal-plastic-explosive-trap of mines around here previously; this civilian will not be loosing any limbs while Fenrir was here.

They resumed trudging and slowly the sky wheeled over to dusk. Walking along dunes, Fenrir stopped as he heard a familiar choppy thumping.

Helicopters. Large ones.

Fenrir turned and barked at Tony to get him moving, loping up to the high point on a dune as Tony jogged after him. It was not long until Tony heard the helicopters and he too was circling, thrusting his arms into the air and waving madly as he yelled.

"Yes! YES!"

Rescue. Finally.

Fenrir barked too, jumping up at the black bellies of the machines as they swooped overhead. It would only be better if John was here too, but pack-partner is not and he must content himself with barking exuberantly as Tony ran, fell, and stumbled towards the landed helicopters.

"Yes!" shouted Tony-idiot-civilian-charge one last time and thrust a victory salute to the air.

A man came running towards them, and Fenrir watched carefully from a slight distance. The waves of friend-relief-pack-loss-relief emanating off the pair reassured Fenrir and he allowed himself to relax, beating his tail lightly as the two men pressed their heads together.
Eventually the other man hauled Tony to his feet, "Come on." He said. "Let's bring you home."

It is only then that the other man noticed Fenrir standing with his huge quiet bulk as he watches with wary eyes.

"Tony." He said slowly, carefully, and the tone has Fenrir tensing warily, ready to fight or run. "You do realise there's a giant *wolf* standing there."

Now idiot-Tony was laughing wearily. "That's just the dog. He's with me. I'm not leaving him behind."

_Caution-threat-wariness_ floated off Tony's friend in waves but nonetheless he didn't do anything so Fenrir followed on Tony's heels.

It was only when they got to the American base that things went wrong. Fenrir was waiting outside a med bunk for Tony when someone noticed him; the stocky man goes blanche white, then red. If Fenrir hadn't been so preoccupied with thoughts of Tony-idiot-charge, he would've noticed the British patch on the man's shoulder and known to run. But he didn't, and that was his downfall.

"Where's the dog?" Tony demanded later, to be met with stares and the cold statement; "the dog was property of the British army. It has been… returned, Mr Stark."

And no matter how loudly he demanded or waved his hands about, Tony did not see Fenrir again.

#

It was a Saturday, and Field Marshal Charlus Fitzwaters was dealing with a headache, the fact he was missing his wife's birthday for work, and several problems he couldn't ignore- one of which he was trying to deal with that very moment. Fitzwaters looked over at his e'mail and frowned as he skimmed it, muttering to himself quietly. 'Won't take any other handlers… dangerous in the field… unpredictable…too wild to be useful… wisely, I would recommend termination of 'Fenrir'…'

"Jesus Christ." He sighed to himself, running a hand over a face he considered too wrinkled for his fifty five years. Stress lines that came from too many years in the army were not helped by the fact Fenrir, that infamously large dog, was once again a problem landed on his plate. He didn't want to just kill the animal, the thing was too damn useful. Too damn once in a lifetime.

Sighing once more, he returned to skimming the email until something written free hand informal down the bottom of the email made him nod in thoughtful decision.

_It would be useful to see if we could see the rouge element in the dog's DNA, even replicate it in our other spec-op's animals. Perhaps the military scientists back in Britain can get onto it? Failing that, perhaps breeding to weed out undesirable traits while keeping those that are useful would be a good course of action. Regardless, the dog is an interesting animal and it would be a waste of military resources to simply dispose of it._

Chewing on one ragged thumbnail, Fitzwaters looked at the email again before he started typing a reply and drafting orders. There was a very good point in that email, and he dared say that he'd come to a decision.

Matter dealt with, he turned his attention to other more worrying things such as the fact that Tony Stark was _no-longer making military weaponry._
As always, Author comments? Meta? - I love answering them. Your comments really make my day.
ALSO: I have a pinterest board for this story, found here ->
https://au.pinterest.com/tiggytag/if-the-wolf-then-the-man/
It's basically me spending too much time there when not writing.
Most of you probably think /and/know where this is going now with Fenrir. also, if you couldn't tell by now, I have no idea how an army works, or who would be the one making decisions about dogs - I am sorry to anyone who works in the armed forces if you're reading this.
John sighed, tapping fingers in place as Sherlock interrogated the poor trembling man sitting in their living room. He tried not to stare so obviously at the ears sticking out at unfortunate angles from the man’s fear-pale face. A year and a bit of running after Sherlock and hearing every desperate plea there ever was from Sherlock’s clients didn’t get old per-say, but some days he had less patience with the gibbering. Sherlock’s oh so gentle demeanour didn’t help either, John swore that it was rubbing off on him at the worst of times.

“It was a gigantic hound!” The man protested, huffing the h and stretching the o to an ow in his desperation, and suddenly Sherlock was that much more interested. He spun in place, aborted movement jumping in his fingers and from his wrist.

John was still caught up in the giant hound thing – it brushed close to memories of his army days when he was with Fenrir. It took an effort to tug himself out of the undertow of loss and he couldn’t quite keep up with Sherlock’s sudden leaps of logic and rapidly changing decisions.

“So you’re going then?” He asked; stumbling around the words as he suddenly missed Fenrir with a painful intensity that shocked him right down to a faintly tremoring hand.

“Oh course,” Sherlock retorted. “I wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

While Sherlock did what he did best – push the adrenaline close to John so that the missing and the yearning cannot – it was not quite enough, not this time. Perhaps was the fact that he’s never liked Dartmoor, or it could be that the hound thing rang too close to Fenrir for comfort, but either way he was uneasy.

Dartmoor exceeded all of his expectations. It was cold, and misty, and foggy, and creepy, and damp, and nerve grating. The locals were more caught up in this hound thing than he thought they’d be, the tourists were willingly gullible – and, well, the whole thing was just setting his nerves off. Not to mention the unfortunate proximity to a military base. It was at time like this where he really missed the heat of the Middle East – bullets and all.

Sitting down for a pint outside, one for Sherlock, one for himself, he got entangled in a conversation with a tourist guide. The man was obviously just jumping on the back of the ‘moor
hound’ myth, and Sherlock was only talking to him for the sake of the case, but there was an uncomfortable twisting deep in his gut as the man spoke.

When Sherlock demanded proof, the guide obliged them with a phone camera photo. The camera warps the image and he has to squint to see it properly. It was blurry, a dark grey-black shape in the underbrush that looks just like a dog. John would be unconvinced, but he remembered the huge size of Fenrir and Lukas’s warning and stayed his tongue. Quietly, he listens as he took cues off Sherlock and watched the guide as he defended his position. There was a ring of truth in the man’s voice; it resounded deep with the belief that even if there was not a hound, there was something not right going down at Baskerville.

“Rats as big as dogs,” He said, “And dogs as big as horses.”

He pulled something out from his bag, and well-

It was paw print, unmistakably that of a hound. (Or a wolf, tickled the back of his unconscious mind.) And it was huge. Easily larger that the span of his hands, and big, so big.

“We did say fifty.” John swallowed, and he can see the scowl that Sherlock hid in the corners of his mouth.

They headed straight to Baskerville afterwards, John riding shotgun as he watched the grey moors flash past.

They only ran into a slight snag when a baby-faced private jumped out a jeep to intercept them. Sherlock did his best shady politician, but it was clear that it wasn’t quite going to cut it. For one threatening moment, their case hung by a thread – easily snapped, about to give way.

John gave an internal sigh and straightened up. Time to pull a non-existent rank; army respected army hierarchy. Despite all their status, a politician will never be of army.

“Captain John Watson,” He said, pulling his cover story for his real military background. “Of the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers.”

It was easy to call up the expectation of immediate obedience that was required by all officers. All he had to do was remember the way that he’d give commands to Fenrir or to his squad members in a tight spot. The baby-faced private relaxed, worries arrested by the comfort of following order and command. Fortunately, he didn’t look too hard at John’s id, because it wouldn’t stand up to scrutiny, and let them in.

Sherlock did glance at John; that calculating slide of his eyes where he was weighing and measuring evidence. No, that small slip of detail had not gone unnoticed.

It was a nerve wracking descent into the bowls of Baskerville. They were lead through fluorescent lit corridors, past doors and down elevators containing buttons for levels that read like a list of redacted statements (B2, B1, BG3, BG4,). John, eyeing them up, noticed that some didn’t even have buttons, just key cards slips. His curiosity was aroused even as he tamped down on the urge to ask ‘and that level contains?’.

Tension settled in his shoulders, mantled under a false legitimacy of purpose. Every time Sherlock swiped that damn card, he reduced their bracket of unknown time.

When the lift eventually opened, it was to a room of white lights, cages, the smell of sterile bleach and powerful cleaner overlaying animal urine.
“How far does that lift go?” He asked, for want of a better question. The ensuing deflection reeked of a lie. Bins, my arse.

Each answer to every question he asked slimed uncomfortably around his stomach. He remembered places akin to this, back when the army had just noticed Fenrir, back when Titanium teeth and careful monitoring of growth was done with a keen scientific intent. He’d never liked the scientists he’d met, there was always too much power there, too much of a will to meddle. He got scientific curiosity - himself a doctor, Sherlock, mates back in college- but the army scientists had always seemed opportunistic; the kind to puncture or poison just to note the healing, or the death, and see how they could use it.

These scientists were the same.

“How many animals have you got down here?” Loads.

“Howare? Biological and Chemical?” and other things.

God. This place: slimier than Mycroft.

They don’t get to stay for too long; their bracket of time was shorter than Sherlock had expected. They almost get found out and escape only by the skin of their teeth.

John was glad to get out of the damn place but he couldn’t escape the feeling that he’d left something behind.

It was an inexorable feeling that had been creeping up on him ever since Henry had walked into their flat, and as he walked away from Baskerville, it flittered low in the base of his skull. But there wasn’t anything that he’d forgotten there, and so he tried to ignore it.

Don’t let them catch you. John had told him. Don’t get caught John had ordered. John had ordered, John had told him – and Fenrir was caught, Fenrir was captured. Fenrir had gone from stone cave to blinding uncertainty and then finally pain and white and capture.

When he could, he paced the bars of his cage, his huge bulk pressed against them as he dreamt of wide flung skies and wider spread lands. He dreamt of lands that ran towards the horizon faster than he could chase it, of stars and darkness blurred in frightening cold. He dreamt of death and pain and heat and brightness until only by clawing the bars and biting his flesh to awareness did he know what was real.

Time in this place blurred, blurred worse than when he was in that cave with Idiot-civilian. There at least Tony and Yinsen treated him as something more than subject-object-experiment-curio.

When he’d been caught, he’d gone from cage to cage in the army as they tried to introduce him to new partners -new command givers. He’d refused them all, was as savage and as dangerous as he knew they thought him to be. Oh to be sure, some he’d given the chance but they weren’t pack. They weren’t John. Eventually the dice fell and his Handlers could not trust him, could not trust the savagery that lay so close under his pelt.

If Fenrir had known what would happen once the army lost faith and patience, he would have tried harder, been more docile, more obedient. But, he hadn’t, and once again, he was bound.

Here, he ran out on the cold-mist-damp hills only when he was lucky enough to rattle at the confines of an outdoor run, when a softened someone gave him a chance, when they wanted to test
Test him they had. Once they’d done something so he’d begun to grow too fast and too large. His bones ached constantly, muscle slipping off brittle skeleton. They reversed whatever they’d done once his lungs could not grow fast enough and his too-small heart could not beat hard enough for ‘full function’. It had taken a long time before everything wrong caught up enough with his too-large body to return to ‘normal’. Even now the cold made his bones threaten again. Once he heard the scientists talking; ‘tripping the growth gene – I never expected that kind of effect. … Then why stop? … Couldn’t be maintained would’ve eventually total bodily collapse …. Yes but imagine we could do … DNA’s curiosity take a look’. Eventually he’d drifted into unconsciousness.

It was easier not to listen to his captors; not the ones in the lab coats who poked and prodded and observed, nor the ones in army kaki who fed him and watched at a wary distance. Some knew his history, splayed out in bold print. They knew he could kill, and in this place one face blurred into another.

If Fenrir got the chance he’d gladly slaughter them all. He’d kill them for the activity of it, something to end the endless light and pain and boredom.

They’d tried mating him to some bitches once, pranced heat ridden females before him like that would do anything. He’d mated one, only once, before realising it was what they wanted. After he’d savaged the fourth, they’d kept the bitches to the other side of the bars.

Still the humiliations did not stop. Humans were too clever by half. They paraded heat-smell before him, letting him get hard and wanting, before reaching latex hands under and jerking, and touching and slicking up and down. Not stopping, even as they restrained him, until he was pulsing shamefully into plastic containers, swollen knot hitching and throbbing in the cold sterile air.

The first time he’d snarled and fought, the second time he’d managed to struggle out the bonds and almost tore a scientist’s throat out before he was shot full of sedative. After the tenth time, he’d simply let them have their way, unresisting. It was easier to let the fugue state take over. It stopped him from thinking about John, John who he knew was closer than he’d been in months. He knew this with the sure certainty of kenning; every time he ran the pen, he roamed at all sides attempting to get a better sense of distance and direction only to be met with failure each time.

But something was different, something made him sit up and pay attention to that sixth extra sense. John was close. John was close enough that he knew distance and direction. He knew.

Lights blared, horns flashed. Hidden by cages, walls, and earth, Fenrir knew that John was here. John was here.

He was on edge. Yes. Very much so. John’s thoughts ticked over restlessly as they drove and he searched for something to distract himself with. Outside the car the moors shifted; sunspots rolling over the dips and valleys before clouds turned over and hid the light in shadows.

“So the email from Kirsty…”

Sherlock’s gaze was intent on the road, cheekbones cutting a slash against his pale face as they talked. “The question is,” Sherlock said eventually, “has she been working on something deadlier than a rabbit?”
John remembered the steely looks military scientists used to give Fenrir whenever they thought that John wasn’t aware of it, part interest in a curio and all driving need to take Fenrir apart to see how he ticked. The sub-textual warnings that Major Vincent Murray had given him when Fenrir’s particular abilities had first come to light and then Lukas’s flat out warning four or so years later now rested heavy in his mind and turned his words bitter-flat against his tongue.

“To be fair, that is quite a wide field.”

They pass most of the rest of the drive in silence until Sherlock looked at him and said, apropos of nothing, “You lied.”

“What?” John asked, tugged from his own musings at Sherlock’s sudden statement.

“Earlier, at Baskerville. You lied. You’ve never been a Captain. But you said it like you believed it was true.”

Sighing, John settled into his chair. “You’re right. I’ve never been a Captain. But I am one, honorary Captain.”

“Explain,” Sherlock snapped, sliding a sharp gaze over at John, taking and processing this new information. “All of it, if you please.”

John sighed, wishing that he could have a cup of tea and ran a hand down his left leg. “My actual military history is classified. I was doctor, then a field medic- could’ve made a captain eventually. But at a certain point I was recruited for special operations. When I was discharged they gave me a false history; Captain because it gave me rank and privilege, but it’s not what I was.”

“No. You were a dog handler.”

“Yes. I was.”

“And you got shot.”

“Yes.”

“Something happened to your dog.”

“Yes. But I don’t know.” The words sat bitter and final. Sherlock was wise enough to leave the matter alone and John turned to look out the window, watching the land with growing sense of unease.

*God, did he hate Dartmoor.*

#

Gate’s clanged and opened, and from where Fenrir lay on his thin foam pallet he could hear the scientists talking and he twitched his ears in interest. He knew these two white-coats well. One of them was soft hearted; slipped him jerky in his bowl, let him out for runs sometimes if he’d been good. Fenrir had been good today.

He’d been good even in the knowledge that John was close, John was so close, and all he wanted to do was fight-bite-find. He’d been good today, even though all the lights flashing and alarms blaring made him want to run and fight and hide and tear. They’d given him something after that, with their sharp needles, and now he couldn’t sense John at all. But John slipping in and out of his ken was a familiar enemy now, a familiar wound that he welcomed; let it nurse inside his chest like a
So now, he nursed the pain, and listened to the white-coats talking.

“He’s losing condition,” Softheart-perfume-white-coat was talking to the other female scientist.

“So?”

“So- if he loses muscle mass, the tests that we have to do each month on his capabilities are erroneous.”

“What has this got to do with me?”

Softheart-perfume-white-coat sounded exasperated as she answered. “To get an accurate result, he needs to be in a consistent condition. He needs exercise, consistent exercise. He’s not getting that in a cage. As the Lead Researcher for this project and this subject, I need you to sign off on it before I can take him out.”

“Take him out?” The word was a snap, sharp with suspicion.

“It’s fenced out; I don’t have to pick up its shit, and its temper is seriously improved. Do you know how many times it has bitten people? Much less with exercise, let me tell you!”

There was a long sigh, and then, “Fine,” Another huff, before the same voice, now softened with concession said, “Look, we’ve gotten a defect deer – leg twisted before it was of any use – it’s still alive; you can set that out for it to kill. It won’t do any harm. Might stop it from trying to savage everything in sight.”

“Thank you.”

A thrum of excitement layered itself in Fenrir’s chest, he was going to go out. He was going to go out! An excited noise thrummed out from him before he could stop it, and then he felt angry with himself for being excited about this, for feeling happy that they were letting him out. Like he should scrape and lick and play pretty for them if they let him go out.

He could never get out, not until he was with John, and none of this could get in the way. He would kill them all if he had too - even the softhearted-white-coat. He would be fast with her, make it quick, make it as painless as he could.

Licking his chops, he let one of the khaki soldiers loop thick cords around his neck and did not struggle even when it tightened. They did not lead the way to the outside, but kept behind him, prodding him up white corridors and past cages. Every time Fenrir attempted to stop and sniff, he was prodded forward by the khaki soldiers who were keeping the long metal poles, to which the loops of rope were attached, held firm, thus keeping Fenrir at a distance.

If Fenrir really put his mind to it, it wouldn’t do much to hinder him for he was larger than he’d ever been before. It took three khakis, all with their own loop poles, for them to feel comfortable with taking him out, and it would take at least three more to control him if he put his mind to it; but for the moment, he was too interested in going out than anything else.

Dusk was just falling when they reached the outside, and Fenrir lifted his muzzle to the darkening sky and relished in the scents he was inhaling. Eagerly, he pulled his way toward the caged grass enclosure at the back of the facility, ignoring the uneasy fear smells of the soldiers around him, or the (pleasing) smells of fear-dog-submission.
The enclosed area at the back was the size of two football pitches roughly overlaid on each other, and Fenrir’s breath came in explosive pants as he leaned forward in anticipation. The gate closed behind him and the loops of rope came off from around his neck, and then he was away.

The ground in the fenced run dipped sharply 100 meters from the gate, the deep slope and angle meant that no one watching from the gate could see down into the valley, and that was where the scent of live prey came to meet him.

The deer’s head jerked up when he approached, the prey response kicked in and then it was scrambling off. It stumbled on its lame leg, but it was fast enough to give him a challenge even as he toyed with it. Adrenaline shot through him as he ran, enjoying the relative freedom even as he enjoyed the hunt.

Eventually though, the deer stumbled and went down, rolling over and down the slope bleating fearfully. He dived in; jaws latched to its neck, fastened around its throat, and tore. The windpipe crushed and ripped, hot blood filled his mouth and Fenrir was lost to the bliss of hunt-kill-success.

The prey was small, hot-warm-alive, under his bulk and he slashed his claws deep into it. He howled ecstatically; throwing his head back to the sky to signal his triumph. Panting furiously, he howled once more, this time longer, to let the white-coats and khaki soldiers that he was dangerous even when sedated, and began to feast. He ripped into the deer, going for the meatiest parts, liberally coating his muzzle in blood.

Eventually, sated, blood-fat and kill-dumb, he heaved his bulk up and returned to the gate. He left his dead kill there, let the khaki’s and white coats clean it up, and moved back to his cell, licking bloody chops and watching the khaki’s watch him.

If they feared him - good. It was all the better.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, reviewing - if you enjoyed it, pls let me know, they make my day every time!

As always, if you'd like authors comments, outtakes, and meta, just ask and I will deliver - I'll be backpacking for all of July, so replies may be sporadic, but i'll get there.
Chapter Notes

(Sooo. the update schedule went totally out the window, but next update should be much sooner.)

Chapter Warning: none (as usual, please let me know if I've missed something)

"Sherlock," John said, as he stumbled along the path to Dwyer's Hollow, "are you sure this is a good idea?"

As usual, Sherlock forged on ahead down the damp twisting path and did not answer. The flashlights of the three men bounced off the plants, throwing gloomy shadows into sharp relief. Darkness had fallen swiftly on the moor, dusk had slipped away before they'd even realised it and now him, Sherlock, and Henry were tramping further and further into the woods. At night, without back up or reliable reception, it was an idiotic idea. More so if the 'Hound' turned out to be real.

The air was cold and clammy, an eerie mist crept through the underbrush and all sound seemed muted and far carrying all at once. It was more than a little off putting and his nerves prickled as he walked. Something moved through the underbrush in a sharp rustling of leaves, and John turned to investigate. Despite the bouncing torch light, he could see nothing in the underbrush and the woods disappeared into thick shadows around the small beam of his light. Turning to go, a blinking light over the horizon caught his eye. It was Morse code, snatches of letters, and he fumbled to write the translation down in his note book.

He got the letters down but didn't know of its meaning. If it was a message, he had no idea of what it meant or even whom it was for.

"Sherlock!" he whispered, turning to search for his friend, "Sherlock!"

The path was empty. Torch light threw up nothing but shadows and darkness. He'd been left behind again.

God damn.

Resigning himself to trying to find the man, John trudged down the path he could just make out and called Sherlock's name as he went.

A hollow thrumming noise echoed off somewhere nearby. The cause: water dripping onto a hollow metal drum. And then – a deep howl echoed through the woods, a beast's howl. A hound's roar of the hunt.

The howl reverberated in his bones, and for the life of him, John could not tell if it was coming from a mile away, or a meter. He ran and did not stop until he'd found Sherlock. The detective was pale, his eyes darting and his on edge emotions held in a visibly tight check.

"It was the hound."
Later that night, sitting by the fire in the inn, Sherlock seemed distant and agitated. John knew it was 'the hound' – knew it was because of what he had – or had not- seen in Dwyer's Hollow.

The night had scraped against the raw edges of John's nerves as well, so he dealt with it the best way he knew how; he took refuge in firm disbelief, squashed all memory of Fenrir, and pretended ignorance. Mutant super dogs? Didn't exist.

Sherlock however, was not at all calmed by John's parade of no-nonsense normality, nor by his iteration of firm facts.

"I saw it. I saw it."

And this was the thing: if Sherlock saw it, if there was a hound, then what were the chances of it being Fenrir? And that was a thought John did not want to entertain.

Sherlock was afraid – and what was worse – he was afraid of being afraid. The man was breaking down before him, and he was vicious because of it.

"I don't have friends."

Hah. "Wonder why."

Angry, John left Sherlock sitting by the fire.

Bastard. This fucking night can go to hell.

The 'morse' code was a bust too. People fucking in a car. And then a message to come talk to Henry's therapist from Sherlock. Like a good friend, he went. Well, that and she was gorgeous. That too was ruined.

Damn it Sherlock.

When he slept that night, it was uneasy and restless. The heat and sand and fur of Afghanistan stirred close at the edges of his mind, closer than they'd been for months. He dreamt about Fenrir; sun glinting off titanium jaws as Fenrir howled, throwing his head back in a wavering cry, only to step off the earth – growing huge, huger than the curve of the world – and split in two. His twin jaws descended on a two tone moon and swallowed it whole.

John woke with a jerk. His hands were shaking and he cursed what this case was doing.

"Air." He muttered, rolling to his feet and eyeing the wan light filtering through the window. "I need air."

Quietly, he changed and made his way downstairs where a sleepy eyed girl, yawning impressively for six am, was there to make him a cuppa and some toast. Sherlock, as usual, didn't pause for breakfast. In his peripheral vision, John saw Sherlock's distinctive figure exit the B&B with his coat flapping at his ankles. Disinclined to follow after the palaver that was last night, John stayed staunch in his chair drinking tea and eating buttery jam toast until the breakfast room filled with people and John fled the bustle for the quiet of the outside gardens.

It was there that Sherlock found him a little over half an hour later. Sherlock was wired, eager, and apologetic – not in so many words, because the great Sherlock Holmes did apologies like he did friends. That is to say, not at all.

"Yes. Yeah. Right, good. So you got something to go on with then," the still raw anger was
obvious in his flattened tone. "Good luck with that," John said as Sherlock tried to talk about the case. He turned away, moving in a soldier's march and trying to avoid an argument that Sherlock would never understand.

"Listen. What I said before John. I meant it. I don't have friends."

The comment stung, just like it had done last night, and he turned with firm spine.

Yes. Got that. Thanks Sherlock.

"I've just got one."

There was slight desperation in Sherlock's voice, the truth in his voice stark and candid. And that – well. Wasn't Sherlock John's only friend in this country? Not a mate, not an acquaintance, but a friend. A brother. Sherlock was the closest thing he had to Lukas or the boys in the army since he'd set Fenrir free from out of a chain link fence and had been discharged home,

Okay. Okay.

"Right."

And Sherlock was forgiven.

But they were going back to Baskerville.

Oh. Lovely.

And the – and then-

He could work with fear and adrenaline, had done for the better part of 6 years when he'd been in the army.

But this – this fear was different. It was just a creeping paranoia – the unshakable knowledge that the hound was here and holy fucking fuck, it was going to get him. There is nothing rational about it, no field tactics, no Fenrir, no gun to defend himself with.

He felt like prey.

He was shaking.

"It's here with me. Oh my god. It's here with me."

"Talk to me." Sherlock demanded.

Oh – John would've laughed but he was too busy trying to slow his rabbit-jacked heart, trying to quiet his breathing in a cage that feels so terribly flimsy.

"It's going to hear me. I can't. I can't."

He's never been afraid of dogs before – not even the huge Great Dane that used to live down from his childhood home until it got cancer and died, which had been larger than John was tall and it barked at everyone who walked past.

But this was death snarling down the cages; a menacing bulk of muscle twice his size and almost his height, glowing red eyes thrown in sharp relief against the white drop sheet.
Hot/cold fear sweat dribbled down his shoulders as it got closer and closer and closer and then-

He was laying in lazy comatose against the bars of his cage, muzzle resting on the chill floor. Occasionally Fenrir pushed his tongue into the corners of his chops, searching for the last tantalising hints of deer blood. He was alone for once, and as was habit, he extended his senses, listening to movement from white coats and khakis and other things and dragging in great lungfuls of sharp sterile air.

Absence. Only absence greeted his senses.

There was no noise, no movement, no fresh strong scents of human skin and sweat. The fur at his ruff prickled and he swung his head up, taking deeper lungful's and straining to hear. Nothing changes in this place, and so change like this, absence like this was dangerous. He growled, swinging his bulk up, pacing against the bars of his cage.

Adrenaline – almost unfamiliar by now- began it's rush through his blood, clearing his mind and heightening his senses, and he could feel his kenning, dampened by the drugs they'd given him, return in a rush.

He could feel where John was.

John was here.

John was here.

John was here, in the absence of movement and sound.

He snarled, pushed his senses further, strained against concreate and sterile air. Was that him? He couldn't tell – only that fear was flooding everywhere. Fenrir snarled again through fear-anger-adrenaline. John was here, John was afraid, John needed him.

John needed him and Fenrir was in a cage.

Apathy, which had wormed its way into his muscle to undercut his will and his strength, crumpled under this knowledge.

He needed out, and so out he would get.

The weakest point of the cage was at the latch that held the door closed. Rearing back, he pounded his full weight down on the latch again and again until his paws bled. He was lucky; corners had been cut when it'd been put together. It was a weak aluminium-iron mix. More soft than strong, it bent under his concentrated weight. Snarling, he dropped back onto all fours and with increasing desperation, began ramming the bulk of his shoulder into the gate. Need gave him strength and the gate burst open with an ear flinching noise of metal bouncing off metal as he skidded out, suddenly more free than he'd been in months.

The blooming bruises ached, and his paws stung sharply as they cracked and bled

He growled deep and low in his voice, more vibration than sound, and began running out the labyrinth of white corridors to John.
"John! It's okay, I'm here! John!"

In the panicked beating of hound, hound, hound, the relief of Sherlock’s presence was immediate and intense. He was okay, Sherlock was here, Sherlock would make it okay. John was safe.

His mouth was running, terror beating up his throat, it was the hound, Jesus Christ, it was the hound, how did you not see it, it was right here! Sherlock, I believe you Sherlock was so calm, steady as a rock, and John fluttered against it almost ineffectually. Anger flew out, scorching hot against remorse and fear, It's not okay! I saw it! I was wrong!

"What did you see?" Sherlock demanded while John was still gasping for breath, shocky with fear and clutching onto Sherlock's arm like a lifeline.

"It was the hound – I believe you! I believe you!" It all he could repeat; he was so sorry for doubting Sherlock, Sherlock! Sherlock who was never deceived by his senses, only by his mind and only by Moriarty.

"Yes!" Sherlock said, fierce and intense. "But what did it look like?"

John felt like a winded animal, snatching breaths in between shudders of adrenaline.

"Huge-" Larger than Fenrir, larger than any wolf or dog with a dark black coat, and a jaw that slavered death, and its eyes – "Glowing red eyes" – hot as blood and filled with rabid intent.

"Oh god, Sherlock, I'm so sorry, I believe you."

It wasn't Fenrir, but it was all the more terrifying for it. The hound tapped into an instinctive nature of primal fear: the creatures of the dark were real and wandering free in the shadows.

But suddenly Sherlock was talking, his mouth running off as it raced to chase his mind, You have been drugged, We have all been drugged, and John was left trying to play catch up.

The scientist Dr Stapleton, Kirsty's Mum, Killer of Bluebell the Rabbit, watched with John as Sherlock stared intently down at the microscope.

"Are sure you're okay?" She asked, "You look very peaky."

Oh no, I'm perfectly fine- oh, hang on, I've just been completely terrified and I've been told it's all in my head. So no. No. I'm not fucking okay

"No," John said instead, "I'm alright."

All he wanted to do was sit down with a glass of scotch and wish that he didn't feel so fucking off balance while she talked about jelly-fish genes and killing bluebell. He wanted to know where Fenrir was, needed arrest the unnerving itch under his skin that whispered Fenrir's been found, and not by the ones you want him found by.

"So what else have you got down here?"

She sighed, shifted to lean against the table, "Listen, if you can imagine it, someone's probably doing it."

It's not a comforting thought, so he kept pressing a little bit more, called up an air of scientific comradery.

Cloning? Yes.
"What about animals?" He asked then, a slight withhold of his breath as she turned to look at him, "and not sheep. Big animals." *Dogs. Wolves.*

Her answer isn't reassuring. "Size isn't a problem. The only restraints are the law and ethics, and both those things can be very…" She hesitated, tossed a word around her mouth before saying, "flexible."

It was then that Sherlock threw the slide against the wall with an angry exclaim of "There's nothing there!"

The slide shattered with a neat sound of crisping glass and John turned his head to look at Sherlock sharply.

"There has to be a drug, a hallucinogen of some kind," Sherlock said, pacing irritably along the lab floor, "in the sugar, it was the only variable."

*And Sherlock drugged me. Lovely.*

"Out!" Sherlock ordered, "I need to go to my mind palace."

John sighed, and tried to explain it to the scientist as he leads her out the lab, knowing that he sounded like a crazy person even as he did so. Sounding insane was okay though, so long as Sherlock deduced the truth.

And deduce it he did; his insane, brilliant mind figuring out the pass-code to project H.O.U.N.D where the full truth spilled out onto a cold computer monitor.

"Good god." John said softly, staring at the string of death and homicide and the idea of it being used as an anti-personnel weapon.

Bob Franklin. It was Bob Franklin.

"Let's arrange a meeting" Sherlock said, flipping his mobile phone into his fingers as John stared into the snarling fangs and black ridged fur of H.O.U.N.D's wolf logo and thought of Fenrir.

Turning away, John was halted as his phone rang. He answered it with some confusion, which tilted into alarm at the sobs on the phone; it was Henry's psychiatrist and it was about Henry. He had a gun, he'd threatened her, they had to find him.

"Henry?" Sherlock asked, phone in hand, thumb already scrolling through contacts at John's affirmative noise.

Sherlock's face firmed into a mask of action. "There's only one place he'll go to, back to where it all started. Lestrade," Sherlock snapped into his phone, "get to Dewyer's Hollow, now, and bring a gun."

#

Fenrir snarled, scratching at the door, the door between him and John, him and his pack-partner, fight-brother.

It wouldn't open, this Fenrir knew. Only the khakis and white-coats could open it with their little bits of plastic. Frustrated beyond control, Fenrir snapped and bit at his legs to stop the roar of anger from howling out of him. This was no way to reach John, no way at all. He lifted his nose to the
air, searching for the scent of fresher air, untainted by metal ducts or plastic-acid-chemicals or trapped-pain-animal. He found it; a faintest hint of the cold crisp of the outside, and it was in the opposite direction from John. Fenrir followed it, even though his instincts were screaming against him, up white corridors and past cages and up stairwells with doors he could open with his paws. He was lucky; a door to the outside was left improperly closed, a mislaid stone jammed between door and frame. Someone, lazy, impatient, hadn't made sure it was locked.

Hope leapt in his chest as he nudged the door open and pushed through to the outside of the building.

He was out.

He was free.

There was only the fence to bypass, and fences could be broken, fences could be jumped, and barbed wire scaled. He lifted his nose and followed the scent of John, followed the scent of anxiety and fear as it dipped down towards the hollow in the woods.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing! - if you enjoyed it, pls let me know, they make my day every time! (I save the really good ones just to read them again sometime. true story.)

As always, if you'd like authors comments, outtakes, and meta, just ask and I will deliver. (srsly I love them)

Pintrest Board for the story -> https://au.pinterest.com/tiggytag/if-the-wolf-then-the-man/

Side note - I am so so sorry for the length between this update and the last - I had this chapter already written up, but life, uni, broken laptop, mental spoons, take your prick, just got in the way. The next one, I promise, will NOT be that long. Thanks so much for you love and patience.
John couldn't tell if it was the rumble of the jeep's engine or just the adrenaline beginning to beat through his system, but for the second time that night, he was stuck on the edge of action and he felt as if he would shake apart from it. When he was in Afghanistan, before Fenrir, before special ops, back when he was just a part of the Northumberland fusiliers, he would go still when the adrenaline hit. He'd find himself tipped on the edge of action; tranquil on the outside, a storm on the inside. The world would go clearer around him as if at any moment it would slow to a crystalline point of decisive movement and the turbulence in his body would shake in his teeth.

When he had Fenrir, it was different. His partner became a lodestone: two bodies against a storm, two hearts beating in unison, two wills twined together for a single purpose. The world would narrow down to a single point but then Fenrir would move on his left and their awareness would kick out again, leaving them in the eye of a storm.

It was hard not to feel adrift, hard to find that centre of pinpoint action without a touch stone. Sherlock had helped, given him the thrill of the chase again, a purpose – but he wasn't the same. It wasn't enough.

And John always felt it clearly at times like this one, tumbling out of the jeep and down the dark moor. His and Sherlock's flashlight beams bounced off the fog. Eerie shadows loomed as they stumbled down into the Hollow to find Henry, gun in hand, sliver muzzle raised to his mouth.

“Oh god.”

"Henry put the gun down!"

John hung on anxious tenterhooks, flashlight in hand and heart in his mouth as Sherlock began unravelling the truth, spools of logic rolling out to try and calm Henry down.

"I don't know anymore!"

Henry was breaking down in front of them, gun raised to his mouth as John and Sherlock both stumbled forward to stop him, Sherlock still running his mouth, telling the truth the only way he knew how. He was steady in his logic, his faith in his conclusions steady and un-repentant.

It worked, Henry's hand fell lax, quiet desperation worked in his mouth as he tried to reason out his truth.

"Sherlock!"

It was Lestrade, and John took the chance to ease in, take the gun from Henry's shaking hand.
It was solid in his hand, he already felt better for having it and he engaged the safety, checking it as Sherlock was still calming Henry down.

"We saw it last night, the hound, I don't – I-"

"There was a dog… it was just a dog Henry, an ordinary dog. Fear and stimulus, that's how it works."

But John still couldn't shake the creeping paranoia, couldn't shake the knowledge that there was more than just a dog here.

And that's when they heard it. The howl.

It echoed over the moor, ringing from all directions in the fog, so far away, but yet too close at once.

A dog.

A Hound.

He ran fast, paws splayed against the ground, following the scent cone and his own kenning of John down over the moor, picking his way past the explosive-metal-danger-mine ground. The pulse of flight-run-John-fight-blood competed with demand of freedom-run-wind-escape and he let the rumble grow in his chest until it trembled the dirt under him and the scent of the small prey reeked with fear-run-predator-danger-hide.

As the scent of John grew stronger, the smell of fear and adrenaline bit sharp in the scent cone. So too did the smell of madness-anger-feral of another dog, too close and too dangerous for comfort.

Throwing his head back he howled a warning of both threat and reassurance, he was here for John and no mere dog would hurt his partner. He would kill before that happened. He dug in his paws, and felt the earth fly beneath him.

They tensed, John turning and swinging the gun up. Around him Lestrade did the same, gun and torch raised, as they turned in circles, their torch lights bouncing up around them.

Lambent eyes loomed out of the shadows. The growl shuddered in the clearing.

"Sherlock,"

There wasn't supposed to be a hound, it was an ordinary dog. But John was seeing it, and Henry, Henry was losing it. His voice cracked hysterically in denial. He tossed his body in one place, rocking against fear and terror.

"Sherlock," John said, demanding an explanation, Henry's hysteria grinding a sharp edge against his own tight hold of alarm. "Are you seeing this? Alright, well- he is not drugged, Sherlock. So what's this? What is it!"

The monster, because even though Sherlock was rationalising it as 'just a dog, Henry, it's nothing more than an ordinary dog', John had never seen a dog like it before. Less canine than beast, it's ugly block head was deformed. Teeth jutted from its jaw in a crocodilian jigsaw and huge eyes
bounced their torches lights back at them. The thing's hide was a leathery armour of jutting bone under the flesh. It was feral and demoninc. The beast was half the size of the thing John had hallucinated in the laboratory, and behind the pulse of fear he felt a drizzle of relief that it was not Fenrir. Fenrir never had and never would ever resemble the deformed thing snarling down at them.

"Oh my god," Lestrade swore and John stared at it as it advanced, its teeth snapping.

"Sherlock!" He demanded, "Sherlock!"

But Sherlock was not answering, he was transfixed on something else behind him, and John could not tear his eyes away from the approaching beast to see what it was. It was hard enough fighting against the effect of whatever had gotten into him, and John only noticed Sherlock's brief struggle with something, someone, after it had finished.

He could hear the harsh pant of Sherlock's breath and then the hastily muffled sound from Bob Franklin, his mask torn away and mouth covered by his sleeve.

"It's the fog! The drug is in the fog. Aerosol dispersant, it said in the paper, Project H.O.U.N.D," Sherlock's voice rose frantically as he figured it out. "It's the fog; a chemical minefield!"

It still did not explain the beast, which was coming ever closer. Its snarl overrode all action until Franklin yelled, "Kill it, for God's sake! Kill it!"

John and Lestrade swung their guns, Lestrade shooting once, then twice, missing both times. The beast snarled, made to leap - John levelled his gun, mind narrowing to a target point – and something burst out of the woods, careening into the beast, slamming it down and out of the way.

John caught nothing except a huge bulk of fur, some slavering jaws, and frantic snarling. It cut off sharply with choked yelp and gunshot whine as the smaller beast lost to the thing that had flung itself down into the pit.

For a moment, he thought that the drugs were playing tricks on him as he watched the huge wolf. because that's what the thing was: a wolf much larger than the demonic hound. There was a long second of stillness as the four men watched the dead thing thump to the ground.

Lestrade's gun was back up again defensively. John's was not.

It hung limp by his side as a strange sense of recognition stuck him still in place.

He knew this animal before him.

It was huge, yes. Its paws were a massive splay against the ground, and its teeth were white and threatening, its coat was a shaggy rough of brown-grey fur. But he knew this animal, he did, and suddenly the ticking paranoia and unease, the sense of missing that had been so close and so near while he'd been here made sense.

"Fenrir?"

He heard the cock of Lestrade's gun as the huge wolf took a single step towards John. Panic rushed his voice in a command.

"No! Don't Shoot! Don't shoot!" He could feel Lestrade's incredulous look from here, but all other awareness was pared away as he stared into the amber eyes, at the wary spark of hope and recognition.
"Fenrir?" He asked this time. Hope burned up his throat. "Fenrir?"

There was a tiny whine, a sweep of a tail, a paw placed hesitantly forward.

"Fuck. Fuck."

John realised that he was sobbing; the sound clear in his voice. The force of it drove him to his knees, Fenrir sinking with him.

"Fenrir. Oh god-"

His arms were around Fenrir's neck; Fenrir's massive head was pushed into his torso. John's own head was bent over, pressing into the thick fur.

"I am so sorry," He said into the solid warmth of his dog's bulk, his wolf's bulk- the truth no longer deniable. "I am so, so, sorry."

Fenrir was here – he was here. John didn't know how, or when, or why. His mind struggled with the impossibility of it before he stopped trying and focused only on the shaggy warmth of Fenrir, the way Fenrir's ribs pushed out under his fingers. It seemed so surreal. But if this was another hallucination, he didn't want to wake up from him. It would kill him. It would hurt too much.

Fenrir pawed desperately at him, and the almost painful rake of claws against his thigh convinced him it was not.

The wolf's noises of happiness were infectious, and John began to laugh through his tears- the emotion brought about by something unnameable – an edge of incredulous mania to his sorrow. Fenrir nudged his muzzle up to bathe the tears away from John's face, and it felt a little like benediction.

"John." That was Lestrade, a humming line of tension in his voice, "care to explain why you are cuddling a massive wolf?"

John swallowed back the sobs, scrubbed a hand over his face, and turned to face the others in the hollow. Fenrir fell automatically to his side, and he let a hand fall to Fenrir's shoulders to ground himself.

"This is Fenrir," He said, "I found him in Afghanistan; when I was discharged they must have found him, or kept him."

"You were a dog handler," Sherlock said, "That was your dog?"

"Yes," He said. "That's not a dog, John," interjected Lestrade, "That's a wolf. How the fuck did you use a wolf in the army? Okay?"

The question was difficult, not because the answer wasn't easy – as the answer was easy - but because John had spent so long living in those moments of sand and heat, and had so many complex emotions tied into those memories.

About to explain it, John was interrupted by Henry's exclamation of, "So there was a hound!"

All heads turned as Henry, no longer forgotten, broke into a hysterical laugh, swinging around from Franklin to Sherlock, to John and Fenrir, "There was a hound!"
"Don't be stupid boy," Franklin barked, "It's only been there less than a year. That thing never saw the outside of the facility – too busy wrapped in tests and cages – animals lack finesse. Chemicals are clean."

Sherlock did not listen to Franklin, and he laid John and Fenrir to the side as he grabbed Henry and dragged him over to dead dog that Fenrir had killed. Henry fought him at every step and Fenrir's head swung to follow his process.

"Look at it Henry – it's an ordinary dog, a dog. John's pet aside – there was no hound."

The man's trembling stilled as he stared at the broken body on the forest floor, stark truth dawning. He didn't look at Fenrir, who stood as an imposing other at John's side, but instead heaved a strangled cry and flung himself at Franklin.

"Why didn't you just kill me?!"

Fenrir snarled low in his throat, but John's hand on his ruff restrained him. The minute trembling of his muscles vibrated up into John's hand, leaving them with false tremors and the primal thrill of barely checked aggression thrumming in his chest.

Lestrade pulled Henry off Franklin to Sherlock's explanations of why, logical and sickly admiring, "Because dead men get listened to! He needed to do more than kill you, he needed to discredit you. He had to discredit every word you ever said about your father, and he had the means right at his feet. A chemical minefield! Pressure pads in the ground dosing you up every time that you came back here. Murder weapon, scene of the crime, all at once."

Sherlock was soliloquizing, John realised, overdone with admiration of other geniuses.

"Thank you, Henry,"

And just when John had thought the man was gaining some measure of, oh, understanding? Humanity? – but – Christ, Sherlock, timing.

"No, no, it's okay," Henry turned to face all of them, "because this means my dad was right, he found something out – and he found you, right in the middle of an experiment."

Henry spat the words out, and John left Fenrir's side to body block him, just in case the man tried to beat Franklin into the ground again.

That was when there was a horrific noise and their heads turned. The dog was scrabbling at the ground, a feral snarl frothed in his mouth. John and Lestrade swung their guns defensively but Fenrir got there first. His jaw clamped down on the dog's throat and he shook it viciously. A horrific snap of breaking spine cracked out and the dog was finally silent.

In their distraction, Franklin slipped away- dashing through the dark wood with a reckless turn of desperation.

"Franklin!"

They scrambled after him, slowed down by the uneven ground. Roots and shadowed dips and rabbit holes threatened treachery, dark knots making to break ankles with each footfall. After John tripped the second time, Fenrir stayed beside him, catching John with his bulk whenever John stumbled. Fenrir could've very easily caught Franklin, pressed him into the ground, jaws a palpable threat around the man's throat, but John did not order him away and Fenrir stayed at his side.
They reached Franklin just in time to see him clamber over a barbed wire fence into the minefield, glance back over his shoulder once and let the mine he'd stepped on activate.

The explosion was a burst of acrid light and left them blinking away the retina burn.

*Fuck.*

The clean-up was, fortunately, none of John's or Sherlock's business. Lestrade was the poor sod who got to deal with the paperwork, explanations, and other bits of bureaucracy that blown up scientists required. Henry was dropped at his house where he promised to A) give John the money, and B) get himself to a psychiatrist.

John was glad to leave Henry there, because Fenrir, who'd loped beside the Jeep on the trip there, was then able to cram himself in the back of the car for the ride to the B&B. It was quiet trip back; John crooked an arm behind his seat so Fenrir can press the comforting warmth of his muzzle into John's hand.

"So, he's staying then," Sherlock said.

"Yes," John said firmly as Sherlock's jaw jutted forward into a vague approximation of mulish displeasure.

"I don't like dogs."

"Sherlock," there was a shade of bite in John's voice, "he's staying."

Sherlock's response was a huffed out *Fine*, but he didn't fight so John knew that it wasn't really a problem.

In the distance, the warm lights of the village were almost absurdly peaceful, a cheery twinkle against the dark night. All John looked forward to was the prospect of a comfy bed, Fenrir sleeping beside him, and an undisturbed sleep without Sherlock perched on a chair muttering things about the case like some damned noisy murder gremlin. Sherlock didn't say anything, but John could tell by the restrained yawn and unnatural stiffness of his shoulders that he needed to sleep too.

It wasn't that late when they reached the B&B, but thankfully no guests were up in the lounge and Fenrir was able to slip up into their room without being noticed. The wolf was a large and looming presence in the relatively small room, and John felt slightly guilty that there wasn't a place for Fenrir to sleep but the floor.

"Sorry Fenrir," he explained, "when we get to London I'll sort you out."

He received a nudge of Fenrir's nose, as if the wolf was saying 'that's okay', before Fenrir lowered himself on the carpet beside John's bed with a sigh and watched John got ready for bed.

Sherlock of course just flung his coat onto the chair, kicked off his shoes and fell onto his bed with a fine disregard for bedtime conventions. John took a little longer, but when he did climb under the sheets with was with a grateful sigh as the screaming tension in his muscles unknotted somewhat.

He lowered one hand over the edge of the mattress so it could just brush the warmth of Fenrir's bulk, and let himself drift to sleep. For once since he'd last seen Fenrir, he slept without an edge of disquiet. He was content with Fenrir back beside him once more.
Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all of your reviews, please please, they give me so much motivation and I love hearing them. They are the highlight of my day when I hear them.

As always, if you'd like authors comments, outtakes, and meta, just ask and I will deliver. (srsly I love them)

I have a pintrest Board for this story! - tiggytag/if-the-wolf-then-the-man/

So this was it, the reunion. Everything i've written has led up to here - i hope you've enjoyed it so far, and I hope you'll enjoy where i'll take it. Also, i'm here for story and plot ideas, Especially for Reichenbark Falls bc I am STUCK.
Loki had looked, fates curse him. He had looked but to no avail. Fenrir was as good as lost to him.

All Loki's shrouds of shadows and magic – ever helpful in the past – were now actively working against him. He couldn't even follow the threads of his own magic; he'd drawn it down in runes, anchored them to Fenrir's own strength thus rendering them without a tie to him. It had been a fine idea at the time; potent protection for Fenrir should anything happen to Loki, but he regretted not leaving Fenrir with a tie for him to follow. All things in hindsight. If he'd not been so rushed when he'd set Fenrir free, perhaps he would have thought of it- but that was the past. There was no turning back. There was no regretting.

Brooding, Loki sat on the steps of his father's antechambers and waited for his father and brother to appear. His father had sent them both a summons, requesting that they come to see him today. It was, Loki thought with an edge of bitterness, just like father to keep them waiting and just like Thor to be late.

The sweep of Asguard unfolded out in a gleaming vista before him. The golden spires, elegant gleam of floating architecture, and the dark breaks in the land where the rock dropped into deep rushing canyons, fell away to the edge of Asguard's waters where the bifrost road arrowed out in a shimmering line.

He raised his face to the morning sun, staring out past it's warm light and into dark glitter of space with its shadow moons.

Fenrir might be lost somewhere but at least he wasn't trapped, chained to a rock until the end of his life.

Heavy footsteps echoed down the hall and Loki stood gracefully to watch his father and Thor approach. They walked side-by-side and there was a look on Thor's face, and on Odin's face, that made Loki's insides swoop with suspicion and a hot gorge of emotion that he refused to label.

"Thor. Father," He said, smiling graciously at them.

"Loki," Odin nodded at him but didn't greet him properly. His gaze sidelined Loki, centred on Thor. Odin stood with a strange expression in the corners of his face: twofold fatherly pride and kingly concern.

Loki had not seen such an expression on his father's face many times before.
"Brother!"

Thor was – Thor was -

Loki was unsure of what Thor was, and it unsettled him. The morning light caught in the strands of Thor's golden hair and shone on his skin until it seemed to come from within him. The lift to his jaw was set with a pride, that while not unusual, seemed elevated and triumphant, as if the wellspring of his ego has found newer more conceited depths.

There was a rattle somewhere around Loki's wrists, like his hands were shaking and with it his bracers. Loki stilled them. His fingers were held half open in loose cradles.

"I did not know we were to meet earlier," Loki said smoothly, "you should have retrieved me."

The pride dampened on Odin's face, the wisdom lines around his eyes sagged a little deeper, but Loki didn't notice; Thor was smiling, Thor was lifting his jaw and smiling.

"Loki! You look upon your future king!"

Something inside him, that he didn't like thinking on and he'd tucked into the dark recesses of his chest, cracked a little. Dark betrayal slipped into that crack, like pieces fitting neatly together, warped edges making sense in the twist of another. Thor's voice was an echoing sound gone distant.

"… we shall be throwing a feast tonight to celebrate father's decision!"

Thor's heavy hand clapped down on Loki's shoulder, beaming at him.

Thor was radiant. Thor was wearing the light in his hair like a king's mantle. The sun blessed him; the golden prince. The shining son.

"Congratulations brother," He smiled, and it was knife thin. "It appears that tonight you shall be held in the place of honour... Future King."

He was Loki Lie-Smith. Silver-tongued Loki. His face betrayed nothing of his thoughts.

Chapter End Notes

If you liked it let me know! You want extra scenes, authors notes? I LOVE giving them, so hmu! & send me your ideas bc i'm still Stuck.

Thanks so much for your lovely messages - i've got the next chapter and a bit written up, please keep sending me your story ideas. It's been a lil' crazy for me, but i've got some stuff on the broil.

Check out my pinterest board for this fic! - www.pinterest.com/tiggytag/if-the-wolf-then-the-man/
The rattle of gunfire.

Scorched flesh – someone screaming. A hoarse edge of panic bellowed deep from the branches of lungs-and-bloody-gut.

Someone was shaking him.

“John! John! Stay with- John!”

John couldn’t yell. The pressure built somewhere up in the thick of his throat.

Something cold-wet, hot-damp, nudged insistently at him.

John shuddered up with a jerk. Limbs tugged on wild muscle strings so they flew about, stopping only when they met thick warm fur. His fingers hooked in tight, gripping as he breathed hard.

Fenrir whined softly, almost imperceptibly, as he pressed his head up against John’s face.

Curling his fingers in tighter, John forced his breath to a measured count – in for four and out for eight- matching it to Sherlock’s soft snores from the bed over.

“I’m okay,” he said quietly, brushing one hand over Fenrir’s head. “You woke me, it’s okay.”

His hand shook with a faint tremor of pulse.

Fenrir nudged his nose over the flat of John’s cheek softly, as if to check. His eyes glinted in the light eerily, unmistakeably wolfish. Considering all that had happened yesterday with the hallucinated hound and the real dog, Fenrir’s eyes, steady and watchful, were still comforting.

John murmured nonsense to Fenrir, more for his own sake than the wolf’s.

“Good boy, Fen’. Good boy, hey? Hey, ‘Rir?”

John huffed another sigh, a purge of nightmares, and laid back down again. He stared up at the ceiling with one hand on his belly to measure his breathing and the other stroking softly over Fenrir’s head, which the wolf was resting beside him.

Fenrir’s golden gaze was steady and his ears were half pricked.

‘You’ve got the watch, huh?’ John said quietly.
At Fenrir’s affirmative huff of breath, John echoed him with a sigh that came deep from the centre of his lungs. It was a breath he’d held so long that exhaling it was a bone deep relief; a feeling of both unbearable weight and total lightness of being. John allowed the mattress to cup his body and let himself sleep. Fenrir had the watch and John felt completely safe in a way that he hadn’t since he’d left Afghanistan.

His fingers carding through Fenrir’s ruff got slower with the heaviness of sleep as eventually he succumbed entirely to unconsciousness. Even then, Fenrir did not move. He stayed sitting by John’s bed; his head down beside John’s hand, his ears twitching and pricking to whatever sound that caught his attention. Only once did he lift his head to look out the window in direction of the moor. Otherwise he was a huge, steady, bulk against the brace of John’s sleep; a watcher in the night.

Eventually, the morning slipped under the blinds and cool Dartmoor light touched John’s face as he came to a slow wakefulness. It was the sort of coming-to where John was chiefly aware of nothing but his sleepy mind and sense of subsumed thought before his body, warm, settled, came to. When he finally rolled onto his side and opened his eyes, Fenrir’s face was the first thing he saw. The wolf’s eyes were lidded sleepily and a soft thump of his tail sounded against the floor as he wagged it once. John gave him a lazy smile.

A soft snore from the other bed indicated that Sherlock was still asleep and John glanced at the little bedside clock. He winced when he saw the time; there were about five hours until check-out and Sherlock would sleep for four of them. A sudden and unpleasant thought struck John then – something that only now, after all the terror and confusion of the night before, could be realised properly. Somehow, Fenrir had found him and the only way he could have done that if he’d been in the area – and the only reason John could think of as to why Fenrir hadn’t found him earlier was because he’d been locked up somewhere. The most likely and most gut wrenching reason for both was that Fenrir had been at Baskerville and had only escaped last night.

If that were the case, and John’s cold, creeping, gut told him it was, then they were most likely looking for Fenrir right now. They’d start with the surrounding area first, then the woods, then the police – Lestrade, who’d seen Fenrir – and eventually catch up to Fenrir with John himself.

An animal Fenrir’s size couldn’t be hidden. It would only take one word, one photo, one twitter post, one newspaper article in a tabloid and they’d take Fenrir away.

That was, John knew with a fierce resolve, not an option. Every iota of John went hot and cold at the thought. Fenrir had done his service – more than done it – and it was only because of John that he’d done it in the first place. Fenrir was not a lab rat. He was not for their experiments. He was John’s brother in arms, his staunchest ally; his family. John would not let anything or anyone separate him from Fenrir ever again.

No, Fenrir couldn’t be hidden. But he could be protected. John would protect Fenrir for the rest of his life and beyond, even if it meant that John had to make a deal with the devil himself.

Even as these thoughts ran though his head, John was already moving to shuck on his clothes. He left the room with Fenrir and made their way down the silent corridor and past the empty foyer outside to an enclosed area. As he moved to sit down on a wooden bench, his hand opened his phone and scrolled to an unmarked number. The dial tone rang, the call connected, and someone picked up.

‘Hello, Mycroft,’ John said.

Mycroft might not be the devil but he could possibly prove worse.
John was willing to take that risk.

Mycroft leaned forward in his chair listening intently to the man who’d called him. It was an unusually early time for the caller, but Mycroft burned the candle at both ends and the caller knew this. Anthea stood attentively by his shoulder with her head cocked to his listening hum. That Mycroft had picked up the phone himself, and that it was a direct line to his phone and not hers, was interesting enough that she stood to attention by his side.

Then came a pause in the caller’s explanation for his call.

‘Before anything, I need to know: did you keep him from me?’

Pausing to gather a reply that had the gravitas to soothe John Watson’s growing ire, Mycroft replied, ‘To answer – if I had known? Would I have told you? Perhaps. But contrary to what my brother claims, I do not know every detail about what happens at research facilities and Baskerville is not the only one within Great Britain. The military can be particularly tight lipped about what they do that involves…’ here he paused and lent a certain weight to his next words, ‘experimental subjects.’

At John’s warning sound of ‘Mycroft…’ he had to restrain a small sigh. ‘But what you’re currently asking for, Mr Watson, is not whether I knew but whether I’m willing to overlook Fenrir’s presence on behalf of anyone and any group searching for him, is that right?’

John’s stiff silence on the line indicated he was correct, but Mycroft waited until John replied.

‘Can you do it?’ John finally said.

‘I can provide the protection you require,’ Mycroft affirmed.

‘From media, the government, and the military?’ John asked.

John was being unusually through in his questioning – something that only piqued Mycroft’s interest further.

‘From any interest, from any party,’ Mycroft confirmed. At John’s sharp blow of breath, Mycroft warned, ‘But, it has a price and rest assured John, I will come to collect that price from you.’

‘I want a written contract,’ John said grimly.

Mycroft smiled. ‘Done. My assistant will be around with the details when you return from Dartmoor.’

‘Fine.’ There was a hesitation on the other side of the line. ‘Fenrir is not the price,’ John said firmly, ‘He’s not an experiment or a thing – he’s not to be treated as such.’

‘Mr Watson,’ Mycroft said, his voice purposely mild, ‘that would completely defeat the purpose of your little bargain, wouldn’t it?’ He paused long enough for his comment to register, but not long enough that John could splutter a reply before he said, ‘Good day, Mr Watson.’
He hung up and placed the phone down on the desk with a soft click of metal on dark mahogany.

‘Anthea,’ Mycroft said, leaning back in his chair, ‘I need something drawn up.’

Anthea, perfect embodiment of efficiency, cocked her head further to show she was listening and bought her phone up to take notes.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘of course.’

John hung up the phone with a strange feeling of reassurance that clashed uneasily with worry. It left an uneasy swill in his stomach. He rolled the heel of his left hand up and down his bad leg feeling a tremor, or perhaps the thought of a tremor, work its way out of the muscle.

For better or worse, Fenrir would be protected – and if Mycroft reneged John would kill the slimy bastard himself.

As if Fenrir knew that John was thinking about him, the wolf shouldered his way out of some bushes and went over to John where he wormed his big head under John’s arm for a scratch. John obliged and was glad to have something for his hands to do. They sat like that for a little while, enjoying the warm sun bathing their corner of the garden in light while they waited for Sherlock to wake up.

It was just before they left when John was met by a surprise that, while not unwelcome, wasn’t exactly comforting either. Mycroft’s protections, it seemed, extended from even before John had signed their damn agreement; a black van had rolled up to the B&B shortly after he’d called the taxi service to ask where their unarrived cab was. The driver, an unmemorable woman explained that ‘her employer’ had decided that travelling on a train with a massive animal was not particularly non-descript and that she’d be driving Sherlock, John, and Fenrir home.

‘Don’t worry, John, she’s from my brother,’ Sherlock spat distastefully as he ascended into the van as if it were a bloody crystal carriage and not a people mover with blacked out windows and some removed seats. Fenrir, who’d somehow managed to avoid being seen by anyone thus far, made the van creak as he jumped in after John. There was enough room in the van that Fenrir could stretch out somewhat and he did so, settling comfortably on his belly with his head right next to John’s leg. As the van pulled away, the woman telling them that they’d stop halfway through the drive for a fifteen-minute break but otherwise they’d go straight to London, all three settled in the back in for a long drive. Sherlock pulled his coat firmly around himself and set about falling into a doze, only waking partway through the journey after the fifteen-minute pit stop.

‘Okay, I’ve waited long enough,’ Sherlock said as John jerked to attention, ‘tell me.’

There was only one thing he was demanding to know and John sighed, shifting in his seat. He settled himself and began to tell Sherlock everything that he didn’t already know – or deduced – already. He told the story the way Sherlock would appreciate most; facts, detail, straight forward and to the point. Sherlock didn’t interrupt after the first time he tried and John had had fixed him
with a steely look.

John skipped over the messy details; the blood and the fear – the way he’d made the wolf his touchstone, how he’d been thinking of leaving the army but he didn’t and couldn’t after Fenrir had officially become part of the military. He didn’t talk about the hole it’d left in him after he’d made Fenrir escape. He didn’t talk about his last op with his squad, only said that he owes Fenrir his life – that he owes Fenrir for his life more times that he cares to think about.

Finally, once he had finished the whole damn tale, he said, ‘I don’t know how they found him, but I guess they must have – took him to Baskerville.’ He shrugged and spread his hands out, ‘and that’s it Sherlock.’

‘Yes, but that doesn’t explain *what* it is.’ Sherlock said impatiently.

John couldn’t help stiffening a little, ‘What do you mean, what he is?’

‘You said it yourself, John. Fenrir’s unusual – it’s much larger than any wolf, and its physical characteristics don’t match the morphology of any other canine species – which begs the obvious-’

‘Sherlock,’ John interrupted, ‘if it looks like a wolf, and howls like a wolf, it’s a bloody wolf even if it’s a bloody large wolf. Besides,’ he said, shrugging, ‘I don’t even know where he came from; I found him in the middle of a firefight in Afghanistan cut up to hell. Aside from that, I don’t know, okay?’

‘But aren’t you even a little curious, John?’ Sherlock said. The look on his face made John glower.

‘No, you are not bloody well doing any experiments on him, Sherlock,’ he started.

‘But aren’t – ’

‘I mean it Sherlock, none,’ John said firmly.

Sulking in his seat, Sherlock said, ‘Your unwillingness to want to know does speak of an unscientific mind.’

‘Sherlock, I just got him from an army R&D facility where they did god knows what to him, I’m not letting anyone do any tests on him – no, not even you.’

‘Fine,’ Sherlock said, then petulantly, ‘Mrs Hudson’s going to throw a fit when you try to bring it in.’

‘I’ll deal with that,’ John replied firmly.

‘It’s going to get in the way.’

Implacable, John said, ‘He’ll earn his keep.’

Argument obviously unwinnable, Sherlock muttered something in return as he folded his coat over himself and pretended to fall asleep again. Restraining a sigh, John slipped one hand down to ruffle Fenrir’s sleepy, droopy ears, before he began typing up notes for his next case blog post. The matter was dealt with. Sherlock would respect that, would have to respect it. No science. No experiments.
Hey friends, sorry this has been so long but you know how it its; you run into writers block, you run into uni work, a new job, family shite, and mental health issues and next minute it's been months. I can say that all your comments, and follows have really spurred me into keeping this story happening. So I'm here, keep commenting because that's how i know you're still here for this.
After Baskerville

Chapter Notes

So uh, it's been a while friends. I'm not dead, this fic is still (somehow!) alive. Happy 2020!

TW: None for this chapter. (As always, please correct me if I've overlooked a needed TW).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fenrir stared darkly at the kitchen where John’s pack-mate, Sherlock, kept his stinging chemicals. Huffing out an explosive sneeze of air to clear his nose, Fenrir stalked over to lie at John’s feet and deliberately turned his back on the mess.

The lab had been full of stinging-chemical-plastic-acid-poison. The white coats and their poking-prodding-pain-tests had never been far away from them. Even now, Fenrir could not escape it. Sherlock was tall-sharp-chemical-nicotine and his eyes tested every tiny detail. Fenrir could feel that gaze no matter where he was. It was annoying.

The man looked at everything, like the white coats did, like idiot-Tony did except idiot-Tony had burned and worked and needed Fenrir to ground him. Whereas that stinging-chemical-nicotine Annoyance was simply exhausting. Sherlock would swing wildly; as like to cut at Fenrir’s attempt to ground him – if Fenrir ever made that attempt – than to be grounded by it.

Sherlock did not like Fenrir and Fenrir didn’t trust Sherlock, so Fenrir played twice as dumb as he was; dumb as any other dog Fenrir had ever crossed paths with.

If it weren’t for John, Fenrir would’ve done something about it long ago. It was only because the Annoyance was John’s packmate that Fenrir restrained himself to a disdainful curl of the lip at him.

He huffed to himself as he stretched out on the plush rug on the floor by John’s feet. The radiator pushed a little heat at him and he shifted in place, enjoying the warmth and quiet. The Annoyance wasn’t there and Fenrir was enjoying the evening’s peace. John was eating Chinese takeout for dinner and if Fenrir was lucky, John would give him the leftovers without the Annoyance getting any.

Except- there it was, the slam of a taxi door, then the front door. He was back. Fenrir sighed again in resignation but refused to move from his comfortable position as the Annoyance’s feet slammed up the stairs.

It had been such a nice evening too.
‘Stop glaring at him Sherlock,’ John said calmly to Sherlock, who’d just come in to the unit. ‘He’s not going anywhere and it’s not helping. It’s been a month – shouldn’t you be over this by now?’

‘I’m not glaring,’ Sherlock snapped. Tearing his gaze from where he’d definitely been glaring at Fenrir, he went back to texting rapidly on his phone. ‘Besides, he’s staring at me. Staring is a sign of dominance in canines. I googled it, John, googled it.’ Sherlock repeated, as if to reinforce the fact that he’d had to stoop to google for information.

‘You’ve never owned a dog have you,’ John sighed, wishing that Sherlock would just give it a rest already. The man had barely been home two minutes for Christ-sakes.

John prodded at the Chinese takeout dinner with his fork. The sweet-and-sour pork had started to congeal in the box; the sticky sauce clumping in a distinctly jelly-like fashion. ‘Are you going to eat any of this?’

‘Don’t ask stupid questions,’ Sherlock said.

John took that as a no.

‘Knock, knock!’ Mrs Hudson called, her voice echoing up the hall as two sets of feet clomped up the stairs. ‘Boys! I’ve got Detective Lestrade here,’

Fenrir, who had been lying quietly on lounge, jumped off and went to the door wagging his tail as the door opened and Mrs Hudson poked her head through.

‘Hello Fenrir, hello lovely boy’ she cooed as Fenrir prodded his nose into her hand for ear rubs. ‘have you been good? Of course, you’ve been good, lovely boy. I’ve got a bone for you if you’re around tonight. A big one from the butcher, yes! John,’ she said straightening up, ‘I’ve got a bone for Fenrir if you’re around tonight.’

Fenrir wiggled his head under her hand as she spoke to him – the shameless beast.

‘Thanks Mrs Hudson,’ John replied, collecting his plates, ‘I’m sure Fenrir will slink by your flat later on before your show’s on.’ He restrained a small smile at the sight of Fenrir turning Mrs Hudson into a puddle of bone gifting goo. The wolf had very quickly wormed his way into her good graces after Mrs Hudson’s initial tremulous quails about his size, his fur, and his smell. The way he carried her shopping up the stairs whenever she had some might’ve had something to do with it; very neatly between his teeth with no slobber at all – the brownnoser.

‘Lestrade, Mrs Hudson,’ Sherlock said shortly. ‘Let him in.’

‘Oh yes, well.’ Mrs Hudson said as Fenrir lingered for one last pat before stepping back and out of the way. Unlike Mrs Hudson, Lestrade was not given anything other than a cool stare of acknowledgement as Fenrir retreated to sit at John’s side.

‘I’ll leave you boys too it, then.’ Mrs Hudson said and promptly retreated down the stairs.

‘If you want my help with a case, I’ve already got one.’ Sherlock said, whipping himself up off the chair.

Lestrade ignored Sherlock, looking at John and Fenrir with a considering eye.

‘A kid’s been taken,’ Lestrade said. ‘We know they’re in London’s underground tunnels, but they
Sherlock shot Lestrade a sharp, stunned, look. ‘Oh, don’t tell me you want the dog’s help.’

‘John…’ Lestrade started, ‘In the army, exactly how good of a tracker was Fenrir?’

John couldn’t restrain his grin. ‘Very good.’

Lestrade nodded to himself whilst in the background Sherlock looked positively murderous.

‘It’ll take longer than I want before our tracker dogs can make it out here. John, would you…’

‘Of course,’ John said, ‘It’ll be good to work a job again.’

Despite himself (a bloody kid being taken was not a cause for celebration), John couldn’t help his excitement. It’d been too long since he and Fenrir had worked together as a team like this.

Fenrir was already waiting at the door by the time John levered himself off the chair; the wolf’s level of understanding was unnerving.

‘I’m coming with you,’ Sherlock said, flinging his scarf back on in a way that managed to communicate just how put out he was.

John had to hide a smile when Fenrir shouldered his way in front of Sherlock as they went down the stairs. Cheeky bugger.

Later, after Fenrir tracked the child and their kidnapper down, Sherlock turned to John and said, ‘I could’ve figured it out.’

‘I know,’ John replied giving Fenrir some well-deserved scratches between the wolf’s shoulder blades, ‘but you’re capable of accepting –’ John broke off when he saw Sherlock’s mutinous stare.

‘You can’t be serious, right?’

‘I just think –’

‘Oh my god.’ John barked a disbelieving laugh. ‘Are you actually jealous? Oh, you are! The great Sherlock Holmes is actually jealous of a – well a – a Fenrir!’

‘Yes. Fine. There’s no need to sound so pleased, John,’ Sherlock said snippily, turning to sweep his coat dramatically and stalk away. ‘It simply feels like cheating, that’s all.’

John had the sense that Sherlock still wasn’t telling him something – there was a deeper cut there – but this was too good to let go.

‘Oh no,’ John replied, hurrying after Sherlock, ‘I’m never letting you hear this end of this - hear that Fenrir, he’s jealous of your nose!’

Fenrir turned his face up to John’s, grinning up at him with a wolfish lolling tongue, as if he was sharing in the joke.

‘Just because my brother fixed you up, doesn’t mean you have to take it everywhere.’ Sherlock retorted.

‘Oh no, I definitely do. Besides Sherlock, didn’t you have a dog as a child? Even I had a dog as a
child.’

Sherlock didn’t even answer, merely strode ahead, coat streaming out behind him.

Sherlock was even more insufferable about Fenrir for the next few days, and John had found the whole thing hysterical – but because Sherlock was his friend and John didn’t make a point of picking at sore points, he didn’t bring it up even when Sherlock got particularly insufferable about the amount of fur Fenrir shed.

It wasn’t long after this that Sherlock’s meteoric rise to notoriety began. Even though John couldn’t complain about the extra income or the fact that Sherlock relished each case with almost manic glee, he began to worry if the media attention would overpower Mycroft’s ability to uphold their deal. It was, after all, hard to keep Fenrir’s true nature quiet. Add to the pressure from Moriarty’s upcoming trial – suffice to say that anxiety worried at him in the dark hours of the night. He would wake to find Fenrir pacing at the foot of his bed, turning in tiny circles, wearing the carpet bare. Then he would call Fenrir up on his bed and stroke the wolf’s soft ears until the both became too exhausted for consciousness.

No. John didn’t like thinking about it, but he couldn’t stop it. That … thing … that he, Sherlock, and Fenrir were riding – that dizzying wave of fame and fortune – was bound to come crashing down.

Of course, when the wave inevitably crashed, not even John could have dreamed of the outcome. When the dust had settled. When the fall happened. No. John had never imagined it ending the way it did.

Nor could he have predicted what followed.

Chapter End Notes

So firstly, I apologise that it's been so long since the last update. This fic has always been something that i've dearly wanted to continue - and it's because of you, all of you, who comment and tell me that they still want to know where this fic will head that I'm even still going. So thank you. Thank you to all the people who still care about John and Fenrir's journey. This chapter, and all the ones that follow, are for you. What's next for John and Fenrir after that cliffhanger? Well, we'll see ;)

Drop me a line; comments and kudos all make my day. You want author's commentary? headcannons? drop me a comment because I love answering them.

End Notes

As always, let me know what you liked, didn't like.
Reviews always make my day, not even kidding.

H.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!