Tea Like Yours

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Tea Like Yours

by Bracket the Indecie

Summary

Sherlock allows John to take him into the realm of feelings and emotions, but this bond is used as a weapon against the detective by Moriarty when he kidnapes John. Sherlock must come to terms with his alien feelings and hope to regain the formidable powers of his mind from the emotional mire in order to save his doctor's life. Runs in tangent with the series; a look at how things might have been with their relationship established after the Blind Banker.
"You're not going," John said with a finality enough to interest Sherlock. He looked up, but did not stop gathering the things he would need.

"You know I won't get anywhere with this case unless I meet them in person, this is the best way to expedite things," he said, perfectly reasonable as ever.

"They why won't you let me go with you?"

"They want to meet me alone, your accompaniment would null our agreement."

"So you plan to meet a bunch of gangsters on your own? Tell me, where's the logic in going out to get shot?" John's anger was rolling off of him in waves. Sherlock gave him a critical look, easily picking up on all the tell-tale signs of anger, but also he saw anxiety; his hands, though clenched, where not fisted as one who was predominantly be angry would be.

"I'm hardly going to get shot, and if I do I'm sure you can tend to the wound," he said nonchalantly, not entirely sure if it was just John's usual misplaced worry for him that was in play here, the man was sending unusual signals, even if he didn't realise it himself. John took in a deep breath at that comment, incensed that Sherlock thought he could rely on John to stitch him up every time he went out and deliberately placed himself in danger; it was like a form of self-harm he could blame on others. He stomped over to the door where the stairs out where behind.

"You're not going," John growled. Sherlock's head snapped up; John had never spoken to him like this. It was the same kind of tone John used to tell people to back off or he was going to shoot them in between the eyes. The man's body was rigid, almost trembling with pent up energy that was currently being put to use in being angry. His eyes were dark and the usual characteristic kindness was completely absent from his face; it was a John that Sherlock did not particularly like.

"Why shouldn't I?" Sherlock challenged him, interested how this behaviour would play out and indignant that John was stopping him from doing something he wanted to do.

"I am not going to sit here and wait for you to come back here bleeding to death," was the response. Sherlock regularly put himself in danger of imminent bodily harm and John had never looked as ferocious as he did now, he wanted to know what had changed. "You go there and they are almost certainly going to kill you."

"You said 'almost', therefore there is a possibility I'll come out of the whole situation unharmed, which is my aim by the way," he said. The angry stance faltered a little before he put his arm out over the door frame.

"I'm not going to let you go out and do something so stupid. Call me selfish all you want, but I'm not letting you do it."

"Selfish'? Interesting lexical choice' Sherlock thought to himself.

"Why not?" Sherlock would ask this question all night if it meant he got a truthful and satisfactory answer from the army doctor, whose face was a little less rigid now.

"You mean too much to me for me to let you do this. Even if you're ok with the risk, I'm not," he said. The confession was almost apologetic - almost. He certainly looked as though he was prepared to use force if necessary.

"I've risked my life before."
"Not like this. This is like walking into a den of starving bears slathered in honey," he said and immediately regretted the analogy. He willed the heat in his cheeks not to be visible to his eagle-eyed friend.

"Interesting simile doctor," he said back, smirking a little to tease John. His interest in meeting the mob had significantly diminished in light of something far more interesting in front of him. John suddenly let out the violent breath he was holding in and he looked around a little awkwardly.

"Pick whichever simile you want, there is another way we can get to these people. I'd prefer not to have to write a eulogy at the end of the week," he said with more pain than he had wanted to let through. Sherlock's eyes darted over John's features: creased worry lines on his face, light perspiration of the anger before, fidgeting hands displaying anxiety, frequent shifting of weight telling of some kind of mental discomfort (it was not physical as he spent equal time on each leg and the change of weight was smooth). His eyes were still dark in the doorway, but when they looked away they looked less angry and more worried. About what, Sherlock couldn't be sure. Was it simply concern for his well-being? Concern for the other person paying rent for this flat? John was his friend and he did his best to reciprocate when he remembered so he was fairly confident the money wasn't a motivating factor. Was he planning to see another girlfriend tonight and didn't want Sherlock's possible-to-likely injuries spoil another date? This man threw up so many questions, the majority of which went unanswered and it not only infuriated Sherlock to a degree, but also kept his interest in his loyal comrade.

"Something else is going on, what is it John?" he asked directly. John looked a little afraid and very self-conscious, realising he had just turned the full beam of Sherlock's powers on himself. His heart began to thump so loudly in his chest he wondered if it would be audible by the fireplace where the detective stood. His hands felt cold as they became sweaty and clammy. He fought to retain control of himself. Sherlock walked towards him, no, stalked towards him, taking in every single piece of him and analysing it; he could almost see a whirr of thoughts above his friend's head.

"I said it before, I don't want you to go out and get killed," he said, now far more uncertain than he was before.

"What's going on? I want to know. I won't stop until I find the answer, John, you know me." Sherlock was predatory and right up close to his face now, his eyes not hiding their glances all over him. John knew he had cornered himself. Dammit! He cursed his protective nature. He knew he had to be honest, after all, Sherlock would instantly detect the moment he lied and then the spotlight would get brighter and hotter if possible. Right now he could feel Sherlock's steady breath on him as he was analysed.

"I don't think I could take it if you were seriously hurt, or even killed, as is likely in this case by the way, and I wasn't there to try and prevent something like that," he said, hoping that what he said was enough, though he could already see Sherlock meticulously going through everything John did not say in that instance.

"There's something you're not telling me, something that is important enough for you to consider using force to keep me in." Damn the man was persistent, couldn't he tell John didn't want to say anymore? Of course he could, he was just demanding an answer anyway.

"I care, Sherlock, I care a lot," he murmured and gave in. He touched Sherlock's close by hand with his own, his fingers just ghosting over those cold, long fingers and holding loosely his first two digits. Unsure, he looked up at Sherlock who leaned back, eyes wide and white, his eyebrows up into his hair. Without a word he turned heel sharply enough to whip John's leg with his coat and almost ran into his bedroom. John's whole figure sank as he heard the door shut assertively and the
lock click across with a definite finality. There, Sherlock had, by the mere intensity of his stare, forced John to reveal his hand, or in this case, his heart. The feelings were still only in their infancy, he had only been aware of them for the past few weeks, but when he thought about it he knew they had stretched on back far more than just a few weeks. He realised it when he had last been contacted by Sarah for a date, with the promise of going back to hers for the night and he had found himself declining in favour of sitting reading in the living room while Sherlock was composing. He was so comfortable in his seat, in that situation with his friend that he didn't want to move for the world. He had met up with Sarah two weeks ago for lunch and called things off between them, and since they had not really had chance to get serious, she was good natured about it, if not disappointed and professional at the surgery.

His heart was still beating loudly, almost painfully. He decided he didn't want to be around in case Sherlock came out any time soon and so retreated into his own room upstairs, trying to read the last BMJ that he was halfway through. Predictably, he didn't get far and resorted to lying on his back in the increasing dark, the journal on his chest, open at the page he was on, his hands behind his head and staring at the artexing above him. He couldn't shake the feeling of sickness roiling in his stomach that seemed to infect his whole throat, and so, absorbed in his thoughts about what exactly he had just done, hours passed. It was late at night and the hunger had turned to light pain and John decided he wouldn't be a prisoner in his own home just for being honest about his own feelings, no matter how inconvenient they were. Surely Sherlock, with all the formidable mental powers at his disposal, would simply be able to act as though this never happened? He would either delete the scene from his 'hard-drive' or pigeon hole it as an aspect of John Watson not necessary for every-day recall, especially since John wasn't going to be pushy about it.

Feeling his limbs far too heavy for one so hungry, he trudged down the stairs, but lightened his step the closer he got to the landing, deciding that while he would not be a prisoner, he was not going to announce to Sherlock that he was on the other side of his door. He pulled a few things from the fridge to make a sandwich, feeling that's all he had the energy to make and that if he didn't eat soon his stomach would begin to eat him from the inside out.

Sherlock, possibly inevitably, did not emerge from his room that night. John considered knocking on the door to try and talk to him, but thought better of it. He did a little apologetic tidying in their living room, carefully restoring the violin and bow to its case and leaving it in Sherlock's chair. He went up to bed and hoped that somehow everything would be back to normal and Sherlock would have deleted the memory.

Of course not. John woke late in the morning, surprised to find no sign Sherlock had been up and around in the night as he usually was. The door through the kitchen remained shut. John frowned. This was a little ridiculous, there was no point Sherlock being angry about his confession. John briefly wondered if it has scared his friend off, but quickly thought better of it; Sherlock was more likely to sneer and rebuke him sharply before dashing off on his stupid suicide mission before that. He knocked on the door.

"Sherlock? Are you ok? Look, I'm sorry about what I said last night, I wasn't thinking straight. I know you probably don't want to talk about it, but could you at least stop hiding from me?" he said through the door. It wasn't as though John had propositioned him or anything. His companion was taking this far too far. Big surprise. No answer. John thought about knocking again, or banging harder, but felt he would resort to that later if the detective was still being silly. So the mundane day began, he washed, he dressed, he loaded the dishwasher. He dedicated his day to writing up the next chapter of his blog and was fast at work when a very dishevelled Sherlock emerged from his room and darted towards the bathroom before John could even say 'good morning, or afternoon now'. The pipes rattled in the walls as the boiler fired up and began pumping hot water through them towards the bathroom. John made a face in annoyance, he hated being ignored by a friend, especially as
Sherlock was keeping away from him in case he might catch something. His fingers fell still. He was too distracted by the sudden continuation of his thoughts from last night to press the keys in some kind of order. He had not written another line by the time Sherlock had emerged from the bathroom, and he had time enough to see the lithe man rush across the hall, towelling his sodden hair and lock himself back in his room. John's hands fist ed in annoyance. He really hoped Sherlock would grow up soon and talk to him, or at least break this silence. Sadness inevitably followed this anger and John slumped in his seat. Where his feelings really that unwelcome? So repulsive to the other man? If anything, he expected Sherlock to show a fleeting scientific interest in the notion of John's feelings, not this 'Johnny's got cooties' behaviour.

An hour later his temper, once again, got the better of him and he was determined to have this out one way or another with Sherlock. Dammit, he didn't want to be blanked out like he didn't exist, or avoided as though he carried Plague.

"Dammit, Sherlock!" he shouted, knocking on the door. "You can't just shut me out, for the love of...just come out and talk to me," he said. "Even if it's to tell me to get out," he added in a much quieter voice. He heard a shuffling of activity inside and the lock on the door clicked, the door opening abruptly. John blinked. Sherlock towered over him, the shower-fresh smell disorienting the smaller man for a moment and the fact that Sherlock was in his sharpest clothes, a black casual suit with a dark amethyst shirt. His hair was sleek and perfectly styled as though he had just emerged from a salon. Now it made sense when John thought he heard a hairdryer earlier. Was Sherlock going out or something?

"You're right, doctor, we have to talk right now," he said with energetic abruptness and quickly ushered the confused man to the front room and after moving his violin he all but jumped into his chair. He didn't appear to be in a bad mood then. Maybe he was excited at a chance to explore and document John's feelings out of scientific interest. That didn't explain the level of personal grooming and the suit that looked irrationally good on him. John hadn't really expected this from Sherlock and was at a loss to things to say, none of the discussions he had had in his head had ever taken this possibility into account. They mostly involved Sherlock distancing himself unbearably from John, telling him he should find somewhere else to live, or curtly reminding his was not interested in any kind of romantic relationship and carrying as normal because he wouldn't let something like that bother him.

"So?" he asked, thinking it might be best for Sherlock to take the lead in this. On second thoughts that was possibly a terrible idea, but the word had already escaped his mouth and Sherlock's cupid bow lips were moving before he had chance to try a different tactic.

"When did you discover this?" he asked, a little too eagerly for John's liking, he could imagine Sherlock logging it all away to write in one of the journals of his experiments. His stomach churned at the thought of being Sherlock's lab-rat he tried not to express it with a grimace.

"Probably a few weeks ago," he said. Honesty might have got him into this mess, but seeing as how Sherlock didn't actually seem to be in a bad mood he knew lying would get him into real trouble. Besides, the confession was out, what else did he have to lose at this point? It's not like Sherlock afforded him much in the way of personal dignity anyway.

"That's not an answer!" Sherlock snapped, but not in bad-temper. "Dates, times, precision, John; haven't I taught you anything about the need for accuracy?" he sighed dramatically, throwing his head back for good effect. John was fighting between being really annoyed at Sherlock's shameless analysis of some of his most precious emotions and being really distracted by the way the fabric of his clothes moved with him and the exposure of his white throat during his dramatic gesture.
"We...I...It's not just something you can put a date stamp on, feelings don't work like that," he said, uncomfortably.

"Then tell me how they do work." Sherlock was leaning forward again, practically inhaling the information as soon as it passed out of John's mouth.

"They build up over time so you don't really notice them at first until you just realise one day they're really strong and that's the way you feel," he explained, wondering where all this was going and when Sherlock was going to stop making him share. Sherlock nodded eagerly.

"And what was the trigger for you realisation in this instance? There had to be some sort of event that you realised your feelings were as powerful as they were." John scowled.

"When I said we had to talk, this isn't exactly what I had in mind," he said, refusing to let Sherlock bully in the data out of him with his staring, piercing eyes.

"What did you expect? That I would suddenly become all gooey and swoon into your arms?" he retaliated acerbically. A small part of him inside cringed, he did not mean to be so sharp; he was not used to having to temper his responses in respect to another person's unfathomable feelings.

"No!" John said, shaking his head in annoyance. "I suppose I largely expected you to tell me to either move out of Baker Street or that had no interest in such things and continue with your head in the fridge, or whatever you've got in there at the moment."

"Eyes."

"What?" John asked, confused.

"There are eyes in the fridge at this moment, the head went some time ago."

"Right," he said, thinking he should say something to carry on their conversation, but nothing came to mind in that moment. There was a silent moment.

"So, what triggered this?" Sherlock tried again. John tried not to look too exasperated.

"What does it matter?"

"Indulge me." John fought for control of his reaction in that moment. If he didn't know better he could have sworn that Sherlock had deliberately asked him such a question in what could only be described as his sex voice. It made John have to concentrate to keep his breathing at a sensible and even pace. Judging by the smug look on Sherlock's face he had done it deliberately. Bastard.

"I had an offer from Sarah a few weeks ago, she wanted to go out on another date and said we could go back to her place, but I realised that I'd rather stay here." There he said it, in as much a dignified and even voice as possible.

"Were we working on a case, because our adventures do seem to be far more interesting than your dates." John bit his tongue to stop the rebuke.

"No, I was reading and you were composing, in a particularly foul mood if I remember," he said. This answer seemed to have surprised Sherlock, because he leaned back in his seat, the purple shirt shimmering in the light over his skin and a curious expression of 'processing...processing...' on his face. John sat and waited for a response until after a couple of minutes there was none. "Right, I'll just go and make some tea, this is awkward enough," and made his way to the kitchen, careful not to trip on the wires from the mains socket to the table where an experiment was simmering. In his
search for the milk, John spotted a sandwich box and immediately closed the door with his milk, knowing exactly what was in there, and it was not a mouldy BLT. Upon finishing he went to deliver Sherlock's tea to the table beside him, except his flatmate seemed to be eager for his next caffeine hit and took the mug straight out of John's hand, something he never did, and their fingers touched as he gripped the warm ceramic. John's heart skipped a beat, but continued to exercise his impressive self-control. He might have been able to conceal these things from anyone other than the hyper-observant man in the other chair and irrationally well-fitting suit. He sighed almost erotically as he sipped his tea and John didn't trust himself to drink without choking. He was caught staring and Sherlock smirked. The doctor was now very red in the face, feeling rather embarrassed, it felt as though Sherlock were trying to humiliate him. John was about to say something when the detective cut across him, again.

"John, I..." he trailed off, at a rare uncertainty.

"It's ok. I'm not expecting anything in return. I'll still be your friend and help you with your cases," John pre-empted him. Sherlock frowned.

"That's not it."

"What is it then?"

"No one has ever...made tea like you do," he said with some difficulty. John wasn't sure whether to laugh or scowl in confusion, so his expression was caught between the two.

"Well, I'm glad I make a good cuppa, I make mean coffee too," he said, choosing to make light. This conversation was awkward enough as it was.

"That's not what I meant," Sherlock replied, rather petulantly. All his confidence and exuberance from earlier was gone and John figured it was because the conversation had now turned its light on him and he found that intensely uncomfortable. "What I said at Angelo's was true, I have never been interested in that capacity in anyone. Those feelings," he spat feelings like it was a dirty word, "have never registered with me."

"Ok, what are you getting at?" Sherlock sipped more tea before replying. John had never seen the man so uncertain.

"You said that those feelings you have were only identifiable once they had built up to a sufficient degree?" John nodded. "And all it takes is a single event to push them into the conscious mind?"

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"What are you saying? I need you to actually say it, or I'm going to get this horribly wrong," John said, refusing to let Sherlock run rings around the matter like this. His friend snarled in aggravation.

"Must I?" he complained.
"Yes you do, this isn't really something I want to muck up with bad communication, we do that regularly enough as it is."

"Very well," he cleared his throat and sat up, almost formally, setting his mug aside. "The gradual build-up of foreign sensations, as you described, has occurred within my mind also, and I attributed it to poor mental discipline on my part, after all, having a friend has been a highly distracting experience. I have enjoyed our companionship and therefore have not expunged it. But the trigger event, as you also described, for me was yesterday when you prevented me from going out. It has taken me, as I said before, eleven and a half hours to discover what this change was and it was a realisation that you have provoked emotions within me beyond our friendship. I decided I needed to test my hypothesis and determined to begin by testing the validity of your claims of...fondness for me. The results conclusively proved you were speaking the truth and now I find myself unsure how to proceed further." Sherlock, despite his strong stance, looked uncertain and a little vulnerable. To be even considering this as worthy of his time was a huge leap out of his usual comfort zone and to go boldly where he has never been before must have been rather frightening for him on some level.

John was now gripping his mug so hard it was shaking. Was Sherlock telling him he felt the same way? So what they had was true chemistry? Deciding now was a time to be bold with an uncertain Sherlock, he set his mug aside and leaned forward, offering his hand to the man. Sherlock looked at it. 'Couples express their feelings through physical contact' he said to himself to decipher John's movement. Steadily but slowly, he took it. The warmth was pleasing to his cold fingers and the light perspiration on the palm told him of anxiety and uncertainty during their conversation. John's fingers closed around his own gently, and he squeezed the hand lightly. Sherlock reciprocated and was inexplicably joyous when John's face split into a wide smile, one of happiness, but also one of relief. He couldn't help but smile back, his lips curving up a little.

"John, there is something you should be made aware of before we enter such a...relationship," he said. The doctor couldn't help but smile a little more at the word 'relationship'. He looked up expectantly. "I am completely inexperienced in any matter regarding a close relationship with another human being. Most of our friendship is a new experience for me, but this has been an unfathomable outcome for me until yesterday."

"It's ok. Experience isn't important to me. This is something we're both meant to enjoy so being uncomfortable at any point isn't a good thing. I'm happy to go at your pace, whatever makes you feel ok, we can do as much or as little as you want. I mean it." That was one confession of his feelings he was happy to make. Sherlock's happiness meant the most to him and he would see to that happiness as often as he could."

"So, if we never..."

"We don't have to do anything you don't want to," he reiterated firmly, but kindly. Sherlock breathed as though a weight had been lifted from him. John thought it was sad that Sherlock was reluctant to enter a relationship because of some ridiculous notion that sex was an obligatory part of it. Sex was good, but he also knew that these actual emotions were overwhelming enough to the other man without complicating them further. But he meant what he said, if they were happy together he would happily forgo sex; he had no doubt he would miss it, but he had coped for several lonely years with just his trusty right hand and was willing to do that again. Maybe Sherlock would want to experiment with sexuality one day; he hoped so, but that was a thought for the far future.

Sherlock wasn't sure why he felt so surprised at John's kindness towards him, perhaps because he had never been treated with such force of generosity before that it was new to him. No one had had that kind of patience with him, or ever promised to sacrifice something of great personal importance to them (sexual congress in this case) for the sake of him and his happiness. Yet, the force that was
John Watson was sitting with a warm smile on his face, his equally warm hand pressed around Sherlock's own radiating joy like an excited atom. He was so lost in his thoughts that he barely noticed when John slowly let go of his hand and returned to his tea. Though Sherlock missed the warmth, he was glad to see John returning to normal, even if the forced even pace of his breathing told of otherwise well-concealed emotions; he wasn't about to gush emotion out at Sherlock - something he was grateful for.

They sat in happy silence for a long while, John picking up his book from the side table and re-immersing himself while Sherlock processed each and every one of his thoughts from the last hour. He was committing the sight of John's relief when he took his hand, the warm and texture of those hands when he idly looked at the clock.

"We're late!" he exclaimed, unexpectedly loudly. He leapt up out of the chair and seized his scarf and coat. John looked up confused.

"Late for what, exactly?" he asked, bewildered, marking his page and putting it back on the table, he knew they were going to be leaving very soon.

"Dinner!" Sherlock announced and bolted out the door before John had even got to his feet.
A date? Ish?

Chapter Summary

Sherlock takes John to dinner to cement the change in their relationship.

Chapter Notes

Previously: "We're late!" he exclaimed, unexpectedly loudly. He leapt up out of the chair and seized his scarf and coat. John looked up confused.

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"Dinner!" Sherlock announced and bolted out the door before John had even got to his feet.

"Wha-?" he asked himself, looking around, trying to think where he had left his coat. He heard Sherlock bounding up the stairs again with his characteristic energy when excited. He found himself blinded as his coat was thrown at his face. He heard Sherlock bound out the door, only to turn sharply on his heels and dash up the stairs.

"Hey, that's-" he called after his friend, but he already heard his door opening and that of his wardrobe. "That's my room," he finished to himself. Reluctantly, he pulled his jacket on and checked he had wallet, keys and phone and waited for his friend, or more-than friend, to return. Something blue and woollen was thrust into his arms and Sherlock looked at him expectantly.

"What's wrong with the jumper I have on?" he asked, a little put-out. Sherlock gave him The Look, the one that says 'even you know what I mean' and thought about acquiescing for a moment, but decided to push it a little. "What?" he defended his current brown knitwear.

"Please?" Sherlock tried and with a beleaguered sigh, he shed his coat and tugged off his existing jumper for the one Sherlock had selected. He wondered if he had just opened up a door where Sherlock would think he could make John do anything, but he was willing to let it slide this time on account of the happy news from just previous. After re-arranging his attire to please his flat-mate they were off in a taxi Sherlock had waiting. John noted the displeased look of the driver and wondered if Sherlock had ran out in front of him to get his attention, which wasn't all that unlikely.

"Where are we going?" John asked, wondering if he would even get an answer, but then again his companion seemed rather excited.

"Angelo's. I made a reservation this morning in anticipation of a favourable outcome to our conversation when I came out of my room," he replied and John nodded, he supposed it made sense. Since Sherlock knew what John was going to do before he knew it himself, he knew the other man reasoned there was no point wasting time and booking after their conversation. John thought those words through again, 'in anticipation of a favourable outcome to our conversation'. Was this, then, a date? John's stomach flipped at the thought, not realising how alien that notion was until he thought
about it. No, they were just going to dinner, getting something to eat, paying for someone else to do
the cooking and wash the dishes for the evening. John somehow doubted romance was in Sherlock's
repertoire, though he did find this gesture a nice one.

He had settled quite easily into the thought of being close to the other man and without thinking
about it, touched Sherlock's hand. Sherlock's hand recoiled and he looked at John strangely.

"What was that?"

"Never mind," John said quickly, feeling a little embarrassed. He had forgotten in that moment of his
own thoughts that Sherlock was not used to physical contact and probably wasn't expecting it from
his partner. John stared steadfastly out the window, hoping his pink face wasn't too obvious in the
dull light. Sherlock gazed down at his hand and logged the warm, tingling sensations and tried to
rationalise them, wondering what it was about that touch in particular that made his react so
strangely. He recalled a similar sensation earlier when John took his hand then, no one else had
provoked a reaction that Sherlock could feel all the way through his body so concluded it must be an
effect of these foreign feelings he held for the doctor. He smirked for a second at John's reaction,
quickly looking away, embarrassed and unsure of himself. He regarded this as foolish, after all, he
could see nothing had happened to make the doctor anything less than what he was, but then again,
he was well aware (even if he did not understand) of the irrationality emotions provoked in people.
Most of the time it was annoying, but in this case he thought it was endearing that John would be so
affected by him and the desire not to do anything that might make Sherlock uncomfortable.

After a few minutes, John voiced a disquieting thought.

"Sherlock, you're not going to just sit and watch me eat again are you? Please tell me you are going
to eat as well," he said, sinking at the thought of eating under the gaze of the ever observant eye of
Sherlock Holmes. There was nothing worse than knowing if you splashed your pasta sauce on the
side of your mouth, even a drop, he would notice. John had to try and not make himself paranoid
about Sherlock's observations while he was eating. There had been a number of awkward moments
at home where he had actually taken his meal to another room to avoid the gaze of Sherlock, and
likened it to the Eye of Sauron.

They were greeted with the usual gusto from Angelo who praised Sherlock a bit more and set them
in a more private booth at the back and took their drinks order. The booth was a bit darker, but at
least most of the patrons couldn't see them. John wasn't quite ready for the press to get a hold of the
change in their relationship. He doubted that Sherlock would ever act differently in public and he
would be as distant as usual when The Work reared its head, so he wondered if people would ever
suspect something else was going on (more than they already did at any rate).

"Leg better, doctor?" Angelo asked as he came over to take their order. John remembered Angelo
returning his cane when he had left it behind back when he first met Sherlock.

"Yes, much, thanks," he said and ordered a plate of pasta, determined to finish this one as events
didn't allow him to eat more than a few bites last time. He glared at Sherlock when he was being
silent. Eventually his nostrils flared a little to show his supreme reluctance and chose a salad.

"I'm glad we got out, honestly," John said, knowing he would have to be the one to initiate
conversation since Sherlock was perfectly at home with his thoughts most of the time. "If we'd have
stayed in you would have got bored and we might even have even had to resort to Cluedo." He
shuddered at the thought, but chuckled at the face Sherlock made.

"It's a grossly inaccurate game, how are you supposed to deduce anything from the start when there
is the absence of any of the other crucial factors?" he snorted.
"Such as?"

"Firstly, none of the characters who were supposed to have done it have no motives to murder Mr Black, so why would you suspect them in the first place? This also presupposes that there is no other person in Earth who might want Mr Black deceased, would not one of your first lines of enquiry be to see if any of the windows or doors had been unlocked? A man could easy slip in and out of a big manor like that." This was all said with a straight face and supreme indignance. John tried to keep his laughter down. Sherlock looked affronted.

"It's only supposed to be a game, not a fierce mental exercise," he said, keeping his hand on his hand close to his face in case he needed to cover up his laughter.

"But-" Sherlock was clearly rallying for a second round of professing its terrible flaws.

"For normal, average, boring people like me," he pointed out with another little escaped laugh.

"Your intelligence might be average, though I'd like to think I am teaching you to better your mind, regardless of how long it's taking," he said, not being able to stop the thoughts coming out of his mouth. "But you are far from boring, on the contrary you are a constant source of fascination," he said, feeling good to have praised the doctor; partly because he had read somewhere that you were supposed to say nice things about your partner and because John was his pupil as much as he as was all the other things John was and he was proud.

"Though coming from you I feel more like a lab experiment than anything else," he couldn't help baiting Sherlock a little, deliberately saying stupid things like this always got his partner to reveal just a little more about his feelings and John had grown quite adept at this. He was surprised Sherlock hadn't noticed by now because he was sure the other man would say something if he had realised.

"You're not an experiment," he said with a sniff, "just a good subject to observe in his natural surroundings." John took a large gulp of his drink so he would have to concentrate on swallowing in order to not laugh. "There are plenty of other subjects I would like to test in controlled conditions, Anderson for example, I would very much like to see if his stupidity knows no bounds. I can think of several experiments he would perform spectacularly poorly in." John nodded in agreement and approval, this was something he would like to hear more about.

"Glad to hear I'm not boring you at any rate," he said, a little too nonchalantly. Sherlock rolled his eyes.

"If you were boring you would have moved away from Baker Street a long while ago. In fact, I may not be alive since you would not have come with me on that case of the serial killing cab driver. Your ability to learn and continued dedication to the solving of our cases, no matter how ignorant you remain, is most un-boring," he said; he never did have much patience for the concept of self-deprecation. He found it was annoying and dishonest in his eyes, not to mention a shameless request for flattery. John was a little surprised he had not been told off for it. He didn't say anything to that, he just smiled and sipped his drink.

"However," Sherlock began after a few minutes of thought and John looked up, wondering if he was now going to be subject to a list of annoyances he committed on a daily basis. "The main problem is judging by where it was found and how he died, why couldn't the death of Mr Black be an accident? Suicide at a push? There aren't enough facts John!" he said in his most annoyed voice and John saw his visibly stop himself from striking the table to emphasise his point.

The conversation over the dinner was principally how Sherlock would go around improving the game and John reminding him that it was just a game and 'going out and solving crimes' defeated the
object of a family board game. He wondered if he could remember enough of Sherlock's argument to blog about his new and improved version. He spent most of the conversation trying to keep a straight enough face to eat, knowing that towards the end Sherlock was thinking things up on the spot just to amuse him.

"You know the card for Mrs Peacock reminds me of Mrs Hudson," he said flippantly, his salad finished. John put his hand over his mouth to keep it shut and food inside while she laughed and chewed at the same time. It had turned out to be a spectacular evening, Sherlock driving the talk and making it his personal mission to get John to laugh as much as he could. By the time John had finished his food the two of them where clutching their sides, feeling the pain of stitches coming up in their stomachs; they were even attracting looks of amusement from the other patrons who weren't quite sure what was so funny, but the two seemed to burst out afresh every few minutes.

"Really?" Sherlock said in surprise. "Suit yourself. I'll have some coffee gelato, Angelo."

"Anything you want Mr Holmes," said Angelo and turned to John again, knowing the doctor had changed his mind.

"Oh, all right, erm, I'll have some of the chocolate cake please," he said politely and gave Sherlock an inscrutable look. He received nothing but a faint smirk for his troubles and wondered what on earth Sherlock was up to. The man barely ate as it was (or certainly never when the doctor was looking) and now he was ordering ice cream like it was part of a devious plan. John quickly came to the conclusion that it must have been.

As it turned out it was part of a devious plan, a very cruel one thought John to himself as he saw the manifestation of the scheme right before his eyes. The damn man must have known he was doing it, the smug look on his face was proof enough. He was eating the ice cream in a deliberately provocative way, seemingly accidentally getting it on his lips and then having to flick out his tongue to lick it off. He even looked directly at John while languidly taking another mouthful and John dropped his fork. It clattered loudly and someone turned around. In a flash Sherlock was back to eating in the most innocent and fastidious way and John was left looking awkward and a little shaken while he retrieved his fork and Angelo attentively brought him a new one.

"What was that?" John asked when he had found his voice again. Sherlock looked perfectly innocent.

"I read that the act of eating seductively can be stimulating to one's partner. I judge from your reaction that I did it correctly?" His interest was partially scientific, but also as part of a gauge of how much influence he really had over the doctor.

"Yes, you very definitely did it right," he said, regaining control of his breathing. "For someone who's never done this before you seem to have it down pat." Sherlock simply smiled and neatly finished his desert, thinking that John deserved to finish his cake in peace. Sherlock reclined and delved into his thoughts again. John had proved to him within the last day that he cared deeply for Sherlock, a care that went beyond the normal parameters of friendship and he wondered what the difference was between the two states of relationship. Friends also cared for one another, shared time, conversation, interests, common causes and expressed concern for the other's well-being both physically and emotionally, so where did the boundary lie? He examined his own feelings to try and draw a conclusion from there. Where had things changed?
"Sherlock?"

It was almost completely impossible to describe what things had changed into, but he knew they had, on a fundamental level. He had come to care for John as a friend; they shared time, exchanged conversation, the cases were their common causes and he desired to see him healthy and happy. What had changed? He still wanted all of those things for John so that much had not changed. He suddenly thought what if John had been taken by that cabbie instead of himself? The notion provoked an unexpected rage and terror in him. The thought of John being held at gunpoint (real gun or not) and being forced to possibly swallow poison for someone's amusement made him want to do what John had done for him - kill the cabbie, except he felt his hands twitch at the thought and supposed he would far rather strangle the man with his bare hands than simply shoot him.

"Sherlock?"

Is this where that difference between friendship and love lay? A brief thought about a world without John suddenly seemed violently unpalatable. Being unable to exist without something/one else was the definition of need and it would seem, then, that Sherlock needed John, he needed him. He needed John's chatter, his sometimes moronic and sometimes insightful questions, his tea, his care and above all he needed his health and his happiness. These had gone from being preferable items to necessary states. What astonished him was that John seemed to have those things - with him. Sherlock had been told by a great many people he was an over-bearing impossible smart arse and no one in their right mind would be able stand him for very long. Yet John had stuck with him, and John was certainly in his right mind (he exhibited all the symptoms of normalcy) and proving those people wrong as he ate. John might never know it, but that thought alone gave him great personal gratitude and his desire for John to remain close increased, it was a need.

"Sherlock?" John insisted, snapping his companion out of his reverie.

"What?"

"Everything alright? You sort of turned off."

"I was thinking." John nodded in comprehension. He looked at his watch.

"We should probably head back," he said. Sherlock thought it couldn't be that late, but realised that their table had been cleared and Angelo had left a card on the table saying 'On the house' and there was no business remaining in the restaurant. With a nod, he tied his scarf back around his neck, donned his coat, thanked Angelo and walked behind John out of the building and down the street. The doctor really was aesthetically pleasing, especially when he wore his more flattering wardrobe. The blue jumper under his coat was more fitted and suited him far more than the shapeless brown thing he was wearing earlier which seemed to have been designed with the sole purpose of hiding everything about John Watson's body to even the trained observer.

Conversation was sparse on their way home, both engrossed in their own thoughts, Sherlock with his inner rant against poorly made knitwear and John about the plus points of finely tailored suits literally made to service a body shape. Using Sherlock's suit as an example. Everything about those clothes did perfect justice to him, and while it had been a very long time since he had last ogled a male form, he could see it so easily in Sherlock and the way the man moved showed off every part of his lean features; it was most clearly seen in the house with no coat on, or when he wondered around in his dressing gown. John's 'medical' eye could see the lanky frame under those expensive clothes, the bony hips, the lithe figure all the way to a delightful collarbone and up to a delectable throat. John shook his head and shook the images away, he would return to them later in his own private time when Sherlock wasn't around to see him so obviously lusting after him. While he didn't have to hide the extent of his feelings from the reciprocating man any more, he did feel the need to contain his
sexual urges out of respect for Sherlock's own intimacy issues, the last thing he wanted to do was push the man further away from him by terrorising him with constant sexual tension. John wondered how much of their relationship would change, Sherlock would obviously continue in his own unique way, perhaps there would be some meaningful touches from time to time, John hoped there would be kissing at some point, after all, he did need some kind of physical outlet for his feelings, he felt it to be a far better way of expressing himself than easily misinterpreted words. Perhaps what had changed was their bond had deepened to closeness. He wondered if his partner even had sexual urges, he seemed so divorced from other standard feelings. He thought it best not to speculate too much on that front. He did notice that Sherlock was walking a little closer to him than he usually did, seemingly born out of affection in some small way.

All was quiet in Baker Street when they returned and they lingered in the living room, a little uncertainly, though both knowing something should happen. John spoke first.

"I'm shattered, so I'm going catch an early night. It's been a pretty damn good day," he said, still on the little high from their 'chat' earlier and the happy change in their relationship and felt the need to reference it. Sherlock smiled, he had been doing a lot of that this evening.

"It has been most memorable. And whatever it is that has made you..." he struggled to articulate himself for a moment, "feel the way you do, I'm glad." John understood him; it was his way of saying 'I don't know what you see in me but I like this situation'.

"Your deductions aren't the only part of you that's amazing," John replied, feeling the blood rush to his cheeks and heat his face. He was used to dishing out the standard compliments to his old girlfriends, not making a sincere point with another man, one he adored. "Right, anyway, I'm off. See you in the morning," he said, trying to banish his own awkwardness. He turned to leave but Sherlock caught his hand, firmly. His grey eyes had lost their usual icy coldness and now were simply cool and slightly vulnerable. His long fingers ran over those of the doctor, taking in their texture as well as subtly stroking the skin affectionately. He had seen other couples do this many times in the past and he could now see that it was more than just a gesture of possessiveness, telling all other rivals this person was taken, it was a comforting connection to them. Sherlock had been alone his whole life, the only one who came close to understanding him might have been his brother, but even then it was a fractured and distorted understanding, warped through Mycroft's own perceptions. John had opened up to him, accepting everything about the eccentric man with only some minor grumbles that he didn't really mean. Perhaps this was what love was? Unconditional acceptance? For the first time he felt that he wasn't alone, that he had someone who would understand, even if he didn't always know it. That alone made him feel warm and hopeful. His thumb pressed down lightly as he stroked the tanned skin.

John was surprised to be pulled back and for such a small, but meaningful action. He hadn't expected any further physical contact after Sherlock had all but snatched his hand away in the taxi, knowing that personal space was something he had wrapped himself in like a suit of armour, a way of increasing his isolation from the world, to ensure no one could break into him and hurt him. Affectionately, he returned the gesture, enjoying the feel of the smooth, cool skin under his own. He caught himself thinking he should very much like more one day.

"Good night," Sherlock said and slowly released his hand. John nodded goodnight as well and left for his room, a big smile on his face. His chest felt as though it was going to burst open as soon as he had closed the door behind him and he braced himself against it. "What a day!" he thought to himself over and over again. He had been dealing with the fact that he was falling for a man who would never be able to return his feelings to thinking his friend was repulsed when those feelings had been forced out of him, to being told the most brilliant man on the planet cares in such a way about you and by the looks of things, be willing to explore new feelings with John. The cold, aloof, virginal
Sherlock had, tonight, been warm, verbose and very alluring with the ice cream. John's knees felt weak as he remembered Sherlock eating that ice cream in that suit, showing the world just what perfection looked like while eating dessert erotically. He felt heat pool in his stomach at the thought and after remembering to silently slide the lock across, felt safe enough to undo his belt and fly enough to release some of the gathering pressure under his jeans.
Embrace

Chapter Summary

The detective's nemesis is making his presence felt in Sherlock's life as the Great Game takes off. John and Sherlock, who are taking their new relationship slowly, share a tender moment in the midst of the chaos strewn about their flat from the first of Moriarty's bombs. John gets caught right in the middle of Moriarty's game, to his, and Sherlock's, expense.

Chapter Notes

Previously: "Good night," Sherlock said and slowly released his hand. John nodded goodnight as well and left for his room, a big smile on his face. His chest felt as though it was going to burst open as soon as he had closed the door behind him and he braced himself against it. 'What a day!' he thought to himself over and over again. He had been dealing with the fact that he was falling for a man who would never be able to return his feelings to thinking his friend was repulsed when those feelings had been forced out of him, to being told the most brilliant man on the planet cares in such a way about you and by the looks of things, be willing to explore new feelings with John.

A couple of weeks went by; Sherlock, bored with the lack of substantial cases cropping up had taken to the research again and was currently nose deep in a journal article about blot clotting in trauma wounds. John noticed his companion had become more relaxed around him, speaking his thoughts aloud sometimes in the evening while he was typing notes for his latest extensive website entry, sometimes words from several sentences mashing together to form incoherent lines as his mind thought much faster than his mouth could ever dream of keeping up with. John was simply grateful for the relative quiet in the house; no pacing, no tantrums, no loud protestations at 3am that the man was bored. As a demonstration of his gratitude he kept the detective supplied with fresh tea and enjoyed how Sherlock would always purposely touch his fingers now as he took the cup. Things were looking good in Baker Street. Mrs Hudson had also noticed the good mood that had descended on the flat and had taken up a small cake as a way of saying 'thank you for keeping out of trouble'. John had thanked her for her kindness and decided against telling her the exact reason why destruction had not been wrought in this time of worklessness.

John was about to leave for work, just tucking his wallet into his front pocket when he saw Sherlock wrapping a tourniquet around his arm with expert swiftness and was pressing a needle into his arm before John got to the kitchen door.

"What the hell?" he demanded, peering over the table and breathing an audible sigh of relief when he saw Sherlock was taking blood out of his body rather than injecting something, probably illegal, into it.

"I need a living sample to finish this experiment," he said, looking up at John as though it was nothing and withdrawing the needle, putting it on a safe rack.
"Right, well, have fun, I'm off to work," he said, zipping his jacket up. Sherlock had only the presence of mind to grunt in reply as he was busily gathering chemicals and dishes. Used to this minimalist response and less from his partner, he jogged down the stairs and headed out for another day in the surgery doing what he was damn good at and spending his lunch break day dreaming about a certain pale skinned stunner at home...

Sherlock didn't notice his phone bleep with news of an incoming message, he was too busy drawing more blood for the next batch of experiments having converted the egg rack in the fridge to a test-tube holder for the various tubes of his earlier batch to quietly refrigerate for a set period of time. It was only when he got up to make himself a cup of sorely needed tea when he saw how late it was; the sky was inky black and the street lamps where covering the street in an amber haze. The clock on the wall read 10:30pm and he realised that he was missing something far more important than the now forgotten beverage on the side; his doctor. He shouted John's name to see if he had come in and he had not noticed (this had happened several times now, such as this morning, he couldn't remember when John left at all) only to get no response. He went to his phone to send an annoyed text to his partner when he noticed a new message on his screen from the aforementioned man; his sister had got herself injured in a drunken escapade and John had gone to see her in hospital; the message was sent shortly after he was due to finish at the surgery. Another message had arrived since, telling him it was a broken leg, nothing more and he would be home in about an hour as he was walking.

Get a cab. SH

Want some air. Need the walk. JW

Hurry up. Need tea. SH

You know where the kettle is. JW

Not the same. SH

Tough. JW

Sherlock pouted, knowing John couldn't see him do it. He didn't like other people changing their routines because it meant that every time he wanted to do something he couldn't rely on where the necessary people where going to be and when and it annoyed the hell out of him. Not to mention John wasn't around to keep him hydrated and he had to take time away from his science to tend to his irritating bodily needs. He looked around the flat and took note of his filing system that John seemed to neither understand nor approve of. Knowing of John's fractured relationship with his sister, it was simple to surmise his partner would not be in a good mood upon returning home, as evidenced by his determination to walk so far for 'air' and Sherlock found himself experiencing that strange sensation of willingness to take time out of his important day to do something to make John happy. He took some of the piles of books and shoved them in a corner, hid the piles of old medical journals under the sofa and put the union jack cushion back into John's chair. The spent crockery was dumped into the sink and the scientific equipment taken off the sides and put back on the table with his other things. Feeling pleased he had made a gesture towards John's increased happiness upon his return he checked his phone again, but there was nothing from the doctor.

How much longer? Need tea. SH

Sherlock should not have been too surprised when that message did not get a reply, but within five minutes he heard the front door opening and banging shut with unusual force for John; he was clearly in a bad mood. Perhaps that last text had been a bit much... It was too late to wonder about that as the tired-looking man came striding into the living room, his lips thin and angry, he pointed an
accusing finger at Sherlock.

"Not funny," he said waringly and looked away, trying to throw the anger out of him through his flexing hands.

"Sit down," Sherlock said, indicating to the chair he had made free for John, complete with cushion.

"What do I do? I've tried everything! I've tried reasoning with her, I've read her the riot act, what do I do?" he asked, almost shouting in his exasperation. Sherlock frowned.

"What good would reading the 1715 now repealed Riot Act of..." he began but was cut across.

"It's a turn of phrase!" he shouted, silencing the detective. "It means I've given her an ultimatum but she still keeps at the drink, what's wrong with her, I don't understand, what more incentive does she need? Mum and Dad would talk to her again if she kicked the drink, her friends would go and see her again, she could patch things up with Clara, she could keep a job down... I don't understand!" he vented.

"Now you understand how I feel most days around normal people," Sherlock said before he could help himself. John gave him a dangerous look. Sherlock registered that nagging need to improve things for John and he didn't feel it was within even his impressive powers to reform a long-term alcoholic since he had been unable to really stop the cigarettes (he never smoked while John was around). Right now was a most unpleasant time to look upon John, he was angry, struggling and isolated; his projected anger was keeping a bubble around himself so no one could get close to him. Sherlock knew that feeling of angry loneliness, feeling that no one would be able to understand or help and did not like the thought of someone he needed to keep suffering that. He might not have been able to stop the metaphorical blade, but he did think he would be able to treat the wound. To stop John's loneliness he did something he had wished for himself when he was in a similar state when he was younger and more receptive to human contact; pushing away his own inhibitions about touching, he approached John and, a little awkwardly at first, put his arms around him. John went stiff for a moment, stunned at the gesture, though it did not take him long to sink into the embrace and put his own arms around the small waist and touch the smooth back of his partner.

"Dammit, I thought I had been able to leave this behind with her, but she's my sister, I can't just blot her out of my life," he said, breathing heavily. Sherlock was able to hold his tongue this time, biting back a probably unhelpful comment about wishing he could do that with Mycroft. John clearly wanted to be held like that while his emotions calmed and ebbed away and Sherlock thought how much of a pleasant experience this was and he would like to do it more often. John was warm and fitted snugly into his tall body. Perhaps if they were to do this when John did not have his jacket on, he could feel more of the doctor's body and ascertain more precisely what was implicitly on offer to him. He still wasn't sure the whole idea of sexual congress appealed to him, but he knew it would be best to remain open minded and take the path to that choice slowly in order that he might process everything on the way. As it was, he simply remained as he was, trying not to think of his experiment in the kitchen that would need attention soon.

"Thanks, Sherlock," John said. He had stopped ranting about the situation with Harry and was patting Sherlock on the back. The detective clung on.

"Erm, you can let go now," John said, gently pushing the other man away. "When people want to end a hug they pat the other person on the back lightly," he explained and he could almost see Sherlock commit that the 'social cues' part of his 'hard-drive'. John had enjoyed the embrace, enough to forget about his problems with Harry for a moment and think about the warmth of the other man's body, the feeling of his chest pushing against his when he breathed, the smell of him, even if he was starting to need a shower, his breath on his hair. It had lulled him, calmed him and comforted him.
"I never like touching other people if I can help it," Sherlock said, "but when I touch you I don't feel..." he stopped himself from using the word 'lonely'. "Isolated." 'A less accurate, but more palatable lexical choice,' he thought, not willing to betray so much of himself quite yet.

"Me too," John said honestly, just the tips of his fingers reaching out and lightly caressing Sherlock's arm.

##

Then the bombings happened. He had been on his way back from seeing Harry out of the hospital when he stopped to get a coffee at a little shop; John had gone into flat-line mode when he saw the windows of Baker Street smashed in from the explosion, his soldier instincts had kicked in and he raced up to find his target, Sherlock, without making any presuppositions as to what had happened.

"Sherlock!" he called out, demanding to know if his partner was safe. He wanted him close by, needed to touch him, possess him just for a few moments while his stomach unclenched and his heart rate went back to normal. He rushed into the living room to see Sherlock and Mycroft playing a game of glare chess, shattered glass and china still on the floor.

"Hello John, your sister is feeling better I trust?" Mycroft said smoothly. John scowled, ignoring him.

"Sherlock, a moment?" he said, not leaving any room for discussion and stomped into the kitchen. With an intrigued expression, Sherlock obeyed the implicit order and joined John in the kitchen, the door sliding shut behind him. John was pacing a little, two steps to and two steps fro in their small kitchen.

"I'll just wait here then, shall I?" Mycroft called out.

"We'll just pretend you're not here!" Sherlock shouted back.

"I'm going to assume you're not hurt," John said, passing a medical eye over Sherlock, who was still in his dressing gown. "Your dressing gown isn't shredded at the back and you've got no cuts on your face," he said, explaining as he thought. Sherlock's lips twitched upwards.

"Meaning?" he said encouragingly.

"You were facing away from the window when the blast impacted and the scratches on your hands are from getting up amongst all that glass."

"I'm impressed," he said, but it didn't seem to elicit the proud, demure smile in John it usually did. John reached out to grab Sherlock's hand, but being sensitive to its scratched up state took his arm instead and caressed it.

"What you missed out was that I was standing between the windows rather than in front of any, as you pointed out my robe is still intact so my chances of severe injury were minimal." John was standing very close to him, still somewhat agitated, but calming down. The doctor, while ostensibly shorter than him, seemed to be towering over him, his proximity was nearly smothering Sherlock and there was a distinctly possessive feel to the touch on his arm, even if it was a gentle one; all the fingers and the thumb had curled around his arm, the whole palm touching him.

"What's the matter? I am clearly unharmed," Sherlock said quietly into John's nearby ear, not wanting Mycroft to hear their exchange.

"I just need a moment," he said. The way John seemed to be covering him was incredibly comforting Sherlock had to admit, it felt like John was shielding him from the horrors of the world and wrapping
him in those fascinating and wholly welcome feelings of John's.

"We have been in danger before yet I have not seen you so agitated," Sherlock observed, though not wishing to break the contact.

"Usually I am there to help protect you though, today I wasn't, so I...just want to make sure you're ok so I can be ok," he said, wondering briefly if his therapist would be proud for this insight into his own behaviour at Sherlock's behest.

"You can't be here every time something happens. Is this to do with Afghanistan?" he asked, making a few quick deductions. John nodded.

"Saw it happen too many times, a blast like that, ripping off the side of a house and everyone you thought was safe were lying face down," he said. "I can deal with the shooting, at least you know what to expect from a bullet."

"But bombs are far less predictable," Sherlock finished for him. Flattered by the attention, he laid his own hand on John's good shoulder, a silent gesture of comfort in return.

"Oh do come on, Sherlock, I have other business I'd like to attend this afternoon," came the loud drawl of Mycroft in the other room. Sherlock scowled, but John stopped him from making a scathing comment in return.

"I'm ok, let's go back in," he said and squeezed Sherlock's arm one last time before opening the kitchen door and going through in the living.

"Is Mrs Hudson alright?" John asked, feeling a little guilty for not having thought of her before now.

"Yes, your landlady was quite fortunate to have been out at the time," Mycroft informed him, but kept his eyes on his brother as he came back to sit in his favourite chair. Sherlock was perched on his chair like a bird, toes curled around the edge of the seat, his arms crossed and holding himself; John noticed he was touching the particular spot his own hand had been a few moments ago. He felt a little happier.

##

This man, whoever was playing Twenty Questions Before Semtex with Sherlock, was a lethal creature, John thought, but he knew there was no way to back out of the challenge, this person would simply kill more people until the detective played along. This had become Work for Sherlock and he was attacking it with equal measures of emotionless intellectualism and childish excitement; while John didn't like the thought of his partner being in danger, it happened frequently enough that he was beginning to get used to it. What had made him unusually jumpy about the explosion in Baker Street was the proximity to their home, their private haven, it had felt intrusive on top of his previous experiences abroad. Despite it all going on around them, he knew life didn't stop for these people, no matter how hard they tried. Sherlock had announced he wanted time alone to think and had text Lestrade, telling him to meet John in a pub for a drink. The DI had agreed, probably thinking the consulting detective was going to be there as well and he wanted to run a few things past him. John hadn't been too pleased that Sherlock was now making social appointments for him, but thought a pint with Greg Lestrade couldn't be all that bad and since his partner was itching to almost throw him out of the door, he would leave him to it.

He got no reply to his farewell and thought little of it as he walked down the road. Unsurprisingly, once The Work had arrived and interested Sherlock sufficiently, he had retreated into himself, into his brilliant mind, shutting the world out while he engaged his mental powers. The doctor had not
been completely shut out, he had his use as a soundboard for one or two ideas and was occasionally asked for a medical opinion on something, but more often than not their communications were demands for tea, pens or his phone. The usual fare. What had cheered him up no end, though, and made this behaviour far more bearable, were the little touches Sherlock would use to communicate his feelings when his mind was too busy being used to think. John wondered if they were barely conscious, the lingering touches from being passed things. He had taken to piling books on John's chair and demanding they not be moved, so he would relocate to the sofa and sure enough, almost as soon as he had settled, Sherlock would drape himself over the sofa, his long legs hanging off the far arm and his head on John's leg as a pillow while he thought, his fingers touching at the tips under his chin. The doctor was surprised, he would have thought that he was thinking too loud for Sherlock, but the detective seemed perfectly content and so John, who was more than comfortable with the arrangement was happy to be Sherlock's thinking pillow.

That thought made him smile as he crossed the road and turned off the main road down a smaller residential road when suddenly he was tackled from behind and bundled into the side of an open van. He began to struggle, to grab at the arm of the assailant on his left side to free his good arm, but he felt a sharp blunt blow to his face and then nothing.

"Oh, boys did you have to be so rough with him?" an obnoxiously cheery voice said. John found himself sat propped up against a wall, feeling very heavy and rather wider than he remembered. "Then again, he was a soldier so I'm sure he can take it. Wakey wakey doc!" John opened his eyes and blinked several times as the light seared at his retinas. The irritating face, flickering through expression to expression in seconds, was familiar.

"Jim?" he muttered, remembering him fanboying over Sherlock at St Bart's.

"Aww, you remember? I'm touched, really I am," he said. His hand flicked up and John was pulled to his feet by a burly man at least six inches taller than him and almost twice as thick. "Well, down to business; you've played this game enough times to know what's going on." He looked down John and the man followed the gaze down his own body and he realised why he felt so heavy, there was a large coat with a semtex vest sewn into it. He was kitted out with enough explosive to take down the whole building they were in, and if they were in a small building then it would take out some of those around it. He felt instantly ill and swallowed the sick feeling, knowing he would be far more likely to get out of this situation alive if he remained calm and followed instructions, this man had not killed any of those who fully complied. He also knew this was about Sherlock and he knew he had to be strong for him if no one else; he had only just opened his armour enough to allow another person a peek inside and already that person was being used against him. He wondered how Sherlock might feel and a grim realisation came upon him, he was being used as the weapon itself; the semtex was just an added bonus as far as that man was concerned. Was his name even Jim?

"There's an earpiece under your collar. Put it in your ear and then I will give you instructions. You will say only what I tell you to say, if you deviate by even a word or try to signal him then I'll order my men to shoot you, detonate the explosives and both you and Sherlock Holmes will be blown into teeny tiny little bits and scattered over half a mile of London. Not difficult to understand is it? I don't want my new playmate dead quite yet, but I have got to put him in his place...Oh well, come with meeee!" he sang and John shuddered as he scowled and reluctantly followed the expensively suited man. He knew Sherlock would be there, even though he wished his partner had just ignored this last one, not put himself into the line of fire. The walls were tiled and there was a strong smell of chlorine so John could tell he was in a public swimming pool. He was led out to the pool side and told to wait in one of the stalls and then he heard them clear the room. He was left with the heavy weight of the vest on his shoulder, making his left shoulder begin to ache unpleasantly. He could see the pool water, gently churning as the machines in the pool disturbed it, the lights playing with waves on against the walls. He felt like screaming, like punching the walls, he wanted to rip this coat off and
throw it, drown it in the water facing him, but he knew he couldn't move a muscle until he was directed by that hideous voice in his ear. The coat was thick and the vest was heavy making him hot and supremely uncomfortable. As much as he wanted to be saved, for someone to come along, tear the thing off him and tell him he'll be able to go home, he begged Sherlock to stay away, to keep himself out of this madman's trap. He knew it was inevitable, so instead of feeling sorry about the situation he tried to think what he could do; there wasn't exactly much in the way of options at the moment. He wondered if he would have to time perhaps dive in the pool before the vest was activated, but he knew from the amount of explosive used in the vests from the previous cases (he didn't want to think too hard about how much was on him currently) that it wouldn't provide much cushioning. Maybe if Sherlock had a few seconds head start to get away he could survive the blast. He might be injured, but if he got past the door he might make it out alive and that's what really mattered at the end of the day; John's own survival was desirable but it was Sherlock's continued existence that was paramount.

It took about twenty minutes for a door to open in the pool chamber, slow cautious footsteps entered and John closed his eyes and took a steady breath. Sherlock was here. Soon enough that wretched voice crooned into his ear to reveal himself and with great trepidation he stepped forward. He tried to keep his face straight as he saw the flicker of betrayal and then fear in Sherlock's cold grey eyes as John spoke the words in his ear.

He had successfully managed to put his fear aside and, to a large extent, keep the anger at bay as he saw confusion than dread comprehension flicker for just a second on his friend's face. Sherlock knew that he, and his feelings, had been played and it was a sickening feeling; it seemed his new nemesis would not just play the game with him, as Sherlock would have liked, it seemed his closeness with John had been taken hostage and used against him. Still, there was no panic on his pale face, just re-calculations, revision of the strategy and making contingencies. Concern for John's wellbeing was communicated in a glance and John, who couldn't bring himself to make any sort of face in return so simply nodded his thanks in a slow blink.
After Moriarty's little game with the bomb vest, Sherlock comes to a realisation and this is something John is more than pleased with. With any luck it's the first step in the road to physical intimacy with his partner. And then there's the Buckingham Palace incident...with the sheet...

They stumbled into Baker Street, feeling dog tired and John was still feeling heavy and slightly wobbly when he thought about the weight of the explosive vest on him. Sherlock had been deathly silent the whole time, constantly vigilant and alert, checking behind them, down every street and alley they crossed making sure no one was going to jump them on the way home. John slumped into the sofa and was happy to sink into the comfortable fabric, glad to be home and safe (for now). Sherlock had strode straight into the kitchen and there was much activity that sounded suspiciously like tea-making. John knew that, no matter how the other man protested otherwise, Sherlock had been affected by the recent hostage situation, he could see the tiny give-aways of Sherlock's heart sinking before and the bounce between an emotional reaction to John's call for him to run when he grabbed Moriarty to seeing those red dots hover over his heart and head just when he thought John was safe.

A couple of minutes later, John was treated to a cup of tea which Sherlock had made.

"I feel privileged," he said, a dry smile creeping back onto his face.

"Hm?" Sherlock said quizzically.

"You made me tea, I can't remember the last time you made me tea!"

"Sugar and caffeine are good for shock and since you could barely stand straight I thought it remedial," he explained.

"Thanks," John said and took a gulp as if to prove the point. It was very sweet. John wondered if the amount of sugar in here was to compensate Sherlock's nerves rather than his own. They sat in silence for nearly ten minutes, thinking about what had just happened, what enemy they had made and what it could mean for them if they got embroiled in further cases that trod on Jim Moriarty's toes. Sherlock was determined not to let this little display deter him from bringing an end to all of the clever schemes his new nemesis waved in front of him as if he would be able to resist the temptation of unravelling them. The encounter at the poolside had put a jolt of sobering terror into him when he saw that John was now in the firing line, it was not just himself anymore. He knew that the doctor would not leave him over something like this, and as much as it had affected him, John seemed to be taking it with better grace than Sherlock felt inside. He attributed it to John's military history; his training and active service had probably faced him with similar situations, even though he was sure
John had never been the one wearing the bomb. The only way they could go from here was to coordinate better and take sensible precautions. Sherlock knew that if he was going to be sensible, he would keep his head down for a while and only take small cases that had little chance of having anything to do with the insane consulting criminal so he fell off the priority list for a while. But he knew that he would take The Work as it came, regardless of who it would inconvenience. They would have to knock heads again sometime, but tonight they could have to themselves. He was not used to these feelings roiling around so uncomfortably inside him, his feelings of late were usually centred around the positive ones he felt about John, not these very distracting ones around fear and trepidation.

"Thanks for the tea," John said, breaking the silence. "Are you done with your mug?" he asked. Sherlock offered it up to him and John took them to the sink. The tap ran, the cold tap judging by the lack of rattling pipes that always accompanied the hot tap, and a quick burst told of a rinse and being placed in the sink for proper washing later. John dried his hands and jumped when he turned around to see Sherlock right in front of him and he had not heard or seen the brooding man enter. The other man had been pre-occupied all evening and John couldn't blame him, it had been rather heart-in-your-mouth for both of them. Pale fingers reached out and touched John's arm, trailing down lightly to find his hands and entwine their fingers.

"I'm sorry you had to get involved like that," he began. "I won't stop, though. Moriarty will come after me again."

"And when he does I'll repay him for what he did tonight,"

"Logically, we should call off this relationship, as we know he is eager to use it against us,"

"I can't just turn off my feelings. Besides, I'm stronger with them, and with you. We work well the way we are now," he interrupted, determined not to have this experience make Sherlock retreat further into his shell as he was before.

"I agree. I do not think I could do it. But you know this won't be our last encounter with him."

"John, when I saw you-" he hesitated for a second, trying to find the words. "It was horrible. And there was no conceivable way I could have run when you told me to. I could not leave you there, with him." John squeezed his hand. "It's made me want to, um...to," he said, fading away when he couldn't bring himself to articulate what he was going to do. Instead, he did it. His insecurities shone in his eyes like a beacon to John, but as Sherlock lowered his head, his stomach flipped as he realised what was going to happen. The taller man looked down to John's dry lips to make sure he was going to land on target and then closed his eyes, wanting to savour the moment, as kissing seemed to be all about the sense of touch. He pressed his lips onto John's and felt his heart beat wildly when he felt the other man's lips push back.

'This feels good' Sherlock thought to himself as he breathed heavily through the wild feelings inside him, understanding now the metaphor of having sparks flying between two people. He felt re-energised by the touch, he felt loved by John who was kissing him so gently, respecting Sherlock's boundaries and simply indulging in conveying his feelings through his actions. John's free hand came up to gently rest on Sherlock's face as their lips danced lazily, his rough, steady hands ghosting appreciatively over the taller man's flushed face.

In a moment of silliness, John wondered if he had been blown up and this was heaven. Maybe a
delusion? But from the way Sherlock's hand was squeezing his so tightly, his other hand settled low on his waist and his delicious lips roving experimentally over his own he felt very much alive. When the moment had passed, they parted, both slightly breathless and reeling from that first kiss.

"I'm so glad you're alright," Sherlock whispered, so quietly that if John had breathed in at that moment he would have missed it. John smiled and pulled his partner into a tight embrace, one that was instantly reciprocated. John's breathing hitched for a second as he felt how wonderful it was to have Sherlock's weight on him instead of that damn, hated, vile vest. It seems both of them were feeling shaken from the night's events; but here, now, being propped up and supported by the other it felt as though things would work out well enough for them.

##

From that first kiss in the kitchen, Sherlock became rather enamoured with that act of tenderness and lavished it upon John most days when business was quiet. John had thoroughly expected that to stop once a case landed in Sherlock's lap, and whilst the number of kisses did decrease, Sherlock would usually kiss him back when John placed a chaste kiss on his cheek goodnight, careful not to interrupt the avid thinking process in his partner too much. Sherlock had got him into the routine of swapping a gentle kiss before John headed off to bed, by asking at first, until after a few nights it became just a meaningful finger pointing to his face and then just an insistent look until John did it every night.

The first night after the establishment of that routine that Sherlock had Work to absorb himself in, John respectfully skipped the kiss and when straight upstairs to bed. Just as he had put his pyjama bottoms on when a hard and insistent knock banged at his door. Answering, he was greeted by his petulant flat-mate who gave him an insistent look.

"Sorry, I thought you wouldn't want to be disturbed on a case," he explained sheepishly. He was feeling very self-conscious standing in front of Sherlock with only blue striped PJ trousers on. The landing behind Sherlock was cool and the draught made his skin cool and sensitive.

"How am I supposed to work without you tending to my emotional needs and keeping those things away," he pouted; 'those things' were a reference to his emotions. "You have roused these feelings, so they're your responsibility to keep under control," he said with an insincere smirk. John smiled, realising he had created a monster (an adorable one, but he knew he could never express that particular word to Sherlock). The doctor obliged and gave him an apologetic full kiss on those pink lips.

"Better," Sherlock announced and strode back to the sitting room where he returned to his work and John chuckled to himself as he closed the door. He was tired, but he looked down at a problem that had been nagging him in the back of his mind throughout the day; his body was wanting. He had deliberately chosen to read the FT in search of stories that did not comment too heavily on his partner or any stories involving sex, or sexy people, or as few people as possible really. He hoped Sherlock had been too absorbed in his case to notice John's 'predicament'; he never wanted to bother Sherlock with those feelings, just because they shared a fundamentally loving relationship did not mean that Sherlock had expressed any interest in sexual contact and John did not wish to make him feel pressured, so kept it politely private. He thought maybe he should have brought his laptop up with him, it wouldn't be unusual for the doctor to take it up with him at night, if not to read himself to sleep then to ensure Sherlock couldn't use it for...whatever Sherlock might use it for, but it would be far too suspicious to go down and collect it now.
John lay sprawled over the top of his bed, thoughts wondering inevitably to sexy time. Realising there was no way he was going to get sleep tonight until he finally paid his starving body some attention, he jerked his pyjama trousers down in a business-like manner and got to work. His eyes were closed the second his hand touched the stiffening flesh, not really thinking there would be much attractive about watching himself toss one off. It was easy to imagine his past encounters, the feel of a tight body moving and responding to his body, the feel of hot flesh under roaming hands, the intoxicating smell of their sex.

Just to be clear about a few things, John still thought about women, still touched himself to the women on the movies he found on the internet, he still had deep-held fantasies of what he would do with Scarlett Johanssen if he ever had the opportunity and his unprecedented attraction to Sherlock was exactly that; an attraction to Sherlock. Guys, even the ‘pretty’ ones, never featured in his private sexy time, they weren’t a turn on but for the single exception in the living room downstairs. His thoughts whilst doing this would often begin to turn to what he fancied his partner would look like beneath the flattering suits; what it would look and sound like to coax out the raw creature that must surely be repressed beneath the weight of his incredible mind. He fantasised about a primal, relentless hedonistic beast that was free from the constraints of accountable logic and able to indulge his passions. Sometimes, John wondered what exactly a fully functioning Sherlock might be like, all his exacting faculties called the task of pleasuring him and John thought he didn’t have the scope of imagination to do that little fantasy justice.

It didn’t take him long to bring himself to climax and the rush of hormones spread quickly throughout his brain making him feel warm and sated. He had just enough time to clean up and fall back into bed, barely registering pulling the blanket around him as sleep claimed his ‘thoroughly average’ brain.

A couple of months later John woke in a warm, comfortable haze. His bed was unusually comfortable and it felt as though the blankets had bunched up behind his back. A soft sound whispered in his ear rhythmically and he wondered blearily if Sherlock was abusing the poor kettle again downstairs; he hoped it was the old red kettle. After his partner had used the old kettle for an experiment which involved some chemicals with very long names and hazardous labels on the bottles he had bought a new one and forbade Sherlock from using it for anything other than making tea/coffee. As consciousness flooded his senses and he began to get a bearing on his surroundings he noticed what he had assumed to be blankets was moving against his back, in time with the sound. He craned his head round and his face split into a huge grin when he recognised the soft dark curls that were resting amidst his own hair. Sometime in the night, Sherlock had crept into his bed and was now spooning him, his face pressed into the back of John’s neck. An arm was looped possessively around the doctor’s waist and the detective had pulled himself as close as he could to his partner. John turned back to face the other way, but continued to grin to himself as he touched a hand to the one around him. He wasn’t sure what he was more pleased about; waking to his partner cuddling him or the fact Sherlock was getting some sleep. Either way he wasn’t going to spoil the moment and allowed himself a moment to feel warm and slightly giddy inside at the thought of Sherlock being comfortable to be so close with him and then seeking him out, knowing he would hardly object. He concluded his partner had done it while John was asleep to save the potential embarrassment of
turning up in his room and asking to ‘cuddle’ which was what they were undeniably doing now. John’s bed had never felt more comfortable to him. His eyes quickly began to feel heavy again and soon he re-entered the world of sleep more comfortable than he had been in a very long time.

He woke again to the feel of his stomach being squeezed hard and it was uncomfortable. He realised Sherlock was clutching him very tightly, the breathing against his back was deep and fast and his whole body was generally tense.

“My answer has probably already crossed yours…” he muttered, his grip on John tightening even more and his breathing increased. He was dreaming about the Pool Incident. “What? No, you can’t have him… Don’t move… John, run, he’s coming for you… Why can’t I move? John…!” he said with increasing anxiety. John took a moment to compose himself, he needed to awaken Sherlock and then deal with the unfamiliar anxiety that he would be experiencing. As Sherlock had told him, John had awoken the emotions in Sherlock and he knew he had to take care of them in return. Turning around to face his troubled partner proved difficult with him clinging so hard to John’s pyjamas, but somehow he managed it and he put one hand on Sherlock’s and the other on the pale man’s face. He stroked the skin gently as he told Sherlock to wake up.

“It’s a dream, he doesn’t have me. I’m here, with you,” he said reassuringly and Sherlock’s eyes snapped open; he took a second or two to determine what was happening. His eyes instantly darted away from John’s and he flushed deep red. Not only was he embarrassed to have been caught snuggling up to John in bed (he had planned on sleeping for a shorter amount of time and leaving the bed before his partner woke) but he had been caught muttering in his sleep about his deep-seated fear of having Moriarty snatch John away from him.

“Don’t worry about it,” John said, referring to his partner’s embarrassment. “I’m going to take care of you. You’re anxious and afraid because of your dream but right now I’m right here.” He could hear Sherlock fighting for control of his breathing, take deep, slower breaths, his eyes darting around nervously. “He didn’t get me.”

“He will try again,” Sherlock said, his deep, sleepy voice at odds with the worried look on his face.

“He probably will, but right here and right now I’m here, alright?” Sherlock nodded, his death grip around John loosening up and it was a relief to be able to breathe without someone else’s limb pressing down on his chest.

“I don’t like this; anxiety has not been in my range before,” he muttered, scowling, though John noticed he did not move himself from his partner’s body.

“Try to think about what you have now. If we always worried about what might happen then life would be terrible,” was the extent of John’s advice; there was only so much he could do, emotions to the greater extent had to be worked through by the person experiencing them. No matter how much he wanted it, Sherlock could not make John his ‘emotion proxy’.

##

John cheeks burned as Sherlock came into the view of the webcam wearing just a sheet by the look of it, the man had not even put his dressing gown on. John sighed, a fully-dressed Sherlock did not create the best first impression with senior police officers on the best day, but now this could only end badly, surely? John only really thought about it when he was in the helicopter he knew was sent
by Mycroft (who else?!). He took an involuntary sharp breath when he realised exactly what he had seen on that computer screen now he wasn’t embarrassed by the detective’s behaviour and attire in front of a police investigator and suddenly he resented the expensively suited man who had severed the connection. He would have liked a few moments in private chatting to the barely-clad man, taking the time to mentally undress him and hope the connection was pixelated enough that Sherlock wouldn’t be able to make out what he was doing. The entire helicopter to ride to, John peered out the window curiously, somewhere in central London by the looks of it, was spent thinking of Sherlock in that white sheet, swathed over him like some Roman senator, or emperor as he thought Sherlock might see himself. The sharp folds hiding some of that delicious body, it looked as though all it needed was a tug and… ‘Stop it John, let’s not arrive at Mycroft’s latest hide-out with a hard-on,’ he told himself sternly. ‘Perhaps I should try Sherlock’s method and file this away for later contemplation…’

The helicopter was flying close to Buckingham Palace, they had come in high over the Mall and they appeared to be descending; John wondered if they were supposed to fly so close. He was startled and a little confused when the flying machine made a very clear swing into the grounds of the palace and it became apparent that they were going to land in the back garden of the British Royal Family. Squaring his jaw and feeling suddenly somewhat conscious of his dirty jacket and muddy boots from the murder scene, he stepped out of the helicopter when the door was opened by the pilot. More men in expensive suits were waiting to ‘greet’ him, well, the extent of their greeting being to say ‘good afternoon’ and ‘follow us’.

“Why am I here?” John asked, feeling it best to get the questions that wouldn’t be answered out of the way now. Perhaps if he persisted enough one of the men would crack and tell him something useful. He wasn’t surprised when he got no answer. “No? Ok, how about who arranged this, to get me here?” He already knew the answer to that question, and they knew it too, but he figured it would be remiss not to ask the standard battery of questions he inflicted on every one of Mycroft’s employees. “Who am I going to be meeting?” Still nothing. John scowled and considered refusing to go any further until someone answered him, but then thought that throwing a tantrum in the middle of Buckingham Palace grounds might not be such a good idea. Dignity was the word of this place and he would try to retain his.

The first time one of his minders spoke, the smaller man with grey hair, came as a bit of a surprise to John, who was more interested in looking around him as they entered a door into one of the most famous buildings in the country.

“Wipe your shoes, please,” he said in a gentle voice, taking great care to scrubs only the underside of his shiny Italian leather shoes on the mat. John looked at him for a second as though not understanding what he had said, but he was just surprised the man had spoken at all. He grunted his assent and wiped his boots vigorously on the coarse matting, glad that most of the mud crumbled and broke off. When they moved on, he ran a hand through his hair, wishing he had combed it that morning instead of rushing out to the scene of a crime on his partner’s behest. ‘Not only has he embarrassed me at a crime scene, but now I’m scruffy for my first trip to Buckingham Palace. He owes me,’ he grumbled internally.

“You are to go in here,” the older man said, stopping short of a door that was throwing light into the otherwise dull corridor. It was clear they were not going any further. Wondering what to expect, probably Mycroft and his very best umbrella for the palace, he walked into the light and had a look inside.

Two sofas were stood facing each other, a small coffee table between them and a certain wannabe Roman-emperor sitting stiffly on the plush royal sofa having a petulant show down with some neatly folded clothes on the table.
“What are we doing here?” John asked, knowing that he was only brought here as Sherlock’s sidekick and figured the detective might have a better idea of what they were doing here.

“I don’t know,” he replied, surprising John. John looked over to him, not really sure he could believe Sherlock was sitting in the middle of the London palace of the Queen dressed in a sheet. The clothes that had been presented to him earlier just before the connection had been cut had clearly been declined, due to their position on the table rather than on Sherlock, but he…he had put something on, hadn’t he? John glanced again, looking down but not seeing any lines in the fabric from boxers or darker areas around his hips to indicate he was wearing anything under the sheet.

“Are you wearing any pants?” he said, having to ask.

“No,” Sherlock said quickly. John quickly looked ahead of him as he thought, with a degree of horror, that Sherlock was completely naked save for one bedsheets in the middle of Buckingham Palace of all places! The tension quickly turned to laughter and both spontaneously burst out as they realised what an absurd situation they were in. John couldn’t believe he was here, and he laughed at the joy of being dragged to the Palace in a helicopter because he was close to Sherlock, who was laughing because whoever had brought him here here had wanted his services enough to bring him here nearly naked was all the funnier for someone who shared his amusement at the situation. No doubt if Mycroft was here he would wear that scowl of disapproval he usually sported whenever Sherlock did something he thought was funny.

“Buckingham Palace, wow,” John said, vocalising his thoughts in a way he knew often annoyed Sherlock, who often told him that his thoughts were droll and wanted to hear nothing more of it. The man in the sheet had the urge to tell his partner what a spectacular deduction he must have made, but thought that he should resist at least one in three sarcastic comments he would have otherwise said, thinking that romantic partners were supposed to enjoy some form of special exemption. “I’m fighting the urge to steal an ashtray,” John said and Sherlock couldn’t help a renewed burst of laughter. Sherlock looked around briefly, but saw no ashtray he could pilfer for John. Perhaps another opportunity would present itself for him to swipe a gift for his partner.

“Do you think we’re here to see the Queen?” John asked, knowing it was absurd, but had the image of Sherlock meeting the exalted person herself in nothing but a bedsheets. He laughed anew and looked over happily at the delightful crease lines he so rarely saw on his partner’s face. He adored these moments, Sherlock laughed quite rarely and it was like music to his ears. At that precise moment a very poe-faced Mycroft appeared through the other door.

“I think so!” Sherlock said and neither of them could contain themselves. They had been brought here, not the other way around, they were going to have a laugh while they could get away with it.

“I think so!” Sherlock said and neither of them could contain themselves. They had been brought here, not the other way around, they were going to have a laugh while they could get away with it.

“Just for once can you two act like grown-ups?” Mycroft said with great embarrassment burning his cheeks.

“We solve crimes, I blog about it and he forgets his pants, I wouldn’t hold out too much hope,” John snickered, still laughing at the mental image of Mycroft in the ermine gown, sceptre and tiny little crown on his head.

The moment the brother’s made eye contact their faces went stiff and serious and they began bickering about Sherlock’s current case and John tuned out for a while, not needing to hear more in the ever-burning Holmes versus Holmes feud. Instead, he thought about the milky white skin that disappeared into the sheet and the fact that with a firm tug, he might be able to see everything about Sherlock he had been thinking about the past few nights. This train of thoughts was disrupted when Mycroft picked up Sherlock’s forgotten clothes on the table and presented them to his brother like a butler trying to dress a petulant prince (John fancied Sherlock would like that simile).
“We are in Buckingham Palace, the very heart of the British nation. Sherlock Holmes, put your trousers on,” he ordered sternly. John was torn between wanting Sherlock to remain dressed in naught but a sheet and the thought of what *that* suit did to his partner’s figure. John quickly looked away, fixing his gaze on an ornament in the corner, not wanting Mycroft to notice his lustful thoughts.

They met a man, Harry, who was representing the anonymous client and John watched with amusement as Sherlock got irritated and eventually angry with Mycroft for withholding information from him. He figured this had something to do with their feud; John could see a taller Mycroft holding Sherlock’s favourite toy from the smaller boy, who would be jumping up and down to try and get it without ever asking nicely for it.

“I don’t do anonymous clients, Mycroft. I’m used to mystery at one end of my cases, both ends it too much work.” The detective then proceeded to bid the other man good day and stalk out the room, but not before Mycroft stepped on his sheet and it was all John could do not to gasp with unexpected delight when Sherlock’s naked back was revealed and it was only thanks to a quick reaction that Sherlock managed to preserve the mystery of his unclothed backside and John had to take a deep breath to contain himself.

“This is a matter of national importance, grow up!” Mycroft hissed, his cheeks once more burning at the childish behaviour of his little brother.

“Get off my sheet!” Sherlock demanded and once more John could see something similar happening when they were children. It seemed that age and experience counted for nothing between warring brothers.

“Or what?” Mycroft scoffed.

“Or I’ll just walk away,” Sherlock said, tilting his head up with as much dignity as he could muster. Luckily, John had good control over his expressions and no one was looking at him to see the wide-eyed doctor take in another heavy breath. ‘*Dammit, this is hardly the time to get aroused,*’ he chastised himself and tried to think about something else; that ornament in the corner of the room really was interesting.

“I’ll let you,” Mycroft said, calling Sherlock’s bluff. John knew that both of the grown children would not give in and the illustrious client’s representative was looking increasingly unimpressed. Whilst John was up for a laugh in Buckingham Palace, this was now getting out of hand and it wasn’t funny anymore.

“Boys, not here,” he said, in a voice that surprised himself; he would later think of it as his ‘dad’ voice. He looked at Sherlock who seemed to be shaking, but not with laughter.

“Who. Is. My. CLIENT?!” Sherlock said, shaking with rage at Mycroft. John raised his eyebrows in surprise at Sherlock, this kind of emotional reaction to his brother’s baiting was a little extreme and John wondered if it wasn’t something Sherlock *wanted* to know, so much as *needed* to know. It seemed to be another of those strange behaviours which came along with…whatever behavioural condition one might chose to diagnose him with.

After Sherlock was dressed, they got to business.

“There are many names for what she does. She prefers ‘dominatrix’,,” Mycroft said delicately. Sherlock looked thoughtful for a moment as his brain rolled around the concept in an innocent fashion, John could tell by the expression on his face.
“Dominatrix…” he said as he thought.

“Don’t be alarmed, it’s to do with sex,” Mycroft said, a smug smirk on his face as he seized the chance to embarrass his little brother.

“Sex doesn’t alarm me,” Sherlock replied, far too quickly to fool anyone in the room.

“How would you know?” There was that snide little smirk again and John could feel his partner bristle defensively next to him. John shot the older brother a protective glare. Mycroft picked up on it and went back to topic. “She provides, shall we say, recreational scolding for those that enjoy that sort of thing and are prepared to pay for it.” Mycroft passed around pictures of Irene Adler John had to try his best not to spill his tea, a beautiful, sultry woman was pictured in the glossy 9 x 15’s with a riding crop, a lacy body stocking, almost wholly nude… This was certainly not what he had predicted for his day, be tantalised and teased by his lover in only a sheet and now by a sumptuous woman who, by the imagery, promised some wild sex, even if he wasn’t particularly into S&M, he suddenly had an unbidden image of Sherlock standing over him with a riding crop and his body froze, staring into space. While he couldn’t think of many things that would turn him off more than being beaten, just the image of power was enough to turn parts of him to jelly and others parts the exact opposite.

“You might want to put that cup back in its saucer, John,” Sherlock snapped at him. It took a few seconds for John to come out of his reverie and completely missed the waspish tone of his partner’s voice as he feared John might have his head turned by this woman. He had taken in a few details of the conversation he had been daydreaming over, something to do with compromising photographs, that was all he needed to know, right? His concentration dipped in and out of the conversation as he fought for control over his bodily reactions and he began to get a control of himself as Sherlock told Mycroft to text him details and suddenly they were walking out of the door, Sherlock with his coat draped over his arm, his sheet casually forgotten to wherever it had been left.

“No I don’t, but your employer does,” Sherlock said smugly and held out his hands for the fire-starting equipment which John thought was rather a dangerous thing for someone like Sherlock who got bored enough to shoot walls, he was afraid he would become bored enough to set fire to something.

“We’ have kept a lot of people successfully in the dark about this little fact, Mr Holmes,” the representative of their client grimaced.

“I’m not the commonwealth,” he replied sharply, with particular emphasis on the ‘common’. John felt a small, somewhat childish, surge of pride at Sherlock to prove himself superior to everyone else, even within Buckingham Palace and he felt himself a little hot for his partner at this moment.

“And that’s as modest as he gets. Pleasure to meet you,” he said, stepping in and taking the hand Sherlock had rejected, so as not to seem so discourteous and to annoy Mycroft who was looking on in distaste.

“Laters!” Sherlock called back obnoxiously. John giggled as soon as he was out of Mycroft’s line of sight and followed his striding partner who seemed to know his way around the Palace with a strange ease. John wondered if this place looked anything like Sherlock’s Mind Palace and then he was no longer surprised that the detective looked so at home here.

Later in the taxi, Sherlock presented him with a stolen ashtray and John laughed out loud heartily, still wondering how on earth they had got away with Sherlock’s outrageous behaviour. He looked over to his partner who returned the gaze and they smiled happily at each other for a few seconds. It said everything they needed to express, they were more than happy to be in this together and content
in each other’s company.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the delay in posting, I’ve just been horrendously lazy, there is no other excuse :( Enjoy this and the chapters to come though! And I have no idea why chapter two posted again, I swear I entered chapter four. This should be correct now....
Music

Chapter Summary

Sherlock has been romancing John for quite some time without the doctor realising it, here the penny drops. Also, Moriarty rears his head again and his plans do not bode well for the Baker Street couple.

Chapter Notes

Previously: Later in the taxi, Sherlock presented him with a stolen ashtray and John laughed out loud heartily, still wondering how on earth they had got away with Sherlock’s outrageous behaviour. He looked over to his partner who returned the gaze and they smiled happily at each other for a few seconds. It said everything they needed to express, they were more than happy to be in this together and content in each other’s company.

“You seem to be much happier now The Woman is dead,” Sherlock said casually from behind his paper. John stared.

“She’s in a witness…”

“Oh please, John. Mycroft wouldn’t have come himself if she really was alive in America,” he said. John looked down, hoping Sherlock wasn’t going to get pissy because he had lied; it was supposed to be a lie to save the detective from the emotions he really had felt for The Woman. “And I’m not angry at you. Whilst I appreciate your efforts to save me from the torrid tangle of emotions that you assumed I would experience upon learning of her death you forget that I feel very little,” he said, passing John a look.

“That’s not entirely true,” the doctor said, conveniently seeing an opening in the conversation to divert it away from his little while lie.

“In the case of everyone but you that’s true,” he corrected himself. It still felt strange to be saying it and it came across in his tone of voice.

“Except annoyance, you still manage to be annoyed at Mycroft, Donovan, Anderson…” he could go on, but Sherlock had got the idea.

“Well, I must retain a few vices,” he mumbled.

“Why would you think I was happy she was dead?” John asked.

“You were jealous of her, now she is permanently out of the picture you are free to continue with me
as we were,” he said, turning the page of his paper.

“Jealous?” John spluttered. He went a little red in the face, it seems Sherlock had picked up on that after all. She had managed to provoke reactions in him that the doctor had been unsuccessful in doing, principally because John had refused to be pushy with Sherlock regarding sexuality; he had been annoyed that Adler had pushed Sherlock and got a favourable reaction. His reaction at Christmas had left Sarah asking John if he was really happy with Sherlock (basically asking if he would like to go out with her again) and then at her first death he was writing sad music. They had not been close at all during that period and, though it had stabbed at John like a cold knife, he wondered if he had really fallen in love (as much as Sherlock was capable anyway) with her; after all, he had never written a composition for John. That was why he had asked for her to tell him she was alive, because if his partner really did want her, John wanted Sherlock to be happier more than anything and if he had to give up his own position next to Sherlock in bed then so be it, even if the thought was a repellent one.

He had realised that Sherlock had not felt anything beyond interest and curiosity for her when he had cracked the fragment of code Adler had on her phone. He could see it Sherlock’s eyes, the way he kept a precise distance from her that he did not like her getting so close. The relief John had felt surprised even him and had caused him to suggest the baby name in jest, knowing it would irritate Sherlock. The detective had indeed glared at him with annoyance and confusion until the light-heartedness in John’s eyes had told him that it was a joke and all had been forgiven. Adler had then missed a telling smile that passed between the two of them and the increase in warmth in the room as things returned to normal between the two.

John had not been too surprised to learn from Sherlock later that Adler had actually fallen from him and through his expert playing to her virgin perception of him he was able to get the proof he needed and ultimately crack the case without The Woman buggering the government over a barrel. He was disheartened for a moment when Sherlock had recounted their conversation, his scathing deconstruction of her and his expressed views on the weakness of sentiment, deriding it as a chemical defect and not something to revel in. He wondered if it was Sherlock getting back at her for the way she had attempted to ruthlessly use him.

“Yes, John, you were jealous. I would have thought the entire room could see it at the Christmas party, but I suppose everyone there was pretty stupid,” he said passively. “How could you possibly have been jealous?” he asked, a look of total confusion on his face as he put the paper down. John looked away, not really wanting to talk about it.

“She was beautiful, sexy, seemed to keep up with you. Maybe she could have offered you more than I can,” he mumbled, cursing his inability to say no to Sherlock, even when asked to divulge his private feelings.

“She was intriguing but fundamentally untrustworthy. Hardly the basis for a relationship.”

“Men leave their wives for less.” Sherlock snorted with laughter. “What?”

“Are you my wife then?” he sniggered and John had to take a deep breath to stop himself from getting too embarrassed.

“You know what I mean,” he said, his lips tight.

“Is this how it’s going to be? Every time someone comes onto me you’re going to sulk?” John didn’t say anything; he was still trying to pick up his tattered ego from being called Sherlock’s ‘wife’. “What made you think I had honestly developed feelings for her that would eclipse those I have for you?” His face was serious now, as though upset that John had questioned his honesty.
“She was flirting with you from the moment you met and you even joined in sometimes,” John said, looking up only once or twice. “And then there was the music,” he said, without realising that he had said it.

“Music?”

“You wrote a song for her when she died. You don’t write songs for anyone else,” he said, purposely trying to his jealousy. Sherlock sighed exasperatedly.

“Your brain must be clogged with so much detritus,” he sighed. John shot him a questioning look. “You’re taking in the things I’m teaching you about observation, but you must be pushing out old information to make space, like how to use your ears.”

“I’m listening to you now, aren’t I?”

“Yes, but clearly not at any other time. It’s painfully obvious you are jealous that I wrote a composition for Irene Adler and you believe that as I have not written one for you I must have greater feelings for her.”

“What’s this got to do with my hearing?” John asked, getting annoyed; it was as though Sherlock was being deliberately evasive. Sherlock sighed with even greater drama and effort, he took his violin up and began to play. The tune was the song John had dubbed, in his head, Mourning for The Woman and caught himself scowling.

“You clearly recognise this. What about this-?” Sherlock demanded and drew the bow across the strings again. The music was a familiar piece, one John had heard being played more than any other piece, and often in the unsociable hours of the morning.

“You play this to wake me up at three in the morning,” he grumbled back. Sherlock rolled his eyes. “I play this for you,” he said and continued the tune. John’s eyes widened. “I wrote this piece for you a long time ago,” he explained as he played. John’s heart missed a beat and he sat back in the chair, rather surprised, to say the least.

“You play that one all the time,” he said, more to himself than to his partner. Sherlock looked up from the instrument, a little smile dancing in his eyes and he slowly waltzed through the front room, playing his creation with great joy and pride.

“What do you think of it?” Sherlock asked, hoping John liked it but knowing the tune would not change whether the man in question agreed with his composition or not. John didn’t think there were any words that could do justice to what he thought and felt at that moment. He felt as though he had heard something very personal, and he supposed he had; it was far more open than Sherlock would have been with words. He rose to meet his partner and pressed a gentle, happy kiss to his lips, tracing a finger lightly across the hand curled around the neck of the violin, onto the smooth polished wood and back onto the musician.

“Make me tea?” he asked in a way that he alluded purposely to the question as their metaphor for affection. John nodded, happily and went into the kitchen. He was followed by Sherlock, who put the violin to his shoulder and said:

“I have a piece for Mycroft too, if you should like to hear it,” he said and drew the bow, playing the theme for the Wicked Witch of the West from The Wizard of Oz. They burst into laughter after the first few bars, remembering the elder Holmes’ spectacular poe-face at the Palace when they embarked on the whole Scandal in Belgravia (as John had called it) adventure. Sherlock leaned over
John’s shoulder as he was distributing sugar into Sherlock’s cup and placed a suspiciously sentimental kiss on his partner’s cheek.

“I can’t believe you threw a tantrum because you thought I hadn’t written you music. I didn’t take you for the romantic type,” he said, unable to resist baiting the doctor a little.

“I did not throw a tantrum!” he protested, refusing to kiss Sherlock back now.

“So how would you describe being willing to leave me at the mercy of The Woman,” he said, breath ghosting around John’s ear and Sherlock’s voice dropping and the doctor cursed under this breath; Sherlock was using The Voice again to make his double entendre.

“Don’t go there,” John said, stirring the tea with a little too much force, it spilled haphazardly out of the cup and over the side. He was getting that image of Sherlock with the riding crop again and he willed himself not to be overly affected by it.

“Anyway, got to go!” he sang innocently and grabbed his coat as he closed the door to the flat. John looked down at the tea, half of it decorating the side. With an irritated sigh he went to pour the sweet and now unneeded cup away when Sherlock reappeared, downed the cup in one, winked at him and kissed John for what seemed like an age before whirling out again. The taste of sweet tea sugared his lips and the smell of his partner lingered in the air. He looked down. He was aroused.

“DAMN IT!” he yelled.

Sherlock smirked to himself as he walked down the street; he had left the window open in the front room for the exact reason of hearing John when he realised what his partner had done to him.

Sherlock was back at Buckingham Palace, fully dressed this time, and sitting on the same couch as he was the last time, having a very stand offish coffee with Mycroft. His elder brother clearly resented having to play host to his sibling, but their ‘mutual friend’ had very much insisted on it; apparently he had been ordered to thank Sherlock in person.

“I have to say, I thought you dealt with Adler quite sloppily, but then, she was very much the unknown quantity for you. I suppose even you could not resist her,” Mycroft said, tapping his fingers to try and resist reaching down for a biscuit.

“Oh please,” Sherlock scoffed, “I was never in any danger of being seduced by her,” he said with utmost distaste.

“And yet she managed.”

“She most certainly did not,” the younger Holmes declared and, as an act of spite, took a huge slice of cake from the tea tray. “I was curious, I wanted to know what she did to get the effect she has on other people. It was a scientific study, nothing more.” He took a large bite and chewed it triumphantly slowly, watching Mycroft’s face turn sour. “Why, were you worried for me, big brother?”

“I was,” he admitted. “The two of you together would be able to cause enough havoc to bring the world to its knees and I do so hate clearing up after you.”

“’The two of us’? Why does everyone think I was going to leave John and go off with her?” he growled angrily.
“It’s not all that difficult to see; she offered excitement, adventure, danger and even more mischief than you create, whereas John is...” he wondered how to put it delicately, he approved of the army doctor and did not wish to deride him unnecessarily.

“Normal?” Sherlock finished shortly for him.

“I was going to say more relaxed,” Mycroft said politically.

“There was nothing I wanted in Adler. Once I figured out how she manipulated everyone there was nothing left to her. She was boring.”

“And John isn’t?”

“Nope.” That hadn’t been the response Mycroft had expected.

“And how is that?”

“John is interesting,” he said, thinking enough about the interesting points of his partner enough to forget about the cake on his lap.

“And here I thought he was just a loyal guard dog to you.” Sherlock scowled venomously.

“John always does as he’s told, but never as expected,” he said, and remembering that he had cake to use as a weapon against his brother.

“I admit, I was surprised when you so cruelly cut Adler down with your little rant about sentiment,” Mycroft said, his fingers now clasping his hand to stop him going for the biscuits. “Especially when that is exactly what you hold for John,” he said, a little smug smirk on his face.

“Don’t be ridiculous, I don’t have anything of the sort,” he snapped.

“Then what is it?”

“It’s far more fundamental than that.” He looked up at Mycroft and put the cake away on the table as a peace offering and gave him a look as if to say ‘please take this seriously now, this matters’. “He is my Atlas.” Mycroft’s mind knew it had double meaning; on the one hand Sherlock was trying to say that John was a map, guiding him down the right path, giving him a sense of direction instead of aimlessly wandering from case to case. He also referred to the old Greek Titan Atlas who held the sky on his shoulders so it wouldn’t crush the earth, John was keeping him upright and steady. Mycroft sank back into the sofa, fixing his little brother with an analytical gaze. He was being absolutely truthful right now, and the elder brother realised that something on a large scale in Sherlock’s mind must be happening to be so honest with him. He needed a little chat with John.

They lapsed into silence, the pressure had grown to be almost a little emotional and both parties wanted to avoid that.

“Right, I think we’ve kept up this charade long enough,” Sherlock declared and sat his cup down and rose.

“Quite. Take care, brother,” Mycroft said, disappearing off into the depths of the Palace and Sherlock taking the opposite door towards the exit, towards home and towards John.

“The traffic on the way home was dense, the taxi driver looking weary; he was at the end of his shift and while he was not looking forward to going home to his depressed wife, his two hyper active toddlers and new-born, he was looking forward to seeing them nonetheless. ‘Appears world-weary
like every London cabbie, but is still fighting for best position in the traffic queue. Hasn’t been on the job very long as he didn’t switch on the meter until at least ten seconds down the road, recently come off long-term unemployment judging by the age of his clothes and how worn they are, values this job as he keeps the cab clean and uses air fresheners… His train of thought was interrupted by his phone buzzing with a text message.

I warned you, but you meddled and I always keep my promises. Anon.

Sherlock ran cold.

What are you planning? SH

I WILL burn the heart out of you. Anon.

Sherlock had to stop himself from crying out, he knew exactly what that had meant. He craned a look at the traffic ahead, they weren’t moving.

“Sorry about this mate, just had a call to avoid this road, they’ve shut it due to some kind of accident. It’s taking ages for them to set up the diversion.” The cabbie told him. Sherlock knew he didn’t have time to sit and wait for London to clear the roads for him. He threw a twenty into the front cab and bounded out, taking to his heels and flying across the streets of London to get home. It still took him nearly half an hour to get home, by which time he was visibly anxious. He looked at the door to 221A, untouched, the light left off. Mrs Hudson had not been home, one less collateral to worry about. He bounded up the stairs and approached their door carefully, it had been left open for him. The living room had been trashed, there had been an almighty struggle and his eyes followed it like a story. It began in the kitchen, clothing falling out of the washing machine said they had come in while John was doing laundry, but nothing smashed, so he had heard them downstairs and gone to fetch his gun, but was intercepted at the stairs. Splintered banister told of John successfully smashing one of them against it. He had retreated to the living room…he had close the door to ambush the next assailant, the handle had dented the wall behind it, his pile of Nat Geo’s were scattered everywhere…John had been thrown across the room, the coffee table had broken his fall… the skull print lay in a heap of smashed glass where John had kicked his attacker away… he had gone over to the fireplace, presumably to get the poker as a weapon, when he had been met by a second man… John had grabbed the knife from the Cludo board, but it had been knocked out of his hand almost straight away, it was in the grate of the fire…there was blood on the cracked mirror, he had been hit in the face and it had caused him to go head first into the mirror…he was struck again and knocked out, falling onto Sherlock’s armchair, pushing it over…drag marks on the carpet told him he had been taken away.

On the far wall, the yellow face had been re-sprayed, but with larger crosses for eyes and a downturned mouth. Sherlock then noticed Victor had something in his teeth, a little printed card with a web address on it. The same dead face was drawn on the back. It took some time to find his laptop under the mess and it felt as though it took even longer to boot it up.

He inputted the address on the card and it loaded an obscenely brightly coloured page, little happy suns and smiling white clouds could be seen grinning obnoxiously at him. A small window loaded up, a video window. Sherlock clicked on the play button and after a few seconds, a live stream flickered into life. There was a small, dark room, the picture was a little grainy, no colour. Easier to upload, less data involved. Ensures the connection doesn’t drop out and Sherlock sees everything. A figure, certainly John by the patterned jumper sat slumped, bound to a chair. A few tense moments passed and the unmistakable voice of Jim Moriarty sang over the connection.

“I told you, Sherlock, I told you this would happen,” his voice was a pastiche of sorrow and regret.
“You interfere and I will burn you. Well, now I have your heart sat here with me, don’t worry he’s only unconscious. I think it’s time you meet my flame.” A man entered the room. He was clearly also ex-army, a harder build than John and a little taller than him too. “This is Seb, say hello Seb,” Moriarty sang and the man turned to the camera and waved. “As soon as little Johnny boy wakes up we can begin the fun. Don’t stray far from your screen, Sherlock, you won’t want to miss the show!” ‘Seb’ walked out of the room, leaving John, with the blood from the cut on his head glistening as it coagulated. The audio line went dead, that had been severed, there was not even a hiss of static coming from his computer.

Sherlock sat, frozen for a good few hours, staring at the unresponsive John on the screen. It took him a long time to process everything he was thinking and yes, everything he was feeling. He had opened up his emotions, loosened the lid for John and now his doctor wasn’t here to take care of him he felt himself as though adrift in the middle of the ocean in a dingy and only a picture of food to sustain him. He tried to think about recovering John, what his plan of action should be but his feelings kept emerging and getting in the way, demanding attention from him like a neglected child. The overriding sensation that was crippling his body and paralyzing his mind was quickly identifiable as fear. He remembered it from the intense feelings he experienced under the influence of the HOUND gas near the Baskerville site, his entire body was affected. What was even worse was that because he had a tangible focus for his fear it seemed to magnify; he wasn’t simply afraid of a dog that might maul him, he was afraid of the pain Moriarty was certainly going to inflict upon John. The thought of that put the fear into him. Another emotion sidled alongside the fear: guilt. He felt the constriction of his oesophagus at the feeling, the biting voice in his head that told him he was solely responsible for the pain John was about to find himself in. He wanted to be in that chair instead, he wanted to be the one who was tortured; he found himself willing to do anything if it meant John would be returned safely home, no more harm done. But he knew, and here the fear returned, that nothing he could do would stop Moriarty now. He was committed, and he really was the kind of man who kept his promises, Sherlock knew that from when he blew up the old lady for saying only that his voice was soft.

After the fear came a surge of anger, rage that bubbled up from deep within him; only a small jet reached the surface, but it was enough to have him snarling at the screen, cursing Moriarty’s name and wishing so vehemently he had shot him in that sing-song mouth at the poolside. This was the kind of anger that made him wish he had the time to go out into the world and take Moriarty’s network down, man by man until his world was aflame around him, burning him, and he had to go begging to someone he had worked for for help. He wanted to break Moriarty’s world piece by piece and make him eat the fragments.

But the anger soon quelled back and the dread returned, fear and guilt all sinking at once as he heard a groan and John’s head slowly rise up.

John felt a pounding in his head, he could hear the blood rushing through his head as a deafening roar, like being sat next to a pulsating waterfall. His limbs were stiff and as he tried to put a hand to his face to quell the throbbing pain he could not; he was bound at wrists and ankles to a chair that was, in turn, bolted to the floor. His vision was blurred, but rapidly returning to normal, whatever drug they had dosed him up with in the van was vanishing from his system and he looked around him. He was in a small room, cold concrete walls, no windows and one overhead strip light. The room, aside from not being particularly warm was about 12 feet by 15 feet and 8 feet high. He knew exactly who had come for him and he wouldn’t put it past the little Irishman to have had this place custom made for the poor sods who he liked to play with. Poor sods like John.

He wasn’t going to lie to himself, he was scared, he knew what Moriarty was like and he knew it wasn’t going to be easy or quick, whatever happened next. He continued to look around and spotted
a glimmer of light on a lens above him on the wall facing him; a camera. He was watching from elsewhere, it made sense, as the bastard had said himself, he didn’t like getting his hands dirty.

“Smile for the camera John, you’re on film!” Jim sang through the microphone. Sherlock’s breathing did not become any faster, but it certainly became deeper. “And just in time for the prime time slot, though this would be considered a little too intense for before the watershed…oh sod it, this is a private channel!” Sherlock could hear the manic glee in his voice, the excitement of a little child who had a room full of spiders he could pull the legs off of. “I’ll not bore you with a tale of how you got into this situation came about, everyone already knows; you poked your nose into my business and I told you to back off. You refused and now here we are, I have to actually burn Sherlock’s heart. Oh well, at least it keeps Seb occupied, he’s dreadfully annoying when he gets bored.” Seb walked into the room, his back to the camera so Sherlock couldn’t see his face, the grim satisfaction that must be on it right now. His eyes locked with John’s and they stared each other down for a moment, taking measure of how much the other man could take before breaking. He was not like Jim, he might be here because he was good, he might even be here because he enjoyed this sort of thing, but he was not really here because it was personal. There was no smile or smirk on his face, only calculation as to what he was going to do. John saw the fist ball up and expected the first punch; his jaw clicked and burned with pain, but he knew it was a light entrée and that he must steel himself for worse.

Sebastian prowled around him, kept him guessing where he was going to hit next, there was no way he could keep his whole body braced for the age that this was kept up for. His stomach burned as a fist sank into it, he felt bile rising in his throat and he immediately spat it out, not letting the taste linger on his tongue or he knew he would vomit. A heavy boot kicked his legs which were unable to move, the bony part of his shin would be discoloured with bruises before the session was through. He grunted with pain as Seb stamped on his foot, not enough to break anything, but enough to bruise again. He was sure he would turn purple overnight.

For both Sherlock and John the beating seemed to go on for hours, when in reality it was one at the most. Sebastian certainly knew what he was doing, he paced out his blows, gave just enough time for John’s body to recover from the last one and then he rained down more, all over his body, though apart from that once at the beginning, he did not touch the face of his victim, that alone was left. John was shaking from pain, his breathing was ragged and disjointed and he knew he was close to passing out. He wished his brain would quickly give in, hoping that if he were not conscious then they would stop for now. The session was brought to a climax when Seb thrust the point of his elbow into John’s injured shoulder, causing the soldier to yelp out in pain, his eyes shooting open and wide, his mouth contorted as he vocalised his agony. Sherlock lurched forward in his chair towards the screen, wishing somehow he could go through it to John, to help him. John’s eyes rolled back and his head dropped down, chin kissing his chest, unconscious. Seb grabbed him by the hair and roughly opened an eyelid, checking his subject wasn’t faking it. Satisfied that he had passed out from pain, he shoved John’s head forward again and left the room.

“It was only our first night, so things were a little nervy, but what do you think, Sherlock? Care to give us any feedback? Constructive criticism?” Jim sneered through the microphone. Sherlock punched a message on his mobile.

Stop.

“No. I’m not stopping when you tell me to, Sherlock. I’m in charge of this game, I’ll tell you when it’s over.” His voice was no longer sing-song, it was sharp and dangerous.

I’m the one you want. You know where to find me.

“Don’t be boring, Sherlock,” he spat. “The role you play in this game is to watch. Nothing more than
an observer. I don’t know when the next session will be but you should stick around to find out. If you don’t watch, if you don’t see everything I do to your lovely little pet in there I’ll make his torture… Ten. Times. Worse,” he vowed in a lethal whisper. The audio went dead again and the image on the screen remained, but it did not change. John was still slumped and unconscious from a vicious beating. Though he did not realise it, the detective was shaking, he knew John’s situation was about to get much worse. Knowing that he couldn’t afford his computer’s internet connection to lapse out he adjusted the settings on his computer so that it would not go to sleep or screensaver and then rummaged around for the power cable, knowing that if the battery died John would suffer. Even more than he currently was anyway.

As soon as he secured his only connection to John he picked up his phone, selecting Lestrade’s number and letting it ring.

“Hello Sherlock,” he said, sounding surprised but not unhappy. “I haven’t got anything that’ll interest you I’m afraid, just the usual ‘boring’ lot.” Sherlock couldn’t find the right words to say. “Are you alright? Are you there?” Lestrade asking into the phone.

“Never mind, you’re an idiot,” Sherlock snapped and severed the connection. No, Lestrade wasn’t going to be much use to him, this was Moriarty for goodness sake. He ran through the rest of the modest contacts list on his phone and to his dismay there was only one other number he could call to help him. Any reluctance he might have had vanished when he glanced at the screen again; he pushed the ‘call’ button and the line connected through to Mycroft.
Agony

Chapter Summary

John is now in Moriarty's hands and Sherlock is powerless to do anything but watch what the criminal mastermind has come up with to burn the heart out of the consulting detective. Even Big Brother's powers are limited when Jim doesn't want to be found. For now, they must sit and suffer, and in John's case, scream.

Chapter Notes

Previously: Never mind, you're an idiot,” Sherlock snapped and severed the connection. No, Lestrade wasn’t going to be much use to him, this was Moriarty for goodness sakes. He ran through the rest of the modest contacts list on his phone and to his dismay there was only one other number he could call to help him. Any reluctance he might have had vanished when he glanced at the screen again; he pushed the ‘call’ button and the line connected through to Mycroft.

“What on earth are you calling me for?” he said with distaste and wonderment.

“Come to Baker Street,” he demanded; his voice felt hollow.

“Come to- Sherlock I’m in the middle of an important security meeting! Some of us do lead productive lives you know,” he replied.

“I need you brother,” Sherlock said. He resented the words coming out of his mouth, but he knew those words would make Mycroft come running. Despite their feud and growing number of differences, Mycroft was still the one who had cared for him the most, the one who had got him out of the mental hospital, the one who forced him into rehab. There was silence on the other end of the line for a few poignant seconds.

“This had better not be one of you games,” Mycroft warned and Sherlock could hear the sounds of rustling papers as the elder Holmes packed away his desk.

“It’s John.”

“Twenty minutes,” he said and cut the line. Sherlock looked at his phone, checking for any message from Moriarty.

Exactly twenty minutes later Big Brother Holmes came into the living room to see his little brother curled up in his armchair, staring at his computer screen as though he were lost and didn’t know which way was home. He surveyed the mess.
“A falling out?” he asked, picking his way through the debris to sit in the other chair (John’s chair). “No, more than that. He’s left?” he said with obvious surprise. He had thought the soldier to be a better man than to simply leave his little brother after how close they had become, especially given Sherlock’s inference earlier on in the day.

“Moriarty.” That word changed everything. Mycroft took a deep breath and rose again, removing his jacket and sitting again, knowing this would get very dirty very quickly if it hadn’t already.

“How long has he had John?” He didn’t vocalise the thought that the doctor needed security since this was the second time he had been snatched.

“At least since my trip to the Palace.” Sherlock’s voice was very small; Mycroft had only seen him like this before once, when they were little and their father was being forced out the house by their furious mother.

“And?” He knew there was something else. He craned his neck to look at the screen on which Sherlock was focusing his gaze. Sherlock turned the laptop slightly so his brother could see the live feed and John, unconscious, bleeding and bound in a dark cell-like room.

“Before I phone you, Moriarty had him beaten. He’s going to do more. Do worse. He promised,” Sherlock said. His words sounded like a child’s, but Mycroft knew they were true, Moriarty kept his promises, especially these ones. “He’s not doing it himself, an ex-military man he calls ‘Seb’ is the torturer.” That last word came out as a whisper, the word barely able to claw its way out of Sherlock’s throat.

“Seb is Sebastian Moran, we’ve encountered him before. Ex-marine, one of the finest marksmen we’ve ever produced. He was dishonourably discharged from service three years ago after a regrettable incident in Bazra,” Mycroft betrayed a look of distaste at the memory of the ‘incident’. “He was the sort of man who quickly became a mercenary because he enjoys hurting others. I’m not surprised he’s worked his way up to being Moriarty’s right hand man.”

Sherlock passed the card he had found in Victor’s jaw over to his brother. Mycroft immediately turned to his phone and typed steadily into it, communicating with some contacts who would be put to the task of tracing the connection and finding out where it was being broadcast from.

“I have put it to my team. I am confident they will have news for us soon.” Mycroft didn’t get a response from Sherlock who was staring at the screen, ghostlike. He knew his younger sibling was currently lost in a sea of emotions, the foremost being guilt. He had been like it when their father had left. A little eight year old Sherlock had made an off-hand comment about how their father had been seeing another woman and their mother had investigated, found it to be true and expelled her husband from the family home leaving the two boys without a father. He had lost himself in guilt then, too, refusing to speak for at least two months, devastated at the destruction his powers could cause. Mycroft had been lucky, he had been less removed from societal graces and had always been able to manage his observations, but Sherlock had been unfortunate enough to not have that intuition and it had proved detrimental many times.

Indeed, it seemed that while Mycroft had retained the ability to control himself, that trait had not been passed onto his younger brother so Sherlock could no more control how his powers worked than he could his own emotions. They had both found that burying, or stamping out most of their feelings had made life much more bearable and, according to their formidable logic, had improved the efficiency of their overall being. But they soon found it was impossible to purge all emotion, Mycroft had never forgotten his love for his brother, despite everything that happened between them, it was a fundamental part of his being that he could never separate from. When their father was evicted Mycroft became the principal male figure in Sherlock’s life and he had tried to be a good role-model
to a child who, it was painfully clear from his earliest developments, was going to have a harder time going through life than Mycroft was. He had always seen it as his responsibility to look out for Sherlock, no matter how much he didn’t want it, because times like this he really did need Mycroft.

The elder Holmes then did something that he would only ever do for his brother and his wife; he made tea. It took him a while to find everything he needed in the kitchen, it seems John had developed a system of working around Sherlock’s curiosities and after finding human ears in one sugar jar, he found the other one and sniffed it very carefully before he put it in the cups. When he came back he saw Sherlock staring, horrified at the screen. John was awake and groaning in pain as his muscles screamed at the abuse he suffered almost an hour now before. Sebastian entered the room and untied the injured soldier who was too weak to protest much. He led him out of the room and Sherlock cried out at the loss of contact. Mycroft checked his phone, nothing; not that he expected anything so soon. He hoped something would be found, though he knew someone of Moriarty’s ilk would not be discovered easily and he knew, with grim resignation, that the good doctor would be in for a lot more yet.

John was brought in half an hour later, returning to the screen with wet hair and glistening drops on his face. He had been washed and stripped down to his underwear. A blanket was thrown over him and the light was cut. The camera took a second to switch to night vision, they saw John crawl into the far corner of the room and use his doctor’s hands to check his wounds, his bruises. Fingers ghosted quickly and efficiently, if not with great pain, over the bruises which were blossoming already in dark patches over his body. His heavy, pained breathing could be heard like a sinister whisper through the speakers. As soon as he had ascertained he was not sporting any serious wounds, he pulled the blanket over himself as though it was a shield and went to sleep, wanting to forget everything that had happened.

Sherlock exhaled shakily, letting a breath of relief go that he didn’t even know he was holding in. He knew it was largely because John had escaped torture for the next period, but he also knew that the relief came in small part because he didn’t have to feel new surges of guilt for being the cause of John’s pain. His tea cup was cold now, he had taken one sip and set it down; it was not John’s tea and John’s tea made it worth getting up in the mornings.

The night was long, far too long for Mycroft who worried as he saw his brother slip so easily back into that sealed off shell. The hours passed inconsequentially to Sherlock, who was so lost in his own thoughts and emotions that he did not register the procession of the clock, even when the sun rose over the London haze in the small hours. The screen showed John wake with a start, he rolled over, frightened and alert; he had forgotten where he was, and after a few seconds for his situation to sink in he remembered, with a grimace, what was happening.

“Dammit,” John whispered, bringing the blanket up around him again to keep warm in the presumably unheated cell. Sherlock opened his mouth to say something but stopped himself; John wouldn’t be able to hear him and anything he said would be overheard by his brother, even if Mycroft had fallen asleep in his armchair. The younger Holmes knew his brother had chosen to sleep that night because he knew he wouldn’t be getting any for the next few.

“Be strong, John,” Sherlock whispered to the screen, knowing that it was silly as there was no audio connection from his computer to the speaker in the cell, but he said it anyway. Perhaps because it brought him comfort more than anything. He glanced up at the time on the computer display: 6:23, still quite early, perhaps Moriarty and Moran were having a lie-in.

Nothing else happened on the screen until 9am when Moran entered the cell with two slices of toast liberally slathered in jam. John glared up at the former Marine and told him to piss off. Moran snickered and left it on the floor before removing himself from the room. John looked hungrily at the
toast and the sweet-smelling jam, but left it where it was.

“If you think I’m going to eat that you can think again,” John said, talking to the camera; he assumed that the feed went to Moriarty. “I’m not willingly ingesting whatever it is you’ve put in that,” he said and turned his back to it and stared at the wall. Sherlock thought with almost surety that there was no foreign chemical in the breakfast, Moriarty wanted to break the doctor when he was at his best so he had no way of blaming something else when his mind cracked.

The ‘show’ began again at 10am, this time the chair was removed and John made to stand, his wrists bound and chained to a loop on the ceiling and Moran entered with a metal hose. This place really had been purposely made for this express purpose, who knows how many other poor souls had met a painful end here?

“I hope you’re watching this Sherlock, you’re really not going to want to miss this. Time for Seb to warm up for the day’s fun!” Moriarty chimed and the audio snapped off.

“Mycroft!” Sherlock cried out and the older brother snapped awake. Sherlock’s face was strained, his eyes wide and afraid, things were starting again. Moran turned on the hose and a jet of boiling water burst out and John cried out in surprise and pain as his skin was assaulted.

“Damn…” Mycroft cursed and looked at his phone, no new messages from his team.

“Are your people even doing anything?!” Sherlock demanded, upset by what he could see and hear on the screen.

“I’m sure they are doing all they can, Sherlock, they just need more time.”

“Look, John doesn’t have time, he’s…” the detective couldn’t finish that sentence, guilt washed over him anew. John yelled out again, this time a distorted curse word. If the picture was in colour Sherlock estimated John’s skin would be bright lobster pink by now. Moran turned the hose off and John was afforded a few moments before a large bucket of ice water was thrown over him and he screamed out as the conflicting temperatures made his skin electric.

“You motherfucker!” John screamed out as the hot water returned. Sherlock couldn’t bring himself to smile even a little at his partner’s spirit, but internally he applauded John for not giving up so easily.

The temperature torture went on for a long time and by the time Moriarty had decided that was enough, tears were running down Sherlock’s face. Mycroft had sat close and watched it with his brother, but his attention was on his phone; the updates he was receiving were not the ones he wanted. For the sake of family and his little brother who he had vowed to protect since he was born.

“I need to step out for a moment,” he excused himself and went out into the hall. He called the phone number of his team and waited to be put through. They answered after four rings; they were afraid to talk to him because they had nothing.

“Good afternoon, sir,” a young man answered, stuttering in his fear of the power of the older Holmes. “I’m afraid we don’t have anything yet. This man is using a very complicated encryption programme and has re-routed the connection through hundreds of servers,” he rambled, trying to explain the technical difficulty of what his boss was asking.

“I’m not asking for a technical explanation, I’m asking why you haven’t found the source yet, you are one of the best men in the country for this, are you not? That was why I personally asked you to be in this team.” His voice was low, measured and dangerous.
“We’re doing our best, sir.”

“You do know what is at stake here? I presume you have the live feed up in your office?”

“Umm, we do, but the screen is turned off. Sampson said it was distracting him,” he said, giving away far more information than he should have. The silence Mycroft gave him was terrifying.

“This is an order:’ he said in his most dangerous voice. “Turn that screen on so that for every minute you fail to find the source of that transmission you understand that an honoured serviceman will suffer.”

“Yes, sir!” the man squeaked.

“Get me results and get them quickly or I will have to come in personally. Don’t make me come in personally,” he threatened.

“No, sir!” The other man was now breathing quite hard and Mycroft hung up. He sighed bitterly, it wasn’t enough for them to be up against a clever man, it was just his luck that Sherlock had sought out the cleverest adversary on the planet. He took a deep breath and went back into the front room. Sherlock had risen and was now staring out of the window at the street below, a freshly lit cigarette in his hand.

“In the circumstances I hardly think John would admonish me,” he said defensively as he took a drag. Mycroft noted how Sherlock’s first point of reference for anything was now his flat-mate. He remembered when his little brother would refer to Mycroft after everything he did and said, seeing if what he had done was right or wrong and Mycroft would always guide him, making sure Sherlock’s behavioural difficulties were as covered up as much as possible. It had been his fear from an early age that Sherlock would be ‘taken away’, especially for his ‘own good’.

“I might join you,” he said and stood by his brother, watching the people going on by. He took a cigarette from the box on the table and lit a match.

“Look at them, going about their boring little lives, they don’t know or care what’s happening all around them.”

“A historical observation, it has always been the same with the plebeian populace,” Mycroft said with an air of superiority and a cloud of smoke streaming out of his nostrils.

“At least one pleb can raise his head above the rest,” Sherlock snorted as he saw a familiar car pull up outside Baker Street and Lestrade came running out and banged on the door. Mycroft looked down at his phone and saw a message from someone he had better not ignore.

“Oh, I think I know what this is about,” he said lazily. He brought up the picture of Moriarty sat on the regal throne, adorned in a familiar ermine gown, the crown of Great Britain on his brow and the orb and sceptre in his hands. Sherlock sniggered, which turned into a full laugh as he thought how ridiculous the picture was.

Lestrade came bounding up the stairs, two at a time and burst into the front room. He nodded to Sherlock, but was surprised to see Mycroft there; they even appeared to be smoking amicably, this was something he had not thought possible if all the complaining Sherlock had done was anything to go by.

“Sherlock, you need to come down to the Yard,” he said. The detective didn’t reply, he was too busy looking a little more somberly at the next picture Mycroft was showing him on his phone. It was a picture of the case that held the crown jewels with the words ‘Get Sherlock’ written on the side just
before he smashed the case open.

“Yes, James Moriarty has been wearing the crown jewels,” he drawled and took a very long drag of his cigarette while he thought.

“How did—” Lestrade looked at Mycroft and didn’t bother to finish that question. “He says he wants to speak to you directly.” Sherlock’s eyes flickered to his laptop and then to his brother.

“My best men,” he reminded Sherlock who he had out looking for John and the younger Holmes knew it would be alright to go out for a while, especially since it was Moriarty himself who had summoned him.

The Yard was surrounded by press; Lestrade had briefed him in the car on the way there that not only had Moriarty tried to steal the crown jewels, but he had simultaneously opened Pentonville Prison and the vault at the Bank of England.

“I haven’t got much time to be away from Baker Street, Lestrade, let’s make this quick,” he snapped.

“I thought this would be important,” the DI grumbled.

“Bigger things at home, though this should be a nice distraction,” was his reply. Lestrade gave him an incredulous look.

“Where’s John, I didn’t see him at the flat?” he asked, wishing the doctor was around, he always managed to make Sherlock a little more bearable. Sherlock said nothing but gritted his teeth. Lestrade raised an eyebrow, maybe they’re had an argument? It wouldn’t be the first time Sherlock had pissed someone off.

“Where is he, I want to interview him right away,” he demanded and Lestrade pointed down the corridor through which they were walking.

“We’re going there now. I warn you now, he’s a bit…odd.”

“I know very much what he’s like,” Sherlock growled, his anger rising to surface, an unfamiliar and rarely seen rage threatening to bubble through into his conscious mind. He knew that when his emotions crested the surface he became uncontrollable. He took a deep breath, all he had to do was maintain control long enough to get Moriarty to tell him where John was. Lestrade nodded to the men guarding the room and the summoned man went into the room.

Moriarty’s face split into a huge smile at the sight of Sherlock.

“Hello Sherlock,” he said happily.

“Where is he?” Sherlock snapped, unable to stand the prattle Jim liked to bore him with. He was getting straight to the point. All he got was a snigger.

“Where is he?” he repeated, his anger rising.

“Getting a little antsy without your fix?” Jim sneered. “Can’t live without your drug?” Sherlock backed off a little, he knew exactly how deep his connection to John went; Jim knew he was torturing far more than the detective’s blogger.

“Tell me!” he shouted, quickly losing control of himself.

“Me? I don’t know anything, I’m just…me,” he giggled. Sherlock roared and threw the table across
the room and seized Jim by his shirt, pulling him close.

“Tell me what I want to know!” he hissed. He could hear Lestrade scrambling to get out from behind the glass.

“Don’t you want to know how I broke into all those places at once?” he teased, knowing all he had to do was stall for time for the police to come to his rescue.

“I don’t care about that!”

“Sherlock!” Lestrade yelled and pulled the taller man off the triumphant Irishman. “What the hell?” he cried as he struggled with the thrashing man. Sherlock was in a haze of ire, he could barely think about anything other than hurting James Moriarty and forcing him to tell him where John was and anything that got in his way registered as an enemy in that mindset. Sherlock pushed Lestrade’s arm off of him and spun round, his fist in the air, already swinging to hit the DI but at the last second he stopped himself and the haze cleared for a moment. Lestrade was looking confused and afraid for both his own personal safety and for Sherlock. He had never seen the ‘consulting detective’ behave like this before and it was deeply worrying. Sherlock dropped his arms.

“Out, now,” Lestrade ordered and Sherlock felt himself complying. He would get no answers here.

“You need to relax, go home, watch some TV, you wouldn’t want to miss anything,” Jim sneered and Sherlock was bundled out of the interview room before he could react. The hot rage was giving way quickly to cold dread and as soon as he was out he took to his heels and ran out of the Yard, diving into the first taxi he could see. Lestrade called him while he was on his way home. He answered it without thinking.

“Sherlock, you need to come back, what the hell happened just now?” Gregory Lestrade was confused and ticked off.

“He asked me to the Yard to bait me and waste your time. This one isn’t difficult, even you can handle it.” He needed to be clear of Lestrade’s irritating time wasting by the time he got back to Baker Street. He needed to focus on John now, not something as trivial as breaking and entering, no matter on how grand a scale.

“Are you alright? You didn’t seem you usual cheerful self,” he asked sardonically to cover up his concern for Sherlock’s well-being.

“I’ll be fine when you stop wasting my time,” he snapped.

“Oh, sorry. We’ll be in touch,” Lestrade said, not really hurt by Sherlock’s waspish tone and the consulting detective supposed it was because the DI was used to it by now.

When he arrived back at Baker Street his first action was to check the screen; he had arrived home in time to see John refusing more food and the large bucket of water had been refilled. Moran kicked John savagely in the back of the knees, causing the man to drop hard on his knees on the cold, wet ground. John grunted in pain.

“No-!” Sherlock whispered as Moran seized a fistful of John’s lovely thick hair and forced him forwards, head into the water. John thrashed about, as much as his bonds would let him. After what seemed like forever, Moran pulled his captive up again, by the hair, and allowed him to gasp several painful breaths before plunging him in again. Sherlock fell into his chair, again bound by the strange horror that meant he could not look away. Every part of him was repulsed and reviled by the sight of John undergoing this torture, but he knew he had to endure, if not so John would not be alone.
Another ridiculous notion, but he was so full of them it seemed, so another added to mix wasn’t going to hurt.
Reflections: John

Chapter Summary

John's thoughts in the cell as a captive of Moriarty and his feelings about Sherlock.

Chapter Notes

Previously: “No-!” Sherlock whispered as Moran seized a fistful of John’s lovely thick hair and forced him forwards, head into the water. John thrashed about, as much as his bonds would let him, After what seemed like forever, Moran pulled his captive up again, by the hair, and allowed him to gasp several painful breaths before plunging him in again. Sherlock fell into his chair, again bound by the strange horror that meant he could not look away. Every part of him was repulsed and reviled by the sight of John undergoing this torture, but he knew he had to endure, if not so John would not be alone. Another ridiculous notion, but he was so full of them it seemed, another added to mix wasn’t going to hurt.

John shivered violently on the cold floor of his cell, still soaked from the days’ torture, all involving water again, the icy drops running down his back, neck and face, succumbing to gravity. If he judged the breaks where the light was turned off and the silent hours he was given to sleep as the night then he had been here for two weeks tomorrow. His stomach hurt terribly not only from the bruises of ‘Seb’s’ blows, but from hunger as well. He had given in last week, forcing down the food they had given him (he noted they gave him his favourite breakfast every day) as there was no other food given to him during the day; breakfast was all he got. Seb had told him that if he didn’t start eating soon he would be force-fed and John thought the notion of being tied down, nose held shut and mouth forcibly opened while food was poured down his throat to be one form of torture he did not want to volunteer for, so ate the toast.

His leg was killing him, pain shot down it like arrowheads and occasionally it spasmed. He was cold, soaking and miserable. His skin was sore and raw from being left in a cold shower for the last hour meaning he was cold through and through, making him shake. It had been too long, they weren’t even asking for any information from him, all they wanted to do was make him suffer and he sure was suffering. He curled a little further into himself, and pulled the blanket tighter around his raw skin, not caring how much it hurt.

The light had been out for at least an hour or two so he was sure Moriarty couldn’t be watching him right now. His dropped the wall he had built around his pent up feelings and allowed them to peek over the dam. His face scrunched up and his sobbed a few times as quietly as he could. His shoulders shook as he cried; he was so confused and felt so powerless and he was suffering for it. He longed to be home, sunken deep into his armchair, tapping away on his latest blog, making tea for Sherlock.
God how he missed Sherlock; he had grown so used to living so completely with him, even if they weren’t always together. He missed the 3am violin concertos, especially since he now realised that the song he was most often playing at that godforsaken time was a dedication to John. He felt alone, very much on his own, but not isolated, not anymore. He still had Sherlock and everything that had happened between them; he had the memories of their touches, that first time he gingerly caressed those long white fingers and told him he cared as more than just a friend. He still had all the beautiful glances Sherlock would give him when he was secretly feeling surges of emotion and he would always have that blissful first kiss. Remembering it made the pain fade away for a while and the cold stopped biting at him as he thought about those soft, chaste lips pushing against his own in an act of rare affection. The kiss was born from fear at losing the other and it was sweeter than anything because their feelings had been tested and proven true. That sweet memory was his one of his most secret, most personal and most treasured. He cried a little harder at the loss of his partner but felt comforted knowing he had a mind like Sherlock’s looking out for him. It had been two weeks, but he knew Moriarty was not going to make it easy to find him. He prayed for Sherlock to be close to finding him, to be bursting through that door with his collar turned up high and a quip about John not being around to buy the groceries or something.

There wasn’t much to hope for in this place, there wasn’t even the promise of it stopping if he gave them some sort of information so that was his main escape route blocked. He knew that if they were doing this for fun, which he was pretty certain of, there was no telling when this would end. He could be kept here for months. He had wondered for a little while if Sherlock had been taken and was being tortured in another cell at the same time, but he had dismissed the idea as Seb spent all his time with John, there were no prolonged lengths of time where he was not with John in order to torture another person. He could always hear his tormentor’s footsteps and sometimes muffled voices from the other side of the door. Since he heard no other screams of pain he assumed he was the sole recipient of their sinister attentions.

He wept a little more, thinking about what he had been put through and what they might have for him in the morning. He didn’t want to think about it, he wanted to fade away, wake up in Baker Street, black out until it was over, but he couldn’t even get to sleep, he was too wired and he hurt too much at the moment.

“Please, hurry up Sherlock…” he whimpered, thinking no one could hear him. But they could. No one had told him that the camera fed not only to the screen outside that Moriarty viewed but to the computer screen of his lover.

Sherlock had solved the mystery of those kidnapped children, Moriarty was being processed for breaking and entering and since returning home from when the girl had screamed her head off at him he had not left the flat since. He had made a short detour to a supermarket on the way and come home with a couple of bags of things that should keep him going. It mainly consisted of coffee and sugar.

He saw John curling up in pain, he heard the sobs and his own breath caught in his throat in sympathy and cried out when John whispered his name, pleading for help. He had had to watch ten days of John’s torture, the ‘nights’ slightly shorter for John than they actually were to eventually skew his perception of time, one of the things he would be clinging to in order to keep him sane.

Sherlock was at a loose end. Mycroft’s people had turned up nothing (that was where he was at the moment, gone to intimidate them in person), Moriarty had not contacted him with any demands, only that he watch and his own enquiries had met a dead end. He felt helpless, utterly helpless and it was not a feeling he was used to, he loathed it with every fibre of his impressive being. It was tearing his mind apart to be ruled by his heart which had been unbound by and for John, but without his anchor here to keep him steady, he was adrift in this storm of emotions that he was not sure how to deal
with. He had never experienced them as strong as this before, as paralyzing and he wasn’t sure if he was going to see this through. He had opened up his heart, unlocked the feelings and allowed himself the pure indulgence of emotions and now they were being used against him; he should have seen this coming, he knew he isolated himself for this exact reason. But the thought of not having had John in his life made him so unbearably sad that he could not entertain it for very long.

He heard John’s plea for help and his head sank to the table, bowed in defeat.
Defiance

Chapter Summary

Sherlock refuses to give in, to Moriarty or his overwhelming emotions. He forms a plan with Mycroft and prays that John will be able to endure one last gruesome round with Sebastian before he can coax Moriarty out. Also, the skull gets it.

Chapter Notes

Previously: He had opened up his heart, unlocked the feelings and allowed himself the pure indulgence of emotions and now they were being used against him; he should have seen this coming, he knew he isolated himself for this exact reason. But the thought of not having had John in his life made him so unbearably sad that he could not entertain it for very long.

He heard John’s plea for help and his head sank to the table, bowed in defeat.

Sherlock snapped his head up. No. He would not lose. He was too good for that. Moriarty had his weakness in his hands, but he had no idea how to exploit it. Jim could torture John to get at Sherlock, and yes it had worked at first, but this had given the detective time to come to an understanding of his own emotions and now he could see everything Moriarty was missing. The feelings Sherlock shared with John went beyond simply a way for John to find an adrenaline rush and Sherlock to get his ego pampered. The younger Holmes hated labels like ‘love’ but surely in the original, purest sense of the word that is what they shared. He knew, he just Knew that John would believe in him until the end, that he would never give up on Sherlock and visa versa so he knew their relationship could never be truly broken in this way. Moriarty had used John as a way of making Sherlock feel guilty, but in truth the detective took strength from the doctor and he would use that against his adversary.

It was like a moment of clarity in realising the nature of the utter trust and regard John and he held each other in, he could see it all laid out before him like a beautiful, gory storyboard and he knew everything that needed to be done. Moriarty had been busy during his time in custody. Lestrade, who felt loyal to Sherlock, had told him, in absolute secrecy, that Moriarty had claimed he was an actor by the name Richard Brook whom Sherlock had hired to be a ‘nemesis’ for him and play the part of master criminal so Sherlock could play master detective. It seemed he was producing ‘proof’ and Scotland Yard were buying the tale hook, line and sinker because they wanted to believe it; they were stupid enough to take it in because they were so resentful of the possibility Sherlock was simply smarter than them all. They wanted to drag him down as much as Jim and that’s why it worked so well. Idiots like Anderson and Donovan had run telling tales to the Chief Superintendent and so the unravelling of Sherlock had begun.

There wasn’t much time. He had a text from Lestrade saying that he could only stall them for another
couple of hours before they would come round and question him about the kidnapping of the ambassador’s children and the Richard Brook story. The story had even got into the press, Mrs Hudson had shown him the teaser excerpt from Kitty Logan in this morning’s Sun and knew the dam was about to break, he just had to be sufficiently ahead of the water to survive it.

His phone beeped again.

**Brook/Moriarty on bail, couldn’t stop it. Watch your back, trying to do everything I can here. GL**

Sherlock didn’t understand the DI’s loyalty or willingness to put himself on the line to help him, but whatever the motivation he was grateful and would repay the man by probably saving his life.

He was worried that Moriarty would come straight to Baker Street to confront him, but he reasoned that on police bail he would be easily spotted if he approached Sherlock so would probably lose any tails and head back to his base of operations. The detective needed the time it took for Mycroft to return from the latest cobra meeting to put his plan into action.

Fifteen minutes later, Sherlock had ironed out his plan and his brother arrived, nearly the end of the jigsaw.

“Mycroft,” he began.

“Moriarty’s out I know, I tried to have him detained but he evaded us. I do seem to have hired a department of morons.” He was in a dangerously angry mood. “I’m here to have you moved to safety.”

“No, that won’t work. I have a better plan, the only one that will work, but I will need your help to do it.” Mycroft studied his brother for a moment, saw how he had gone from the emotionally breaking little brother to his old self again in the last two hours he had been away. He nodded, as if to say ‘go on’.

“His plan has been to break me, using John as the pressure point. When I am emotionally vulnerable and at my most erratic he has sought to frame me, to concoct this story which he will know everyone will want to believe: that I am a fraud. This has taken a long time to plan and now everything is playing as he expected, everything except me. I will arrange to meet him on the roof of St Bart’s hospital and offer my life in exchange for John’s. He will accept because that is really what this has been about. In order to cement his story that will deconstruct my life he knows the most climactic ending will be my suicide, that way it will seem like an admission of guilt.”

“I assume you have a way of surviving this latest suicide attempt?” Mycroft asked, carelessly alluding to Sherlock’s fraught past.

“Yes. I need you to collect me from Molly Hooper’s address the evening after I am buried. After that I will need to get out to the continent. I will also need you to set my funds up accessible in an offshore account under a different name.”

“How long do you plan on being someone else?”

“Until I’ve brought them all down.” Mycroft knew that tone of voice. Even the Gods could not stop Sherlock now. “Moriarty knows that I could kill him any time soon so he will have instructed his criminal network to make sure he is avenged. I have to take it down.”

“That’s a plan I could well get behind. There are a few channels I will need to clear of course, but
tentatively I can promise you our resources to back you up. Not to mention my own personal resources will, of course, be at your disposal.” Sherlock reached across to the table and lit himself a cigarette.

“This is so unusual it is almost irksome; us actually agreeing on something.” Mycroft simply half-smiled in response, it was an unusual circumstance when they would be working together.

“Are you sure you want to do this, Sherlock?” Mycroft asked after joining his brother in a cigarette as well. The younger Holmes knew his brother was really saying ‘are you sure you can leave everything behind, leave John behind?’ He took a while to respond.

“It is not a preferable situation, but I have no doubt it is only course of action.” Sherlock looked away. Mycroft could tell the thought of being separated from John was sitting painfully with him. “It depends on how Moriarty plays his final hand. Perhaps we won’t need to do this. Knowing him though I don’t think he will leave me any other way out than to die.”

“Have we ever been beaten, little brother?” Mycroft said, smirking into his cigarette. Sherlock shared the familial smirk as well. They had survived school together and all the bullies that had targeted Sherlock because of his social difficulties, the two of them had managed to get Sherlock out of the mental institution and the sibling pair had beaten Sherlock’s cocaine addiction. Together they would beat James Moriarty and eliminate him from their path; the sooner they had done that and they could both return to their lives the sooner they could get back to their all-important feud which, while supremely annoying, was a sure sign that all was fundamentally well and they treasured it as a measure of normality in their lives.

They finished the rest of their cigarettes in silence and the computer made sounds of life. Sherlock steeled himself for the oncoming harrowing scenes that he would have to subject himself and John to so they could put this plan into action.

“Oh Johnny boy,” Moriarty said through the microphone in the cell, both John and Sherlock could hear him. “Just something I thought you should know before I get Seb to start the day’s fun. Your darling detective, the lovely Sherlock Holmes is watching, that camera is a live feed to his computer. Smile!” John looked up at the camera in abject horror.

“Oh for the love of God…” John moaned as he saw the shining silver steel of the instruments and knew what was coming his way.

“Sherlock turn your damn computer off!” he bellowed. “You don’t need to watch this, turn it off!” he was stopped from any further speech by a harsh punch to his jaw which left him reeling. He was hard pushed for breath knowing that his partner had probably seen everything that had happened to him. He felt sick, Sherlock would have heard all those things John had said to himself, all those little whispers and moans, begging his partner to come and save him. “Turn it off that’s an order!” he yelled through his teeth as his jaw pounded. Sebastian thumped him again and he decided against any more talking directly to Sherlock.

At home, Sherlock raised an eyebrow, John had never given him an order before, but then, he supposed he was trying to protect him in the only he could seeing as he could physically do nothing.
The detective disregarded the soldier’s orders and his eyes remained glued to the screen, knowing that John had to survive this one last session before he could put his plan into action and bring an end to this gratuitous torture. He heard Mycroft shuffle as he took position behind Sherlock’s chair, looking over his brother’s shoulder at the screen and remaining close to Sherlock for if he would need comfort.

“First thing’s first, Seb,” Moriarty’s voice came through the speaker. Moran looked up at the camera. “He spoke out of turn, break a few fingers.” John fisted his hands in the bonds on the chair in an effort to protect himself. Moran took out a small, heavy iron bar and forced his right hand open.

“No, no-!” John protested and the iron bar smashed the bones in his first two fingers. He screamed as pain exploded in the sensitive digits. A brief thought wondered in the back of his mind saying that it wasn’t the cleanest break, but it wasn’t messy.

Sherlock had jumped slightly at the sound John made at the pain and his own hands fisted tightly, more in anger than in sympathetic feeling. Moran had turned back to his roll of equipment, preparing for whatever sinister surgery he had in mind. John was still trying to control his groans of pain through his deep breathing as the pain from his hand radiated up his arm. Sherlock did not miss the spasm of John’s leg which was in a lot of pain now that he was severely stressed and traumatised.

As if to mock him, Moran applied some anti-bacterial wash on an area on John’s chest on his ribs, cleaning it and making sure there was no chance of infection. He then took a scalpel and made a small incision about two inches across in between two ribs, quite deep. John bared his teeth as he tried not to make too much noise at the stinging. Moran then took a pair of long handled tweezers with a sharp point and dug the point into the cut he had made and then, after working his strong fingers into the loops at the top, forced them apart, prising the ribs apart. John grunted in increasing pain, blood now dribbling freely down his torso.

Sherlock’s hands were clenched so tightly now his fingernails were digging into his palms, not that he could feel the sting of them cutting him flesh and bloodying his hand.

The process of picking John’s ribs apart was repeated several times and the point of it, other than to inflict pain, became apparent after the ‘treatment’ was finished, it was now very painful for the doctor to breathe; the cuts widened when he filled his lungs and the intercostal muscles were now inflamed and swollen from Moran’s torture.

There was a few moments break and John’s laboured, pained breathing echoed in the Baker Street flat. Moran was now opening a jar of something and Mycroft recognised instantly what was going to happen next.

“You might want to turn the sound down,” he said quietly, knowing that Sherlock was not going to agree to look away; he was intent, it seemed, on subjecting himself to every part of this, no matter how much it hurt him. Sherlock shot him a dark look and then heard what Mycroft meant. John screamed so loudly it distorted on the laptop speakers; Sherlock whipped his head around to see what was happening and saw Moran rubbing something roughly into the cuts, he quickly realised it was salt.

John felt as though he was going to explode with pain, nearly every part of him was ripe with agony. An aching pain clamped his leg as though a vice was being tightened around it, his chest was stinging with shooting pains that ran all over his body, his lungs burned as he breathed harshly and with difficulty, his head throbbed with the pain from the punches earlier and his right hand was ablaze with a burning sensation. This was only today’s fresh agony, there were still bruises and cuts and pains from the last two weeks which pulsed underneath everything else.
Sherlock’s hand shook as he realised now was the time, this was supposed to be his breaking point, and later he would come to accept that it very nearly was. He reached for his phone and typed a message to Moriarty.

**You’ve won. I’ll do what you want. Stop now, please. SH.**

He thought that sounded adequately desperate and sent the message. Mycroft’s hand appeared by his face with a white handkerchief and Sherlock was confused at first.

“Your face,” he said, trying to delicately tell his brother that he was crying. Sherlock lifted a shaking finger to his face and found it to be wet, he was crying, and quite considerably. He took the little square of material and dried his face, now feeling it to be hot and itchy. He was glad Mycroft hadn’t said anything, that last thing he needed right now was an attack on his pride as well right now. He had been in so much pain watching John suffer because of him he had become used to it sitting heavily in his chest, though he was surprised that he was crying out of emotion now, since he had not cried like this since he was in rehab.

Moran, however, did not stop, he took a hold of John’s broken fingers and twisted them to the side to make sure they would not set straight. John cried out in pain again, his voice becoming hoarse and raw, unable to take much more.

“Seb,” Moriarty said over the speaker and Moran took up his scalpel again. He yanked John’s head back by his hair and held the scalpel underneath his right eye. Sherlock seized his phone and immediately text again.

**Please, I’ll do anything. Don’t do this. SH**

John’s face was a picture of pain and dread, his breathing was laced with whimpers, trying to stay as still as possible so the blade wouldn’t accidentally slip and cut his eye out. Moran was waiting, dragging it out and drawing out John’s fear and nerves, the blade cutting into the delicate skin beneath his eye.

**Meet me, darling?**

Sherlock pounced on his phone as it beeped.

**St Bart’s, rooftop. SH**

“Four hours sexy, can’t wait to see you,” Moriarty said on the speaker and Moran withdrew, leaving a small cut dribbling blood down John’s face.

“What deal have you made? Sherlock?” the doctor said, knowing his partner could hear him, but fearing that Sherlock was going to swap himself for him. Moran, ever silent smiled grimly and jabbed his arm with a needle. John knew it was pointless to ask what he had been injected with and after a few minutes he blacked out.

“Four hours. That should be enough time. I’m needed at the Palace again which will detain me until this evening, that should keep me sufficiently separated from you.”

“We should fight,” Sherlock said, his voice strained. John was once more unmoving in the chair, bleeding and alone.

“Excuse me?”

“If I storm out and then you call a car for you, anyone observing should think that we have parted
under bad circumstances and will not be working together.”

“Must it devolve into fisticuffs?” Mycroft said distastefully.

“Would be the most convincing,” he said and immediately hit his brother in the face, not too hard, but enough to split Mycroft’s lip. He backed up at the prospect of a retaliatory whack having learned from John just before they went to Irene Adler. “I’m about to jump off a roof, you want to hit me as well?” he teased, grabbing the cigarettes from the table and pocketing the box of matches. Mycroft was hissing at the pain of his lip, but took care to bite it so it bled over his chin. Not wanting to let his brother get away with it completely, Mycroft threw Victor out the window.

“What the-!” Sherlock protested angrily.

“You wanted it to look convincing,” Mycroft said smoothly. Sherlock seethed at his sibling for a moment before closing his eyes in concentration. He replayed the memories of John whimpering and shivering on the floor, begging Sherlock to save him, the sounds of John’s screams as Moran rubbed the salt in his wounds and when John ordered him to turn his computer off to spare him the sight of his own torture. The tears flowed quite easily and there was no way even the most skilled observer could tell Moriarty that he was faking anything as the tears were very real.

“Good luck, Sherlock” Mycroft said as his little brother went out the door and to his fate.
Heeding the Call

Chapter Summary

Sherlock meets Moriarty and bargains his life for John's in a the most important gambit he has ever made. John, battered and tortured can only watch on as Sherlock takes himself and Moriarty over the edge. The world's most unassuming pathologist is the key to everything.

Chapter Notes

Previously: He replayed the memories of John whimpering and shivering on the floor, begging Sherlock to save him, the sounds of John’s screams as Moran rubbed the salt in his wounds and when John ordered him to turn his computer off to spare him the sight of his own torture. The tears flowed quite easily and there was no way even the most skilled observer could tell Moriarty that he was faking anything as the tears where very real.

“Good luck, Sherlock” Mycroft said as his little brother went out the door and to his fate.

“What do you need?” Molly asked without hesitation or a second thought. He had not flirted with her to get her compliance, had not bribed or cajoled her help because he knew she would not be able to keep his secret unless she truly believed.

“You,” Sherlock had replied simply. He marvelled at Molly and could not understand why she would help him or even want anything to do with him at this point when his career, his life, everything that made him what he was in her eyes was about to come crashing down about them. Like John, she believed in him. Sherlock wasn’t sure what he had done to cultivate that trust, but he was glad he had found people who were worthy.

“Wh-excuse me?” Molly stuttered, not sure at all what he meant.

“You are the only person who can help me now, if not then I will die and in likelihood John will die too. Moriarty has him,” Molly cringed at the mention of her ex-‘boyfriend’ s” name.

“I’ll do everything I can. What do you need?” she asked, putting her bag down on the table and removing her thick jumper.

It didn’t take long for Sherlock to explain what he needed, a syringe of a particular chemical that would slow his heart down to only a few beats per minutes, essentially giving the impression that he was dead. She would take a pint of his blood which she would douse over him when he hit the
pavement. Fifteen minutes before he was due to meet Moriarty she would sneak outside and slash the
tyre on the hospital laundry truck, keeping it in place so his impact would be shielded from most
people’s view. She would then make sure the body came to her lab and she would process him and
then she would inject him with the serum to wake him up from his coma and hide him in the hospital.
Mycroft would then take care of the rest; he would supply a suitable replacement body and use his
influence to get Sherlock’s remains interred as soon as possible. He would also stay at Molly’s flat
until the funeral when Mycroft would collect him and he would be secreted away to places
unspecified.

“There is also something I need to you do Molly which is really important,” Sherlock added, with
some considerable hesitation. She looked up, eager to help. “I need you to…keep an eye on John,
make sure he’s alright.” His eyes were the most unguarded Molly had ever seen them and in an
instant she understood what the doctor meant to Sherlock.

“Of course,” she said, nodding assuredly. After a silent moment which almost turned awkward,
Molly went off to get what they would need to make the two solutions, leaving Sherlock to
contemplate his plans in the lab.

Where are you? GL

The message popped up quite unexpectedly and Sherlock frowned at it; he didn’t have time for
Lestrade right now.

Out. SH

A word of advice: stay that way. The chief super wants you in for that kidnapping. Am
dragging out the paperwork as long as I can. I know you didn’t do it, am trying to prove it.
Anderson and Donovan are being idiots. I’m sorry. GL

Sherlock was stunned again. He wasn’t sure what would make Lestrade have any considerable
loyalty to him (besides solving cases for him) but he was grateful. If he survived this and Moriarty
then he would have to thank the DI not only for helping him, but for saving John’s life. There would
be no way this could work if Sherlock was in cuffs at the Yard. He didn’t reply yet, he knew what
he would say when the time came, but now was not that time.

The next couple of hours were sombre, the two of them working in the lab mostly in quiet; Sherlock
was contemplating his checkmate move and Molly was concentrating hard, knowing that this was
going to be one of the most important things she had ever done. Dutifully she went about her
business, taking syringes and chemicals without anyone noticing and for the first time ever she was
grateful that no one ever took much heed of her presence in the hospital, it meant that she could go
about her important tasks unhindered and without suspicion.

“Right, we’re all set up. I’m just off to sort out the truck and get some things for you when you wake
up. So I guess this is it, this is the last time I’ll see you before…you know,” she said, a little
awkwardly as ever. “Well, good luck,” she said and, without giving him any choice in the matter,
hugged him around the middle. Her eyes flickered up to his briefly and her cheeks set aflame. With
no second spared, she grabbed her bag and jumper and went out the door, leaving a rather surprised
Sherlock behind.

He had about half an hour until he had to go up to the roof to meet his nemesis. He looked at the little
syringe on the desk, the bright sterile light glinted off the needle tip and for the first time Sherlock felt
a little nervous. He knew the risks his plan carried and had taken all the measures possible, it was a
calculated risk after all; even if he didn’t survive, he still planned to take Moriarty out with him and if
he had to pay for taking Jim’s life with his own then that wouldn’t be too bad a price to pay. The only thing he would regret would be leaving John behind in such a way, leaving him to face the vultures of the media as they demanded to know if he was ‘in’ on Sherlock’s fraud and possibly even face investigation as being an accessory to fraud. The other one who would face extensive enquiry would be Lestrade who would probably be thrown to the jackals for his support of Sherlock and letting him in on police work. Sherlock did feel a little guilt at this, he had a certain respect for Lestrade that meant he did not wish to bring down his hard-earned career and he also felt he would be leaving London in a poorer state for causing one of its only inspectors with a brain to be crucified as the scapegoat.

The time came far sooner than he would have ever liked and soon he found himself having to make his way to the door. He slipped the syringe into his pocket and took a deep breath, pushing his emotions away and feeling his old, cold self slip back into place; he had to be at the top of his game to pull this off. He would beat Moriarty, no matter what.

The rooftop was warm, the sun bathed it magnificently and the wind was minimal, but he could see the dark clouds quickly descending upon them. At least the impending rain would help wash away evidence; all he needed were enough fuzzy facts and people would do the rest in believing what they wanted to. Bound with harsh cable ties cutting into his skin and tape over his mouth, John lay on his side on the ground, barely conscious. His eyes recognised Sherlock’s form and widened; he struggled for a second.

“Say hello to him. It has been a while,” Jim said from the far edge, his phone playing the Bee Gee’s as some kind of twisted joke. Sherlock crouched down beside his partner, but did not take off the tape.

“It’ll be alright John, I’m here to get you back. I’m going to set everything right,” he said, quietly. In theory, Jim would not be able to hear his words, but he had to be careful nonetheless, John had to believe this too. The doctor’s wounds had not been cleaned up very well, he still had blood on his face from the cut under his eye, but Sherlock stroked the side of his face lovingly, affording John a rare, comforting smile that Moriarty would not be privy to. It would likely be their last intimate moment. John’s eyes told him that he was worried and he was agonised to be so powerless. “Trust me,” Sherlock said and kissed John through the tape, knowing that he could not have his resolve shaken by John’s inevitable words of ‘don’t do it’. He straightened up and turned on his heel to Moriarty.

“I’m glad you came, though you certainly took your time,” Jim said above the music. “I love the eighties, don’t you? Their music…” he said, just as the chorus came crooning through the little tinny speakers. “That’s the problem, isn’t it? We’re just staying…” he said, gesturing with his hand a straight line and then holding his head in his hands, exasperated.

Sherlock saw in that moment the madness of James Moriarty; he was exactly like himself but passed his limit for boredom, he was everything Sherlock would have been without the things that pulled him back from the vacuum of his own powerful mind. There were times when Sherlock feared he would drown under the weight of his mind, ever buzzing, ever working, never ever shutting down even for a second. What would take people hours to figure out would take him seconds, his mind worked at such a furious pace that his life seemed to be drawn out by a factor of N; for every minute John would spend reading the paper, for Sherlock would feel as though an hour had passed and he had long ago run out of things to think about in those in between moments in life.

At first he had not been able to handle it, he had been sent to an institution where they had medicated him, but this had only stretched out the time longer. It had made him even madder, but it had given him time he needed at that age to sort his own mind; that was where his mind palace was built, he
spent hours in a chair by the window sorting through every piece of information he possessed and filed it away, stored it in the various rooms for access later so he was able to better process new data. The hospital staff had thought he was getting worse when in fact it was what he needed to sort his mind. However, when he had finished that task and the palace was ready to be put in use, he was not free to learn new things or find problems to exercise his new formidable mental strategy. He recalled the mind-destroying terror that had engulfed him when he thought about how he might spend a large chunk of his future with little to no appropriate stimuli and it was only Mycroft’s promise to get him out that had made him hang on as long as he did.

Then there were the drugs; those dark days filled with anger and frustration at his condition, at never seeing a satisfactory outcome for him, at always managing his difficulties and never excelling at anything. He numbed himself out with morphine when he felt it get too much for him to handle and shoot up with cocaine when he was scared about losing his mental acuity. That time too he felt as though his mind was sucking him in to a black hole of its own destruction, a vacuum in which everything that he was would implode and he would become a being of instinct. Purely rational and logical instinct but he would never really be him anymore. His self-control would be gone and he would do only as he pleased; while this had its merits and he was fairly sure he would get away with it for the longest time, he knew that self-control was what separated him from the average plebeians and he would always prove himself better than most people even if it was only for the sake of it.

James Moriarty had been crushed under the weight of his own mind. It’s never ceasing, endless chasing of itself in circles of boredom where every little thing in life was unsatisfying. The acts of eating, sleeping, shagging (he supposed) were empty and boring, the supposed great stimuli of life were dull and grey for him. He no longer controlled himself, he saw things he wanted and took them by any means necessary because he couldn’t help himself, because he was a slave to those things now. Sherlock could see Jim knew this, at times the other man had moments of clarity which buried him further in his own mental prison and Sherlock, in another life, would have empathised with him. But he had turned that uncontrolled instinct, no better than a cruel animal, upon his loved one, upon John who had brought a new stimulus into his life which had made him want to turn away from the abyss and gather himself together. For that, for harming Sherlock’s anchor to sanity he would kill James Moriarty. For his sanity, for the love of John, for the love of his brother, for the care he had for his few friends.

“How do they do it? Ordinary people, go on living day to day doing the same boring things? How do they not get BORED?” he cried, roaring the last word out to the world for it to hear. He snapped the phone shut and the music cut out abruptly. “Then again, I guess they don’t have minds like us, they don’t have greatness weighing them down like an iron collar choking the life out of them,” he said, looking as though he was physically in pain. “All my life I’ve been searching for distractions, little things to keep my mind from eating itself from the inside out. Imagine my joy when I found you. You were like my salvation, finally, an interesting little problem that would take time and deliberation to get out of my way. But you turned out to be boring, ordinary like everyone else.” He scowled in hatred at Sherlock who was standing straight, needing to get the facts out of Moriarty until he made his move. “Plain old boring Sherlock,” he said in a playground voice, trampling around a few paces imitating something he supposed would be boring and plain.

“I’m here aren’t I?” he said.

“Yes, I suppose there is that,” he sighed. “And what did it take? A bit of torture of some pet to break you. To get you here.”

“And what do you plan to do now?”

“Did you laugh? You had to laugh. Richard Brook? No one else seemed to get it, but I thought you
might find it funny,” he said, not even registering Sherlock’s question.

“Richard Brook is Reichenbach in German. Did you honestly expect any of them to get it?” he said with a snobbish air of superiority. They were the same.

“No, I suppose not. Did you like it though? I thought it was such a fitting way to get rid of you. I mean, not only am I going to get a dead Sherlock, but everything you worked for, everything that you wanted to leave behind, your legacy if you will, is going to die as well.”

“Do you think everyone will swallow the lies you’ve fed them?”

“Nice place, by the way, a nice high building. Good way to do it.”

That was the curtain call.

“Do what? Do-Oooh,” he said, as though it was only just dawning on him. “My suicide. You’ve built up your lies enough that they will only want one more little piece of so called evidence and they’ll believe you. My suicide will be an admission of guilt.”

“You got to admit that’s sexier,” Jim said with genuine relish.

“What makes you think I’m just going to jump off this building?”

“Please? Do it for me?” he pleaded in a mocking tone.

“I’ve got contacts, I can prove to everyone that you’re telling a lie and exonerate myself.”

“Oh PLEASE!” he snapped, there it was again, that flash of utter lack of control. “They’ve been fed exactly what they want to hear, it’ll never leave you now, Sherlock. You’ll be smeared forever, no one’s going to come to you with a case when they think you’re a big fat phoney. Your little ‘pal’ at Scotland Yard’s about to get crucified for this one. They want to believe it Sherlock, that’s the beauty of it. They always will want to believe too, you can’t escape it. You’ll be under investigation for the rest of your life, by the public and the police. Please, it’ll save everyone a lot of unnecessary time and effort if you just took the flying leap now.” Sherlock stared him down, not going to give in if this was all Moriarty was going to throw at him, he had to know more, know the entirety of his nemesis’ endgame if he was going to defeat it.

“Not convinced? Let’s throw in some extra incentive then!” he said, imitating a game show host, complete with a cheesy fake smile. “You remember Seb, don’t you?” he asked and looked over to John. There was the red dot of a sniper’s sight hovering in between John’s bloodshot eyes and Sherlock’s heart flipped. He fought for control of his reactions for a second. “Looks like you already know what will happen to him,” Jim sneered, he had seen the look on Sherlock’s face, a second of unguarded feeling as his heart leapt for his lover. “I will have your other silly friends killed as well.”

“What?” Sherlock said, wondering if he had really known that the stakes were always going to be this high.

“One of my men is at your flat at this moment doing some repair work for your landlady. He’s been known to do some impressive work with a knife,” he said nastily. Sherlock’s eyes darted about for a second, as though searching for some way out of this.

“Mrs Hudson?” he sighed, panicking.

“Everyone.”
“Lestrade?” he asked, needing to know how many people where targets. If Molly had been a target then he might have been found out.

“Everyone. Three assassins for three people and they all have orders to kill your friends if you don’t jump, even if you kill me. Friends are a weakness, Sherlock, I thought someone like you would know that. You may have only collected a few of them but they’re the flaws in the diamond. And I had hoped you were a beautiful mind…” He was back to that melancholia again. Sherlock locked his expression to one of horror, he could absolutely not give away that he was relieved Moriarty had not thought Molly worthy of a bullet.

“What makes you think you’re going to win?” Sherlock said, suddenly curious. He knew Moriarty had thought of everything, had planned for every contingency, but if he had held Sherlock in such high regard did he really think he would not be met with some equally cunning moves…like the one the detective had in his pocket.

“Because even if you weren’t ordinary,” he spat the word like a foul taste on his tongue, “you’re one of them, one of the goody goodies. You’re boring because you’re on the side of the angels,” he said. Sherlock snorted with distaste and slowly stepped right up to Moriarty’s face, looming tall over him and bringing every part of his formidable mind into step like an aura of power that made the sun flare up behind his head; the last gasp of sunshine before the rain.

“I may be on the side of the angels, but don’t think for one second that I am one of them,” he hissed coldly. His entire focus now was on making James Moriarty see him for every part as extraordinary as he was. “You want me to shake hands with you in hell? I shall not disappoint you. Here I am; I am you ready to do whatever is necessary. Willing to do anything,” he menaced. His gaze, as focused as a single beam of light shot into Moriarty’s dark, mad eyes and burned a hole in his mind, or whatever tattered remains of his soul if there was such a thing. His face relaxed and brightened.

“You’re me,” he said in a moment of total clarity. It was in this moment that he saw himself in Sherlock, what he might have been had he not given into the vacuum of his mind and he acknowledged that he had allowed himself to be crushed by the weight of his own ferocious, ceaseless brain. He saw in his nemesis what he might have been if he had held onto his sanity and not become the impulsive creature he was now. “You’re me,” he said, moved in such a way that it made time stop and for seconds which actually felt like real seconds, he saw everything he could have been and he realised that he wanted it. “Bless you.” He was irredeemable now, there was no way he could have what he wanted; there was no peace for him, no respite from his madness and endless thoughts and there was nothing he could do. He knew he was doomed to this.

In a flash that clarity faded and the impulsive creature that lurked in narcissism and hedonism broke forth again.

“I’m not going to let this game end in an impasse, Sherlock,” he said and stepped away from the taller man and returned to pacing the rooftop and edge. “You have a time limit. If you don’t jump in the next two minutes there’s going to be an awful lot of blood going flying around. I’d get a move on if I were you.” Sherlock looked frantic, crushed that he had not been able to manoeuvre Moriarty into the position he had wanted.

“Please then, give me a minute. I need to…say goodbye,” he said, defeated and nodded his thanks when Jim waved his hand in consent. He stuck his hands in his pocket to gather his phone and at the same time took hold of the syringe and pushed the needle through his clothing and into his leg, pushing the plunger. He had about a minute before it would take effect. He typed in a few words and showed Jim, who looked gleeful at them.

Goodbye. Thank you for everything. SH
The message was sent to his brother, to Lestrade, to John and Mrs Hudson’s phone. He looked up at the sky, as if wishing the messages a safe journey and he felt an icy wind whip up around him, the storm front was moving in now, the sun was blotted out and there were spots of rain in the air. He filled his lungs deeply and prepared himself for the fall. His coat blew out behind him and he shivered in cold involuntarily.

“Now would be a good time,” Moriarty said. “Unless, of course you want Doctor Watson’s brains decorating your lovely jacket.” That made Sherlock snap. With a ferocious roar and a strength he had summoned from nowhere, especially with the drug starting to take effect, he rushed Moriarty and rugby-tackled him over the edge, sending them both plummeting over the edge. They only had time to hear Jim’s scream as the fell before the dark reflection of their being landed on his back on the pavement, playing cushion to the taller man. The impact was painful and messy, Sherlock had felt a few of his ribs break, but Moriarty’s shattered body had been enough for his nemesis to survive. The world began to spin around him as he felt warm liquid being thrown over his head and it blinded him, running into his eyes and down his face. He was tired and the warm liquid running through his hair was soothing and his eyes closed. He stayed conscious enough to hear people screaming and John’s cry of ‘SHERLOCK!’ from the rooftop but there was no sound of a sniper bullet and he ‘died’ happily.

Molly rubbed her eyes until they were sore. She looked in the mirror, they were bloodshot and the area around them was red, an excellent way to make people believe she had been crying. She grabbed a tissue from her bag and exited the Ladies’ dabbing her eyes. A man, who revealed himself to be an agent of Mycroft, had the body of Sherlock wheeled into her lab and went to take care of putting through the paperwork nice and quickly. As soon as she was absolutely sure she was alone and took the syringe from earlier out of its protective shell in the glasses case in her bag and she carefully pushed it into the detective’s arm. She had only unzipped the upper half of the body bag, not bringing herself to peek too much at his prone form, even if the thought did cross her mind – every few minutes or so. Instead of sneaking a look, she took out the clothes she had managed to get from her quick trip out earlier and placed them on a stool which she put next to the table on which he was placed. She took a few pictures of his body, the necessary injuries that Mycroft’s man would need for photoshopping some nasty skull damage onto and he left as soon as he took the images from her camera. Molly knew the serum she had injected would take a while to get around Sherlock’s body and wake him up so she alternated between catching up on some old papers and carefully looking out the door to see if anyone was coming.

After about twenty minutes she heard the unmistakeable groan of her not-so-dead body and the rustling as he fidgeted. After taking a good long while to grow accustomed to living again, Sherlock reached for the zip on the bag and extracted himself. As soon as his fingers touched the zip, Molly flushed bright red and immediately turned around to give him some privacy, she refused to perv. It didn’t take him long to dress and he tested out the functioning of his limbs and fine motor control.

“Is John alright?” he asked at once.

“He was found not too long after you…you know,” she said. “He’s in the Intensive Care ward, but they’re taking good care of him.”

“Has he said anything?”

“Not a word the last time I checked with the nurses down there. He’s going to be ok, Sherlock,” she said in her best effort to comfort him. He was looking a little lost and Molly couldn’t decide if that was because he was still waking up from his coma or because he was now very separated from John.
“I know you don’t like to eat much, but you should after having those chemicals in your system. They only had pasta pots left in the cafeteria when I went down, sorry if you don’t like,” she mumbled and passed him a little plastic tub of cold penne. Sherlock nodded and consented to pick at the food until he had finished it, which took quite some time.

“We need to wait until dark and then we can sneak you out of here. I’ve got a place you can hide.” She checked the corridor outside was clear and led him to a large storage room; it was filled with shelves of supplies ranging from latex gloves to body bags at so forth.

“This is the storage room for the morgue. I’m usually the only one who comes in here, even when the other pathologists are working. I’ll come in as often as I can. I’ll be in the morgue if there’s an emergency,” she said and passed him a bottle of water. “Rehydration is important too,” she said as she left the room and closed it behind her with a soft click. Sherlock exhaled long and loudly. His body still felt strange after the use of the drug and the clothes he was in were not, by any means, making him feel as though he had jumped out of his own body on the top of the hospital and into another one. He sipped the water Molly had given him and contemplated his next move. He would be hiding with Molly for the next two weeks, staying in London until after his own funeral when Mycroft would be able to sneak him away onto the continent where he would be able to begin bringing down Moriarty’s network. Moriarty had tried, and in some ways succeeded, in bringing down everything that Sherlock had worked to build up: his career, his reputation, his skills and now Sherlock was going to do the same to Sebastian Moran. The network was vast and there were many people in it, but none of them would be terribly intelligent, they had not supplanted their old boss after all, but still his work against international crime would be a tremendous legacy, it would be a worthy magnus opus to leave.

But it would be work completed without John. He would be travelling the world and uncovering mystery upon enigma without his soundboard, his blogger, his lover by his side. He licked his lips at the thought of John’s kisses and felt sadness at the knowledge he would not be feeling those delicious kisses for some time now. Even with Mycroft’s help it would take time to accomplish his goal. An unpleasant thought then crawled into his mind which provoked a slightly nauseous reaction; if John believed he was dead he would eventually move on, stop loving Sherlock and find someone else to be with. The detective could not predict how long such a thing might take but there was no reason to believe that his partner would remain static to Sherlock’s memory and he would eventually start dating again. Perhaps he would meet a pretty (but oh so boring) woman and they might well get married, have a child (he could see John being an exemplary father), hold a (boring) job, move into a nice house, maybe have another child and generally settle down to all the things that were supposed to bring happiness to a man. His stomach rolled nastily at the thought of losing John in such a way, but then he experienced something new: a rare moment of selflessness. If John could be happy that way then Sherlock would accept that, if his work took so long that John moved on from him then it would be acceptable; not to mention that his decision had saved John’s life and that in itself was worth any personal suffering. It was strange, valuing another’s happiness above his own, he had never seen the need, use or desire for it but now he felt it as though it formed a basic part of his being.

He pondered a little more on this feeling, this selflessness and he compared it to other expressions of this feeling in order to try and place it, to find a name for it so he might understand it a little better. He found the closest answer he could in fiction; when characters gave up their own happiness and desires for the benefit of someone else’s that was usually reasoned by love, Character A loved Character B. Therefore, he thought that he must love John, truly, in order for him to sacrifice the one connection that had made him feel most at peace with himself in his entire fraught life for the chance at happiness he knew John could have. The revelation was a bittersweet one; he felt joy at being able to feel the emotion in this manner, it made him feel human and connected to his species in a way that
grounded him, that gave him the strength to face the goliath task ahead of him. What was sour about
the realisation of his feelings was that he never truly expressed it to John, not in a way he would have
liked in hindsight. He had never spoken the words, or indeed, many words of affection, and he
wished that he had been able to express these feelings more adequately. He wondered if John would
ever, looking back, question their relationship, those feelings which had drawn them together in the
first place; those emotions that had caused them to touch, to kiss, to sleep in the same bed with such
intimate closeness that warmed them both.

But just the memory of the red laser sight on John’s head was enough to steel his resolve, he would
remove any and all threats to those he cared about, John foremost, and if he was still around by the
time he had finished then perhaps they could return to that happiness they had known before two
weeks ago. He had never worked for a specific reason before, the work was always its own reward
and he wondered if a motivation would conflict with his resolution of the work, but he quickly
concluded that it would not matter; he would do the work because he had to and whatever the
reasons happened to be were clutter if he dwelled on them for too long.

Sherlock wondered if John would be alright, he wondered how his partner would take this ‘death’
and all the press attention that would follow it, especially when he found out about ‘Richard Brook’
and how everyone now thought he was a fraud. He worried for a moment before he thought about
something he had considered in those long, horrid nights when John was being tortured for his
viewing agony; John believed in him until the very end, he refused to let anyone shake his belief in
the detective, no matter what anyone said or did to make him think otherwise. Likewise, he had faith
(what an alien concept for him) in John, he knew that the doctor would not believe the idiotic press
and the stories that would undoubtedly surface in Sherlock’s absence. He knew John would be
alright.

When Molly returned some hours later it was dark and the hospital had gone quiet now, even with
the press hawking around like vultures, scavenging the scene of Sherlock’s ‘death’. They had been
outside all day, journalists reporting live from the scene and cameras flashing periodically as the
paparazzi and passers-by wanted a macabre memento of the day’s events.

“There’s a taxi waiting outside, one of your brother’s men is driving it. Are you sure you want to
come back with me? I mean, wouldn’t it be better to hide with Mr Holmes for a while?” she asked,
awkwardly, reluctant to make eye contact with him. She passed him a plastic bag from the taxi
driver.

“No, Mycroft would be under constant surveillance at the moment. No, you flew under Moriarty’s
radar, he won’t have anyone watching you.” He emptied the bag, finding a short blonde wig in there
and he immediately started to push his dark curls into the wig cap with a practised hand.

“Seems a bit silly since he pretended to date me,” she said, forcing a little laugh. He settled the wig
into place, adjusting it so it was in the most natural position, enough to be able to fool someone who
would only spare him a passing glance.

“He didn’t consider you important and too stupid to be worth keeping an eye on you.” Her face fell.
“Something I am grateful for. Thank you, Molly Hooper, you have saved my life today,” he said
and, like at Christmas, placed a kiss on her cheek. She thought he looked strange in the wig, but he
still had those eyes and she turned to mush a little on the inside.

“I showed him,” she said with a huge grin, mostly from the tingling on her cheek where those lips
had touched her face. “He thought I wasn’t worth it and now I’ve helped bring his plan down! For
the first time in my life I’m glad everyone ignores me. I wouldn’t have been of any use to you if they
paid me any attention!” Sherlock couldn’t tell if she was being brutally honest with herself or if this
was that irritating self-deprecation which people were prone to do when they were fishing for compliments.

“You would have been of no interest to me if you had been boring and normal like the rest of this hospital,” he said, feeling that was quite the end of any such things he was going to say. While he had only spoken the truth, he didn’t want this to turn into pampering Molly’s ego or she would become unfocussed and likely to give the game away. She seemed to sense this and turned to the door, forcibly removing the pleased smile from her face and rubbing her eyes a little more again to keep them red and sore; Sherlock had to admit she was rather good at this. He face straightened and fell into one of sorrow and upset before she opened the door and headed down the corridor, guiding him easily down the hospital on the path that would put them into contact with the least amount of people.

Molly’s apartment was small and clean, there were several pink cushions which had been hastily stowed behind the sofa as she had prepared to receive a guest who would regard them with the distaste he was showing now. The tour was brief and ended with the spare room, which had been prepared for him. It was very small, only large enough for a single bed, canvas wardrobe and a small set of drawers but it would do for now. He only planned on staying here for no more than two weeks anyway.

“I’ve done a full shop so there’s enough food for both of us, take anything you like,” she said, refusing to cross the threshold into what was now his territory. “Oh, but no severed heads in the fridge,” she giggled. He stared at her. Immediately, she stuttered and looked down. “John told me. I had no idea what you did with the parts I got for you. To be honest, I was a little scared to ask…”

“What did you think I did with them that was so frightening?” he asked, astonished. Surely even Molly had the basic deduction skills to realise that he would be experimenting on them in household conditions which would be closer to those presented in his cases.

“I don’t know…” she trailed off, embarrassed by what she had said. Sherlock rolled his eyes and reclined on the bed. “I’ll go now. I’m going to run a bath. If you hear any scratching it’s just Toby,” she said and eventually left him alone, closing the door quietly after her. He breathed a silent sigh of relief. He owed Molly after everything she had done, but he supposed her prattle wasn’t going to get any more bearable because of it; he just had to keep his mouth shut for longer was all.
Getting Rid of Sherlock

Chapter Summary

Sherlock is dead, John is in hospital and Molly is playing host to the ghost of the detective. All that remains is for him to get rid of Sherlock Holmes altogether to become someone else: the Destroyer of Moriarty's empire.

Chapter Notes

Previously: ‘I’ll go now. I’m going to run a bath. If you hear any scratching it’s just Toby,” she said and eventually left him alone, closing the door quietly after her. He breathed a silent sigh of relief. He owed Molly after everything she had done, but he supposed her prattle wasn’t going to get any more bearable because of it, he just had to keep his mouth shut for longer was all.

The next morning was Molly’s day off fortunately and as she ate breakfast in her pink fluffy dressing gown, Sherlock had waltzed in with a list of things he needed her to go out and get for him at the soonest possible convenience (aka ten minutes ago).

“Umm, I don’t think I’ll be able to get all of these things,” she said sheepishly, looking down the list. “Payday is next week and I’m almost spent out,” she explained, a little embarrassed.

“Mycroft will reimburse you everything,” he said immediately. “I need to communicate with him, but my phone has been impounded as evidence, not to mention if the number is recorded as active my enemies will know I am still alive. The cosmetics are vital if I am to avoid being seen, I must change my appearance,” he explained, with a small degree of frustration. However, Molly’s only sticking point was her own financial situation and she seemed to be less reluctant to go shopping at the promise that it wouldn’t bankrupt her. She would have to dip into her savings, but she supposed, while not a rainy day, it was a worthwhile cause. The holiday was on indefinite hold anyway.

In less than twenty minutes Sherlock had all but pushed her out of the door and she was heading to the nearest Boots store. Walking down the street, Molly saw a newspaper board outside a newsagents saying ‘Sherlock Hoax – Moriarty an actor’. Molly balled her fists and, even though she was loath to do so, she popped inside to buy the paper that was running the story. The Sun. ‘No surprises there then, they’ll run any old trash’ she thought vehemently to herself. She treated herself to a bag of chocolate buttons to snack on as she went round the shops.

“What do you make of that then?” the old lady behind the counter said, pointing to the front page of the paper which featured the infamous picture of Sherlock in That Hat.

“Load of nonsense,” she said, quite sure of herself.
“The press do like to smear the muck on people, don’t they?” she said. Clearly she was sitting on the fence and peeked over either side depending on her customer’s views. Molly didn’t thank the old lady as she exited the shop, scanning the bullshit articles inside. It seemed Mycroft had been exerting his influence again, none of them mentioned the deaths of Sherlock or Moriarty. It happened quite late yesterday, so maybe they hadn’t enough to write much up, though Molly was sure they would have just made something up if they didn’t have all the facts quite yet. She snorted, calling Kitty Whatsherface ‘stupid and ignorant’ and then giggling to herself as she realised that was a Sherlockism. With a renewed smile on her face she stuffed the paper in her satchel but quickly remembered that she might be being watched (she wasn’t going to take any chances) and quickly straightened her expression. Still, she felt warm inside and excited at the thought of her crush waiting at her flat for her to return, even if it was for new clothes and a way to change his appearance, but she had helped save his life. He was alive and for that she was happy and grateful.

It took her ages to find the right hair dye to buy for Sherlock. She had not much liked the cheap blonde wig on him yesterday and fancied she would miss the dark curls that made him all handsome and mysterious, but then it was a necessity. After no less than half an hour of dallying and prevaricating she eventually found one she thought she could live with (not that she would have to live with it for very long) and put it in her basket. Choosing the make-up was much easier, after all, she had some experience in this department and was able to pick out creams and powders which would darken his alabaster skin tone without making it look too false. She put in a few bottles and picked up a few bits for herself; she needed more shampoo since it would be going at twice the rate now and a man’s razor. She had no idea what type of razor Sherlock might use; personal grooming was something she hadn’t exactly asked him many questions on, so she asked a man who was stacking the shelves nearby and received a good long lecture on the merits of some over others. Slightly regretting asking in the first place, she went with his first suggestion and put it in her basket.

She took even longer in the nearest Phone 4 U as the very nice sales assistant (who was also rather cute) tried to persuade her that a contract phone would be a really good idea and they had some specular deals on at the moment which meant she could get the latest handset (in pink no less) for a relatively small amount a month. She had tried to insist that all she wanted was a phone with a basic sim as she was only going to be using it sporadically.

“I travel a lot, you see,” she said, the lie coming effortlessly to her. “I’ve got a phone I use abroad, that’s my business phone, but I just want one for when I’m back in the UK. I’m getting rather sick of having business texts coming through when I’m trying to call my sister!” she laughed and the assistant laughed with her. She stood her ground and eventually managed to get the latest handset (in pink no less) for a phone in the basket.

“It took her a little while to get to the costume shop she was heading for, it was the only place she knew of that did coloured contact lenses. Her stomach rumbled, she had only been to two shops but it had taken her three hours and her breakfast had been paltry before Sherlock had shoved her out of the door. Instinctively, she checked her phone to see if she had had any messages; there was a missed call from the Yard and two from home, which meant Sherlock. Hoping everything was alright, she called her own home number and waited anxiously. Her answer phone kicked in and she almost kicked herself in the middle of street for her stupidity, of course he wasn’t going to pick up. She needed to be discreet in case anyone overheard anything.

“Umm, hello, I have a missed call from this number, I’m just returning the call. My name’s Molly by
the way,” she said and paused for a moment; the phone line connected.

“Where are you?” Sherlock’s unmistakable voice demanded.

“I’m about to get a sandwich,” she said, looking at the different delis down the road and deciding which one she wanted.

“Do you have everything?” he said. He was irritable, probably bored.

“Not yet, I wasn’t too sure about things from Boots and the guy in Phones 4 U kind of ambushed me,” she explained, her fingers on her free hand winding around her scarf.

“Well hurry up, I’m bored,” he snapped. “You left me here with nothing to do and the choice of literature available is hardly an inspiring read. Unless back issues of Cosmo are meant to be interesting,” he drawled. She heard the slap of a magazine hitting the floor; Molly could clearly see him spread over her sofa in her mind’s eye, looking at front covers of her Cosmos and throwing them behind him. “Oh look,” he said with sarcastic excitement, “‘the top ten sex positions women just can’t get enough of,’” he said, with the obvious intent to embarrass her enough to make her hurry up. Her cheeks did flush deep pink, but her voice remained steady. She wasn’t in his presence; her mind retained something of its independence.

“So there isn’t some kind of emergency?” she asked, getting to the point, she didn’t fancy being held up on the line for him to humiliate her by referencing a sex-life she wish she had.

“Boredom is a serious condition in me,” he muttered as though losing interest in the conversation. He was distracted by something, probably something in a magazine.

“Well, if you want me to get home quickly stop calling me. Unless there’s an emergency then you should probably call me,” she said, gushing a little.

“What?” he said petulantly. “Molly?”

“Yes?”

“What’s a Rampant Rabbit?” he asked with innocence. Molly coughed loudly and before she realised it, she had ended the call, her whole face now red. There was no way she was going to be having that conversation with Sherlock, it just wasn’t right. Shaking the thought out of her head, she dipped into the first sandwich shop she came across and brought something to eat, but not staying in to eat it, she was keen to get the shopping over with before Sherlock started doing something worse.

‘Oh God, I hope he doesn’t get so bored he starts rummaging around in my room or something!’ she thought. Molly gasped at her own thoughts, ‘Argh! I’m making him out to be some kind of pervert! No, I meant that he would be looking around out of curiosity, not so he could sneak around in my underwear drawer…oh no…shut up Molly,’ she argued with herself internally. There were times when she thought she should just stop thinking as well as speaking.

She spent another couple of hours shopping for some clothes for him (she brought a few things for herself too, she didn’t want to present as too suspicious and it was cruel to ask a girl to go shopping without getting something for her too).

“Shopping for a boyfriend?” one gum-chewing cashier asked.

“Oh no, my cousin,” she said, another cover story spilling out without hesitation. “He’s visiting from America, but they lost his suitcase at the airport and then he broke his leg yesterday so I’m doing a bit of emergency shopping for him!” she said with a giggle.
“That’s bad luck for you, innit?” the cashier said with a sympathetic ‘aww’.

Eventually, Molly was able to make her way home with a heavy backpack of things for Sherlock and some bags of clothes for her. It had been a very successful trip and she was looking forward to getting back, though not looking forward to seeing the mess Sherlock had probably made. Sitting on the tube, she thought back to the cover stories she had used that afternoon; it had always been her party trick, something her friends at school always came to her for. If anyone needed a good excuse or an alibi they would turn to her and her tales would trip off the tongue in the most convincing way. She wasn’t sure why or how she was so good at it, after all, she had enough problems interacting normally with people, she always seemed to make things so awkward, but when it came to lying she was very good at it. But apparently she wasn’t very good at spotting it. Memories of Moriarty when he was sweet Jim from IT, always there, always listening, made her cringe at herself.

He had completely used her to get to Sherlock and had no doubt told all his criminal minions (she supposed he had to have minions) how pathetic she had been and so easy to get on side. But he had underestimated her, twice. Not only did he deem her unworthy of an assassin so she had been free to bring down his plan, but he seemed to genuinely believe he had crept his way into her heart, she supposed he thought she was heartbroken or something. She found comfort in the knowledge that, while she was upset and angry at having been used so ruthlessly, she was hardly cut up by the loss of him as a boyfriend. He wasn’t even that, they had gone on a few dates, shared coffee and few more personal things than she had intended, but it wasn’t as though she had slept with him or he had promised her marriage. He had underestimated her, just as Sherlock always did, except she now had the proof that he valued her, whereas Moriarty saw no value in her. She smiled to herself; she just kept proving them wrong.

Her thoughts on the way home were interrupted by a phone call, it was Scotland Yard. Deciding it would be better to pick up now instead of at home with Sherlock she pressed the green button.

“Hello,” she said.

“Hello Molly, it's Lestrade from Scotland Yard,” he said, he sounded strained.

“I know, your name comes up on my phone,” she said. It stalled the conversation for a moment.

“Look, I have some bad news, about Sherlock Holmes,” he sounded as though he was really hating what he was doing.

“I know,” she said, putting him out of his misery. “I was on shift yesterday,” she explained.

“Oh, right. Well, at least I don’t have to break it to you. Mrs Hudson didn’t take it too well,” he said and Molly understood his reticence.

“Have you seen the papers this morning?” she said, trying not to make it sound as though she was fishing for information, even if that’s exactly what she was doing. She thought it might be worth trying to get the Yard’s position over Sherlock’s ‘fraud’ for the detective in her home.

“Yeah, vicious bastards,” he said harshly. “I’m sorry, that was uncalled for.”

“I feel the same way. I know he was a bit weird, but there’s no way he could have faked all that.”

“I know that, but I think I’m the only one here who does. The problem is he pissed off pretty much everyone, they’re all as keen to believe it as Kitty bloody whatshername. Did you do the post-mortem?”

“Yeah. I thought it would better having someone he knew do it, rather than have some stranger
poking around in his brain tissue,” she said with a little laugh. He didn’t reciprocate, she cleared her throat awkwardly.

“I’m sure he would have appreciated that. Even if he wouldn’t have said it. Look, there’s going to be an investigation into his cases, into him and they’re going to want to interview you. I won’t be on the team, I told them I wouldn’t do it. Too close anyway. Just thought I should give you the heads up,” he said. His fractured sentences meant he was dealing with grief, he was struggling to understand everything that was going on. It was easy for Molly, she was in possession of most of the facts, aka that Sherlock was alive and he was doing this to save the lives of those he cared about. A part of Molly wished she could tell Lestrade that Sherlock had tackled Moriarty off the roof of the hospital not as an admission of guilt, but to save his life, to protect him.

“Thanks.” There was a pause. “Is there in any change in John? Last I knew he was being taken into the ICU for septic wounds,” Molly said, knowing this was information she had to get, not only for Sherlock, but she wanted to know how the kindly doctor was. Sherlock had not told her much about John, only that Moriarty had kidnapped him to use against his partner.

“It’s pretty nasty, Molly. The hospital said he’s been tortured extensively over the last couple of weeks. Apparently there were some knife wounds that were infected on his chest they were most worried about. Last I heard he’s going to be alright though. I was going to visit later on today…”

“I’m sure he’ll want to see a friendly face,” she said. She knew there was no way she could see him at the moment, not knowing that he thought Sherlock was dead and she knew he was alive. She didn’t think she could do that to any of them at the moment. “Can you…text me or something when you see him? Just let me know how he’s doing. I know I didn’t know him as well as you, but, well I really hope he’s ok. Well, obviously he’s not, but…”

“I know what you mean. Ok, I have to go now, but I’ll let you know how John is,” he said and they said quick goodbyes. Molly felt like they were going to form a ‘We Miss Sherlock’ club soon. She continued down the road, a feeling of butterflies in her stomach. Sherlock was going to be investigated? Or, more precisely, the memory of Sherlock? She felt a little sick that they seemed so eager to dissect him so soon after his death, but she supposed no amount of righteous complaining would change things; Lestrade had given her time to make her plan. The best lies were the ones that were carefully thought out and here she couldn’t afford to falter, the whole point of this deception was to save lives and she wouldn’t be the one to muck it up.

The flat was suspiciously quiet when she turned the key in the door; she supposed he wasn’t going to make a lot of noise as that would just attract attention when he was trying to keep a low profile, but she didn’t expect silence. She gasped with horror as she entered the living room to find Sherlock surrounded by old Cosmos, looking as though he was reading his way through her back catalogue.

“Wha…what are you doing?” she stuttered.

“I’ll probably delete half of this stuff later, but these really do provide a fascinating insight into the banality of the modern female average mind. This magazine devotes so much page space to the topic of sex, yet every time it seems to simply be reiterating the same thing over and over, tell me Molly, as a modern average woman, is sex really that important? Does nothing else interest you?” he asked out of more curiosity and a little of his usual dismissive acerbicness.

“Err…” she had no idea how to answer that question, especially considering she was thinking more about John’s condition and the impending investigation than the importance of getting laid. “Err, they think John’s going to be ok,” she said, the words in her mind just spilling out of her mouth before she could think of a more appropriate response. Sherlock dropped the magazine and sat upright, to attention. “I don’t have any details, but apart from some infected knife wounds Lestrade seems
confident he’ll be ok, physically at any rate. I’ll go to the hospital in a couple of days and get more information for you.”

“There’s more. Lestrade didn’t just call you to say that, did he?” Sherlock said, reading her critically now.

“Umm, no. They said he was…tortured,” she said, not wanting to say it out loud. Sherlock stiffened.

“Yes. For the last two weeks Moriarty has been torturing him on a live feed to me as a way of breaking me.” Molly was horrified and it showed on her face. “Yes, he did all those terrible things to get to me. I’m not the safest person to be around.” Sherlock was tense, his jaw set squarely and his eyes thin with distaste. To Molly, a trained Sherlock observer, he was practically radiating guilt, and why not? She would certainly be torn up if she were in his position. She wasn’t sure there was anything she could say that would alleviate him of the guilt because Moriarty had done it because of Sherlock, but done was done and it’s not like he could anticipate the route that mad man would have taken.

“I’ve got the things you wanted,” she said to distract him. She emptied the contents of her overburdened backpack and scattered them out across the table so he could inspect them. She noticed the reticent fingers pick up the box of hair dye and knew he didn’t really want to do it, after all, he was a little vain and it must be strange having to be someone else for an extended period of time. Sherlock was generally distasteful about everything on the little table and Molly could see it was partly this reluctance to go away and partly disagreeing with her choice of clothing, but he said nothing because of a sadness, the sadness of John’s fate, was weighing him down.

“He’ll be ok. He knows you never intended for it to happen,” Molly said. Sherlock stared, since when did she get so good at reading him? She can’t have been able to do this for very long or she would have been able to see through all the times he flirted with her to get into the lab or another body. Unless she did see through them and let him do it anyway because she liked the attention. He gave her a wary, appraising look. Seeing nothing but honest innocent sympathy, a look he knew he wouldn’t be able to tolerate for very long, he decided to let it go and picked up the hair scissors and dye and locked himself in the bathroom.

He was in there for some time and Molly used it to clear up her back issues of Cosmo and stash them in a box in the far corner behind a table, out of sight, out of mind. Once finished, she picked up the latest issue and started flicking through it, feeling the need to stay away from the sex pages while Sherlock was around; she might read in the privacy of her room tonight when he wasn’t going to peek over her shoulder. She was just sighing longingly over a gorgeous striped swimsuit that was hugely out of her price range when Sherlock emerged from the bathroom. She gulped, he had the scissors in his hands, but he had already shorn of most of his locks. He wasn’t cutting it ultra-short, but it was already different enough.

“Can you tidy up the back?” he asked, uncharacteristically muted. She nodded and they went back to the bathroom. Her heart lurched a little to see the hair she had so loved in her sink now. He turned to lean against the sink and Molly reached up, clearing up the back. She had never thought that the summer she had spent in hair and beauty college would actually prove useful one day. He had rather hacked away at his hair and there was considerably more clearing up to do than he had implied. She ended up snipping away at most of his head, including neatening the mess he had made of his fringe and after ten minutes he looked quite a bit smarter and much less like Sherlock, even if that made them both sullen and quiet. He thanked Molly curtly and shooed her out of the bathroom, opening the box of hair dye and cleaning out the sink.

Molly had finished making a pasta bake for dinner when Sherlock emerged, his hair treated and
bleached. He would have to leave it like that for a few days before putting the actual blonde in and Molly had to bite her lip to stop her saying something, it was so unlike anything she imagined of Sherlock it was difficult to adjust. The evening was quiet and the silences, while of decreasing awkwardness, were filled quickly with sadness and melancholia. They were both tense about John’s situation and the things the poor man would have to wake up to; not only was he going to be set on the long road to recovery after two weeks of torture he was going to be told Sherlock was dead, apparently a murder/suicide as he killed the ‘actor’ he had hired to make himself look good.
John wakes to a world without Sherlock, but at least he is not left alone to his mourning. Sherlock, now transformed into someone else entirely, leaves Molly to begin his Magnus Opus. However, his heart pulls him back to what may well have been a rash move, but would provide all the motivation he would need to clear out the webs of Moriarty left in the world.

Previously: The evening was quiet and the silences, while of decreasing awkwardness, were filled quickly with sadness and melancholia. They were both tense about John’s situation and the things the poor man would have to wake up to; not only was he going to be set on the long road to recovery after two weeks of torture he was going to be told Sherlock was dead, apparently a murder/suicide as he killed the ‘actor’ he had hired to make himself look good.

“John? Hey,” Lestrade said softly as he walked into the little private room the hospital had set John up in. They had thought it was better given the traumatic nature of how he acquired the extensive wounds that were littering his body. He had been asleep for the last two days and had only really started to wake up last night, but he was now compes mentes again.

“Lestrade?” he croaked, throat dry and sore. He reached over to the beaker of water, sucking it up through the straw because his hands felt too numb to trust to hold the cup.

“Yeah, how are you doing? I heard you’ve had it pretty rough,” he said, doing his best to sound sympathetic without pitying. John waved haphazardly at a chair and the police officer shed his coat and sat down.

“That’s putting it very politely,” John said, not able to crack a smile. His body ached, he could tell he was on the tail end of the painkillers they had used to ease his sleep and he felt numb and clumsy. “How’s Sherlock?” he asked, wincing from the pain in his leg which was not affected by medication. Lestrade looked down and John saw how drawn his face was.

“What’s the last thing you remember?”

“Sherlock met with Moriarty on the roof, I think he was there to trade for me, to get me away from Moriarty… He… He tackled that monster off the roof. He was going to kill me, he had a sniper…” he said, trying to piece together the disparate memories that were hovering around in his mind, but
“They’re both dead,” he said heavily. John took a large breath and straightened his neck, looking directly up at the ceiling. John felt nothing inside, nothing but an icy wind inside a barren cavern. It took several moments for the full impact of that statement to filter through to his mind; he was alone once more and more precisely the man he loved was dead, he had thrown himself of a roof for John. His first thought was ‘no more violin, no more music’ and he felt himself begin to die inside.

He had gone through two weeks of torture for the love of Sherlock, he had told himself that as soon as he was freed of Moriarty and Seb that he could go back to Baker Street and return to solving cases and kissing the lips of the man who made him feel more alive than anyone before him. That was going to be his reward, his prize for staying sane throughout those black days, for not trying to kill himself when the pain or the torment was starting to get too much. His reward was supposed to be Sherlock, was supposed to be that deep velvety voice telling him how he had outsmarted Moriarty, it was supposed to be those long, pale fingers touching his own tanned digits where they had been broken, he was supposed to be able to sink into bed with his warm pale lover wrapped around him where he could sleep for days and days without having to think about Seb ever again. But now he had had that prize, that reason for enduring the pain, stolen away from him; he had paid with his pain for Sherlock and his lover had gone and killed himself. He felt…baseless, without purpose or without foundation.

“I need to tell you that there is going to be an investigation into…into Sherlock. They won’t question you for a few days, courtesy and all, but I thought I should give you the heads up,” Lestrade said eventually.

“What do you mean they’re investigating him? You mean the circumstances surrounding his…” John’s throat closed up before he was able to finish the sentence.

“Moriarty was busy while you were…imprisoned,” he said delicately. “He’s convinced everyone that Sherlock wasn’t real, that Moriarty himself was an actor Sherlock hired to be his arch enemy, to set up the crimes that he would later solve,” he explained with the disgust evident in his voice, he wanted to make sure that John knew where his loyalties lay.

“What?” he asked, confused. “What?!” he asked again, his confusion sinking in. “How can people believe that?” He was incredulous. Lestrade ran a hand through silvery hair.

“They want to. Sherlock made them all feel so inadequate, they’re happy to believe he wasn’t smarter than them after all. Even if he was the smartest man we’ve both ever met, and you know doctors!” he said with a weak laugh. John scowled at the use of past tense.

“And I was tortured for two weeks by who? A fucking actor?!” John said, his voice rising quickly as his temper at the rest of the stupid, wrong world.

“You’re preaching to the choir.” John was having trouble keeping his anger in check now, and he had no way of letting it out, he couldn’t flex his hands because one had a IV line in it and the other was bandaged. He couldn’t move, he was well bandaged and his leg was in too much pain to stand on right now; not to mention he would probably pop his stitches if he did.

“Lestrade…”

“Greg.”

“Greg, I really appreciate you coming to tell me all this. I have to say I’d rather hear it from you, someone who understands, rather than Sally or someone,” John said, breathing deeply to retain
decorum. “And I know I’ll want to ask you some more questions later, but I need to wrap my head around the fact that my flatmate and best friend and…is dead. Can you come back a bit later?” he asked, but Greg knew it wasn’t a request at all.

“Sure. I’m going to get a coffee, I’ll be back in a while,” he said and left the room, nearly forgetting to take his coat. Greg closed the door behind him and he hadn’t taken two steps before he heard an ungodly howl of pain erupt from the room behind him. He reassured the startled nurses that he had just found out his best friend was dead, it wasn’t going to be any of his physical injuries and they should give him some time to himself.

John’s throat was killing him, the scream of anguish that had ripped from his chest was uncontrollable. He had never felt anything like it before, as though an integral part of his heart, mind and soul had been taken out and smashed in front of him, which it had. He noticed the cut on his eye was stinging with a vengeance and it made him wince in pain, he was crying and his tears were salting the wound.

“DAMN YOU!” he shouted out to both Sherlock for taking his own life and to Moriarty for taking away Sherlock. “Damn you!” he whimpered and sobbed to himself, allowing his face to contort and scrunch up while no one was in the room to see him like this. After everything he had been through he did not deserve this, he did not take all that pain and suffering for Sherlock to just take his own life. He did not know why he had hurled himself off the roof; John’s life was in danger from Moriarty’s sniper but had not pulled the trigger when his master was crushed beneath Sherlock from the fall. Why not? Sherlock had gone there to make a bargain, a trade, a final battle of wits which he would surely win, so why then did he jump? The question went over and over in his mind, searching fruitlessly for the answer. He cursed the rooftop, his distance from the men so he could not hear what they were saying except when Moriarty shouted. He was there, but how didn’t he know why Sherlock had committed suicide, right at the point where he was going to win? In John’s mind there was no question of him losing; Moriarty was certainly an adept nemesis and good foil for Sherlock, but the consulting detective would always be able to trump the consulting criminal, so why hadn’t he? Why had he taken this route? His frustration worked its way out in another roar of anguish. His good hand slammed on the bed beside his leg and he winced as the needle jarred in his hand.

About half an hour later Greg poked a sheepish face around the door and saw John staring out the window, his face was a mashed up mix of anger and loss. John acknowledged his entrance with a small nod and Greg took the seat from earlier.

“I know there’s nothing I can say, but I’m gonna be here if you need anything.” John didn’t say anything, but he didn’t really need to. He was grateful that someone was going to stay with him because he didn’t want to deal with the walls of isolation closing in on him again and at least that person believed in Sherlock as much as he did. It was all a lot to take in, he was just getting used to waking up, comfortable (or numb at any rate) in a warm bed with a familiar face around after two weeks of soul-shattering torture when he realised that when he had been away the rest of his life that he was so looking forward to returning to had fallen apart. Sherlock was dead, Moriarty was dead (thank God), everyone was convinced Sherlock was a fraud and they were going to be investigated by the police (and no doubt the press as well) in the next couple of days.

They sat in comfortable silence for a few hours, sometimes a snippet or two of conversation came up but neither was able to say much. Greg was still in shock from Sherlock’s death, he was worried for John’s condition and he was facing a very intense investigation at work, at the end of which he wouldn’t be surprised if he was asked forcefully to consider resignation. Four o’clock appeared and they both looked at the door when there seemed to be some kind of commotion outside, raised voices were arguing hotly and nurses were trying to shove the arguers outside. Greg glanced at John and opened the door a crack to see what was going on, he thought maybe some press had managed to
sneak in and were circling poor Doctor Watson’s room like vultures. No, he was surprised to see Sally Donovan shooting off her big mouth at a tall lean man with dark reddish brown hair and an expensive suit.

“He’s in no condition to be interrogated!” a nurse said indignantly at Sally who was wearing a particularly nasty expression.

“I quite agree, the man has been through enough without having to see you in the same day,” the dapper man said with complete cool and controlled acid tones.

“I don’t know who you think you are but you can’t just come in here and tell me what to do,” Sally said, crossing her arms defensively.

“And what is it you want with him exactly?” the man asked, his tone was low and dangerous, but Sally wasn’t going to let herself be intimidated by that. “To question him about the torture he has endured over the last two weeks or to gloat over him that you feel proved right about Sherlock’s genius?”

“Genius? The man paid someone to torture his best friend, the freak’s a sicko!” she said, her voice raised so everyone on the floor could hear. The man shook with anger, the first expression of his emotions Greg had detected, his delicate hands were white around the umbrella handle.

“Don’t expect to walk into work tomorrow Ms Donovan,” he said, his voice barely contained. The man looked at an expensively dressed woman who was typing away on a blackberry. Their eyes met for a few seconds and she changed whatever it was she was doing on the phone and started typing furiously. She had been typing ignorantly throughout the conversation, but even she had looked up at Sally’s accusation.

“Is that a threat?” she said, smirking.

“No, a threat implies that I would consider not doing what I said. I was simply expressing a fact,” he said icily and had a discreet word in the ear of a nurse who nodded in understanding and showed him to John’s room.

“Ah, Detective Inspector Lestrade, I did not think Scotland Yard had sent an officer,” he expressed cordially, but icily.

“He’s a friend, Mycroft,” John croaked. “He’s not here with the Yard.” Mycroft’s expression softened considerably and closed the door behind him, right in Sally’s face.

“She is an unpleasant woman,” he said, distaste dancing on his face. There was a bang on the door and Mycroft’s expression turned positively murderous.

“I’ll handle this,” Greg said quickly and slipped outside.

“What the fuck are you playing at Sally?” he hissed, keeping his voice and hoping she would do the same.

“Who the hell was that guy? And what are you doing here? I thought you were on leave,” she said.

“I am on leave, believe it or not I’m here as a friend. He’s not got many of those to help him,” he said angrily.

“We’ve got to interview him,” she said. Her whole demeanour was wrong, it was a mixture of smug and an over-inflated ego.
“I think it’ll wait a couple of days, the man’s just been found after two weeks of torture for God’s sake!”

“Yeah, which his so called best friend set up for him.”

“You don’t know that!”

“You mean you wouldn’t have put it passed the freak?”

“Sally…”

“Oh come on, you don’t want to admit because you know it’s true. The man was a psychopath and didn’t care how many people he hurt to make himself look good!” Greg took a very deep and slow breath.

“Sally, come back the day after tomorrow. The last thing John needs is for you to stand and gloat over him. Give him that at least,” he pleaded. She glared at him for a while, but eventually she caved in, he still had some influence then. “Who was that pompous prick?” she asked, nodding towards the door.

“I don’t know, but just got home, please.”

“You believe him don’t you?” she said incredulously. “You believe the freak? There’s proof, Lestrade, actual proof he was a stupid freak who took us all for a joyride,” she hissed venomously. The door opened.

“Take the Detective Inspector’s advice and remove your unpleasant existence from our proximity, I don’t want to catch Idiocy,” the icy voice of Mycroft said.

“You sound just like the freak,” she scoffed, laughing.

“Yes, he learned well from me. I’m his older brother, Mycroft Holmes and if we have to listen to any more of you smearing my little brother’s name I swear you will disappear forever and no one will ever question why,” he said with such venom that Greg took a step back, withdrawing any support Sally might draw from him and she sunk back from him. He was drawn to his full height and he was glaring down his nose at her in such a superior and cold way that she couldn’t help but feel she had invoked the wrath of something very dangerous.

“Alright, but I will be back,” she said.

“You won’t be,” Mycroft said with utter finality. He glanced over to Anthea who nodded. With a grim face he turned back into the room and his expression went back to one of sympathy and underlying pain.

“Thanks, Mycroft,” John said, “Or I would have let her in here so I could punch her. Girl or not.” Mycroft afforded him a half-second half smile and perched himself in a seat.

“I’m sorry about her,” Greg said, feeling the need to apologise for her since they had worked together.

“Don’t worry about it,” John said.

“We cannot always help the people we are forced to tolerate,” Mycroft said with superior distaste. “But she will not have the satisfaction of working on the investigation into my little brother.” Both John and Greg noticed how Mycroft referred to Sherlock as his ‘little’ brother, revealing a secret
loving bond he had had for the deceased detective.

“Forgive me,” Mycroft said, remembering his manners. He rose and shook Greg’s hand. “I am Mycroft Holmes. I tried so desperately to keep Sherlock on the right path, but he always was such a handful. Not even with all my experience could I keep him under control.”

“Right, Greg Lestrade,” he said, returning the handshake, but couldn’t help but think the other man knew his name already, he already knew his rank, before his suspension.

“Yes, Sherlock spoke of you,” Mycroft said.

“Not highly I’d imagine. Was I an idiot?” he asked, knowing the answer. Mycroft smiled sadly.

“Yes, although he did tell me that you were the least moronic of Scotland Yard. Quite a compliment coming from him,” he said. He could see Greg had been genuinely affected by his brother’s death, even if they were not close, and he felt it would be kind to offer him a small token of Sherlock’s affection. He did not care if Sherlock would not want him to share it; his brother had faked his own death and had therefore forfeited any rights to censor his personal feelings. Lestrade managed a small smile.

“The nurses tell me you are on the road to recovery from your wounds. Is there anything I can do to make you more comfortable? I’m sure I can have you referred to a private hospital if that is your wish,” Mycroft said, feeling that he should dote a little on the good doctor considering his brother had developed feelings enough to go to all this trouble to protect him. In fact, he had two of the three people he was saving from direct harm in the room with him. At least it would give him an opportunity to appraise this now suspended DI and examine what Sherlock saw in him. He was certainly a loyal fellow and one who had little trouble putting himself on the line for things he believed in.

“I’ll stay thanks. Besides, doesn’t matter where I go, I can’t get away from what’s happened,” he said with sad resignation. John thought about the morgue some floors below, knowing that Sherlock was in there, zipped up in a black bag, his once beautiful skin now undoubtedly that lifeless white of the dead.

“John,” Mycroft said, hesitantly clearing his throat. “I have been privy to certain pieces of information over the last two weeks concerning Sherlock, you see, when Moriarty revealed that he had you my brother called me. It was Moriarty’s plan to break Sherlock by breaking you; he told me Moriarty had said ‘I will burn the heart out of you’ and that you were his heart. I was with him throughout the majority of the last two weeks and I had never seen him more vulnerable than those long hours watching the footage. Sherlock had always had trouble expressing the little emotion he had and I had only ever seen him so emotional on two previous occasions; when our parents split and when he was going through withdrawal at the rehabilitation clinic.”

“Why are you telling me this?” John said, his voice breaking as he desperately tried to will away the tears.

“Because you deserve to know that you were the one person in his life he has ever loved in such a way. When he went out of meet Moriarty he knew he was going to exchange his life for yours and you are the only person he would have done that for. He sat at his computer and wept for you, John. He told me that you had made him feel whole for the first time in his life, that he thought he had everything he needed from life until he met you. You made his time on this earth a happy one and for that I am forever indebted to you.” It wasn’t a huge lie. Mycroft, who had the joy of constantly worrying over Sherlock since his little brother was born had never felt better about his brother’s prospects than when he was with the army doctor. He knew his brother was in good hands, and to
see Sherlock happy like that had made him relieved and happy for them both. Caring was a weakness, but Mycroft only permitted himself to be weak to one man and that was his sibling. ‘Big brothers protect’ as a five-year old Sherlock had once said to him.

John felt, foremost, that it was the strangest thing to hear Mycroft talking about Sherlock’s emotions and their bond as brothers. They fought like petulant children but John could see the desperate sadness tugging at Mycroft’s eyes and he knew they must have been far closer than Sherlock ever let on; in fact he was willing to bet that the older brother had carried his little brother through his life, through all the hardest and lowest times. Something Mycroft had said during that first, cryptic meeting came to mind.

“I worry about him. Constantly,” John said, not meaning to say it out loud. Mycroft looked up, recognising those words.

“Yes, I said that, didn’t I?”

“You two fought like cat and dog.”

“As do all siblings,” Mycroft said, diverting attention away from his own fraternal feelings.

“You really did, didn’t you? You weren’t just trying to stop him embarrassing you.”

“Yes. Although he did do a very good job of being a thorn in my side to his credit.” They lapsed into silence. “Well,” Mycroft said, after playing with the varnish on his umbrella handle for a few moments. “I’ve come here to say what needed to be said, I’ll be on my way. Call if you need anything. Detective Inspector,” Mycroft said by way of a polite goodbye and left the room.

“What does he do?” Greg asked, not able to contain his curiosity anymore. “He said he’d get Donovan off the investigation, how can he do that?” John noted Greg had stopped calling his sergeant by her first name, clearly he was not impressed with her.

“He’d tell you he occupies a minor position in the British government,” John said, able to force out a small laugh, even if it hurt his abused ribs.

“But-?”

“Sherlock always says he is the British government.” The smile fell from his face. “He used to say. God, will I ever get used to this?” he said. He felt as though the road in front of him stopped short at a few paces ahead but that few feet of road stretched on for miles, as though he would forever get to nowhere.

“It won’t be easy, but you’ll get there,” Greg said with optimism that would have been painfully annoying if he wasn’t trying to be such a good friend. No one else had come and sit with the doctor. Molly hadn’t returned to the hospital since that day, Mycroft had only visited just now for a few minutes only (though it had been worth it to see him destroy Donovan) and Mrs Hudson had not called by. His parents were going to come and visit him when he was out of hospital and Harry had not answered any calls, she was probably in too much of a stupor too, not to mention the leg had not healed properly yet.

“You don’t have to stay,” John said, hoping he would. Greg smiled softly.

“I do have to go at six, but I’m not going before then unless you want me to. Besides, if Donovan comes back she’ll end up in the next ward if someone’s not here to stop you!” he joked darkly and John cracked an unpleasant smile which quickly faded from his face, he wasn’t a cruel man but she really was testing his limits.
“Greg, when was the first time you met Sherlock? He never told me about it,” John asked. Greg snickered and then burst out laughing, even though he was trying hard not to. John stared. “Oh God, like that, was it?” Greg laughed again.

“I knew he was going to be trouble from day one, so help me,” he said. “We had just made a public appeal for information about the murders in Greenwich and we were all processing the leagues of public that came in. He came storming in,” he paused to laugh again, “in his pyjamas, these green striped things, he looked like a strip of toothpaste!” John let a bubble of laughter in his throat escape as he had a very clear mental image of Sherlock just striding into the CID HQ in Scotland Yard and acting like he had solved the case and therefore owned the place. “He looked terrible, he hadn’t been out of his flat for days, his feet were filthy, he had walked the whole way, his hair was even longer back then, and he hadn’t shaved for at least a week. He strides in and loudly declares that it was quite clearly the boyfriend’s brother and we were all as dumb as monkeys for not seeing it.”

“That sounds about right.”

“When no one took him seriously he started doing his thing on everyone, told us, in front of everyone else, who was cheating on who, who was secretly pregnant, who was in the closet, the whole nine yards. Someone shouted ‘are you high?’ at him as a joke and he said ‘actually, yes I am. High as a kite and even I can see it you morons’.” He broke off again and the two of them fell into hysterics. John allowed the laughter to bubble up and release freely because it was keeping the hiccupping tears away for now and he loved to enjoy everything that was Sherlock again, even if it was only for a few minutes.

“And was he?”

“Absolutely off his tits on cocaine. We took him to an interview room where he paced up and down babbling at this inhuman speed, going through all the details of the case we had missed. It turns out he had seen everything he needed to solve the case from the photos published in the press and had decided he absolutely had to come and tell us right away. He was quite clearly high so we locked him up for the night. And that was how I first met him!”

Greg continued to entertain John with tales of Sherlock’s antics when he would show up at random points in time with utterly brilliant and astonished deductions that would break cases wide open but often as a mess and with his pupils blown wide open and a fresh track mark on his arm. It turns out Scotland Yard had seen most of Sherlock’s pyjamas at some point or another until he fell off the rails. He put the finishing flourishes to a narrative about Sherlock having covered the cell he spent a night in after another drug-induced rant with details of the private lives of everyone in the CID and further up the chain of command, including the Assistant Commissioner; they had all taken a vow of silence at what they heard or learned from Sherlock. Greg looked at his watch and stretched out his limbs.

“Right, visiting hours are getting close to closed and if I don’t go I think the nurses will throw me out the window or something,” John chuckled again. “So I’m going to go home for the night, but you’ve got my number if…anything needs doing. I’m due in at the Yard tomorrow for a bit so I might not see you till later, if you want me to drop by?”

“That’d be good,” John said, nodding, pleased with the suggestion. He didn’t want to go a day without understanding company yet. “And remember, if they give you a hard time just think of what Sherlock would say and realise you’ve got off easy,” John chuckled, but Greg couldn’t quite laugh with him. John grimaced. “Sorry, that came out completely wrong,” he groaned. “Whatever happens, thanks, for today.” The doctor looks up at Greg to make sure his gratitude is taken seriously and Greg nods, a little sheepishly.
“Sure. Well, goodnight, John,” he said with a little wave left the room. The door shut, with a sort of finality and John realised he was left all alone with only his memories and the ghost of Sherlock for company. He sank into his hospital bed, successfully ignoring the pain that was now throbbing dully over his whole body. The pain in his leg seared like a poker when he was left by himself and his head was swimming with thoughts of his deceased lover. Greg had made him genuinely laugh with the tales of Sherlock’s old self; it seemed the great man had never lost that flair for the dramatic and sometimes comical disregard for social convention, like walking to Scotland Yard in your pyjamas.

The doctor was glad his first day without Sherlock wasn’t a totally miserable one. Sure he was miserable now that he was left alone and he knew it hadn’t fully sunk in yet, but he had been able to laugh for his friend for a couple of hours and he felt it had done him the world of good. He had been able to celebrate Sherlock for a while instead of that first day being about how he died. He was happy to fade uncomfortably into sleep with good memories washing around in his skull.

That night he dreamed of the first time he had kissed those beautiful lips, the feeling of softness and warmth giving him the feeling that his heart was swelling and he wept as he pushed into the kiss, knowing that he would only have this in his memory now.

“Sherlock I never told you, but you knew, didn’t you? You always knew I loved you? Please tell me you knew,” he whispered through his tears at the dream-Sherlock who said nothing and smiled into the kiss.

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The traumatic nature of the wounding meant that the hospital was very keen to keep the doctor in for observation for an extended period of time. It also meant that they would have the time to have a trauma-specialist psychologist sent down to him to begin him on the path to emotional recovery from the double hit of torture and the disgrace and death of his lover. Dr Reynolds was a softly spoken older man who John had liked, but could not reconcile that amicability with his profession and what seemed like an intrusion into his feelings at the time.

It also meant that the press could not get to John Watson for a little while longer yet. They had already camped outside the flat and were terrorising Mrs Hudson who had stopped going out unless it was necessary because she would be ambushed by cameras and Dictaphones from the second she opened the door. Mycroft had put two of his men on watch in the ward where John was staying to make sure that no one snuck through pretending to be a doctor or some such as the less reputable journalists would stoop to any low to get pictures of the banged up ‘batchelor John Watson’. He had somehow managed to charm a nurse into getting him a copy of the day’s paper, despite nearly every publication running the Richard Brook story. He knew it had been a mistake because the article in the day’s Daily Mail had been scathing and he threw the bundle of newsprint across the room with his good arm.

He wanted to text Greg and ask him if they really were the only ones who believed in Sherlock, because it certainly seemed like it from reading the paper. Not a single kind word. News of his own incarceration and torture had made its way into the press and now apparently they were trying to pin that one on Sherlock too. They actually thought Sherlock, in his bid to devise more dastardly and extreme crimes had paid a guy to do inhumane things to his flatmate and blogger because he couldn’t stop himself from inventing the bigger crime. It seemed the only people who believed in Sherlock were those who had really got to know him, the ones who had made the effort and leap of insight to really see him, not like the Donovans and Andersons of this world. His little prophesy had come true, the press had turned and revealed their ugly face.

He didn’t want to be alone, but he didn’t want company. He wanted Sherlock back, the man who
could be in the same room as John yet leave him completely alone. Or bug the hell of him dependent on his mood at the time. Not having Sherlock at his side, or at least looming over him in some way, felt as though he had lost a limb, it was cold and numb at the same time, as though a piece of him had been detached and he was waiting for it to be sewn on again, even if that would never happen now.

He grunted, his chest was feeling tight, as though a weight was slowly being lowered onto him; soon it ached to breathe, his chest flaring in dull pain as his lungs inflated and the muscles between his ribs flexed. He looked at the machines that surrounded him and they told of nothing out of the ordinary, except for an elevated heart rate which was normal in response to pain or anxiety. A doctor bustled in and said a cheery ‘good morning’ to him and went about checking him, the equipment and the readings they were getting.

“It hurts to breathe again,” he reported, knowing it would be best to let her know everything. While he was sure it was nothing he was reminded of the adage that doctors make the worst patients, so he had vowed to himself that he would do everything he wished his own patients would do. The doctor looked over his wounded chest, felt around with sensitive fingertips and listened to his breathing for a moment.

“Young breathing sounds clean, I’d say it’s the muscles recovering. Abuse of muscular tissue does take a while to heal I’m afraid,” she said kindly. John nodded with relief. “That gentleman from yesterday in the posh suit dropped by today. He asked after you and said you might want this,” she said and after a quick pop out of the room, she presented him with his laptop. She helped by plugging it in so he wouldn’t have to get out of bed.

“Anything else?”

“Don’t worry about me, I’ll buzz if there’s a problem. I don’t want to waste any more of your time,” he said. She knew he referencing the fact that she was as doctor doing something that could be done by the attending nurses. The truth was she wanted a first-hand look at this type of trauma wound and didn’t think the patient would object to having the attentions of a doctor for once. She left politely.

John booted up his laptop automatically though he thought as he watched the loading screen whizz across the monitor that he did not know what to do with it. Normally he would write a blog, or his personal journal of case notes and things he could not tell the World Wide Web, but now he had nothing. He ended up playing Solitaire and Free Cell on there for ages until he was winning games in a row and he was getting bored.

He remembered what his first therapist told him, that writing down everything that happened to him would honestly help. Deciding to take the first step he pulled up two documents. It took him ages to type with his non-dominant hand, but he eventually typed out the titles ‘Sherlock’ and ‘What Happened To Me’. He decided to underline them and put them in bold after deciding italics looked a bit ugly and chose a slightly different font; his procrastination skills were impeccable. He knew he was doing it as well, knowing he was faffing around endlessly to avoid typing anything. For the longest time his fingers hovered, paralyzed over the keyboard, trying to fathom what he could say in either of the documents that wasn’t going to pull him to pieces. He wrote the names of the two men who had detained and hurt him, but deciding he hated those formations of letters slapped the backspace button until they were gone. That seemed to have done the trick; having realised that he could erase anything he did not feel he could cope with he began to write.

It was easy at first, he wrote an extended summary of everything that had happened between Sherlock and himself, everything from their first bizaar encounter at the lab downstairs to their first touch, their ‘date’ at Angelo’s where Sherlock had John reacting like a schoolboy at the erotic way he had eaten the ice cream. He covered what had happened at the poolside with the bomb strapped to
his torso and the look on Sherlock’s face when he thought for a split second that John might actually have been conspiring with Moriarty until he realised that his feelings were not misplaced. John wrote and wrote, finding it difficult to keep up with his thoughts when typing with only one hand and he eventually brought in his cast and, using the one protruding finger as another key-pressing digit, he got things down a little faster. He went onto to document their first kiss, the first time he had woken up with Sherlock in his bed and all the beautiful little things that had happened between them. This included a truncated account of when John had gone out drinking with some army buddies on leave from Afghanistan and had stumbled back to the flat at three in the morning barely able to see through the drinks they had consumed. Sherlock said he would never let him forget that.

Then he wrote about his feelings and that ended up turning more into bad poetry and an incomprehensible stream of consciousness than anything coherent, but it was coming out of him and he continued to pour out in waves of feeling that felt good to be let out while he recorded them on the page. He allowed himself to become ignorant to time and therefore outside of it while he typed, while he thought, felt and remembered.

By the time five o’clock came round John was startled to look up and see it read as such on the clock, he had thought had had only been typing for an hour, not three. He looked down at the six pages it said he had written. His thoughts were swirling and fading away like eddies in a mist as he extracted himself from his memories and brought himself back to the present. He took note of the time and realised Greg had not been in to see him, even though he said he would. Visiting hours ended at six and John knew if the DI hadn’t come by now then he wasn’t coming at all. It must be an intense day for the enquiry. John closed his eyes and sighed. He was wishing Greg luck, even though he knew the man would be used as a scapegoat since he had been the least afraid to push his ego aside and call for Sherlock’s help when he needed it. With the most number of assists to his name and his numerous public support of the former consulting detecting he made the perfect person to sacrifice at the altar of mass media opinion and save the Met’s reputation as much as it could be salvaged. Greg didn’t deserve it, he was a nice guy with a good mind who did the Met credit, but it seemed that Sherlock had left something short of devastation in his wake, intentional or otherwise.

Molly adjusted her hat and gave herself one last look in the mirror, she knew it would be the last time she saw Sherlock, both in reality and fiction they had created. It was the day of the funeral and today Sherlock, instead of attending his own memorial, would be jetting off to Switzerland with the help of his brother. He was waiting for her in the living room, unusually quiet. He had grown sullen over the last two weeks he had been hiding here but this usually took the form of scathing comments and remarks which Molly had learned to simply ignore most of the time.

“Good luck,” she said, genuine sadness in her voice. “I’m sure you’ll be brilliant, but a bit of luck can’t hurt, right?” she said, not having grown at all out of her usual awkwardness during Sherlock’s stay with her. “I hope you can come back soon,” she said affectionately. Sherlock leaned in a kissed her tenderly on the cheek, giving her arms a gentle squeeze as he did so. Molly fought to keep control of her breathing, it seemed like such an intimate gesture.

“Thank you Molly Hooper. Without you everyone I was close to would be dead. I would be dead. I’ll be back. Just…look after John if you can.” He could barely look her in the eye.

“You’re welcome. I’m really glad I did it. I’m really glad you’re alive. Bring me back a souvenir,” she joked and jumped at the sound of the taxi horn pipping short and impatient outside her home. “Right, got to run! Bye!” she said and ran back to give him a bold peck on the cheek and she was off again before he could much move. He hoped he had sufficiently conveyed his gratitude and now Molly would not become upset or offended by his severance of communication with her; he would
have enough to do without becoming her penpal. While he had found a new respect for her, largely stemming out of her impressive ability to lie effortlessly under pressure and gratitude for hiding him at her inconvenience, he had no desire to much socialise or even talk to her, the girl was still inane. He had hoped a silent understanding would settle over them and that would be the end of that. He could dream, couldn’t he?

He was already planning his trip, his single bag was packed as he now owned barely anything in the world. Mycroft’s man had already been around the previous night delivering a Chinese takeaway and a roll of notes for Molly to reimburse her (generously) for her time and expenses in shielding his brother. He looked out the window for another taxi to arrive, he was going to stop by his own funeral in his new persona, Petter Sigurson the Norwegian travel writer. He couldn’t keep himself away, even if he knew he would be chastised by anyone who found out, which meant Mycroft. He was curious as to see who would attend his funeral and what would be said but most of all, he wanted to see John. He had heard reports from Molly that he was up and walking again, his limp now pronounced and obviously paining him, but his other injuries healing well. His bruises were fading into flesh-like yellow and the cuts were just neat lines of dark red. He knew this would be his only opportunity to see his partner before he left and since John had been staying at the hospital until a few nights ago, it was almost impossible to see the man without being seen himself. Sod what Mycroft would make of this move, he was going. It would be the final sight he had to endure of John’s pain before he would be too far away to see that radiant face and he would be too busy to be allowed distractions.

The test of his disguise came sooner than he thought; his cabbie turned out to be a real fan of Sherlock Holmes and spent the nearly whole trip saying how he ‘didn’t believe any of the bollocks in the papers’ and he had a mate whose sister’s uncle had been helped by the man he went to ‘mourn’ today. To Sherlock’s undying amusement, the cabbie did not see the detective at all, just another poor soul off to the cemetery.

He decided not to go into the little chapel after all. Firstly, it was too small for him to sneak in unnoticed and secondly, he found himself not wanting to know the things that were said about him, even though they were concerning him; he felt that he was not meant to hear those things. Such retrospective emotionality was supposed to be between the mourner and the corpse, not the living flesh of the actual ‘dead’ person.

He hid himself well in the foliage of the low-hanging branches of the trees which kept the cemetery airy and fresh. He heard Mrs Hudson cursing him insincerely for being the worst tenant she had thought was possible to have and smiled to himself when John said ‘I’m not actually that angry’ as he realised he wasn’t the only one to be vexed with the consulting detective.

“I was so alone and I owe you so much,” John said with a crack in his voice that they both heard and had to hold back a sob. ‘And I you, John,’ Sherlock thought to himself. ‘I knew not what loneliness was until you showed me what it was like to live without you. The ends will justify the means, I promise you. Moriarty thought he had won, but I will dismantle everything he ever achieved and accomplished in this world. I need to do it to pay him back for what he has done to my reputation, to me, to you. He hurt you and from that moment he was doomed.’

“Just one last thing, for me, don’t be dead. Don’t, be, dead,” he said to the shining headstone and Sherlock frowned, a little concerned. Did this mean his plan had not been as fool-proof as he thought? Did John honestly think he was still alive, that he had cheated death? ‘No, of course not’ Sherlock reassured himself. ‘That was genuine emotion. He wouldn’t have been able to give such a convincing performance if he knew I was alive. Ever-loyal John, he still believes in me, still has faith I can out-play anyone’s movements. He’s not far wrong. Given the proper motivation there has been no challenge insurmountable for me.’
“Reckless,” Mycroft said, disapprovingly behind him. Sherlock peer around his shoulder while John walked away towards the waiting cars to take them home. ‘See you soon, but for now – fare thee well John H Watson.’

“Still, I understand why you have come. You didn’t peek in at the service did you?” Mycroft was lighting himself a cigarette.

“It wasn’t my place to be there.”

“Quite. Mummy’s eulogy was beautiful; in French,” he commented. Sherlock looked guiltily away. He knew it would have taken a heavy toll on his mother. “She blames herself, naturally. I think all parents who are forced to bury their children feel the same. And I thought you and I lived without sentiment,” Mycroft said.

“That’s bullshit and you know it,” Sherlock snapped, eyeing his brother’s cigarette hungrily. An elegant gloved hand pulled out another long, slim stick and lit it. Sherlock puffed on it as though it was oxygen and the atmosphere around him was water.

“Are you ready?” Mycroft’s voice implied more than simply questioning his readiness to leave the cemetery, but to get on the plane, to start his magnus opus mission. Sherlock nodded and with an air of finality, turned smartly on his heels, marched into the back of his brother’s sleek black vehicle and waited for the airport to loom up ahead, calling him to his fate.

Chapter End Notes

So yeah, I'm sorry this hasn't been updated. I uploaded the first 10 chapters and then sort of forgot about it. Am now writing Avengers fics so no more Sherlock until season 3 at least I'm afraid. Enjoy the rest of Tea though!
Life Without

Chapter Summary

John remains close to Molly and Greg while his life evens out and he begins to make some kind of progress towards normalcy. Sherlock would always be in his heart and memories, but the fall was no longer plaguing his every though. While the trio battle Lestrade's ex-wife, Sherlock, beneath his disguise, is alone, with no John to help him through the torrent of emotions that creep up on him.

Chapter Notes

Previously: “Are you ready?” Mycroft’s voice implied more than simply questioning his readiness to leave the cemetery, but to get on the plane, to start his magnus opus mission. Sherlock nodded and with an air of finality turned smartly on his heels and marched into the back of his brother’s sleek black vehicle and waited for the airport to loom up ahead, calling him to his fate.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Well over a year later John Watson was doing very well for himself. He had moved out of Baker Street after Mycroft had promised to preserve the rooms as they used to be out of respect for Sherlock and was rooming with Greg. The man had got the house in the divorce and John, who just needed a place to crash, happily helped him with the living expenses every month from his paycheck. He was working sixteen hours a week now at the GP surgery, having found that work helped with his PTSD symptoms and his treating psychologist had helped him with the transition into a work environment again. The part-time work at this level was challenging at the moment though, he found it difficult to go through the day without intrusive memories disrupting his concentration with patients or when doing the paperwork at the end of a shift. The tremor in his hand and the limp he had not managed to shake off again were not helping either. The exhaustion that he seemed to feel at the end of a shift “helped him sleep, though he did still frequently experience very real-feeling dreams of being tortured once more, or of Sherlock tackling Moriarty off the roof. But for more than a year’s worth of treatment he was coping very well.

Greg Lestrade had, only by Mycroft’s impressive influence, not been forced to resign, although he was suspended for the eight months of the formal inquiry and then demoted; he held his job, kept his head down and did well. Not all of his results had been due to the consulting detective and so when his performance review came up his superiors were rather surprised to see he had done so well off of his own back. Of course there was no way he would ever be promoted again and he knew he would be stuck at this level forever. Still, he was grateful he retained his job as not only did he enjoy and believe in it, he was good at it and it felt like he had clawed back a small victory to prove he had been a damn good officer without Sherlock.
The two men saw each other quite infrequently; Greg would often work late and John would start early, necessitating an early night. In between that and John's medical and psychological appointments, there were very few times when their schedules put them in the same place at the same time. However, one evening Greg had been sent home as he had been up for three days straight getting his head around a murder in which the victim was made to look as though he had hung himself. John was on his laptop, seemingly reading something of interest.

“This is fascinating, have you been reading any of this?” John said out loud.

“Reading what?” Greg asked, nonchalantly.

“This blog, a Norwegian guy called Sigurson. He’s travelling the world and writing everything up on his website. He’s been to some amazing places, seen this? It’s a monastery in Tibet,” John explained and turned the computer around so Greg could see the screen. There was a panoramic picture of a beautiful ancient monastery set into snow-capped mountains.

“Cool, where did you find that out?”

“Molly sent me a link to it, she thought I might like to see it. It’s an interesting read too.”

“Molly? I didn’t think she was all that into travel,” Greg said, remembering the last disastrous conversation he had with her.

“No, but she likes the way he writes. It is fascinating stuff,” he said again, unaware he was just repeating himself now. The blogs mostly took the form of letters to Petter’s wife; he always wrote about what he thought she would like the most about the places he visited, or what she would find interesting about a particular location. Every entry was signed off ‘Missing you’. John fought the urge to blog again, he wouldn’t be posting anything else on there, it was no longer a private tool to work through his emotions, it had become a public forum until he had blocked everyone from posting new comments. Now he simply added to the two huge files on his hardrive when he couldn’t come to terms with his feelings for one, he would write it in that book.

He clicked the button which meant he would be kept up to date with Petter Sigurson’s latest entries before he went back to his general surfing.

The year had been a tough one for both men, John was still prone to bouts of depression and would sometimes disappear for a few days in his room under a fitful cloud of anger and loss until either Molly or Greg would pull him out of it. John had, for a couple of months, returned to the bedsit he was renting prior to moving in to Baker Street, not able to return to the flat they had shared except to pack his things. Even then he had left a lot of stuff behind, not wanting to extricate everything from what Sherlock had left behind. Those two months had been so hard on him. He was seeing his psychologist and physiotherapist but never once did he feel as though he was likely to smile again. The only time he did was in his sleep when he dreamed of Sherlock spooning him in bed, the late morning pouring sunshine through the window. He was warm, comforted and peaceful. Sometimes he would hear a mumble of something sweet (for Sherlock) in his ear and he would drift off again, only to feel cold and cut off when he woke.

Greg had returned home after another day of giving evidence at the enquiry to find John sat at the kitchen table with a cup of cold tea in front of him and his gun on the table. John explained that he had been staring at it for hours and couldn’t bring himself to move. He didn’t want to put it away in case he decided he wanted to use it but he wasn’t quite ready to use it yet. When Greg had fearfully asked what he intended to use it on John had very calmly expressed how he had been contemplating the idea of shooting himself through the temple. The DI had been horrified at this statement and immediately confiscated the weapon, locking it in a small safe under his bed that John, if he knew
about it, wouldn’t know the combination for. What had terrified Greg the most was the calmness
John was showing the face of seriously considering taking his own life and he stayed awake that
night, hoping the doctor wouldn’t try anything else.

That was a year ago now and John was much better. His thoughts of suicide had marked his lowest
point and now things were starting to look up. He and Greg went to the pub every week to get a bit
drunk and loosen up a little and on some occasions Molly would join in and it quickly turned into the
Sherlock Anonymous meeting. He had told them both some time ago that he and Sherlock had been
more than just friends and Molly told him that she had guessed as much.

“I’m so sorry for crushing on your boyfriend, but I couldn’t help myself!” she said, a little weepily
after her third glass of wine. John had chuckled and thrown an arm around her, saying that it wasn’t
her fault he was damn irresistible.

“I wonder what he’s doing now…” Molly said, somewhat drunk. John stared at her pointedly. Her
stomach clenched as she realised she had made a slip up.

“It got me thinking, what comes after this life, you know?” she said, covering for herself. “I mean,
could you imagine him standing at the pearly gates?” she giggled and stood up, pulled her collar up
to her face and put on a scowl in an impressive impression of their old friend.

“I’m Sherlock Holmes and I demand to be let in!” she barked and Greg fell to pieces, laughing. “Oh,
Saint Peter? You’ve clearly got a drug problem, have been kicked out of your divine semi-detached
by a neglected Mrs Peter and what’s that? You’re having a love affair with Saint Michael? Tut tut,”
she mocked and John had to hold onto the chair to stop himself from falling off laughing. Molly was
giggling madly, glad she had successfully covered up for her slip and decided against any more
alcohol for the evening. She had attracted odd looks from the other patrons and with a wine-aided
blush resumed her seat.

“And then I bet Saint Peter would turn him away and he would break into heaven, pick the lock or
scale the fence,” John added, glad to revel in the memory of his friend’s eccentricities.

Scenes like this carried on over the next two years. Thanks to Greg’s tireless efforts to keep John
looking ahead and Molly sometimes using her comical awkwardness to kick off a conversation the
three of them did very well. John met up with Mrs Hudson every month in a little café down the
road, he still didn’t want to go back to the flat. She was doing very well and had struck up a
‘companionship’ with an older gentleman from the library which was keeping her happy and
occupied. He still visited the grave of his ex-lover every month as well and gave him updates on
what was happening in the world, with him, how much he missed him and asked questions about
things that were puzzling him at the time.

Greg had learned that a great way to keep John happy was to informally consult him on cases he was
having particular trouble with. In utilising everything Sherlock had taught him, John felt as though he
was keeping the memory and legacy of a great man alive seeing as no one else would ever believe in
his methods. He never went to crime scenes, but he looked at the photographs back at the house with
Greg and pointed out things the forensic team had missed. This point in itself had proved Sherlock to
absolutely right about Anderson and it hadn’t been just a feud between children; Anderson did
genuinely miss things and sometimes they were case-breakers.

He had also grown quite close to and fond of Molly and it came as no great surprise to him when he
catched her snogging Lestrade in her office at St Bart’s one day when he wanted to surprise her with
a coffee and clinical questions he had about a patient’s condition. John had, of course, mercilessly
teased Greg about it, but was happy if they were.
One strange day he was off work for the Saturday and was using it to catch up with some reading he had been doing. There had been several journals published in the last few months with some fascinating cases and breakthroughs in battlefield surgery. He still retained a great interest in what his old job entailed and wondered if it would ever come in use in a civilian context; with Sherlock no longer running him around some of the most dangerous parts of London the chances had significantly decreased, but he read about it nonetheless. He held the mug of tea in his dominant hand, even though the fingers were still bent and achy, he did this to keep the strength in his hand. The breaks had been rough and there was some minor nerve damage which meant they didn’t always moved exactly as he told them to. Luckily they had never failed him when he had needed to use them for his vocation and decided that if they played up only when he was relaxing it was an ok price to pay.

He was half way through an article about sickle-cell disorders when he heard the front door unlock and open and someone with some noisy plastic bags came through. He fancied Greg and Molly were returning from their date with a little extra shopping.

No, instead of the cutesy couple, a woman about Greg’s age with straightened dyed brown hair stormed through the hall into the living room where John was, her face scrunched up with anger. The doctor supposed in another life she had been a good-looking woman when her eyes weren’t squinting with fury and her mouth pursed. She threw the bags down onto the floor, uncaring if the contents spilled out. There were some films, CD’s and a few clothes.

“Who the hell are you?” she demanded, awfully rudely.

“John, err, who are you? I didn’t know anyone else had a key to this house,” he said, maintaining a polite front.

“I’m Jeanette Lestrade, although soon to be Sampson thank god,” she scowled. John instantly didn’t like her. Not only was she being incredibly rude about a good friend of his, she was also the bitch who had refused to let Greg see his kids outside one weekend a month. It seems as though she was remarrying; hopefully that would mean he wouldn’t have to see her again. Somehow John had always managed to avoid her, through some feat of luck and now he can see why Greg wanted as little to do with her as possible.

“Oh right, well Greg isn’t in at the moment, would you like to leave a note?” he asked, his sickly polite smile clearly ticking her off so he smiled a little wider.

“No I don’t want to leave a fucking note. And you didn’t answer my question: who the hell are you?” John was rather taken aback, she really was a bit of a cow.

“I’m John, I live here.”

“Gregory Lestrade lives here, I should know he stole this house from me,” she snapped.

“I wouldn’t know about that,” John said with faked calm, “But he’s my mate and I live in the back room.”

“Are you another one of his deadbeat copper friends? Useless bunch of morons,” she spat.

“No, actually I’m a doctor,” he said through gritted teeth, finding it very difficult to keep his temper in check.

“Really? Aren’t doctors supposed to be intelligent? You don’t look it at all,” she declared unkindly and stormed off into the kitchen. John heard the kettle being filled and mug slammed on the side. He
reached for his phone.

I'm starting to see why you broke up with Jeanette. She’s here and she’s bloody rude. JW

Shit. Thanks for the heads up. I'll rescue you in ten minutes. GL

John smiled grimly. By ‘rescue’ he figured Greg would come in and they would argue loudly about whatever Jeanette came here to argue loudly about and then he would either have to go for a walk or break up a fight, he wasn’t sure which yet. Jeanette came back into the room and took the chair by the window, sipping the coffee she had made for herself which was so strong it was making John feel a little ill from the smell.

“Why does Greg need to share then? Has he got himself into debt?” she asked, prying for another reason to hound her poor ex-husband.

“I needed a place to live and Greg and I get on well,” he said, trying not to be too defensive. She scoffed.

“What are you, gay?” she sneered. John was taken aback. This woman really was unpleasant, why the hell did Greg marry her in the first place?

“Yes I am actually, is that a problem?” he was done being nice to her. She was rather surprised by his answer, clearly she had said it just to snipe at her ex-husband rather than the doctor. John wasn’t going to get into the complexity of his last partner having been male but had never considered any other male on the face of the planet to be sexually attractive to him.

“No,” she said begrudgingly and took a large gulp of her tea. They sat in awkward silence again.

“Hey, I know you,” she said, a look of realisation and terrible cruelty on her face. “You’re John Watson, the guy who wrote that blog about Sherlock Holmes. I had to laugh so hard when that Richard Brook story came out, to think Greg had actually believed him?!?” she laughed. Again, had she not been dancing on thin ice with John’s temper and so much of a bitch that her face seemed to be permanently twisted into an ugly expression she might have been considered pretty, with a pleasant laugh but all John could think about was how he must not hit a woman. “I would have loved to have seen his face when he read that paper. I’m glad Kitty Riley published it without going to the police first, I bet you could have fried an egg on Greg’s face.” She laughed again and John was getting near breaking point.

“And you think a man’s death is something to laugh about?” he asked, his voice nearly shaking. Her shrieking had covered up the sound of the front door being unlocked and his housemate coming in.

“What? What do I care if some retard throws himself off a building? I just had to laugh when…”

“Jesus Christ Jeanette!” Greg shouted, his face terrified at John’s reaction to her insensitive ranting. “Sorry John, I…” he didn’t know what to say, he was afraid it would put his friend back into the depression he had been able to avoid in these last few months.

“Don’t you start, Greg!” she barked at him, her hands flew to her hips.

“What did you come here for? Why visit when you could call?”

“So you can hang up on me? I think not!”

“As I recall you hung up on me last time…”
“I told you not to start Gregory!”

“I’ve got a really good idea,” John butted in. “Why don’t you just come here to do whatever you came in here to do and then go? I think we’d all like to spend as little time in each other’s company as possible.” His voice was calm, but he definitely didn’t feel it; he still felt ready to throttle her.

“I have a really good idea too: piss off, this is nothing to do with you,” she snarled and turned for wrath back to Greg. “The kids have been wanting to see you and every time I call with a date you blow me off. Is this your idea of wanting to be there for them? Or are your ‘cases’ too important? How are still even employed? Didn’t they fire you after it turned out you blindly followed the words of a nutter who tricked you…”

“Shut the fuck up!” John roared, leaping to his feet and stunned her into silence. She turned to look at him and immediately bit off her scathing remark. He might have been a short man, but by heaven he was radiating white hot fury that had her taking a few steps back from him. “I don’t care what beef you’ve got with your ex-husband but don’t drag Sherlock’s name into this,” he growled. “I also don’t care what you think about Kitty fucking Riley, you don’t just march into here and start badmouthing him, not in front of me…” his anger was now starting to give away to upset and instead of being around to listen to more of Jeanette’s insults or Greg’s pity, he walked past them and grabbed his coat by the door, intent on going to walk it off.

As he opened the door a sheepish-looking Molly appeared on the door step, she was struggling with some bulky shopping bags in one hand and holding her other hand up; it was bruised.

“Molly, what happened?” John asked, his anger evaporating as his concern took over with great speed.

“Oh, it was so silly, I had just turned the corner down the road and some boy on a bike nearly hit me! I tried to get out the way, but I fell over on my wrist and it really hurts! I came back to ask for some ice,” she gushed. John sighed, she had been a clumsy girl for the whole time he had known her.

“-not flexible! My job doesn’t allow me to just drop things at the last minute!” Greg could be heard protesting from the other room. Molly’s face dropped.

“Oh dear, he’s arguing with Jeanette isn’t he?” she asked. John nodded grimly.

“She’s in the other room.” Molly instantly looked even more awkward than usual.

“You know what, it’s not too far to my flat, I’ll put a bag of chips or something on my wrist, I’ll be fine. Sorry to bother you John!” she said and tried to walk away, but the doctor grabbed her arm gently.

“Don’t be ridiculous Molly, what sort of doctor would I be if I turned you away? What kind of friend would I be?!” he said, scoffing at her suggestion and shucked off his coat. This would probably be a better distraction than pounding the pavements around his house.

“But if Jeanette’s in there…” she said, quite clearly afraid to go in; John guessed it was because she didn’t want to create more problems for Greg rather than wanting to avoid confrontation with Jeanette.

“She can sod off, you’re hurt,” he said with finality and she stepped inside. He helped wind the shopping bags from her other arm and put them to the side in the hallway, John noting one of them was a bunch of flowers, Greg really had spent the day charming her. She followed John, trying to appear as invisible as possible, as the only way to get to the kitchen was through the living room.
“-the one who kicked up a stink about seeing them and the only time you’re available is once a month? Why can’t you just let them go, you can’t spend the time you need with them. Let Evan look after them, he’ll be a much better father to those kids!” Jeanette was yelling as John and Molly came through.

“Evan? Jamie doesn’t even like Evan!” Greg protested and then turned to see the two entering the room. His eyes lowered to the hand Molly was cradling and he saw the darkened skin. “Are you alright?!” he exclaimed, his tone and expression immediately changing when addressing Molly.

“Who’s this?!?” Jeanette demanded. “Are you two-? This is how you’re getting over me? What is she? Some police PA?” she spat. Molly looked affronted.

“Actually I’m a pathologist, I have a doctorate,” she said, defensively.

“It’s probably just a mild sprain, I’m going to treat it now,” John said to soften the worried look on Greg’s face.

“How young is she? And how old are you?” Jeanette sneered.

“What does that matter?” Molly asked. Her expression was one of timid curiosity, but her voice was hard; John was quite surprised by it. “And what business is it of yours?”


“You divorced Greg, you gave up any right to know anything about his business or personal life.”

“I’m the mother of his children, that’s who!”

“And not his wife. He’s free to see other people and right now that means me. You can either accept that you no longer have control over him or you can go and run back to your own new fiancée and whine at him about it.” Molly took a deep breath and turned to John. “Did you say you had some ice?” He stared at her for a second.

“Yes, sure, this way,” he said and ushered her into the kitchen. As they closed the door behind them and the two Lestrades resumed their discussion, Molly let out a huge breath and shakily sat down.

“Wow, I didn’t think I had that in me!” she whispered excitedly. Her stomach was still all a quiver from telling off Jeanette. John smiled at her in reply and fished out a fresh tea-towel to wrap the packet of ice in. Carefully he applied the bundle to her wrist and she hissed slightly at the pain.

“That was pretty good, you certainly did take her down a notch. I can see now why Greg wanted rid of her,” John murmured back conspiratorially.

Jeanette left the house some twenty minutes later after Greg had managed to persuade her to be more flexible with the times he could take the kids out.

“I’m sorry you both had to see all that,” he said sheepishly. Molly was texting under the table.

All is well. Thanks for the lesson. Molly xx

She didn’t let the others see the message. It was an irregular update she sent to Sherlock’s phone that more often than not went unanswered, but she knew he appreciated her telling him his friends were doing ok. She often thought perhaps Mycroft gave him updates, but Sherlock had once told her that her insight was infinitely more valuable that his brother’s and while she could never write anything very long or with too much detail she sent whenever she felt it was important.
It was two years to the day since he had faked his own suicide and Sherlock was in the top floor suite of an expensive hotel in Stuttgart. He was waiting here having travelled from Berlin that day. A contact had got in touch with him and told him to rent the very room in which he stood and he would meet him in three days. The Moriarty network was crumbling; it had been easy to take out the low-level players and middle management, after all they were stupid and they believed their boss was still alive. Now he was dealing with upper echelons things were difficult, these men knew Moriarty was dead and had hidden in the shadows of other gangs and crime syndicates, waiting to take power of the consulting criminal’s name and resources. These men needed to be lured out and traps set, all of which seemed to be taking a long time to set up.

The city was thrumming with the sound and life of the average masses, Sherlock stood above it all, barely even registering the 1.8 million people in the immediate region around him. He had remained blonde, his hair cut short with a small fringe and fashionable glasses which seemed to divert enough attention from his other much celebrated facial features to ensure no one ever saw the similarity to the dead detective. His green eyes were focused on the infinite point on the horizon, blowing a lungful of cigarette smoke out, greying the sky for a moment. Smoking was far more sociable and acceptable out in Europe and Sherlock had found that indulging his old habit had led to many opportunities opening up to him; not to mention the added bonus of getting to smoke again.

He had three days to wait, to waste before his contact would be meeting him here. He had left Berlin as hastily as he did because he was in danger of being discovered; not his true identity but that someone was uncovering the web Moriarty had left behind. With the prospect of three days of nothingness stretching out in front of him like a road that went on forever he could feel the boredom and impatience creeping up on him like a swarm of ants biting at his toes, his fingertips, his face… With a snarl, he took a long final drag of his cigarette and turned on his heel smartly to go inside, trying to think of something to that he could expend his energy on. He was in no mood to write his blog and he had no other reason to be in Stuttgart other than to meet this man so it was not as if he could go into the city and do some looking around.

He saw a flash on an old mobile phone on his bed and immediately went over to it to look at the text, it was from either Molly or Mycroft who had lowered himself to text now when he wanted to communicate as Sherlock would never answer that phone.

All is well. Thanks for the lesson. Molly xx

Sherlock thought back to their last email exchange (under two temporary and totally anonymous addresses of course) when he had told her to stand up to those who bullied her. She had a clever mind and should say what she is thinking rather than worrying about social conventions; after all, it had always worked for him. Molly had been typically reticent about doing anything that might lead to conflict or confrontation but it sounded as though she had done something that really mattered to her. He was glad to hear they were alright, he knew Molly would have gone into detail should something bad have happened.

He stood by the decorative marble fireplace and looked into the large mirror that hung above it. He stared just beyond his shoulder, focused his mental faculties and after a few moments his mind was able to conjure an image of his partner as though he was standing right behind him. The image of John stood patiently, he looked around from time to time as if assessing the environment in his usual militaristic way; he rarely observed the details, but he did have potential and viable threats registered and monitored at all times and Sherlock supposed it would be a waste of resources to have both of them doing the same jobs all the time.
The last two years had not been easy on him. It was far more difficult than he ever imagined it to be; it was all due to the feelings the doctor had stirred in him and now they were difficult to get under control again. John’s regular care and maintenance of his emotional state had always meant that it had not been much of an issue before, but by now he felt fraught; it had been two years without the doctor. He wasn’t even himself for most of that time, he had to live in the skin of another person as he took apart the criminal organisation (or, specifically, Jim Moriarty) that had begged him to challenge them. He wasn’t sure how he was supposed to be feeling right now and was having trouble with identifying his different emotions; he had no idea what to do with them. All he knew was that they were clawing their way out from inside and shredding his mind as they did so.

The image of his partner vanished as he headed for the mini-bar and poured himself a generous helping of scotch. These feelings were getting too much for him and he needed them to go away for now, he needed to be able to think clearly and organise his thoughts and emotions without them interfering. The most readily available option lay in the bottle of fine spirits in front of him. Alcohol could bring numbness. He needed to get away from the feelings that were surging in his chest by any means possible and he downed the measure in a single swig.

It had taken a few months to grow accustomed to his independence and loneliness again. He had become so used to letting John worry about the domestic things such as groceries, bills or the inane jobs of the household. Then he had to quieten himself again, re-learn to internalise all his thought-processes, suppress the urge to deduce people out loud as John was not there to either cover or apologise for him. There was a suffocating emotion sitting in his chest that was one of loss and his frustration strangled him until he could have sworn he felt a physiological reaction. He had never expected to feel so miserable without his lover and it had been driving him slowly into despair over the last two years. He had wanted this network to be a simple thing to take apart, for all the pieces to fall in like a stack of dominos; he had wanted to finish the case that began with Moriarty and get back to England where he could see John again and ask his forgiveness. However, given the nature of his adversary, Sherlock knew that destroying his criminal empire would not be an easy thing of course would need some considerable time to devote to.

Sherlock began to realise a small part of what he had been feeling was fear. A considerable amount of time had elapsed after all, John would probably be getting over the death of his lover and be contemplating moving on, perhaps taking things back up with Sarah. The thought made him feel resentful and rather ill, after everything he had put on the line to tell John in the first place, to let the doctor into his heart where no one else had been, after everything he had sacrificed to ensure the life of his partner he felt he deserved to return home to his reward. He was on this case not only as an ego-stroke or mental exercise but to preserve the lives of those he valued and his just reward should be to go home to them and re-establish communications with them, going back to his old life without the looming threat of Moriarty hanging around them like a bad smell. He knew that he should be happy enough that John was safe and he should be prepared to sacrifice anything for the man, and he supposed he was (after all, he had given his life and reputation for the love of the man) but he could not help the pure selfishness in him that meant it would only be truly worth it if Sherlock returned from his incredible adventure to a waiting John.

He had allowed a part of himself to become dependent on another, he had allowed John’s needs to come above his own and now he suffered for it. His emotions had broken the surface of his mind and after two years of neglect were clouding his mind in a maelstrom of chaos and confusion. He was desperately lost and miserable without John but he knew as soon as he returned to his partner without having completed his work that John would suffer and die and that would tear Sherlock up even
more. What a strange and torrid triangle of emotions he was twisted in and he could see how these things could drag people down to squalid depths they inhabited.

His mind was also beginning to be clouded by the alcohol, which he supposed was the point. Another scotch. He had always had problems feelings emotions since he was a child and his therapist in the psychiatric ward had suspected he had a neurological disconnection to them and so when he did feel (most often anger and frustration) was because of disjointed firing of his brain which intensified the emotions. Sherlock snorted as he recalled how he had broken into Dr Warner’s office and read the file on himself. Perhaps this was true, but since he had escaped adolescence and had got clean of the cocaine his brain chemistry had stabilised considerably and he had found his emotions easier to keep under wraps. He had felt stable enough and safe enough with John to explore them and had enjoyed the experience. Safety and comfort was the most rewarding part of their connection, he knew John would do anything to keep him safe and Sherlock was proving that his strength of feeling was the same. The tenderness and love that had then developed had been wonderful sensations and would be something that he would never forget even if he could not return to John after his mission was complete.

Another scotch.

Anger, frustration, loss, love and loneliness suddenly crashed upon him as he knocked back the drink and it almost knocked the air from his lungs as he was bombarded with such strength of emotion that he was at a loss to know what to do. Too drunk and too disconsolate to think about processing and filing the feelings he allowed himself to succumb to them and he felt himself collapse under their weight. He wanted his John, he needed him; even hundreds of miles away he could feel the doctor’s presence and he simultaneously mourned and celebrated his partner, knowing that John was the best and worst thing that had happened to him and he loved him entirely and utterly. Sherlock had always known that he was incapable of feeling things in a small way; whenever his emotions got involved they were almost always intense and deeply ingrained into his being. There was no way he was ever going to like his partner in a small or middling way; he realised from the moment he recognised his feelings as love that he would adore John Watson with his whole being and never look back.

He stumbled over to the netbook on the bad and opened the lid. He was having trouble seeing straight now and had some trouble navigating with the touch pad. He dropped the glass and it rolled away on its side under the bed somewhere and he grabbed the bottle by the neck and sunk another mouthful. His mouth tasted awful by this point, but he couldn’t quite bring himself to care as he loaded his most viewed webpage; the blog of Dr John H Watson. It had not updated since Sherlock’s ‘death’ except to say that he believed in his friend and that he would always do so. There was a post which contained the only picture of John he could look at without having any suspicion aroused if his computer was looked through. He looked longingly at the image, knowing that it was, on this night, the only reason he would continue with his mission. He had to make sure that everything was in place before he could return to John.

The picture of the smiling John on his blog profile was enough for the storm of emotions to capsize the SS Sherlock Holmes and he crumpled, torrents of sobs and tears racking painfully through his body. He had no idea how to make these feelings easier to deal with, it felt as though he would drown under the weight of them; they sat on his chest and blocked off his mind with such frightening ease that he feared he would never be his quiet, serene self again. In all of this, in his bitter missing of the kindly doctor, he never once hated John or the love they shared, even in the maelstrom of sorrow and bitterness he could not imagine living a life without that beautiful feeling of being completely accepted for who he was. He mourned their separation and cherished what they had. He was stuck in a dark chaotic ocean of emotion that he was sure was going to swallow him up and crush him.

#
The next morning Sherlock awoke feeling as though he had run a marathon the night before. He had retained the presence of mind to drink a lot of water before going to sleep which had prevented the onset of a hangover. He sat up and shucked off his crumpled clothes from the day before feeling strangely serene. After the storm of emotions the previous night everything seemed to be calm and quiet in his mind. He could still feel the familiar twangs of loss at his separation and the warming love he held for the doctor, but all those feelings were somehow manageable now. He acknowledged their existence and what they meant to him without being dragged down by them. It seemed that allowing them out last night had been something of a purge; like lancing a boil or squeezing a ripe spot he was able to move on.

He closed the netbook’s lid and walked over to the bathroom where a good shower would complete the feeling of freshness he was experiencing in his mind. He kept in mind the benefits of purging emotions in a single evening (though messy, was efficient) and hoped it would last a long time. Should there have to be a next time, he hoped to be able to do it in the safety of Baker Street, not in some hotel where there were no friendly faces for miles. He was glad this is hit him when he had some time to spare and there were no immediate threats around; he was appalled at the idea of how those emotions might have cost him everything if they had struck at an inopportune moment. He would use the day to take account of the experience, log the sensations and catalogue the new sense of calm he felt, even though he knew his feelings were just below the surface again. He wanted to learn everything he could deduce from it, test himself and above all, make sure it did not happen again. He viewed it as necessary, but it should not have happened the first place. Ruefully he remembered the day he told Anderson he was a high-functioning sociopath; gone were those days it seemed. He wondered if this was a bad thing, if it meant that he was becoming more ‘normal’, but then again, emotions scared ordinary people as much as a lack of them and what scared people even more was change. Upon his return to his old life he fancied he could irk Anderson even more if he were to display certain feelings…he filed that away for future reference and to ask John how best such a thing might be achieved. He wasn’t considering a practical joke, of course, simply being dramatic. Yes, that was it.

Chapter End Notes

Very sorry for mistakes and etc. Let me know any stonkers out there, I'll correct them.
The Final Phase

Chapter Summary

Sherlock returns, full of swag and as sharp as ever as the final phase of his mission is now in play. He reveals himself to Lestrade to get the help he will need from the police and Mrs Hudson tells him off for picking up smoking again. Later, John loses his temper with a patient and causes harm where perhaps it was deserved.

Chapter Notes

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John looked at the date on his computer; it had been a little over three years since his partner had hurled himself off the top of St Bart's hospital, taking his enemy and nemesis with him. John’s feelings, whilst conflicted, were at ease. He would always hate and rue that day, but he had not been allowed to fall into total despair. Greg and Molly had been true friends and kept him afloat, even when he thought things could get no worse and he could not bear the hurt of it all. He saw Mycroft infrequently and hoped to keep it that way; while he bore no resentment for the man he reminded John too strongly of Sherlock and tingles of old pains would creep into the fore of his mind if they spent too much time together. The news website he was on at the moment had a small article on a recent spate of graffiti appearing all over the country. The designs were all different, but the content was always the same: ‘I believe in Sherlock Holmes’, or ‘James Moriarty was real’. John didn’t know what was going on, but he recognised Raz’s work, which had got a picture at the top of the article and wondered if he was behind it.

Come to think of it, there had been a few more emails from his blog come in too expressing support for the deceased detective. John wondered if the anniversary of his death had something to do with it; people only tended to remember things like this when a time marker made them recall. Mrs Hudson had called and said that she received things in the post at Baker Street, cards and letters all very short, but all expressing their belief in her old tenant and some of them had been addressed to John, also expressing their support. The doctor had found it incredible that the hate mail had only lasted a few months and largely stopped after his ordeal had been revealed and Sherlock further disgraced in the eyes of the public and population at large, but that the support letters had kept going and suddenly decided to pick up now of all times.

He decided to take a trip to the cemetery; it had been a couple of months since he last visited and figured the headstone would like to know what was going on. He was grateful the ground was dry, even after the last light shower of rain as it meant that his cane didn’t sink into the spongy grass when
he leaned heavily on it as he was now required to do. His leg had hurt so badly in the months after The Fall that he had barely been able to walk on it and had been bed-ridden for the longest time, his therapist was able to sign him off sick at work so he wouldn’t lose his job for it. The pain had eased off since that time, he was able to function properly (though he now hated using stairs in front of anyone) without the continuous use of painkillers, the aching sensation was a familiar one and something he was able to handle. Although he had resented the canes at first, his friends had made him accept that they were going to be a part of his life and Greg and Molly had clubbed together to buy him a very nice ash stick which, after a few modifications, was infinitely more comfortable than the metal thing from the hospital he had been using before. Mycroft had also added to his small collection, having what he suspected to be a custom made ebony cane with gilt detail that he had come to think of as his ‘formal’ cane. What horrified and amused him in equal measure was how he seemed to treat that one like Mycroft treated his umbrella and when Molly had pointed this out to him in a fit of giggles he had gone very red in the face and mumbled something about not being like the older Holmes.

“Hello again,” he said, addressing the headstone and golden letters. “I know I haven’t been by in a while, but I guess things have been pretty busy. No, that’s no excuse, I’ve just been… I have just ‘been’.” A nice, awkward start then. “Some weird stuff’s been going on lately, not that’d you’d appreciate it but people have been saying they believe in you, as in more than usual. Mrs Hudson’s been getting all kinds of things through the post, cards, letters, sometimes just pictures of graffiti that’s been going up. I swear I saw something Raz might do on the road down from Baker Street. Some giant raven in a scarf with ‘I believe in SH’ written around it. I thought the scarf was a good touch. I don’t know why people have chosen now of all times to get so public about it, but I guess better late than never. Or maybe it’s turned into some internet thing. I don’t know. But whatever it is and however long it lasts for I’ll believe for the rest of my life.” He looked down, not wanting the headstone to see the emotion on his face. “There is no way anyone will be able to convince me that you were anything less than the most brilliant man I ever met.” He sniffed.

He chatted away lightly to the grave for about fifteen minutes, telling him that Molly and Greg were getting very serious and he was considering offering to do a flat swap with Molly. She had her flat for a very good deal and John was sure he would be able to afford it; he would have to redecorate of course, he was manly enough to refuse to sleep in a pink bedroom, but it would mean that the two lovebirds could have their time together without having to plan around John. Eventually he drifted off into silence as his thoughts became more melancholic.

“Why do I keep coming here? It’s like I’m tormenting myself!” he asked, a puzzled laugh escaping from his mouth to contradict his feelings. “People have told me to move on, to find someone else, date again, but I don’t want to. I know you’re not coming back and that I’ll never get to have you again, but I just don’t want to see anyone else. I know that if I do I’ll just spend the whole evening comparing them to you and it would never work out. But you know what? I think I’m ok with that. I think I’m ok to carry on with what you gave me. Thank you. Again. I know I say it every time, but thank you; you gave me so much and I love you so much that…just thanks,” he said, finishing a little awkwardly. He touched the headstone tenderly as his usual way of saying ‘until next time’ and limped off.

Sherlock did not enjoy the feeling of having been here before watching something a little similar. His position hidden in the foliage of the tree (which seems to have grown a little thicker in the years that had passed) was almost exactly the same as when he said his silent farewell to John at his own funeral. He had to see it, hear John’s honest and unguarded thoughts before he went through with his plan. His faith in John had been well-placed, the man was as ever loyal as ever and it seemed as though he had coped well with the loss that had threatened to consume him in the immediate months following their separation. He felt confident he could reunite with his partner and have him ready for adventure within a few hours.
He had noted the cane and was not surprised that the limp had returned, though he was a little surprised that it had endured for this long and he still experienced the pain in his leg; he was still hurting. Sherlock would have said that the cause of the lasting pain would have been the trauma from the two weeks of torture he had suffered at the hands of Moriarty and Moran, but the doctor had not even mentioned it, or made an allusion to his time in captivity and instead had talked about his love for Sherlock. Was his pain from this love still affecting him even after years had passed? Sherlock would never doubt John’s loyalty, though he was surprised at the force of love his partner was under. He supposed he shouldn’t have been too surprised, love, for all its failings, was a mighty emotion and could be the source of the greatest and worst acts humanity provided.

His own feelings remained under the surface again, and he was able to acknowledge them without being too affected. He felt that familiar guilty sadness for his actions being the cause of their suffering, but also warmth at the continued strength of John’s feelings as well excited anticipation of revealing his secret. The last touches were being put into place tonight, he had already gone to see Mrs Hudson and, amidst her fussing and weeping, had put everything into place at Baker Street. He had managed to corner Lestrade on his way back to the Yard from a Starbucks and tell him everything and get his men in place. Now all he had to do was go and see John and make sure he stayed by Sherlock’s side to make sure he was safe. He would have to leave this to the last possible moment as he knew the longer he was with John the more likely he would be spotted and his location absolutely could not be given away, even if Moran knew he was alive. He knew this fact would lure him out into a well-crafted trap and with any luck the sniper would be in one of Mycroft’s people’s special facilities.

#

Sherlock pulled his smart suit jacket into place as he strutted down Baker Street taking in a smart drag of his cigarette, feeling pleased to be back and his plan so close to completion that he couldn’t help but taste a little bit of victory already. He knew the lad in the blue jacket down the road was hired to keep an eye on the flat and when he saw Sherlock he scarpered, no doubt to tell his boss that the detective had returned. He smirked to himself knowing that he had frustrated Moran to such an extent that he would be eager to jump into such an obvious trap as this to have a chance of murdering his master’s killer. Stamping out the cigarette under a shined leather shoe, he rapped smartly on the door to 221B. He had shed his disguise and was now finally in something a little more like his usual clothing, a smart dark suit, his contacts and make ups all removed, his face clean shaven and his hair was back to black, even if it was rather short so he could cut the dyed blond he had been growing out of it.

Mrs Hudson opened the door and before she had chance to say hello her mouth dropped open like a fish and he grinned.

“It can’t be…” she gasped and he swooped down to ambush her with a hug. He adored the older lady and loved her as the benchmark for how all mothers should be and as a sort of surrogate son he was pleased he had fulfilled his duty to protect her. “How?!” was all she could manage as she clung to him and he suspected she was crying.

“Shall I tell you over some tea?” he suggested knowing that standing too long on the doorway might not be such a good idea. In the corner of his eye he saw a crowd of youths heading for the sandwich shop and spotted Raz amongst them. Good. He needed to keep Moran away from Baker Street until the evening. He suspected the sniper would wait until the cover of darkness to attempt his
assassination, but he had to be sure and had paid generously for Raz to bring his mates and keep Baker Street busy and full of witnesses until the sun set. He ushered Mrs Hudson inside, already tuning out the babble that was spewing, half-formed from her as she processed the fact that her favourite tenant (and sort-of son) was indeed alive and well.

“I can smell smoke on you Sherlock,” she said reprovingly as she led him through to her flat.

#

Sherlock had been sitting for an hour and a half in a noisy Starbucks that was heaving with students and a few Scotland Yard officers as they were beginning or ending their shifts. He was beginning to get annoyed and there was only so much coffee he could drink without starting to feel slightly sick. He was waiting for a certain officer to whom he owed a personal debt and of whom he required a favour. His patience finally bore fruit when a harassed looking older man pushed his way through the shop and Sherlock signalled to the girl behind the counter for two coffees (he had explained he was meeting someone and to bring them over when he told her).

“Lestrade!” he called over. The officer in question looked around for the person calling his name and looked past Sherlock until he realised that the man he had assumed to be a City boy was in fact a man he thought had been dead and he was grinning at Greg like a naughty schoolboy.

“You-!” he said, accusingly, but nothing following. “You little shit!” he exclaimed finally as he forgot his drink and took the other chair on the table, his eyes wide and agog at a sight he never thought he would be able to see again.

“Really, after three years that’s all you can say to me?” Sherlock said, his tone sharp but not scathing. “It seems the Yard continues to drain you of your brainpower, now it’s taking you vocabulary.”

“There’s nothing wrong with my language. If anything it’s about to get more colourful,” he said and was startled when the girl brought coffees over for the both of them. “What did John say?” he asked, gratefully inhaling his coffee as though it were a life line. Sherlock looked away. “Oh for the love of God!” he cried out. “No, call him right now!” he demanded and took his phone out of his pocket. Sherlock’s hand slammed on his phone, confiscating it. Greg looked at him, confused.

“Not yet,” he said quietly.

“What’s going on? It’s not fair that he doesn’t know. Since you…since you ‘died’ he hasn’t been the same.”

“I know. But it’s for his own safety that I don’t tell him. Look Lestrade, I don’t have a lot of time so I can only go through this once,” he said, very seriously. Lestrade shuffled uncomfortably in his seat and put on his listening face.

“Jim Moriarty framed me to get back at the trouble I had caused his criminal empire with some of my cases,” he started.

“I know,” he said. Sherlock considered rebuking him for interrupting, but managed to keep it in since it was a display of loyalty which he knew Lestrade did not have to give.

“To complete his story about a fake genius he required me to commit suicide as admission of my guilt. I also knew that he would have his men, mostly likely led by Sebastian Moran, his lieutenant, positioned to take action against me if anything went wrong with their boss. Knowing it would be probable I would have to fake my own suicide, if not just to get Moriarty to release John, I knew that
the best way to do this, whilst keeping it convincing, was to jump from a tall building. With Molly Hooper, I arranged use of a drug that would slow my heart rate enough to convince people I was dead and then she slashed a laundry van’s tyres so it would stay in position, I would land on that and roll onto the pavement where she would douse my head with a pint of my own blood I gave earlier that day. I would then be taken to the morgue where Molly would ensure she was on duty and insist she processed the body.”

“But I saw the photos Sherlock, your skull was bashed in!” he protested, even though he knew it was true; the proof was explaining the whole thing to him right now.

“Molly took photographs of my body and gave them to one of my brother’s people for digital manipulation. The pictures you saw of my head wound were done in Photoshop.” Greg nodded and sank back into his chair, his face suddenly ashen and drawn. “They did a very convincing job,” Sherlock said. Then he realised the cause of Lestrade’s upset. “Yes, Molly has been lying. But if it were not for her lies neither you, John, Mrs Hudson or I would be alive.” Greg looked at him, not surprised the man had read his mind.

“What do you mean?”

“Moriarty’s incentive for me to commit suicide was to kill the people I cared about. He had his men poised to kill you all if I didn’t kill myself by a certain time. I knew then I couldn’t escape it. I had had Mycroft make the rest of the arrangements and said goodbye to John whilst injecting myself with the serum.”

“How did you manage that without Moriarty noticing?”

“I had it in my coat pocket, just put it through the material and into my leg. Not the most precise method of delivery but the only option I had open to me.”

“So how did Moriarty end up under you on the pavement?” Lestrade asked as the sequence of events didn’t quite add up yet. Sherlock betrayed himself with a quick glance away and if he didn’t know better, Greg could have sworn Sherlock looked embarrassed.

“He made a rather unpleasant threat upon John. I…lost my temper and tackled him off the roof edge,” he said delicately and Greg noticed his fingers were starting to twitch in the way his own did when he wanted a cigarette. He wondered if the other man had picked up the habit again. “His body did me the great service of not only cushioning my body enough to survive the fall but it also died quickly and without much screaming,” he added coldly. The glint in his eyes was enough to make Greg feel uncomfortable. He had never seen Sherlock truly hate someone before and with a glare like that he was sure he never wanted to be that person. The resurrected detective took another drink of his coffee before he continued his explanation.

“I hid out in Molly’s flat for two weeks and altered my appearance while Mycroft pushed for the body to be returned to him so he could bury it. The day of the funeral I left for Europe and began the process of tracking down every element to the Moriarty network and dismantling it. Mycroft helped, naturally, his European contacts and governmental influences were an asset.” Greg noted he was reluctant to give his brother an ounce more credit than he was due; this was Sherlock’s great work after all.

“Wow, sounds like you had your work cut out for you,” he said.

“It certainly was stimulating, I was with a single driving focus for the better part of three years. Sadly, half the time I spent out there seemed to be waiting for contacts, meetings, deadlines, ambushes. I travelled globally to seek my quarry, did a few small cases on the side. Did you hear
about the collapse of the Doran-Axis Group Investment Bank?” he asked, a little smug smirk playing on his face. Lestrade rattled his memory for a moment.

“You mean the bank that was done for laundering millions of euros for the Russian mafia?” Greg asked. “Was that one of Moriarty’s operations?”

“Yes. I did the work that brought it down,” he said with a little superior sniff. Greg had no reason to doubt it any more, Sherlock Holmes was well and truly back. He laughed, astonishment and praise glowing in his smile.

“Wow!” he said. “That was one of the cases of the century! The guys in the fraud department wouldn’t stop talking about it for weeks!”

“Yes, it was rather satisfying. It had also been a front for a sizable amount of money funding many of Moriarty’s operations. Toppling that house of cards made the rest of the organisation rather twitchy.”

“So what’s left of it?”


“I’m going to assume he’s pretty dangerous since you’ve taken down the rest of his network. Who is he?”

“Sebastian Moran; former colonel and specialist sniper in the Royal Marines, dishonourably discharged and Moriarty’s right hand man since before we became known to each other. He was the single being Moriarty trusted to carry out his orders to the letter. Moran has been the head of the network his former master created and has been the principal man hunting me for the last three months. He didn’t know it was me destroying everything his boss had made until then. I hadn’t intended to do it, but it has worked in my favour and allowed me to lure him here into a trap.”

“And that’s where you need my help right?”

“Yes. Tonight he will try to assassinate me in my rooms in Baker Street from an empty flat opposite. I need you and some officers to come and make an arrest. He will use a sniper rifle to shoot me. I have set up a decoy in my flat that he will believe is me. When you hear the shot, you are to come in and arrest him.” Greg’s eyes went wide in disbelief.

“Wha- are you sure? How do you know he’s going to fall for it?”

“Because he desperately wants to. He’s angry that I’ve survived when Jim Moriarty died and has been trying to kill me for three months. Also, do you think these years away have dulled my ability to fool anyone I choose?” he said, that air of superiority back. Years ago this would have annoyed Lestrade, but he was still glad to have Sherlock back.

“I suppose not. When are you going to tell John?” The conversation had come round full circle now.

“I will visit him later on this afternoon, though I will have to do so in disguise. If Moran knows John knows I am alive then John will be killed before we even leave this coffee shop. It will take a couple of hours for John to come round but we should have the last piece of Moriarty’s jigsaw in custody by tonight. What do you say to that?”

“It would probably be my job, but I think it would be worth it to see the look on all their faces,” he said ruefully into his coffee. To be honest, he had been thinking of resigning from the Yard, his colleagues still treated him badly despite his record, there would never be any chance of promotion and he was never allowed publically near any high-profile cases. Eight months ago he had been
working on a murder case in which he had been making real progress on when one of the witnesses had turned out to be the brother of a famous singer; a paper published his name in connection with the case along with their ‘serious doubts’ about the officer so connected with the Sherlock case working on such a ‘high profile’ murder. The paper had even been so audacious as to question why Lestrade had only been demoted and not fired as a result of the enquiry that had followed Sherlock’s ‘death’.

“If I have any hand in it, Lestrade, you will be restored to your former position and get to, how do they put it, watch the egg on people’s faces as they realise Moriarty played them for idiots far more than I ever did. At least I told them they were idiots,” Sherlock said smoothly.

“How do you plan on doing that?!” he spluttered.

“Oh please, you don’t think I would have come back to London without proof of my innocence? It was one of the first things I did. The evidence is being kept with Mycroft at the moment and will be released tomorrow when Moran is in custody and everything Moriarty ever worked for has been reduced to ash.” Sherlock’s eyes glinted dangerously again, like the flash of steel before the blade falls. Sherlock had wrought complete revenge upon his enemy, he had not only killed him, but had taken apart at the very sinews all which would have mattered to the man, he had toppled Jim’s achievements and danced on them until they were nothing but dust. Sherlock’s wrath and revenge had been truly terrifying and Greg realised how lightly they had got off in the past compared to the full capabilities the restored detective now showed.

Sherlock knew exactly what Lestrade was thinking, he was afraid of what Sherlock was capable of. Moriarty had inspired fear through chaos and unpredictability, but he invoked terror because his enemies knew exactly what he would do and when he was finished with them there would be nothing left. He was pleased; on the one hand he appreciated the awe that was coming off in waves from the police officer and on the other he had showed exactly what he was capable of and Greg had recognised it. He pulled a manila envelope out of the messenger bag slung on his chair.

“Here should be everything you need to get authorisation for the plan tonight. Text me with any problems, I’ll get Mycroft on it.”

“You know I always thought you two didn’t get on,” Greg said, taking the package.

“We don’t. But brothers are brothers.”

“Still, won’t you owe him after this?”

“On the contrary, I think this settles our debt,” he said, but realised quickly that he had said too much and eyed Lestrade with a wary glance.

“I won’t ask,” he said, understanding. His relationship with his own brother was even worse than Mycroft and Sherlock’s; he hadn’t even spoken to Joseph in seven years.

“Good. Now. I have to go and see my doctor,” Sherlock said with a wry smile and rose to leave, slinging the messenger bag over his shoulder.

“It’s good to see you. I’m glad you’re not dead,” Greg said, and held his hand out optimistically. Slowly and with some caution, Sherlock took it and they shook hands. Greg looked shocked.

“I didn’t honestly expect you to take that,” he admitted. Sherlock smiled in knowing.

“I think you deserve it. I can’t think what I did to earn your friendship, Lestrade, but I’m grateful for it,” he said, with no small degree of difficulty. He nodded and they broke off the shake, both feeling
lost in unfamiliar territory to say much more.

“Don’t let this plan fail or you will never get Moran,” Sherlock warned as he tucked his wallet in his pocket. “He was the one who was in charge of making sure John died if I didn’t,” he said and walked out. Greg knew that Sherlock would get his prey tonight, regardless of whether he had police back-up or not; he also knew that if there was no one there to take him into custody Sherlock would probably kill Moran in a very nasty way and make sure no one ever found out about it.

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It had taken Sherlock a little while to get his alias registered at the surgery where John was working, but the time had been well spent; Sarah had walked by him several times and not even looked twice at him, his disguise was perfect. A wig, coloured contacts, some prosthetics in the mouth changed his face shape and carefully placed makeup defined different features of his face. Eventually, ‘Samuel Benham’ took a seat and waited for his turn with the duty doctor. He had carefully chosen to come in at the end of the clinic hours and in theory he should be the last patient on John’s list. He was kept waiting for at least half an hour and was contemplating leaving and just breaking into John’s office when his alias flashed up on the screen showing which patient was to be shown next. His heart leaped into his mouth for a second in excitement and anticipation and he got to his feet, following the nurse who showed him to the doctor’s office.

“Hello Mr Benham,” John said amicably, on his feet and offering a hand. Sherlock gladly took it and fought to control his reactions. John was looking older, far more than three years should have done to him, the scar under his eye was bright white and stark against his tan skin. “Please take a seat. Your records haven’t been transferred from your last GP’s office yet, so you’ll have to forgive me if I ask about your medical history,” he said, settling in his chair.

“Not a problem. My transfer to London came through very last minute, I didn’t get chance to visit my GP before I moved. I have the box, here,” he said, a northern accent disguising his voice. He passed over a box with a pharmacist’s label on it for Samuel Benham and answered a few questions John was obliged to ask until he was happy with repeating the prescription.

“I’ll be just a minute,” he said with a generic kind smile and left the room, leaning heavily on his stick. As soon as the door closed Sherlock began tearing at his costume, throwing off the wig onto the bed against the far wall, fumbling slightly as he picked out his contacts, lifted the prosthetics out and ran a cloth over his face to remove the make up from the sink in the corner. He flung his coat off and stood, in his own suit as his own self and waited for the doctor to return. He was jittery now, he was excited, he was restless and in that state saw the mug of tea on John’s desk. The kettle on the other side was still steaming slightly, meaning John had poured himself a cup just as Sherlock had come in. The tea on his desk would still be warm and he picked it up, stirring a couple of sugars in and took a long sip. It tasted like heaven.

“Sorry about the delay Mr Benham, trouble with-“ John began and stopped when he saw his ‘client’. He managed to close the door, his hands limp at his sides.

“There never was anything like your tea John, can I have another?” Sherlock asked nonchalantly. John gaped, for quite some time. After a few moments, he limped over to his desk and set the slip of paper in his shaking hand on the desk,

“Before you ask, you are not hallucinating and nor is this some kind of joke. I assure you I am quite real.”

“C…can I test that?” John asked, stuttering as he seemed to be shaking all over.
“Of course, what would you like to know?” Sherlock said and put the cup down.


“What?!” Sherlock protested, nursing his pained face.

“That’s what I want to know: did it hurt?” he said, his face a picture of rage.

“Yes John, it bloody hurt!” Sherlock answered petulantly. “I come home after three years and this is
the kind of welcome I get? Mrs Hudson and Lestrade took it with far more grace.” That earned him
another thump in the jaw. “Argh! John!” He yelled.

“You told them before you told me? You bastard!” he cursed and limped around behind his desk to
sit down.

“Well, this isn’t how I planned our reunion,” Sherlock pouted and sat down in the chair he inhabited
before, still stroking his aching jaw.

“Oh, so you did plan on telling me this was all some trick after all? Three years not long enough?”

“You’re angry. I thought you’d be happy,” Sherlock frowned.

“Of course I’m angry, you’ve put me through seven levels of hell for three years for some reason or
another. Either way you willingly put me through that,” he said through gritted teeth.

“It was the only way,” he tried.

“No Sherlock, there is always another way. You could have told me, let me in on the little secret. But
instead you chose to keep me in the dark and make me work through the pain of losing you.” There
was something about John’s voice that made Sherlock unable to answer immediately. His tone was
dark, intensely sad, betrayed, deep and hurt. It wasn’t his usual impatient tone for when he was mad
at his partner. Maybe Sherlock had been wrong to assume John would be as generous as he was
three years ago, especially to forgive the man who had hurt him, intentionally as it was now revealed,
for those three long years.

“Hurting you was an unpleasant consequence of a necessary action,” he said slowly, trying, and
failing, to find the words that would explain to John the situation.

“‘Unpleasant consequence’? You had me staring down the barrel of my own gun!” John thundered.
Sherlock snarled in frustration, how did this turn from a joyous reunion to an interrogation of his
emotional state?

“If there was any other way, I would have done it,” he said. “John, I knew before I left Baker Street
that morning that Moriarty was going to want me dead when I met him. I made arrangements to fake
my death,” John closed his eyes at this point. “When I met with Moriarty he had his men ready to kill
you, Mrs Hudson and Lestrade if I didn’t end my life by a certain time,” he explained, hoping John
would have the sense to empathise with his predicament.

“And you couldn’t tell me this for three years because-?”

“I had to take down Moriarty’s network, his organisation, everything that he had left in place to
continue operating after his own death.”

“And he’s definitely still dead?”
“There was no way he come back from the dead—“ Sherlock stopped himself as he realised what John was asking. “Yes, his skull was completely smashed, his ribs punctured his lungs and heart in several parts…”

“I read the post-mortem. So he didn’t fake his death either?”

“No. He is dead.” That seemed to make John feel much better and he breathed what sounded like a relieved sigh.

“So you’ve come back now because you’ve finished?”

“Not quite yet. There is one more man, the last piece on the board.”

“It’s Moran isn’t it?” John said, tensing up again. Sherlock nodded and looked down at the desk where John’s hand was clenching. His eyes traced the lines of his once broken fingers and noticed they were slightly bent; it seems the break was severe enough to not be able to set straight and true afterwards.

“But he’ll be dealt with by tonight. I came back now to give you the chance to be in on the plan. I thought you would have wanted to see him taken down.” Sherlock looked up and saw his partner’s eyes ablaze with what he could only describe as his ‘war face’.

“Whatever it is, I’ll do it,” he said with a determination that made Sherlock smirk. “When do we start?”

“Are you still on the same mobile number?” he asked, taking out his own phone. John nodded. “I’ll text you the time and address where we are to meet. I have one or two things to do until then. You need to finish up here and go to Lestrade’s house like normal. Head out to a pub about 7 and I should text you soon after then. Until I contact you, act normally, you are probably being watched. Now, I think there has been more than enough time for Samuel Benham to get his prescription,” he announced and headed over to where his disguise sat on the bed. He reached for his wig when he felt John suddenly wrap his arms around him. He froze for a moment, he had not had this kind of contact in over three years and he felt as though he would just fall onto the floor for the feeling of John’s arms around him, the warmth of the man and the smell of him; all things he had missed painfully. A little awkwardly, he returned the embrace and found himself gripping the doctor has hard as he was being clung to.

“Try not to die on me this time,” John spluttered out, laughing while trying, badly, to cover up how much he wanted to weep for joy.

“See you this evening, John,” he said and went back to putting his disguise on. He fished out fresh contact lenses and make up from the briefcase he had been carrying and put his coat on over his suit and John stared as he realised he could barely recognise his friend. Not only was his physical appearance totally changed (the coat put a few pounds on him), but his stance, poise, gait and voice had been transformed.

“See you later,” the doctor said, seeing his ‘patient’ out the door with the prescription he got earlier and flumped down in the chair behind his desk. He leaned forwards, cradling his head in his hands; a hundred thoughts and feelings where running through his head and he was trying to process them all.

“John?” a muffled voice came from the other side of the door. It was Sarah. “Are you alright?” He gathered himself and opened the door, putting on a weary smile.

“Yes. I’m just tired,” he said. “Leg hurts today,” he said, joyfully realising he was lying for the first
time in three years.

“You should get home, I’ll lock up,” she said and he accepted. He wanted to go home and prepare for the night ahead.

John got home and saw Greg wasn’t around. He wasn’t surprised; Sherlock had mentioned he had spoken with the officer and he was probably planning the night’s adventures. He was glad, he wasn’t ready to have that conversation yet, not with his torturer on the menu for tonight. Almost ritualistically, John washed, ate and changed into some fresh, dark clothes, constantly meditating on the night ahead of him; he would feel the adrenaline rush of running into danger at Sherlock’s side, he would face the demon who tortured him and the man who had made his partner live in hiding away from him for the past three years.

To complete the ritual he checked his gun, packed a spare magazine into his pocket and secured the weapon behind his belt and took the ash cane from the umbrella stand in the hall, appreciating the round handle at the top under his hand. He locked up and headed for a pub that was not his usual local, ‘on call’ and ready for the night.

He met Sherlock at the address that had been texted him, pleased to see the man in his own skin rather than in disguise; those pale eyes flickering around in the moonlight.

“Ready?” he asked, his face alight with excitement. John nodded grimly, he was ready for this, but not exactly looking forward to it. Sherlock led him down an alley way and through a network of back streets and through a few people’s gardens until they got to the end of a thin passageway. Nimbly, he leapt up onto a bin and monkeyed up a fire escape that had been bolted on the back of a building. John rolled his eyes and stared up at Sherlock.

“What? It was psychosomatic before,” he said in response to the indignant look the doctor was giving him.

“Sod you, that bastard gave me semi-permanent ligament damage!” John hissed back at him, referring to his time in the cell with Moran. He was almost sure he saw a look of concern flicker across Sherlock’s face but he put it down to a trick of the low light and threw his cane up for his partner to catch, which he did. Clambering up, rather less elegantly than Sherlock, onto the bin he found it fairly easy to pull himself up onto the fire escape and his partner pulled him up the rest of the way. They made their way quietly up the steps to the top level of the building and Sherlock pulled the window open without so much as a creak. Something Mycroft had once said about his brother suddenly into John’s mind: ‘He would’ve made the best cat burglar in London’. John grinned for a second to himself and clambered through the dark frame as best he could without making any noise. By the time he had made it inside, Sherlock re-appeared in the room.

“He’s not here yet, but we should still proceed quietly,” he whispered. He led John with a wave of his hand to the front room. He was slow though, whilst the cane had a rubber cap on the bottom he still went slowly so he could tread lightly while making use of his stick. Sherlock was staying in the shadows but he pointed out of the window and John, mimicking his care not to be seen, made his way to the window and looked out of it. They were in a flat along a street with a row of terraced housing on the other side, there was a sandwich shop shut up on the…

“Are we in Baker Street?” he whispered. Sherlock nodded, his pale skin lighting up in the darkness. “We climbed through all those gardens and up that fire escape to get into the flat across the road?!” he whispered hotly. A look of comprehension then dawn on him. “But we couldn’t be seen. He’s going to try and shoot you.” He was rusty, but the powers of logical thought which Sherlock had
been coaching him in had never truly left him. “How will he think you’re in there though?” Sherlock looked down at his watch and saw as the light flickered on in their rooms across the street. John saw a figure seated at the window with curly hair, but the net curtain obscured a clear view.

“If the window were open we would hear Mrs Hudson admonishing me for not eating properly and playing the violin too loudly. I instructed her to make it sound like a perfectly normal evening,” he said as John saw the figure in the window move and wave what he presumed to be the violin bow around in the air for a moment.

“Sherlock, who have you got in there? They could be shot if Moran is going to try and kill you!” John asked, purposely keeping his whisper quiet.

“It’s a mannequin. Mrs Hudson is sat beside the window on the floor operating it. She will move it every now and then enough to make anyone looking in think I’m in there.”

“We Hudson!” John whispered hotly.

“She will be fine, she’s behind the wall with specific instructions not to go near the window. She used to tour with a company of puppeteers,” he explained as John watched ‘Sherlock’ move around in his chest periodically, from reading a book to throwing his bow around to rolling his head back; it all looked very convincing. After a few minutes watching Baker Street and their house opposite, they retreated into the back room, keeping the partitioning door ajar so they had a clear view of the window Moran would use to try and assassinate his quarry.

They waited for several hours. Sherlock sat in a kind of meditative trance, staring through the door, his face set in its ‘thinking expression’ which John knew better than to disturb. Not that he wanted to anyway, he was alive with anticipation, a steady thrum of nervous energy kept him alert, but the pain in his leg eventually meant that he had to move. He forced himself up as quietly as he could from his place behind the door and walked to the back of the small room, stretching out his leg and trying a few of the physiotherapy exercises that seemed to help with the pain and stiffness in total silence. He saw Sherlock watching him slyly out of the corner of his eye, but just continued with what he was doing; he wasn’t making noise and it wouldn’t spoil their plan. He would rather he was able to walk properly when they got to apprehending Moran instead of hobbling around in which may well end up in a fist fight. The pale grey eyes returned to the door and he delved even deeper into his own thoughts, leaving John rather glad he was no longer being observed.

As the time ticked away past midnight, John observed Sherlock sending texts on his phone; it was flashing but making no noise or vibrating. He passed the device over to John to read the conversation he was having with Greg, apparently they were getting rather restless outside and wanted to know if he was sure Moran was going to strike tonight. He had curtly told them to stay put or Moran would know he was being trapped and it would take months to find him again. John gave him a sympathetic look and an eye roll as he passed it back and shook his head to himself. He knew Greg would be under a lot of pressure on the ground, if this didn’t pan out then he would probably looking at resignation as a way of escaping the storm that his bosses would rain down in him.

A click followed by a clunk made the two waiting men tense and heighten their senses as they realised that the time was now; the whole reason they had been parted for three years and were currently huddled in an empty flat waiting for a sniper. John stepped with absolute care and silence back into his waiting place and brought his breathing under control; deep, slow and quiet.

Moran quickly trotted up the stairs and peered out the window.

“You cocky son of a bitch,” he snarled, dropping his bag on the floor and kneeling by it to rip open the zip. He wasted no time in putting his rifle together, the well-cleaned metal glinting in the yellow
light of the streetlights outside. It was a sleek custom-made piece of equipment, no doubt a relic of his time working as Moriarty’s number one sniper. “This might not be how Jim wanted you dead but not even your cleverness can stop my bullet,” he muttered angrily to himself as he assembled and loaded the weapon. He heaved the window open a fraction and positioned the barrel of the gun on the sill. He took a good few minutes to take his aim, to prepare himself and get exactly the shot he wanted. “One for you and the next for your pet,” he growled as he pulled the trigger. The shot was deafening and the noise banged on the walls of the small flat for what felt like hours. The window to their flat shattered and the mannequin flew backwards out of the chair. They heard Mrs Hudson scream with shock and fright and Sherlock sprang into action.

He leapt up and kicked the door open, hard enough that he took a chunk out of it and rushed Moran with what John could only describe as a battle cry. Sherlock had seized Moran and had looped his arm around the sniper’s neck, pulled hard; he had no problem with trying his best to kill the man. Moran, being a bulky man, threw the slight detective off him with only a little exertion and thumped his attacker so hard Sherlock was sent reeling back into a wall.

John took his opportunity and rushed him, punching him hard in the gut, which was far more solid than he anticipated, but nevertheless winded Moran for a moment. He seemed to forget all about the gun in his belt and ran the man into the corner of an old MDF unit which buckled under the weight of the two former soldiers. Moran cried out as the corner sank into his shoulder before it broke and the muscles screamed at the abuse. John happily let the darkness inside him out now; years of torment, hurt, guilt and pain he had suffered because of this man. Not only for helping to take Sherlock away from him but for the two weeks of torture he had been put through at Moran’s own hands. The mental scars that had kept him awake for so many nights, for the nightmares, the aches and pains in his body, the physical scars that peppered him and even marked his face. John would never forgive Moran for breaking his fingers; his hands meant more than just your average ability to do stuff. They signified his purpose in the world, his use to those around him; he was a doctor, a trained combat zone surgeon as well, he saved lives and performed his purpose with those hands, they were his self-worth. There was one other thing he could not forgive Moran for and this made his heart dark enough to want to kill the man and the punched him hard in the side, hoping to break a rib or two as the thought about this. Moran had used John against Sherlock. He had perverted their connection and what they shared and weaponised it. The idea may have started with Moriarty but Moran had physically done it and since ‘Jim’ wasn’t around to take the rap for it, ‘Sebby’ would do nicely.

Sherlock was back on his feet, if not a little unsteadily and arrived in time to take over when Moran kicked the doctor away from him with a blow that was sure to leave a bruise snaking up his ribs. Sherlock had never felt anything like this before, he was in a blind fury. He knew the doctor was exorcising his demons with his torturer, but Sherlock had not felt the white hot blinding fury that he felt now; Moran had tortured John, Moran had threatened his life constantly for the past three years and Moran was the last vestige of Moriarty. He had to be eliminated. A memory, unbidden, sprang into his mind: the look on John’s face when he had ordered Sherlock to turn off his computer and Moran had broken his partner’s fingers. He was awash with pure emotions that were as strong as a tsunami battering against his Mind Palace, wrecking it and destroying the precise foundations he had laid, but he, as a single coherent entity, existed in the midst of it all, surrounded by the power of his emotions and directed that storm at one man.

He reached behind the door he had kicked back a few moments ago for the stick that lay forgotten on the floor. He spun round and swung it smartly, bringing the hard ash handle into direct contact with Moran’s face. The man went down, clutching his head and he fell completely onto the floor, disoriented and dizzy. Sherlock wasted no time in leaning over the man and wrapping his long, pale fingers around the brute’s neck and squeezed around the adam’s apple, curling his fingers directly into the windpipe, cutting off the air supply. Within a few seconds Moran began to rasp and wheeze;
his limbs scrabbled about weakly, he was far too dazed by the blow to the head to move coherently. Sherlock was learning right over him, his white hot eyes boring furious holes into Moran’s swimming ones.

“This is what you get!” he hissed. His entire world focused on this point, Moran’s suffering and imminent death. Every single other piece of sensory information was disregarded and lost in the storm of feeling which Sherlock was channelling.

“You hurt him, you burned my heart,” he growled. “But everything has its price. This will be your price for hurting John, for threatening him, Mrs Hudson and Lestrade. If your stupid little brain can still think while your lungs are burning for air I want you to think about what a stupid mistake you made threatening the only people in this world I care about.” Moran’s eyes rolled up and he passed out.

“Sherlock!” A voice snapped him out of his reverie and two rough hands yanked him away from Moran, who was lying quite still, but unfortunately still alive. He looked up at the owner of the voice to see Lestrade. “We’ve got it from here,” he said, his voice trying to disguise how much it was shaking. He wasn’t going to say it out loud to anyone, but he had been frightened by the single fury and determination to kill in Sherlock’s eyes, he had never seen that before in the man; and secondly, he had been surprised to have been comprehensively included in the list of people that would make Sherlock to go into such a state for.

A flood of armed officers were swarming into the flat and securing it, even though Moran was the only firearm-threat at the location. Officers gathered around the sniper, quickly checking him over and then rolling him into cuffs, ready to be transported when the paramedics got up there. John was being helped up by a rather wild-eyed Donovan who was very pale indeed from the whole affair. He got the impression that Sherlock being revealed to have survived and proved innocent in less than a day had been a very tough pill to swallow and she still wasn’t quite there yet.

“Get off me,” John hissed and yanked his arm away from her. “Don’t you dare touch me after what you did to him,” he commanded, clearly meaning her pro-active role in the anti-Sherlock enquiry.

The detective in question had managed to persuade the officers either side of him that he was fine and wasn’t going to attempt to murder Moran so he could go to John.

“Anything serious?” he asked, a little flippantly. John gave a ponderous expression as he appraised his wounds.

“Nah, just some bruising to the ribs. Nothing he hasn’t done to me before,” he said with a grim humour that Sherlock wasn’t sure he liked quite yet; it would definitely take some getting used to. “You?”

“Nothing severe,” he replied shortly.

“Yoohoo!” A coo came from outside the window. “Is everything sorted now?” It was Mrs Hudson shouting from the shattered window across the street. Lestrade signalled all was well and she smiled. “Tell those boys they owe me a big bottle of something special!” she said before retreating back into the flat and closing the window. Clearly not even this incident had dented her spirits.
Alive Again

Chapter Summary

Unsurprisingly, things between Sherlock and John have not just magically gone back to how they were before. Tension remains between the two old lovers and John is still staying at Greg's house. The two take some time to reconnect, Molly doing the vital background work as usual.

Chapter Notes

Previously: The detective in question had managed to persuade the officers either side of him that he was fine and wasn’t going to attempt to murder Moran so he could go to John.

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Several days later when John and Sherlock had given their statements and had been thoroughly interrogated by several different officers about the whole incident, Sherlock was sitting in his old rooms feeling strangely peaceful. It meant a lot to him to be back and he was grateful that very little had changed; the fridge was empty save for a few bits of new food he had bought that day. Mrs Hudson had ended up not packing up his things when Mycroft had come to visit her, asking her to keep them the way they were as he did not want to ‘let go’ of his ‘baby brother’ yet. He promised to pay the rent on the flat and put on a sufficiently emotional show that she of course believed him and, in a fit of her own renewed tears, told him she would of course keep it as it was and would go into to dust around once a week.

There was a crucial element missing though, the thing that made home, Home; John’s presence. He knew he had gone back to his room at Greg’s house, even though the Yarder wouldn’t be there, and Molly was keeping clear of John while he processed that she had systematically lied to him over the last three years.
Has Donovan stopped haranguing you yet? SH

It was a diplomatic opening to a conversation. While he was not one for idle chatter, he wanted to use the line of communication he was now allowed to have all the time he was in hiding.

Just got off the phone with her. Third call today. JW.

You should report her for harassment. SH.

She wants me to give a second statement, thinks I’m covering for you. JW

Come home? SH.

Sherlock didn’t get a reply to the last text, he assumed Donovan had called him yet again, trying to salvage what was left of her anti-Sherlock theory by attempting to pit them against each other. She really was a moron; if John was going to turn against Sherlock he would have done it long ago. It would take more than Sally bloody Donovan to split them now.

Twenty minutes later Sherlock heard the knocker on the door being used and Mrs Hudson open the door. He had no wish to hear who was visiting her so he picked up his violin and drew the bow across the new strings, playing the composition he had made for John. He was delighted at how his hands and fingers so easily remembered the notes and chords for the composition. The music, a little jilted to begin with soon began to dance off the strings and he couldn’t help a small smile as he played. He enjoyed playing this piece.

John stopped in the hallway as he heard beautiful music emerge from the old living room and he took a moment to savour it, knowing it would stop when he entered. He breathed deeply, realising he was getting quite emotional at the melodic sounds that were caressing his ears; it was more than Sherlock’s music, it was his own unique piece, that song he had written for John. The music washed over him, his heart rose and beat with the sweet crescendo of notes, giving him a blissful peace he had craved for three bitterly long years and he leaned against the wall, listening and not realising he was shedding a few tears from how tranquil the music was making him feel.

It took John a few minutes to pull himself together and once the song had finished, he knocked on the door and entered. As he predicted, Sherlock put down his violin as soon as he was aware he was not alone and he turned from the window to greet John. The look on his partner’s face was not what he had been expecting; it was clearly emotional, his eyes were red and there were tell-tale trails on the side of his face from tears.

“What is wrong?” he asked instantly.

“Nothing,” John said, forgetting Sherlock would know he had been crying in an instant; he was used to being able to fob people off.

“That’s clearly untrue,” he replied.

“I just thought I would never hear that music again,” he said truthfully. Sherlock nodded, as though accepting his excuse. “God, I’m so glad to be back here,” John said after a few moments and he happily limped over to his chair.

An unasked question hovered in the air, it had been looming over them since their reunion and now they were alone together without threat of a police officer entering imminently the tension grew exponentially. Sherlock wanted to know what John was feeling (yes, that despicable word), specifically with reference to their romantic relations before his sojourn out to Europe and Moriarty’s
people. He had never stopped having feelings for the doctor, John was the main reason he went after all, but he knew that emotional connections often changed and diminished when the partner is assumed dead. Molly had always referred to it as ‘moving on’; she used to report that John didn’t seem like he was ‘moving on’, or maybe given time he would ‘move on’ as though it was a good thing. Sherlock had found out that it was supposedly the healthy thing to do and judging how John had never returned to Baker Street, he wondered if he was only here out of friendship. Not that their friendship was worth less to him, Sherlock didn’t want to think about what it would have been like if John had rebuffed even that, the basis of their whole relationship and dynamic. But did John still wish to be ‘with’ him? He wanted to ask the question bluntly like that, but he thought that it defied convention and John would admonish him for it.

John knew that both of them were feeling completed inside; he could see it in his partner like a radiance. They had sunk naturally into their old places in the flat and Sherlock was clearly happy: he had *smiled* when John entered the room. John had been told that he had had to accept Sherlock’s death and come to terms with it, which he had managed to some degree. He had begun functioning how he thought he might carry out the rest of his life; a professional man who, whilst living alone, spent much time with his friends (Greg and Molly) and would enjoy life that way. He had been unable to stomach the thought of finding a new partner, no matter how many times Greg had told him that he should get back on the dating scene. Suddenly it made sense now why Molly had defended John’s reticence since she knew there would one day be a reunion of this nature. Sherlock had gone forth and taken out his revenge, as well as his probable boredom, out on the Moriarty network, he had utterly destroyed it and it had taken him three long years to do it. He had quite clearly been successful and able to take care of himself and his Work without John and the doctor wondered if that was something that was going to continue. He could have easily retreated back into his shell whilst travelling and closed off his need for John’s support, either in a professional or emotional capacity.

The tension was not something John wanted to sit and suffer through all evening, though he thought he should probably leave Sherlock to approach the subject seeing as his intimacy issues were far more pressing than John’s. He saw Sherlock’s eyes flicker to just beneath John’s eyes and he knew the other man was looking at his scar. It stood out bright white against his skin and was something that every person who glanced at him could see like a giant neon sign that told them that something nasty had happened to him. His mind darted to the thought of his other scars from those two weeks and he suddenly felt quite ill; he had come to terms with them, he no longer had a violent reaction whenever he saw them in the mirror and he could once again shave shirtless after a shower (which was great news for all his shirts which had been stained by shaving foam and blood from having cut himself). But when he thought of the possibility of restarting his relationship with Sherlock and the possibility of him seeing the multitude of scar tissue that now marred his body he felt ill.

“Tea?” he asked as a way of getting out from the tension for a few minutes.

“You have no idea how good that sounds,” Sherlock said and leaned his head back in his chair happily, hiding his mild anxiety well.

John found all the tea things in the old places, easily able to slip into autopilot as he worked through feelings that had only really occurred to him in the last few minutes. It wasn’t that he felt ugly or deformed by the physical remnants of his incarceration, but he was afraid that now whenever Sherlock saw them there would be a sort of tension that would never go away. He didn’t want every night (if they were to share a bed as they had been doing previously) to turn into a sour visit down memory lane and should they ever become intimate he really didn’t want it to be ruined by any bad memories or guilt-trips.

He was so absorbed in his thoughts that he didn’t realise Sherlock had followed him into the kitchen;
his partner had read the tension and apprehension in his body and come to investigate, not wanting to wait before the mystery was revealed. He approached John but kept his distance, for aforementioned reasons.

John nearly jumped when he saw the tall dark figure looming behind him, watching his slightly crooked fingers wrap around the teaspoon and shovel two sugars into Sherlock’s tea and suddenly he felt self-conscious. ‘This is ridiculous!’ he suddenly snapped to himself. ‘I’m not going to be as I was before Moriarty, I shouldn’t be ashamed of what happened, it wasn’t my fault,’ he thought fiercely to himself and with this renewed confidence turned to face his curious-looking partner. The confidence also made him bold enough to make the first move to solving the question hanging between them.

Tentatively, he slowly held out his hand, not as in to shake hands, but a far more intimate touch. His insides liquefied into a trembling mess as he saw Sherlock slowly move out his own hand to take it, his eyes eloquently communicating the need to be together in again, to re-establish the relationship they had before the his absence.

When skin finally touched skin John stopped breathing, though he didn’t realise it. He had suffered when he thought of how he would never touch those pale slender fingers again and now it was happening in a reality that was far stranger than a dream. Sherlock’s fingers ghosted down John’s crooked ones, feeling the textures of his hand until they were intertwined. John couldn’t hold himself back any more and without realising he was doing it and with no regard for Sherlock’s feelings on personal space, he pulled himself and the taller man together for a crushing embrace. He took a frantic gasp of air and breathed in the realness of his partner, the living scent of him and the feel of his form around John’s own. Sherlock was tense for a moment but allowed himself to sink into the embrace, also realising how much he had missed it. John was clinging to him for dear life and both felt that they had woken up from a long, horrible nightmare which they had not been able to escape from. In that moment, John felt alive once more and Sherlock felt real again. He had hated having to do it, to leave John in the state he did, to trick him and go away for so very long but that embrace suddenly made the whole three years not only worth it, but meaningless in terms of time. He could have been away for three weeks and still felt like this. This wasn’t just a reunion after a long period of separation, it was the realisation that the person he cared about so much it scared him when he thought about it too hard was safe and they would be at liberty to enjoy each other’s company once more without that threat looming on the horizon.

John visited Sherlock every day after that wonderful reunion and they would be together from early in the morning until late at night delighting in each other’s company, after all, they had a lot of catching up to do. Three years’ worth of stories and adventures were not going to fit into a couple of evenings, or days, or weeks, or… John had ended up staying the night several evenings in a row. He had usually fallen asleep on the couch as they had talked until he literally dropped with exhaustion and he woke up the next morning with cramp. Last night Sherlock had demanded he get some sleep.

“It’s 2 in the morning, if memory serves you quantify this as an ‘unsociable’ hour. You should get some sleep,” Sherlock said, noting the signs of tiredness in his partner on the opposite armchair.

“But I want to hear more about your time in Paris,” he protested, but he was betrayed by a fat yawn at the end of his sentence. Sherlock smirked, but not unkindly and rose, indicating the doctor should do the same. He did follow, but he was so unsteady on his feet, the detective wondered if he would be safe to get down the stairs, let alone home. “I don’t wanna go…” John said, slurring with
tiredness. Sherlock couldn’t help but feel slightly endeared by the man and guided John into the hall and around through to the other kitchen door (he didn’t want to risk an unsteady John near his chemistry things) and urged him in the direction of his bed. He would have sent John to his old room, but there was no duvet or sheets on the mattress up there and his room was closer; it wasn’t as though he was going to sleep tonight anyway. John realised instantly he was on a bed and immediately curled into the pillow, pulling the covers around him. Sherlock didn’t miss how the doctor took a deep breath of the scent on the pillow and instantly fell asleep, a look of utter contentment on his face.

Sherlock returned to the living room and sent a text to Lestrade that John was staying in Baker Street again.

**Dammit, it’s 230. Why are you texting now? GL**

So the police officer was still awake; Sherlock suspected Molly was round, the couple taking advantage of John’s absence in Greg’s house, otherwise he would not have replied since the man seemed to sleep through every other late night phone call from the consultant.

Early the next morning Molly appeared at the door to Baker Street with a bag. She looked tired, but radiated happiness, Sherlock noted that she had put effort into her physical appearance with hair and make-up and he surmised things must be going well with Lestrade.

“I packed a few things for John,” she said, holding up the bag.

“Thanks,” he said shortly, but not without a small measure of sincerity.

“Have a good day!” she chirped and practically skipped off to the tube station and off to work. Sherlock shut the door and wondered if the morning after intercourse provoked the same chirpy reaction in everyone. John had always seemed cheerier the days after staying the night over with some of his old dates and reasoned that the hormone rush extended to the morning after, hence all the grinning.

He took the bag upstairs to the living room and resumed his meditative position on the sofa, returning to his weekly maintenance of his mind palace. He was currently sifting through everything that had happened in the last week about the arrest of Moran, the destruction of the final piece of Moriarty’s network, the numerous police interviews and the return of John to Baker Street. Technically John was only visiting, but he was there so much that he might as well have moved back in. Yet, his things were still back at Lestrade’s house and he hadn’t even spoken about moving back in. Sherlock had assumed that once they had straightened out their relationship and been forgiven for his deception that John would be returning full-time to their flat and it annoyed the consulting detective that he hadn’t done so.

Why had John not moved back in? It was evident that they were once again in a romantic relationship and they had wanted to spend as much time as possible together (as evidenced by John’s refusal to leave at a sensible time last night), so what was stopping the doctor from making the move? Surely he didn’t have so many things at Lestrade’s house that it would be a great mission to move his belongings from one house to the other; Sherlock had noticed John had left some of his things behind at Baker Street those years ago as though he subconsciously knew he would be moving back in. Now he was distracted from his thoughts about the investigation and he opened his eyes in frustration, fixing his irritated glare upon the direction of his room where he knew John was sleeping.

A couple of hours later, Sherlock was quite wound up about the issue of John’s living arrangements and the aforementioned army doctor came in through the kitchen, very bleary eyed and wearing one his partner’s dressing gowns which seemed to swamp him considerably.
“Hope you don’t mind. I hate sleeping in my clothes,” he said around a yawn. Sherlock wanted to fix him with a glare for having caused him confusion and vexation for the whole morning (even if the doctor didn’t realise he had done anything) but the sight of John in his dressing gown immediately swept away his irritation and replaced it with an as of yet unnamed feeling. A feeling besides amusement, as the sleeves almost covered his hands and the bottom hem of the garment trailed along behind him like a king’s robe.

“Hey, is that my bag?” he said, recognising the satchel on ‘his’ armchair.

“Molly brought it over this morning,” Sherlock replied distantly. He poked around inside, secretly relieved there was clean underwear in there, though he wasn’t sure what irked him more: having to ask Sherlock to borrow some or Molly going through his underwear drawer. He came to the conclusion that if he didn’t think about it all would be well and he zipped the bag up again.

“Do mind if I use the shower?” John asked, shouldering the bag and making for the bathroom already.

“Why would I?” Sherlock snapped and stormed out into his bedroom, slamming the door shut with some force. John raised his eyebrows and wondered what he had done wrong. Then again, when he thought about it, Sherlock’s mood swings were hardly news to him when they were living together, so he should have expected them to make a reappearance upon his return. In many ways, the doctor counted himself lucky that he had not been subjected to one before now. He figured he should best leave the man to it for now and grab a shower before trying to pull him out of the sulk with a cup of tea and a funny story.

Sherlock threw himself on his unmade bed and growled in frustration. He was unable to quantify the feelings he had had in regard to John and it was driving him mad; he had thought that once he was back together with John that his emotional state would calm down, but if anything else they had got more out of control and it was burning a hole in his mind. He was unable to concentrate on the investigation about the faking of his death and the evidence he had gathered about the Moriarty network and this was simply unacceptable. Perhaps the time gap had left their relationship with the need for ‘work’ i.e. John needed to remember he should take care of Sherlock’s emotions and they would be fine. There were no words to describe how much he had enjoyed their new time together, the happiness and relief had come even more powerfully than he had thought they would but those feelings were not going away now when he wanted them to and he didn’t know what he should do.

It did not help that new and unfamiliar feelings were being introduced into the mix; he had no idea how to label what he had felt when John had come in wearing one of Sherlock’s dressing gowns. He felt a strange mixture of pleasure, satisfaction and anticipation that he had no idea how to place. It was times like this that he wished he had a guide, or that John was around to recognise them and tell him what it was.

He fell backwards and immediately could smell John on his pillow. That was home, the smell of his lover in their flat, that was everything to Sherlock’s small, infant heart. It soothed his racing mind for a moment and brought him comfort. Then he wanted to know why John wasn’t permanently installed in Baker Street already and the vexation began anew.

John, on the other hand, was thoroughly enjoying the shower. The hot water felt great against his skin and he felt so relaxed that he thought he might just sit in the bath with the water running over him for a while. But he wasn’t going to do that so he got on with lathering up the shower gel and scrubbing the sleepiness of the previous night off of himself before working Sherlock’s shampoo into his hair. He was so glad to be back that he didn’t want to leave again. He wondered if he would be ok to take up his old room again upstairs, after all, they had sunk into their old life so easily that he
almost thought last night that he was already back. Baker Street truly meant ‘home’ to him and while living with Greg had not been a bad experience, this flat was his home and he wanted to be here. Not to mention that would leave the lovebirds free to use the house for late night dates and other liaisons that he was pretty certain was going on whenever he was out of the house. Or sometimes when he was home and they thought he was asleep, but at least they tried to be quiet unlike the couple next door.

This was all riding on the fact that Sherlock wanted him to move back in, but he couldn’t think of any reason why he would be averse to the idea. It would just take a little time for the paperwork to go through and notify everyone necessary that he was changing residence again. Then again, he thought as he rinsed the shampoo out of his hair, the investigation into Moran and Sherlock’s disappearance was about to blow wide open once the press got a hold of the information that not only was the consulting detective still alive but that rumours of his fraud had been greatly made up and propagated by one Jim Moriarty. He knew the press reaction would be either muted, all of them too embarrassed to admit they were suckered right into the lie, or proclaim that they supported the genius all along. John suddenly thought to all those pieces of graffiti he had seen around the city and in the news recently. All those people who believed in Sherlock, Raz and his lot spreading the word and voicing the feeling that most people had in their guts that their instincts couldn’t quite bring themselves to trust ‘Richard Brook’.

The wash had left him feeling good and his skin felt warm. He dried off and changed into the fresh clothes Molly had brought for him, comfortable jeans and an old shirt that was perhaps a little tighter on him than he would have preferred. He was suitably warm enough after the shower to forego the jumper for now and after he brushed his teeth he cheerily made his way out into his home. Hopefully the worst of Sherlock’s brooding would be over now and tea would make things ok again; he still wanted to hear about his partner’s trip to Budapest. Alas, the younger man was not to be found in the living room, though John did notice a small pile of newspaper had been kicked over and thought the mood had not yet passed.

Cautiously, he made his way back into the bedroom that he had emerged from only half an hour previously and knocked on the door. Without waiting for a response he knew he would not get, he opened the door slowly and went inside. He was met with the sight of Sherlock lying rigid on his back in the bed with the worst sort of petulant scowl on his face that John thought he had ever seen.

“What’s the matter?” he asked, wondering what could have happened while he was in the shower to have triggered this kind of tantrum.

“Why haven’t you moved back in yet?” Sherlock demanded with almost childish force. John couldn’t hold back the laugh that erupted from him.

“What? It’s been less than a week since you’ve been back and we’ve been so busy catching up Molly’s had to bring me a change of clothes because I haven’t gone back to Greg’s!” he said, sitting on the side of the bed next to his partner.

“Greg’s? You said Greg’s,” Sherlock said, fixing him with a complete stare of wonder.

“Well, it is his house,” John rebuffed, not sure where this was going. Sherlock’s scowl melted away into a smile that suddenly turned into laughter and John was getting rather afraid now.

“You didn’t call it home. You said ‘Greg’s house’, not ‘home’,” he said between his chuckles of laughter.

“And why is this funny?” John asked, smiling a very confused smile.
“I’m not sure,” Sherlock said with utter confusion. Understanding dawned on John and he grinned.

“I think that’s relief. I didn’t realise you wanted me back so much.” Sherlock reached, grabbed John’s arm and with an unexpected yank, pulled his partner down to lie beside him. Arms instinctively reached over each other and soon they were laying nose-to-nose on the large bed, the smell of the shower foam hanging between them.

“It’s been a long three years,” Sherlock said in his defence, running his hands down John’s bare arm and slipping his fingers between those of the doctor. John simply nodded in agreement and shifted slightly closer to the detective. The younger man stared deep into John’s eyes, checking his face and expression from what he remembered about his lover before he left. The pain had aged him a little more than three years should have, there were a few wrinkles around his eyes which brought Sherlock’s attention to the little white line on the soft part of the flesh under John’s right eye. He brought up his free hand to touch it very gently, to feel the realness of the reminder of what Moriarty did to them. John immediately looked slightly uncomfortable.

“This was the last scar he gave you,” Sherlock said, running his finger very gently over the white line again.

“I hate it,” John confessed with a whisper. Sherlock gaze him a questioning look. “You exchanged your life for that one,” he said. “I don’t particularly care that it’s visible, but it’s what happened after I got the cut that I hated.” There was nothing else to be said to that and Sherlock realised that things could never go back to how they were before Moriarty because of what had happened in between, the torture and the fake death. This scared him at first because he loved what he had, and that was one of the main reasons he did everything he did over those three years he was away. Perhaps, though, they could salvage something, after all, their friendship was quite clearly intact, as was their relationship judging by the intimate position they were both in.

John felt a little exposed, he hadn’t wanted to bombard Sherlock with the emotional trials he had suffered, but now it was being teased out of him, perhaps unwittingly, by the man opposite. Sherlock leaned forward, his hand still touching John’s face and laid his lips upon John’s in a sweet, shy kiss. John was so surprised he didn’t respond at first, but surprise soon gave way to bliss as he realised that those soft beautiful lips on his was a sensation he thought he would never have again. Sherlock broke away, disheartened by John’s lack of response and wondered what he had done wrong, but these thoughts were soon thrown out when John kissed him back fiercely, crushing their lips together, his hand squeezing Sherlock’s tightly. The younger man hadn’t expected this as John had always been very careful to let Sherlock take the lead, but he found that he wanted this desperate acknowledgement of their attraction as much as John and pushed back with equal ardour.

John was feeling such a rush of euphoria, he was lost in the feel of Sherlock moving beside him, the smell of his living person, the sound of his heavy breathing rushing in and out of his lungs so alive that he felt he would explode with feeling. Hastily, but not forcefully, he pushed Sherlock onto his back on the bed, not parting their lips for a second so he loomed protectively and possessively over the taller man, his hands unable to stop themselves from roaming over the pulse points of his detective; his fingers touched the white wrists which had told him the worst news three years ago, and joyfully found the pulse which affirmed his life. His hands ghosted over the wonderful throat which danced with the rapid beat of Sherlock’s heart and finally, his hand came to rest over the man’s chest, feeling the thump of the cardiac muscle beneath it as well as the inflation and deflation of the lungs.

“Yes, John, I am very much alive,” Sherlock smirked underneath him. He had never allowed someone to pin him down before, but there was no threat from John and it seemed as though his partner had needed this; tactile connections were important, he reminded himself. He felt John smile
against his lips and they continued to kiss, enjoying the feeling of his lover’s hands running happily over his thin body. John’s hands pulled up Sherlock’s shirt a little so he could touch his partner’s skin and he felt the stomach muscles flutter inside as he continued to log the feeling of the younger man’s body beneath his.

At some point in the proceedings John’s hand must have flitted too close to Sherlock’s waistband because a thin hand darted down and grabbed his wrist hard, and pulled it up. John pulled away apologetically.

“Sorry,” he mumbled, but Sherlock simply took the wrist in his hand and use it to swap their positions so he was now pressing John into the bed. He didn’t say anything, but he was sure John got the message that while the action had made him uncomfortable, Sherlock was not averse to exploring this new world of sensations as long as he could lead for a while. John happily submitted and enjoyed being pressed into the mattress by the lean body of his lover who seemed as though he was determined to make up for three years of missed kissing in a single sitting. Curiously he ran his tongue over Sherlock’s bottom lip and the younger man gasped and went rigid for a second, but John knew it wasn’t a negative reaction from the positively pornographic moan that escaped his lover in that moment. The detective had never felt the warm thrill of a soft tongue on his lips, telling him to open his mouth and he couldn’t help the reaction that came from him. He was a rather embarrassed by the sound he had made but when John kissed him harder and gripped his arm, he knew the doctor had found it rather arousing. Cautiously, Sherlock allowed John to kiss him deeply, the sensation of another tongue in his mouth being a strange and very alien one, but his lover was stimulating him in ways he had never been stimulated in before, feelings strangely pleasurable he would never have assumed felt good before.

“You know we’re like two teenagers,” John mused between breaths. “Sitting here making out on your bed.” Speaking was difficult with Sherlock’s rather insistent mouth claiming John’s at every moment between deep breaths. Eventually John had to break away in order to breathe properly and happily he pulled Sherlock into a close embrace.

“I didn’t do all the snogging you speak of when I was a teenager,” the detective mumbled. John looked down at him, looking down at the swollen tender lips as they moved to speak. “Looks like I have lost time to make up for,” he said with a mischievous smirk. John took another deep breath.

After a while Sherlock got up and sat over John, straddling his legs (carefully avoiding their pelvic areas John noticed) and his nimble fingers had unbuttoned half of the doctor’s shirt before he realised what was going on.

“Sherlock?” he asked, wanting to know what the darker haired man was thinking. He had kept his hair short during his travels and John found himself missing the way his curls would hang over his eyes, making him look even more mysterious in half-light like this. The fringe just didn’t quite cut it. The detective didn’t reply and simply continued with his task to undo the rest of the buttons and push the fabric apart, exposing John’s chest to the warm air of the room. His pale eyes sharpened as he became analytical and they darted over his skin. It took a few moments to twig, but John realised that the man was cataloguing his scars from his incarceration. Light touches followed his visual inspection of each blemish and the warm haze of arousal and heady emotional rushes cleared as John began to feel more and more exposed.

This was exactly what he had been afraid of, how any physical intimacy would bring reminders of what he had gone through and it was a distinct turn off. Those lips were moving, he was muttering how each wound was acquired as he went through them.

Thick messy lines on his ribs from the final torture, the incision and salting of aggravated intercostal
muscles. Faded lines from the abrasions caused by Moran’s fists which were never attended to during the incarceration leading to light scarring. Pink, shiny flesh on his side from burns. Mottled skin on wrists, most likely from zip ties. He held up the wrists for closer inspection.

“There are several layers of these. They used cable ties for every binding. Lacerations closest to the hands indicate a serious attempt to free yourself…” he said to himself, inspecting every little one of the thin white lines around the tan arm.

“I almost got free on the roof, but…” John didn’t want to continue that line of thought. This was supposed to be a joyous reunion, but now they were dwelling on the past he wasn’t sure he wanted to face quite yet. He had thought that he could put it all behind him until a week ago when Sherlock returned and kind of set him back several months in therapy. Sherlock then saw something that completely diverted his interest. A messy spiderweb of scar tissue on the shoulder of the soldier; the entry wound from the bullet that nearly killed him in Afghanistan. His fingers traced the shape of it, the texture of the skin, fascinated by it. This was what had brought John to Sherlock. Without this, John would never have been in London at the same time as an old school friend and he would never have been introduced to Sherlock. The detective found himself bereft at the thought of his life without the man beneath him; aside from probably being dead several times over if not for John, he would be back in that cold place he used to be. Alone and isolated from the world, thinking that he was ok with that and only now, having experienced something of what John was making him feel, realising that that was a half life.

John’s mood lifted a little when Sherlock began his investigation of the bullet wound because it meant that his partner was not just fixating on the things Moriarty had done to him. The inspection continued and the detective stumbled across a very old scar on his side, low down near his belly.

“Old, at least twenty years, childhood scar,” he rattled off as his deductions about the size, colour and shape of the scar moulded into coherent sentences. “Odd location, looks like a stab wound, but line too large to be a knife. A glancing blow perhaps? No, too messy…”

“I fell out a tree,” John said, putting Sherlock out of his misery. The detective scowled at him for telling him the answer without giving him sufficient chance to work it out. The doctor afforded him an apologetic look. Sherlock continued to examine the map of John’s exposed torso when the silence was broken by a loud gurgle; John’s stomach was protesting the lack of breakfast noisily.

“I think you’re hungry,” Sherlock said and his face split into laughter.

“Well observed,” John returned and joined in the chuckle. They looked at each other, asking with a look if each other was agreeable to getting food and they both realised that the heated moment from earlier was now gone. Sherlock swung his legs off of John and he breezed ahead into the kitchen, banging cupboards and the fridge open and closed in his search for food. The only thing he had was toast and marmalade and considering jam on toast was the only thing Moran gave John to eat while he was being tortured he didn’t think it would make the most sensitive breakfast.

“Don’t tell me, we need to go out?” John asked, emerging from the bedroom, buttoning up his shirt. That strange feeling rippled through Sherlock again thinking he would like to see more of John emerging from his bedroom half clothed. He began to wonder if that feeling was sexual desire, he certainly felt it during their heated kissing earlier and he thought that perhaps he could feel such baser experiences comfortably when he thought he never could before.
Resurrection

Chapter Summary

John may have Sherlock back, but the wider world does not yet. Sherlock takes his place in the limelight, happily agreeing to air the overwhelming success of his opus, even if John is still having trouble processing the course of recent events. However, Sherlock seems entirely ignorant of this and makes significant decisions on John's behalf. Whilst irritating, the doctor rolls with it the couple take an incredible step in their relationship.

Chapter Notes

“Don’t tell me, we need to go out?” John asked, emerging from the bedroom, buttoning up his shirt. That strange feeling rippled through Sherlock again thinking he would like to see more of John emerging from his bedroom half clothed. He began to wonder if that feeling was sexual desire, he certainly felt it during their heated kissing earlier and he thought that perhaps he could feel such baser experiences comfortably when he thought he never could before.

“Are you ready?” Lestrade asked, clearly nervous himself. Greg sat with John and Sherlock in the waiting room at the Yard, a huge press conference being organised in the press hall. Reporters had flocked to the Yard when there had issued a press release declaring the results of a recent investigation into Moriarty and how ‘new facts’ had come to light which had drastically changed the course of the investigation. The press had been buzzing for the last few days with rumours and stories about how the Met had restarted their investigations into the Moriarty incidents and the famed suicide of the biggest fraudster of recent times. Sherlock had stayed in his flat since the arrest of Moran, though this was more out of either laziness or swapping stories with John than any particular wish to deceive the press. He had slipped out once, in his disguise, to see Mummy Holmes and explain himself to her. But otherwise, it appears that the media had been more than willing to keep the consulting detective dead and occasionally print a derogatory story about him.

John looked very nervous. He had been bombarded by the press during the months after Sherlock’s ‘death’; they had been violently eager to get pictures of him when he was discharged from hospital as somehow they knew that he had been tortured. They were keen to print stories of how Sherlock had organised John’s torture and how the ‘poor man had been suckered’. Other newspapers wrote that the army doctor had been complicit with Sherlock’s fakery, even though the police had found no evidence as such and had cleared him of all involvement with fraud. He hated the glare of the cameras and the tricky hands of the journalists who would do and twist anything to sell a story.

Sherlock, typically, was cool and almost nonchalant, though the other two men could see the smirk on his face; he was clearly looking forward to telling all those idiots that they were wrong and
deriding them for swallowing Moriarty’s lies because they all felt so inadequate next to his ‘massive intellect’, to quote John.

Greg wasn’t feeling too bad at this point. He had been absolutely ripped to shreds by the press in the fallout of the investigation and he had been well and truly hung out to dry by his fellows in the police service. He, like Sherlock, was looking forward to telling them all that they were wrong and he was now vindicated after three years of constant abuse from the press and his peers he could finally prove that he was right and they were wrong and…he sounded like a primary school kid. They had asked for the final report to not name Molly as the person who had helped fake the medical side of Sherlock’s death; firstly she didn’t want the attention, that wasn’t why she did it and it was enough that Greg would be hounded by press day and night after this without everything about Molly coming up as well. She didn’t particularly want her dates with ‘Jim from IT’ to be public knowledge. Secondly, whilst Sherlock had utterly deconstructed everything Moriarty had built, there may still be a few threats out there, perhaps some disgruntled dealers or in between men who hadn’t been part of the network, but missed the business from the old crime boss.

A young press liaison poked his head through the door and told them it was time. Greg marched out with the attitude of ‘quicker we start, the quicker it would be over’ while John lingered to fiddle with his tie. Sensing the reticence of his partner, Sherlock placed a hand on the one which was doing the faffing and deftly pulled at the knot and off the neck of the doctor.

“You don’t relax when you wear a tie,” he said, butting in over John’s protests. His hand where undoing the first couple of buttons on his partner’s shirt. “And relax or the pictures they’ll get of you will make you look as though you’ve swallowed a canary,” he said and turned smartly on his heel to chase Lestrade down the hall.

“At least give me my tie back,” John said, jogging to catch up. “That’s my best tie,” he said. Sherlock stuffed the poor thing mercilessly in his pocket and continued onwards.

Greg’s pocket buzzed and he read the text message on the screen.

“Molly says good luck,” he reported with a sentimental smile on his face. Sherlock rolled his eyes dramatically, but John pinched his arm lightly before the acerbic come back had quite made it to the younger man’s mouth. It was just like the old days.

The Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner were also present, reading the highlights of the report
for the assembled press, all of whom had been given copies of the full report to thumb once the conference was concluded.

John dipped in and out of the opening statement; the Commissioner was droning on in his best press voice about how the enquiry three years ago that had found Sherlock guilty of fraud and worse was based upon the facts as they knew them at the time. He was trying to make excuses for the fact that they got it horribly wrong and were now being forced to eat their five hundred page dossier of previous. John glanced at his partner from time to time, he was completely unsurprised and constantly worried by the look of skull-numbing boredom on his face; John prayed that he wouldn’t do something stupid or say something outrageous to try and pass the time. He went on to tell them that Moriarty was, in fact, real and Richard Brook was the fake. He pointed them to the highlighted pages and passages in the reports which provided all of Sherlock’s meticulous and clever counter-proofs that he was indeed who and what he said he was.

“Detective Sergeant Lestrade, sat to my right,” the Commissioner droned on, “was believed to have been in error when he consulted with Mr Holmes on some his cases. However, we have always believed he has been a great asset to the force and has had our full support,” his speech was interrupted by a loud and obvious snort from Sherlock who passed on a weary and half-arsed apologetic look over to the man in the posh uniform. “In light of this new evidence I would like to take this opportunity to personally apologise to Mr Lestrade on behalf of myself and the Metropolitan Police Service and say now that you will be reinstated to your previous position as Detective Inspector with the Criminal Investigation Department as soon as possible.” Greg smiled, he had known it was going to be announced, but he was still happy about it. The cameras flashed a little more.

“There will now be a short statement from Mr Holmes,” the Commissioner announced, with emphasis on the ‘short’. Sherlock did not have a piece of paper to read from, so any hope of a polite, considered statement was out of the window and John crossed his fingers under the table.

“James Moriarty was one of the greatest criminal minds the world has ever seen,” Sherlock began.

Several of my cases had caused him problems and knowing that I would not stop in my efforts to bring down his businesses in London, he set himself directly against me. He arranged for the kidnap and torture of my colleague, John Watson,” cameras flashed again, “so that I might admit defeat. I knew that his endgame would be my death, as that is what happened to everyone who ever crossed Moriarty. Richard Brooke is Reichenbach in English. He used it as a pseudonym for a joke, knowing that you were all too stupid to get it. The Reichenbach case not only made my name but lost Moriarty millions and was the last straw that made him come after me.

“For crossing him, even after the first warning, he vowed to utterly destroy me. He got the information about my past from my idiotic brother so when he presented his lie, that I was a fake, wrapped in the truth about my history you would all believe it. I don’t think even he anticipated how quickly and how greedily you all took up the story, working yourselves up into such a frenzy that you would blindly accept my suicide as ‘proof’ of my guilt.” He paused for a moment, partly for dramatic effect and partly to invisibly remind himself that John was sat next to him and they had reconciled with what he was about to relate next.

“With the help of a friend I was able to make preparations to fake my death. When I met with Moriarty on the rooftop of St Bartholomew’s Hospital he revealed that he had men poised to kill
John Watson, Detective Inspector Lestrade,” John had to hide a smirk at how Sherlock emphasised the title which was to be restored to the man sat beside him, “and Martha Hudson. He would kill them if I did not kill myself. There was a brief altercation and we both fell off the roof. He was killed upon impact and I was able to fake my death.

“In the last three years I have been travelling extensively to bring down the crime empire which Moriarty built up for himself and my return to London corresponds with the fulfilment of that objective. Sebastian Moran was the last man in the network. After three years, I have dismantled everything Moriarty had ever worked for. I will be returning to my cases as soon as possible,” he said and ended abruptly.

John felt a swell of pride in his partner for two reasons. Firstly, he was always going to be ridiculously in awe and proud of Sherlock’s achievement to almost singlehandedly reduce a global criminal empire to utter nothingness. Secondly, the doctor felt that the detective had done very well to restrain himself from hurling abuse at the press and had only directly called them stupid once or twice. Sherlock’s return had been inevitably quite emotional for both men and perhaps they were still riding the wave of good feeling which made him strangely more polite to those around him. John wasn’t going to delude himself, he knew it wouldn’t last forever, it probably wouldn’t even last for that much longer, but he was happy with how they had been before (hell, he had fallen in love with those moods), and knew things would soon return to normality.

“Dr Watson,” an older male journalist asked, “Did you know about Mr Holmes’ plan to fake his death?”

“Nope. I was being watched and if I had given anything away that I knew he was alive I would have been shot, so Sherlock had me believing for three years that he was dead,” he responded, swallowing his nervousness and trying to keep as factual as possible.

“What was your reaction when he told you he was alive?”

“I punched him,” John said and the assembled reporters laughed. He could almost feel Sherlock’s sour look in the side of him, but he determined not to look in case he laughed at his partner, and he certainly didn’t want to rain on his much-deserved parade. “But when he explained what was going on that it wasn’t just life at stake, but Greg’s and Mrs Hudson’s as well, I could understand.”

“Will you be returning to helping Sherlock on his cases?”

“I’ve got a few things with work to sort out, but I hope to be, yes,” he said and sat back, the next question aimed for Greg. He stretched his leg under the table and could sense the restlessness in his partner and knew it would probably be best to get Sherlock out of there before he started getting very rude at the crowd which was still burgeoning with questions, some more intelligent than others. To save himself and his partner he leaned over to the press liaison next to him and whispered in his ear.

“Can we wrap this up? My leg is killing me,” he said. The officer gave him a questioning look.

“The one Moran kicked in,” he said and the young man looked suitably apologetic. With a flourish, he wrapped up the press conference, much to the consternation of the journalists who still had questions they wanted answered. They were directed to the hefty reports they had been given and officers began to usher them out of the room. John got up, somewhat stiffly and limped out of the room into the hall where the cameras weren’t recording his ever ungainly movements. He stopped in the hallway for a moment and stretched out his leg, feeling the stiffness in the joint curl and tense as he exercised it. They had been in there for over an hour and it hadn’t been feeling particularly good to begin with.
“You ok John?” Greg asked. Sherlock had not needed to ask, he knew exactly what the problem was.

“Yeah, just need to stretch out for a minute,” he said with a weary smile and did so. Sherlock was tapping away at his phone, uninterested in the injured knee. He was half browsing the internet for something and half responding to a rude text from Mycroft about calling him an idiot on national live television.

#

The media fallout, predictably, was pretty big; they made headlines and front pages for days afterwards, inevitably the old pictures of the Hat had been dug out and there was a lot of unapologetic rhetoric from the papers. They received hundreds of letters and emails from radio, TV and printed publications asking for interviews, photoshoots, quotes, promises of a fair hearing of ‘their real story’. There was, of course, fanmail that came in, people saying they always believed in Sherlock, or that they thought he was amazing for all the work he had done over the last three years. Sherlock summarily ignored it all and while John read through most of it, most of it was consigned to the recycling bin as neither of them had the slightest interest in appearing on telly or giving an interview. Sherlock was starting to itch for cases, so John kept an eye out for them as he siphoned through the mail and the email.

He maintained his current set of shifts at work, but had met with his boss to organise a reduction of his hours now that Sherlock would be demanding of his time. His boss had gone off on a bit of a tangent, talking about the incredible return and it took a while for John to be able to steer the conversation back on topic and, on the promise that he would start up his blog again, he was going to be starting the reduced hours next month.

True to his word, John started up his blog again; it took him a few drafts before he got the first one as he wanted it and it took it him the best part of his Tuesday afternoon off, during which Sherlock was sorting out his chemistry things in the kitchen. Much of it had been left out on the table, but some of it had been put away in the boxes under the table and he was bemoaning how there appeared to be no reasoning or system behind the tidy up. The doctor knew better than to try and help, not that he was particularly interested in doing so anyway, and it certainly kept Sherlock occupied, despite the noise, for the better part of the day. Much of the equipment needed re-sterilising if it was to yield accurate results and so that was the state John found the kitchen in when he got up to make some tea a few hours later. He poked his head in the door to assess the mess he would have to dance around to get to the kettle, only to find glassware and stuff everywhere, and the sink completely full. Sherlock was under the table again, digging around in boxes and John just nodded to himself and made a tactical withdrawal, there was no way he would be getting anything safe to consume from that kitchen for at least the rest of the day.

#

John was so glad to be home; the sight of Baker Street brought sweet relief to his tired eyes and he smiled to himself as he saw the familiar numbers gleaming in the last of the evening’s sunlight. His shoulder bag was heavy as he manoeuvred his way up the steps and poked his head in the living
room door to say hello to Sherlock if he was in. He dropped his bag by the door and had a look around. There was no great mess, and all was quiet. Sherlock had made some mention of a case that had interested him briefly, though John got the impression that that would be all over and done with by now; it was clearly a trivial matter as the consulting detective had not bombarded him with texts or demands that he come home. Who knew what part of London the dark haired man was terrorising, all John knew was that he wanted to go and change and then maybe he would think about asking his partner where he was and not to come home with a bleeding wound no matter how badly he thought he needed evidence.

For now, a new change of clothes was called for and he made his way wearily up the stairs, pausing when he saw scratches on the varnish of the upper banister. Scuff marks on the wall paper at ankle and elbow height told of something, possibly going up and down the stairs repeatedly, so that was the ankle marks accounted for. The other marks where far higher up, near his chest; perhaps from something large that had been carried up or down the stairs with some clumsiness. He wondered what on earth could have happened and with a great deal more caution, he finished the ascent and slowly opened his door.

The first thing that he noticed was the change in smell; fresh paint lingered in the air and John instantly saw that the colours of his walls were different to when he left them. Instead of the odd, shabby wallpaper from when he had moved in the first time around, they were a warm cream colour with one wall a deep luxurious purple; a very similar colour to a certain shirt the doctor held a deep and lasting appreciation for. Then he noticed the shift in the furniture. He knew that his room was the larger one, and indeed inside, in addition to his own furniture, was now an extra wardrobe, a small set of drawers and a double bed. Speaking of the bed, there was a figure inside the covers in there, curled up and the chest rising and falling slowly.

John was having another one of those moments, those strange, odd moments which only came from living with Sherlock and he felt that somehow he had slipped into a dream or some kind of parallel universe. This was not his bedroom as he had left it only a few days ago; not only was the décor and the furniture utterly different, but Sherlock was actually asleep and John was more than confused. What the hell had happened in his absence?

“John?” a bleary voice murmured from the bed. Sherlock turned over and his eye lit up when he saw his lover, perking up instantly.

“Sherlock what have you done?” John asked, flabbergasted as to what had happened.

“Do you like it?” he asked, looking around, admiring his handiwork.

“You… completely changed my room and moved yourself in?!” he said in a gasp, still not quite believing it.

“We rarely sleep apart, this was a logical step. Besides, I need more room for my experiments since you keep complaining about my use of the kitchen. My old bedroom suffices as a lab.”

“And you didn’t think I would want a say in this?” John was used to Sherlock making decisions without his knowledge or consent, but this really was a step too far. This was an invasion of John’s last bastion of privacy and normalcy in the flat and now it, too, was being invaded.

“I didn’t see what the problem would be,” Sherlock replied, sitting up. The cover fell off his chest and pooled around his waist, revealing white skin stretched over lithe muscle. John’s anger evaporated for just a second as he found himself in pure wanting but he quickly returned to the annoyance at hand.
“The problem? What about my stuff?”

“Exactly where it used to be with a few small exceptions. I didn’t snoop around in your belongings if that’s what you’re worried about,” he sniffed. John was finding it harder and harder to remember why he was angry at Sherlock because the expanse of white skin on show, with the promise of more underneath the blanket, and his tousled hair hanging over his beautiful eyes was an image of temptation and distraction; either way not good for John.

“If anything, this makes more sense,” Sherlock continued, apparently ignoring John’s reaction to coming home and finding his usually coy lover almost naked in his bed. “We sleep together every night anyway, this simply prevents you leaving your clothes in my room and visa versa.” John, even in his addled state, could not find fault in Sherlock’s logic. They did sleep wrapped around each other every night, so it would make sense for their sleeping places to be adjoined, but it was the detective’s inability to ask John’s permission which was angering the doctor.

“This room will continue to be free of almost all experiments,” he promised, waving the idea around as though it were a bargaining chip.

“‘Almost all’?” John asked sceptically.

“Yes, there are plenty of things to be discovered and explored between the two of us,” he said. A worried look then flashed across his face as he thought of something. “I assume that you would wish for there to be a physical intimacy between us.” John nodded dumbly. He had no idea what to say to that concept. He had long ago offered and accepted to forgo all sexual activity with Sherlock, since the man seemed either ambivalent or a little fearful of it. This wasn’t to say that John didn’t harbour those feelings, he certainly did, after all, he could still see vividly in his mind’s eye the things he would like to do to Sherlock if given the opportunity one day; he just wasn’t sure if that day would ever come. Now his partner was alluding to a certainty of sexual exploration between the two and John suddenly realised that his self-control was about to be put to the greatest test he had ever endured.

“Well, I suppose it is nice,” he conceded and sat heavily on what he fathomed to now be ‘his’ side of the bed, facing his lover. Sherlock reached over and pulled the cream wool from John’s body and dragged it over the shorter man’s head and arms until it had completely come off and he dropped it on the floor somewhere.

“Sherlock, you don’t….” John started to say but he was silenced by an annoyed glare.

“I’m not afraid of the human body John, there’s no need to be prudish about this,” he said and began to slowly divest his lover of the different articles of clothing he had worn that day.

“You know, usually it’s good to kiss for at least a little bit before we jump into stripping each other,” John said between gasps for air at Sherlock’s fingers running across his skin as they dragged the materials down. The doctor was now shamelessly aroused; they were in a bed together, Sherlock already practically bare save for some covers and possibly an item or two of clothing and the aforementioned lover was making it his life’s work, at this precise moment in time, to undress the shorter man, how could he not be responding in that warm way?

Deciding that he couldn’t not respond and it would more than likely annoy Sherlock if he played hard to get, John reached his fingers up to somewhere safe. They gently lay on Sherlock’s face and ran through short black hair, touches that were not likely to get him into trouble and allowed him to participate. Sherlock twisted in the bed like a snake into a kiss, contorting his lithe body until he was able to pull John down into the bed, allowing John to prize his mouth open with a flick of his tongue and Sherlock shuddered. The sensation on his sensitive lips was wonderful and a sympathetic thrill
ran down his body in a way that he had felt so few times before, it was new, indulgent and incredible.

He wasn’t experiencing that fabled ‘loss of mind’ that so many of the mundane sexually active populace reported, but then again the detective wasn’t sure he wanted to lose control, the last couple of times he had done that he had tackled a man off a rooftop and the other time he had drank himself into a stupor. But this wasn’t to say he couldn’t enjoy the rush of chemicals in his brain that was delightfully organic, no artificial stimulants needed. At that precise moment his world extended to the freshly painted walls and no further, the focus of his entire being the man who was currently kissing him, running his strong hand’s through his lover’s hair and wiggling to be helped out of his clothes.

John’s shoes joined his jumper, shirt and belt on the floor as the man above him systematically removed articles of clothing and the doctor was now breathing heavily against Sherlock’s kisses. Pale fingers twisted the fabric of his jeans to pop the button and John let out a rather unintentional gasp as he realised this really was happening. Sherlock paused for a minute, wondering why John had made such a noise, but he smirked in satisfaction when he saw the look on his doctor’s face, one of surprise and unashamed arousal. The genius kept everything he had read about sexual contact in the fore of his mind ready for instant recall as John lifted his hips to allow Sherlock tug his trousers off and consign them to the floor as well, to be forgotten for a very long time.

John couldn’t stop the sound that rushed out of his mouth when Sherlock’s hands touched his groin as he flipped the button out of the eye and stripped him of the jeans that had become uncomfortable several minutes ago. His eyes feasted on the beautiful sight above him, long sinewy limbs encased in a white skin that glowed, his eyes boring a searing hot line of observation down John’s body and the doctor used this time to trace the hard lines of his lover’s body, delighting in the knowledge that Sherlock was his. The dark haired man dipped down, his fingers traced the white line beneath John’s eye and trailed his fingers down his jaw, down to his shoulders, tracing the bullet wound’s scar and then down to the rest Moran had made. John’s hands travelled the planes of skin available to him, sitting up to follow Sherlock’s gaze as he continued down, past his waist, past the strikingly obvious bulge in his underwear and down to the few on his legs. Since Sherlock’s thorough inspection of his collected scar tissue the last time they had an intimate moment like this, John didn’t feel self-conscious about the map of blemishes across his body; he recognised the origin of them, acknowledged the bullet wound that brought him back from Afghanistan and the two weeks of incarceration under Moran, but there were no intrusive memories, no flashbacks, no visions of Moriarty’s grin looming over him. The only thing that actually mattered to him now was the sensual trace of Sherlock’s fingers on his sensitive flesh, the tickling of his fringe as he bent down close to the skin, placing a few experimental kisses on John, who had to force his lungs to operate in deep, slow breaths to keep himself under control.

Sherlock made his way back to up John’s face, laying his lips over the doctor’s jaw, making his way back to the eager mouth of his lover. The doctor’s kisses were different now, they were stronger, more heated and the detective knew John was now helplessly aroused. His mouth drifted away from the hungry kisses once more to John’s ear.

“John, I want you to touch me,” he breathed, barely able to bring himself to say it louder than a whisper, he had never asked for such a thing. A tiny moan came through John’s mouth; the hot breath on his neck and that beautiful voice practically fucking his ear, even if he was sure Sherlock didn’t quite understand the effect his voice had on his lover. He also realised in that moment that he was going to get to touch his partner in an intimate way that he had thought he would never be able to. Pushing gently, John rolled Sherlock onto his back and placed hot kisses all over that delectable throat as his hand travelled slowly down the hard planes of his body to push the fabric of his underwear down, leaving Sherlock to finish pulling them off while his fingers sought out his lover’s hard member. He touched it teasingly, determined to take it slow unless Sherlock expressly directed
him otherwise, as well as getting used to the fact that this was the first time he had touched another man’s cock in a sexual situation since his university days. This didn’t mean he didn’t know how to administer pleasure though and he rubbed his thumb across the slit and around the sensitive head. Sherlock’s gasping intake of breath was enough for John to feel satisfied that he would be able to provide amply for his lover’s pleasure. The look on his face was intense, puzzlement, surprise and pleasure flicked in quick succession across his beautiful face.

“How does it never feel this good when I do it?” Sherlock asked out to the room, mostly a biological conundrum that John instantly knew the answer to.

“It always feels better when someone else does it,” he answered and wrapped his hand fully around the engorged member and gave it a few slow pumps. He couldn’t hide his smile as Sherlock’s entire body seemed to move to the feeling of someone else pleasuring him. His responsivity was a turn on for John, who could feel his own insistent need restrained by the flimsy fabric of his boxers.

“You have no idea how long I’ve waited to do this,” John murmured in his lover’s ear, stroking a little faster. “You’re so fucking gorgeous like this, it turns me on so much to be the one getting you off,” he said, the words pouring from his mouth with little conscious thought other than to vocalise what was running through his head.

Little moans were coming from Sherlock’s mouth, his plump lips rounding out as he whimpered (not that he would ever use that word), his hips now rolling with John’s strokes, his entire lean body aquiver with acute sexual desire and pleasure. His hands were restless, spending half their time gripping the sheets beneath him until his knuckles were white and gripping John’s shoulders, arms, hair, or just the first thing that came into contact with his hands. John couldn’t keep his own breathing straight as Sherlock responded so keenly to his touch, the creases on the younger man’s face showing that the only thing that was going through his mind was John and the pleasure, just as it should be. The doctor’s mouth roam freely over the heated flesh of his lover while he ignored the burn of his arm as he began to jerk Sherlock with greater speed and he squeezed a little harder, stepping up the pleasure as the darker haired man looked down, watching John’s lips over his skin and the hand that was bringing him ever closer to the edge of what was sure to be a powerful orgasm.

Sherlock’s hand flew to John’s hip, being the first thing he could grab properly, and he gasped out a few more shuddering breaths before his entire body heaved and he let out a stuttering cry of ecstasy. His clouded eyes locked onto John’s as he writhed through what was undoubtedly the most intense sexual experience of his life. Never had the pleasure been so great and never had he been so focused; laying on that bed with John’s hand wrapped around his cock it felt as though his entire being revolved around his lover and he didn’t even need to try, he just fell into the doctor’s existence.

John ignored the crushing pain on his hip bone as Sherlock’s grip tightened like a vice signalling the onset of his orgasm. He revelled in the way the body beneath him shuddered and quivered as it released euphoria into Sherlock’s bloodstream. John decided in that instant that the detective’s voice keening out in explosive orgasm was the single best thing he had ever heard in his life. He didn’t need Sherlock’s memory techniques to implant that sound in this mind for the rest of his life and he hoped to god he would hear it again. Over and over. He lost his breath when Sherlock locked their eyes as he came, it was as though they were sharing the orgasm, sending thrills through John’s body which made him hard enough to probably only require a few touches to bring him to the brink.

It took Sherlock quite some time to come down from his orgasmic bliss, his now warm grey eyes still fixated on John as the euphoria coursed through his system and he began to come down from the incredible peak he had achieved. His grip on John was now slack, his fingers resting on the skin that was almost certainly going to bruise, his chest still heaving, his mouth hanging open slightly and his
eyes still locked with his partner’s. John definitely felt as though they had shared that orgasm with Sherlock, even if he didn’t come himself. The dark haired man’s fingers twitched in movement and began to trace lethargic, tender circles around the bruising skin, a sign he was regaining lucidity. His gaze was then broken as he closed his eyes and his mind fell back into place, his world expanding once more outside of the confines of their room.

“Enjoy that then?” John asked with a smug grin on his face, knowing exactly how much it had been enjoyed.

“Almost entirely new,” he said between breaths, carefully considering his words through the fog in his mind. “Worthy of noting for future reference,” he mumbled. John couldn’t help the smile that spread across his face rapidly turning into a grin. The look on Sherlock’s face was something John hadn’t seen before; it was as though his mind had been completely shut down and was now undergoing to the slow process of re-booting. He chuckled internally at his choice of metaphor, Sherlock had always referred to his brain as a computer and now here John was doing the exact same thing. At the same time as the reboot, Sherlock was trying to process everything that had just happened to him, all the sensations, the experiences and the feelings that had accompanied them, it was as though he was still catching up on the things John had made him feel.

With no sort of warning, Sherlock yawned and stretched, not unlike how a cat would do and rolled over, already asleep as his other cheek touched the pillow. John was left not quite sure what to do, he was rather shocked that his partner had just gone to sleep without so much as a word leaving the doctor hanging. He supposed it was possibly a little too much to expect much in the way of reciprocation after what he could only assume to be Sherlock’s first sexual experience with someone else, but that was…abrupt. Not that he should have expected anything else from his partner, it’s hardly as though Sherlock was going to start verbose declarations of love or cuddling, so, still feeling rather wobbly from the earlier experience, he made his way to the bathroom to quickly relieve himself (not that difficult when he remembered Sherlock’s face as the orgasm took him) and crawled into bed. He felt like jelly and sleep came easily, but he was aware of an arm being thrown around his middle before he lost the battle with consciousness.
Ghosts

Chapter Summary

Despite life returning to whatever quantifies as normal for Sherlock and John, the couple is reminded that what John went through would be with him forever, even if they lived with it nine days out of ten.

It was three thirty in the morning, prime thinking time. Most of London around the flat was as quiet as it ever got and he was in full force of his thinking process, dissecting every tiny detail from the crime scene they had been to earlier the day before. There was something not quite right about the way the body had been positioned and he was intent on finding out the special significance behind the placement when he was disturbed by a noise coming from the bedroom upstairs. His ears picked up the sound of John's pained moan and he wondered what on earth could be so wrong with him that he made noise enough to reach the living room. A thud quickly followed the moan and Sherlock deduced that his partner had fallen out of their bed. With a dramatic roll of his eyes he contemplated going upstairs to admonish him, but he decided he couldn't be bothered to move and would offer his scolding in the morning, returning to his meditative state. There was the sound of the door opening and John was staggering frantically down the stairs and Sherlock snarled in irritation as he realised his thinking was going to be disrupted for at least another twenty minutes. John threw the door open, his heavy panting nearly echoing around the otherwise silent room.

"What is it?" Sherlock demanded irritably, purposely not opening his eyes to convey his displeasure. John often protested when Sherlock's thinking techniques (the violin for example) woke him from his sleep and this was exactly how the detective felt at the moment, his thinking time was as important to him as sleeping time was to the doctor. John didn't say anything, he instead lunged at Sherlock, pinning the taller man with a dangerous amount of force to the sofa, his dominant hand around Sherlock's throat, choking the life out of him quite efficiently.

"John-!" Sherlock rasped, completely taken aback by the sudden and unprovoked (as far as he could remember) attempt on his life. A gust of wind sent the curtain fluttering and light from the outside streetlamp illuminated John's face for a moment; he was covered in a sheen of sweat, his face contorted in rage and fear, his eyes utterly vacant. He was asleep. Sherlock was no stranger to the nightmares that would torment his lover and the reactions ranged from simple tension in his body, to muttering, to waking up wet and short of breath. He was pretty sure these night terrors were quite new and he was sure he hadn't heard anything like this before in John's behaviour.

But for the moment, he was being choked quite spectacularly by John who seemed to think he was someone else, probably Moran or Moriarty. He struggled, trying to manoeuvre his arms inside of John's to try and prise them away from his neck, but the doctor was clearly focused on murder in his dream and he was utilising his strength without reserve, which was considerably more than Sherlock's. In a desperate move, the taller man wound his legs around John's middle and used the last of his strength to flip John's over, sending him crashing to the floor, pushing the coffee table over, spilling a cold cup of tea over the waking man. Sherlock coughed and wheezed as he relished his
ability to breath once again, the little white spots behind his eyes disappearing as he re-oxygenated his body.

"What the-?" John exclaimed groggily as he picked himself up from the floor, his pyjama shirt sopping with cold tea. "Is this another one of your insane experiments?" he demanded angrily. He was feeling wired and on edge from his dream, a rather graphic one about escaping from the cell and squeezing the life out of one ever-smiling Jim Moriarty.

"What?!” Sherlock spluttered at the injustice of the accusation. "You're the one who was trying to kill me!” he said angrily, massaging his neck, feeling where the bruises would bloom quite nicely and he knew he would have to endure some tiresome remarks from Donovan if he saw her about the nature of their relationship. He couldn't care less about the comments levied about himself, but when they sought to bring John into their sordid little lies it irritated him enough to be angry about it.

"What are you talking about?" John demanded, stripping himself of the sodden cloth and using the remaining dry patches to towel his damp skin.

"You fell out of bed by the sounds of it, ran down here and tried to strangle me,” he said indignantly, his voice still hoarse and rasping from the savage treatment. John flicked the main light switch on and his face fell when he saw the angry red marks around his lover's usually beautiful neck. His entire frame sank and he looked not only mortified but embarrassed as well.

"Jesus, I'm sorry... I haven't...not in ages, I didn't think this was a problem anymore," he said, stumbling over himself as he tried to think of what he wanted to say.

"This has happened before?"

"About a year after I moved in with Greg, he used to wake up to me putting holes through the door to my room and trying to run out of the house. One morning he found me asleep in the garden," he said, muted and terrified of his own actions. "The therapy and medication put a stop to it and I thought I wasn't going to do it again. But I've never put anyone in danger before. Shit." He ran a hand through his soaking hair and walked out to the bedroom upstairs. Sherlock scowled. He wasn't supposed to just walk out like that, he thought John would want to talk about it more, that's all normal people seemed to want, so why wasn't he talking? Giving up on thinking time for the immediate future, Sherlock followed his partner upstairs, to find John packing a bag.

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

"I can't stay here, not until I know I'm not going to try and kill you again. What if I hurt you next time? Seriously? I couldn't live with myself I did something to you,” he mumbled as he stuffed essentials for a couple of days out the flat, extracting his things from the shared dresser, trying to remember which can was his deodorant, where his phone charger was and then having to undo the knot it had formed from being entangled with Sherlock's phone cord.

"This is a ridiculous over-reaction John," Sherlock announced and closed the bedroom door.

"I could have killed you!" John burst out, the bubble of dread in his stomach making him feel slightly sick.

"I'm quite capable of surviving you. I've lived through several assassination attempts, muggings, stabbings, shootings, sword fights...” he reeled off, but was interrupted before he could go any further.
"It's not right that I make you live in fear of your life because when I'm having a night terror I don't even realise I'm doing it. There is no difference to me between just dreaming and getting up and trying to kill someone because everyone looks like one of them two when I'm having that dream," he said.

"Nonsense, if anything, it'll stop me getting bored," he said, rather flippantly. He had meant for it to cheer John up, but it seemed to have the opposite effect.

"Not funny," he muttered and stuffed his comb in the bag.

"You're not going anywhere John," Sherlock commanded, placing careful emphasis on the doctor's name.

"I'm just going to sleep somewhere else, where I can't throttle someone. I'll be back in the morning."

"No." The taller man placed himself in front of the door and made it very clear that the only way John was getting out of the room would involve some kind of altercation.

"I've made up my mind, so move," John said, annoyed now. His next destination was the bathroom.

"Did I stutter?" Sherlock's face was set in his particularly determined expression, mixed in with a little petulance.

"For god's sake, it's not like I'm walking out forever, it's just for the rest of the morning. Now let me go." Sherlock was blocking the door with his body and when John reached out a hand to depress the handle behind his partner, his hand was slapped away. John stared at him.

"You know, this is starting to feel very familiar," Sherlock said, with a little smirk which infuriated John no end as he had no idea to what his lover was alluding to.

"Let me out of this room!" John demanded.

"No!" Sherlock cried, frustrated that he had to reiterate himself yet again. It seemed that most arguments came down to both parties saying the same things to each other in different tones of voice. He could never stand it in others and it was beyond tedious to be involved in.

"Why not?!"

"Because I care," Sherlock said, deliberately using John's words that night the doctor confessed his feelings for his flatmate. John was so stunned he didn't reply. He recognised the situation immediately, the words bringing back memories of that night where he thought he had irrevocably ruined his friendship with the detective, only to find it was possibly one of the best things he had ever done. Back then John had felt hot and angry that Sherlock was running off to put himself in danger and he had felt so sullen that his partner didn't trust him enough to come along and protect him. A glance into Sherlock's pale eyes told him that his lover was feeling very similar things right now; angry that John was just marching out at the first sign of some trouble and hurt that the doctor didn't trust him enough to be able to defend himself should a similar occurrence happen. John’s shoulder's slumped once more in defeat and his face flushed with embarrassment.

He couldn't bring himself to say anything, but was glad when Sherlock, continuing his little homage, touched their fingers together. The touch was reassuring and instantly calming, the fingers working
their way down to the palm and weaving their hands together.

"Well now I feel like a tit," John muttered and dropped his bag in the corner. He sat back heavily on the bed, dragging the detective to sit with him. Sherlock sat there, waiting for some kind of prompt from John as to what he should do next. He had accomplished his objective, he had got John to stay and not run off to who knows where and now he was thinking about the tattered remains of his thinking time. He wondered when the doctor would go back to sleep so he could get back to examining his memories of the crime scene. But he could tell John was waiting for something, probably some form of comfort from his lover, but Sherlock had no idea what was appropriate here. Desperately, he thought back to what Lestrade had done for Molly and put his arm around John, who instantly rolled his head into the detective's shoulder, breathing normally now. It seemed to be the right thing to do, as the tension in John's body seemed to ease out and tiredness quickly pulled at his eyes, tugging them closed.

"Can you do your thinking in bed?" John mumbled sleepily. Sherlock looked down at him. "I interrupted you during a case night, of course you want to think," he explained, heavily pulling his head up to look at his partner. Happiness shone from Sherlock's eyes in that moment; John truly understood him, his needs without disapproval and hadn't tried to change a thing. Sherlock had never felt so happy to be with another human being as he did with his doctor.

"Yes," he said simply and pulled the blanket for the two of them to climb into bed. John curled into the cool body of his lover, falling back into sleep, feeling safer, as though Sherlock's presence would frighten off the nightmares and he could have a restful night. The detective shuffled and fidgeted several times to try and get into a comfortable thinking posture, trying to find his way back into this thoughts earlier before the attempted strangulation, though it was proving more difficult than he had thought it would be. He eventually wriggled his way into a seated position, John's sleeping form (impervious to Sherlock's movements he was so deeply asleep) resting in his lap and it left his hands free to clasp together in meditation or gesticulate when he was trying to expand a line of thought that could be useful. For the most part, his left hand stayed either on John's shoulder, or stroking through his hair, though his awareness of the actions of his hand was next to nil; his conscious brain was being employed fiercely again as he dissected the crime scene evidence and ran countless theories, while his unconscious took care of his partner, providing comfort and care for the sleeping man.
Chapter Summary

Sherlock and John's life is steady; it helps that the fickle detective's focus has been inwards and trusting himself to his worthy partner.

John was a very happy man. Not only had he won Sherlock’s affection, but the man had developed an increasing like and appetite for ‘bedroom intimacy’ as it was dubbed casually in conversation. The doctor had, at one point, decided that should Sherlock be averse to sexual contact that he would respect that and stay with the other man regardless of his own need; he felt it a sacrifice he would be willing to make and he certainly wasn’t going to pressure the younger man into anything. However, it turned out that John had made a good student out of Sherlock, who took all sexual exploration slowly and cautiously as he knew that if he rushed anything the onslaught of the following emotions would not be something he could deal with.

Sherlock had always disliked it because the acts were performed on some of the most vulnerable spots on the body; for instance, John had shown a distinct like for kissing and gently biting his neck, something which had felt very good, but the notion of allowing that kind of closeness to a vital area of his body (even if it was only transport) still felt somewhat unnerving. Not to mention the sensitivity of the genitals: untold pain could be wrought with hands, teeth or nails if his partner had a change of heart. But he had never felt that trepidation and fear with John, there was never any doubt in his mind that his partner was a sensitive and skilled enough lover to ensure that he would not bring any pain and nor would he ever do it intentionally.

As Sherlock thought on he realised that a large part of the act of sexual congress with one’s romantic partner was trust, being able to fully release and reveal oneself without being rejected or hurt by the other. He knew that John would never intentionally hurt Sherlock in a physical or emotional way and knowing that made the idea of sharing his vulnerabilities all the more palatable. He realised that there was no judgement or ulterior motive to John’s ministrations, he wasn’t seeking leverage by taking him to bed, he wasn’t going to use it for blackmail. His lover had even proved that he did not seek sexual intimacy as a way of simply getting his own end off, as there had been a few times where he had delivered pleasure to Sherlock and not received any himself, either because the detective was still unsure what to do or the pleasure coma post-orgasm turned almost instantly to sleep. He was still a little astonished at the notion of someone doing something selflessly, he had long established that there was no such thing as a selfless act, there was always something to be gained by the party who was giving something up, but he knew that, in John’s case, it made John happy to see Sherlock enjoying the new things so much as well as something akin to satisfaction at being able to teach the genius something new for once.

Their first few forays into pleasure provided a lot of data for Sherlock to sift through, and after analysing the basic technique behind it, he began to experiment with reciprocation, seeing how his roaming kisses stimulated and teased his partner, while a firm grip and a rhythmic pump would make his lover cry out with pleasure. He had begun by simply imitating what John had done to him, only
to find that the doctor did not respond in quite the way Sherlock did, so the detective began to try subtly different techniques; he internally measured how John reacted to differing pressure of his fist, how to make the rhythm of his ministrations fast enough to maintain a good pleasure output, but prolonging the feelings for as long as possible. His powers of observation came into their own in the bedroom; he was able to notice, see and interpret each of John’s tiny signals, some unconscious, of what he wanted. John would always try to control his breathing when he wanted the pleasure to last out for some time, he would gently frown when Sherlock paused to change something about his actions and he would always push his shoulders back and leave his mouth open when he was desperately trying to climax.

This, in turn, would lead to mind-blowing sensations for one John Watson, who had never thought that a simple handjob from Sherlock could be better than a large amount of the sex he had had in the last five years (not counting his years of celibacy during Sherlock’s ‘absence’). His attentiveness appeared to know no bounds and it was thrilling to have someone move or change almost before he knew what he wanted himself. To say he had been glad Sherlock had wanted to continue the great Sexual Experiment was probably the understatement of the century; never had there been a quicker study or responsive partner. John had been slightly put off at first, thinking that Sherlock would never be able to disengage and he would be constantly deducing while they were in bed, observing and coming to conclusions about what John wanted through the use of his cognitive skills. John had always found sex to be much better the less he thought about it and the more he went on instinct, his intuition picked up on the signals from his partners, not active observations in his mind. He quickly realised that such deductions were second-nature to Sherlock and for the large part were part of an unconscious process which meant that his brain wasn’t in danger of over-thinking during their bedroom sessions. The way Sherlock picked up on his body language and other signals was entirely natural, it was his intuition, he had simply figured out a way to bring it into his conscious mind and mentally dissect it.

One week, Sherlock had found himself quite satisfied with everything they had gleaned from their intimate touches and was ready to move on to something else, so he pulled up a private browsing tab on his laptop and began his research. There was no shortage of information on the internet about the giving and receiving of oral sex and the detective found himself completely immersed in this new branch of enquiry that he didn’t realise that the subject-to-be of the fruits of his research had returned from a shift at work and was currently showering off. He re-read two of the most informative articles (he had found the helpfulness of videos to be scant at best) and, retreating into his mind, planned how he would test his new-found knowledge.

This state was how John found him upon returning to the living room since his first ignored ‘hello’ and he didn’t bother to say anything this time, knowing he wouldn’t get an answer until the detective was finished with his all-important thinking. The laptop lid was closed, but John could hear the fan in the little thing whirring for all it was worth, telling him that the closure had only been recent and he had done a great amount of work on it for it to need such vigorous temperature control. Still, John thanked the heavens that it wasn’t his own laptop that had been requisitioned and he settled down on the settee with his computer and checked his blog, reading through some of the comments that had been left on his recent update about the initial details of a case being taken. He dutifully deleted all the creepy ones and started to write up the next instalment of their last case; a spectacular jewellery store robbery in which nothing had been stolen.

If there was one thing about their relationship that John didn’t mind so much taking advantage of was that he could get Sherlock to eat more often than he used to. The man now subsisted on something small each day and since a pleased smile seemed to be all that was necessary to emotionally blackmail Sherlock (in the nicest possible way), he didn’t see it as too much of an evil. It helped that the chemical rushes released by orgasm during their intimate nights triggered an increase in appetite in the younger man so a post-climax snack was almost always on the cards and John always made
sure to have something in for them to nibble afterwards. Tonight Sherlock had decided to eat without waiting for John and was rhythmically picking out bits from a bowl of assorted fruits, vegetables and nuts which, while John would have preferred he eat something warm, he couldn’t contest and put himself the rest of last night’s left over pizza in the microwave to warm through. Just because Sherlock was eating healthily didn’t mean he had to.

John wasn’t sure it was going to be an intimate night as Sherlock had been so distant for much of the evening; usually there were behavioural precursors which began with kisses in the front room (some more frantic than others) and ending up with a need to change the sheets the next morning. But Sherlock had barely spoken a word that evening and John supposed he was simply in one of his internal post-case critiques were he picked the case apart, identifying where he had been wrong or had not been quick enough to make the connections in order to improve his investigative technique for the next case. He didn’t have a problem with no sex tonight and donned his striped pyjamas before sinking blissfully into the welcoming bed; he had forgotten how tired he was and was happily sinking into sleep when the door burst open.

“Don’t go to sleep!” Sherlock commanded with an energetic tone John felt was inappropriate given his sleepiness.

“Why not? It’s late for normal people,” he said with a weak groan. Sherlock grabbed the cover and yanked it away, causing a small cry of protest at the loss of warmth. “What-?” he began, but Sherlock was already over him, stealing the words away from him with a crushing kiss. If John didn’t know that his partner had been sat meditating on a case for the past several hours he would have thought that Sherlock had been aroused for some time before the ravaging kiss. The kiss was hard and insistent and John knew that he wasn’t going anywhere anytime soon, let alone to the land of nod so he forced himself awake and snaked his hands around the tall form above him, happily relishing the feel of muscles moving about under that pale skin, hidden by his dressing gown.

There seemed to be no extended foreplay tonight as, within minutes, he was snapping the buttons through the holes on John’s pyjamas and tugging off the fabric that hid his lover’s form away from him. As had become ritual, Sherlock kissed his way down John’s body and touching every scar with his pink lips in an act of sentimentality which never failed to make John smile. His body responded happily to the sensual treatment, and he laid back, letting Sherlock rain sweet kisses all over him. What he wasn’t expecting though was the feel of something warm and wet on his cock. His head shot up to look down his body at Sherlock who was bent over his midsection, his lips and the tip of his tongue teasing the smooth pink head of his member. Words failed John at the sight, a spluttering gasp was all that made it past his constricted vocal chords. Sherlock smirked and continued his tease, testing the taste and texture of the organ beneath the tip of his tongue, delighting in John’s reactions.

John wanted to say something, he wanted to tell Sherlock that he didn’t have to do this if he didn’t want to, that there was no obligation, but two things stopped him. Firstly was the shockingly erotic image of Sherlock sensually swirling his tongue around his cock had blocked any and all words from being formed. Secondly, he had already made this abundantly clear and his partner had not done anything he was uncomfortable with before now; John had always been able to spot it and Sherlock had become accustomed to saying no when he didn’t want something (in the bedroom this is, outside of these intimate moments he was as demanding as ever). The protest died quite suddenly when Sherlock took John fully into his mouth, his tongue still working on the underside, the head running along the ridged roof of his lover’s mouth and gently hitting the back of his throat. John thought he would leap off the bed in pleasure and surprise and he cried out, somewhat louder than he had intended, earning him a glance from his busy partner. John couldn’t tear his eyes away from what was being done to him and for a few seconds their eyes locked and John took a giant leap towards his climax at the smouldering look in those pale slate eyes.
Thoughts chased each other erratically through John’s mind as he continued to receive a very thorough and hugely pleasurable blowjob; thoughts like ‘for his first blowjob this is amazing’, ‘holy fuck, yes, right there’ and ‘bloody hell I love this man’ were at the fore of his mind. That is, when it wasn’t being wiped clean by the pleasure now pulsing through him as his lover began to suck, paying special attention to the tip, Sherlock’s head now bobbing with increasing pace, his hair, now long enough to start curling again, exaggerating the obscene movements. The doctor forgot how to breathe for a moment, the overwhelming pleasure and the sight of his lover putting that clever mouth to an altogether different use was enough to have him shaking and gripping the sheets so hard he thought he might put a hole in them to stop himself thrusting up into the warm, welcoming mouth. The experience was building up to a sensational climax and the first signs of impending orgasm clumsily registered in John’s brain. He was just about cognisant enough to remember it was polite to inform his lover of his situation and after a couple of failed attempts at speaking he managed to push out a few words.

“I’m…close,” was all he could gasp out and he noticed Sherlock’s ministrations pause for a moment. The detective was having a lightning-fast debate with himself about how he wanted to finish John off, after all, the idea of allowing the semen into his mouth was not exactly something that had been on his to-do list, but he also knew that it would be the most pleasurable outcome for John. There was nothing harmful in the fluid to the body and the only thing he would really have to worry about was the taste, and since he was the master of his transport he could dutifully ignore it and focus entirely on the man he had moaning and gasping underneath him.

His decision made, he immediately reapplied the heated pressure on John’s cock, this time faster, determined to bring him to climax quickly. John almost yelped out in shocked pleasure and surprise and his mind went completely blank as his breath hitched and he could hold it back no longer; with a guttural cry, his orgasm flooded over him, nearly blinding him in its intensity. He didn’t realise he had raised his hips in the air as he did so, he was too busy having every last iota of pleasure sucked out of him as Sherlock continued to work his mouth to every pulse of John’s cock.

When the orgasm finally receded, Sherlock quickly swallowed the build-up in his mouth, completely ignoring the taste and paused for a second to catch his breath. Breathing had been more difficult than he had originally assumed considering the actions that caused John the greatest pleasure generally involved his organ cutting off the younger man’s airway. It was a matter for practise then. He looked up to see his lover panting and boneless on the bed, his face a mixture of bliss and complete surprise. Sherlock crawled up to him, sinking into the sheets on his side, shamelessly smirking at the look on John’s face which he had caused.

“I’ll assume by your reaction that was performed well?” he asked, knowing the answer, but he always liked to hear John say it, whether it was for his deductions or his skills in the bedroom hearing his partner’s praise always seemed to legitimise his prowess. John nodded dumbly.

“Wow…” he said breathlessly. “Was that the first time you’ve ever done that?”

“Obviously.” Sherlock rolled his eyes at having to repeat himself’ he had already informed John (several times) that he totally lacked personal experience of sexual intimacy, a definition he would have thought clearly involved oral sex.

“Because that was amazing for a beginner!” he said, his praise instantly bringing happiness to Sherlock. John knew that his partner was inherently skilled at anything he applied himself to and he suspected that Sherlock would now care to improve his technique and he was a little afraid of the puddle of moaning mess he would become at his lover’s slightest touch. He had always had a weakness for blowjobs, he had usually been able to hold out pretty well against other types of sexual touches with his ‘soldier’s will’ as one of his ex-girlfriends had called it, but there was something
about the pleasure of a hot, wet mouth and a writhing tongue that seemed to switch off all but the
base parts of his brain.

After the few minutes it took John to gather his senses and re-enter the normal world, he snaked a
hand down pale skin and grabbed his partner’s cock, determined to pay him back with a little
attention and began a few slightly erratic pumps with his hand. Sherlock was never one to protest
when John paid him this kind of exquisite attention and he greedily took in every sensation of the
other man’s touch.

Words were so wholly inadequate to explain what he felt for John Watson and what these acts meant
to him deep down. There was a lot of logical bullshit in the way about hormone releases, new
sensations and the like, but when he meditated enough on the subject to take that away he was left
with a few pure slithers feeling. John accepted him without conditions attached, he adored Sherlock’s
flaws as much as his perfections, he would never turn away from the detective if he truly needed him
and he gave the younger man a stronger sense of purpose. Genius was all well and good when he
solved the puzzles that no one else could answer, but having someone acknowledge the very thing
you wish to be remembered by was very much welcome, especially when other morons only saw the
trivial parts, the parts he tried to keep hidden. He took exception to Sally Donovan’s words above
those of the others as she was always quick to point out his social deficits, as though having them
herself made her superior. It also reminded Sherlock of a very dark place in his life that began with
social awkwardness and culminated in several attempts being made on his life. But John took all of
that in his stride and still continued to manifest feelings for the dark haired man. The doctor gave out
trust as he took it from Sherlock, he accepted the whole person that made up his partner, and above
all, John gave him endless stimulation to much atrophied parts of himself.

But Sherlock only thought about that for a few seconds before pleasure began to overtake his mind
and he filed those thoughts to be taken through to their conclusion later. Right here and now there
was a firm hand gripped around his hard member, pumping far too slowly. With a cry that filled the
room, he came, his eyes locked on John’s as his spilled his seed on his stomach and in his lover’s
hand. John noticed how Sherlock would always stare right into him when he climaxed, always
robbing him of breath as a spark of electricity passed between them, leaving him feeling as though
they had both shared the orgasm. The younger man soon pulled his partner down to kiss him deeply,
an unusually overt loving gesture from the way his control was frayed by sexual bliss and he allowed
his emotions to pour out for a few moments while his mind rearranged itself.
Now Sherlock is committed to John, he knows that the doctor deserves to know some things about Sherlock's rather ugly past. So he chickens out and palms it off on Mycroft.

John was seething. He was sat in the middle of some posh cafe in central London, completely alone as all the other patrons had been kicked out and only one staff member was allowed to remain, working the coffee machine noisily in the corner. He had been brought here by some of Mycroft's goons, as usual without any word of why or asking for permission to take him out of his workplace and deposit him in an empty cafe. 'Probably serves cake he wants' he thought to himself. John nearly did a double take at his own thoughts there and bemoaned the day he began to think like Sherlock. They were clearly a bad influence on each other's thought patterns, the detective constantly whining about how John's emotions kept distracting him and the doctor rued how he now sometimes had the most acerbic comments to hand as though his partner were whispering them into his mind.

The last remaining staff member in the cafe brought over two coffees and left the shop by the backdoor; Mycroft's agents were visible on the other side. It didn't take too long after John had begun sipping at his hot beverage for the political sibling to swan into the cafe as though he owned it, as having treated it like he did, John thought that Mycroft believed he did own half of Britain.

"What am I doing here?" John demanded instantly. He hated being brought to these places like a puppy or a truanting schoolboy. As far as he was concerned, Mycroft forfeited the right to pleasantries every time he kidnapped the good doctor.

"No need to be so aggressive, John, this time I was asked to...take you aside for a conversation," he said with his diplomat's voice. He sat himself elegantly opposite John and began scooping sugar into his coffee.

"Asked by who?"

"Sherlock." That was the one answer John had not been expecting.

"Then why not meet at Baker Street? Hell, why not tell me himself?"

"He feels there are things you need to know, but finds it extraordinarily difficult to talk about them himself. He has asked me to relay the information," Mycroft explained. John saw a strange change come over the elder Holmes; it wasn't an instantly obvious one, but his frame sank ever so slightly, yet his shoulders stiffened with tension, his slight frown did not fade and lines in the corners of his eyes made themselves a little more noticeable. He was worried about something. John wondered what the political situation was like back at the office; he surmised it couldn't have been that bad if he took time out of his day to talk to John about the younger detective.
"So what is it that you have to tell me?" he said, wanting to get on with this.

"Something about Sherlock's past. It is a matter of delicacy since mention of it tends to upset him greatly. You are aware of his past substance abuse?" John knew instantly this was going to be a very serious conversation and immediately stopped feeling annoyed at Mycroft's method of getting them in the same space to talk, focusing on the matters at hand.

"Yes. Cocaine mostly?" Mycroft nodded. "Greg told me what he knew about Sherlock. When they met he was still using."

"Yes. Well." That was clearly an end to that. "I mean about before he met Mr Lestrade. I suppose I should start at the beginning. It was clear from his early years that my brother was not going to ever be a normal child. He developed his basic skills disproportionately, for instance he learned to read and write extremely quickly for his age, yet his speech remained very underdeveloped. He displayed knowledge of a wide and varied vocabulary, but rarely spoke the words he was able to write. This naturally concerned our parents greatly, they feared he would eventually become mute, but thankfully once his formal education began he began speaking until we couldn't stop him. As soon as he learned how to vocalise his questions about life and the universe he could not contain himself and badgered both our parents and myself with endless questions about how things worked or why they did the things they did." John smiled into his coffee. He had a mental image of a four and half foot version of Sherlock, about 5 years old with the same curly hair and a mini version of his trademark coat and scarf tugging on the trousers of everyone walking past asking questions like why do flowers grow bigger when watered, why fires crackled the way they did or how did frogs grow from tadpoles.

"His social skills were never particularly astute, and this only got worse as he naturally isolated himself at school from his peers. He identified more with the intelligence of his teachers until his own intellect outgrew theirs and he withdrew into himself, quickly growing frustrated at the inherent stupidity of those around him." Another mental image appeared in John's mind; a young teenage Sherlock, with messy hair and creased clothes looking lanky and awkward, looming over his peers and more interested in the chemistry lab than the football pitch.

"For a time we were...close," said Mycroft with such a strange look in his eyes that John could only interpret it as a little wistfulness. It must have been the only time in their lives that they actually got on. "I was able to keep up with his mind for the most part and our parents often passed him on to me to entertain when we were home. Since we both attended the same school I was able to keep him occupied for the most time with extra work from the science classes which kept him largely out of trouble. However, being some years his senior I departed for university when he began his GCSE years. Since Oxford was some distance from our school and home I was not often home and available to keep Sherlock occupied. This resulted in a rift between us, where I was beginning to follow the path to my future career and he had lost the main source of his distraction." John pulled a face at the thought of a moody teenage Sherlock.

"We had not realised until then, but Sherlock had been under the influence of steadily worsening psychological disorders. He has a mild form of Asperger's Syndrome with a disastrous measure of clinical depression. The two were creating a storm in his brain. As I provided him with distractions, puzzles, experiments and the like it masked the true nature of his condition, leaving it to explode violently when I left. He began a pattern of self destructive behaviour, earning him multiple reprimands from the school in which he boarded. He got into a fight at school with a boy who often bullied him, as this was not an infrequent occurrence, and put the young man in question in hospital. You may have seen glimpses of it, his frustrated rage," Mycroft said and John cast his mind back. He had seen it, now he came to think of it, times when no one had sent he patterns in cases that the
detective could see as clearly as the light of day, he had banged his fists on the table and shouted at John with an expression of pure rage, but it lasted for less than a second.

“You remember at Buckingham Palace before the Adler case? He grew terribly upset when we wouldn’t tell him the name of his client,” he prompted. John certainly did, there was no way he was going to forget being in the heart of the palace with his lover who was wrapped in only a bedsheet at the time. He had thrown a tantrum, for lack of a better word, and the anger coming from him had been to the point of irrational and incontrollable.

“Yes, I remember,” John said, nodding.

“He lost control of his temper and broke the boy’s nose, jaw and arm. Luckily he was young enough not to cause any severe damage, but he was expelled from the school. Our parents were disappointed as you might imagine, they had indulged his eccentricities as long as he performed adequately at school, but they were forced to hire in tutors for him while they found another school that would take him.” He paused to take a sip of his drink. “Eventually one suitable academy was found, however, Sherlock’s behaviour had deteriorated considerably in the period he was at home.”

“Didn’t your mum and dad think there was something wrong?” John asked, wondering how they could have possibly missed the signs that he should see a psychology professional.

“Our father was absent much of the time and Sherlock inherited his depressive tendencies from our mother who spent most of her time locked in her room. She never really recovered from her post-natal depression and… Well, all you need to know is that they weren’t really there for him,” Mycroft said diplomatically. John nodded. It really didn’t matter what background you came from, rich or poor, you could still have a shit childhood and it appeared Sherlock had one of those.

“No one really saw the depth of his problems and by the time he enrolled in college I was travelling. The bullying that had been a trademark of his schooling years did not stop when he engaged in further education, it simply took a different and more insidious form. Eventually, as it had gone untreated and unmedicated, his depression took over and he missed several weeks of classes as he simply did not get out of bed in the morning. I can only imagine that his motivation drained when he ran out of distractions to occupy his brain with. According to reports which I was later privy to, there were some days he would roam the campus, collecting samples and performing his own experiments and occasionally attending class until he fell into another depressive low. This manic behaviour went completely ignored by the faculty. At this point our father had been away on business for several months and mother was in convalescence from a nervous breakdown; I was nine months into my tour and he had no friends at college. He had not seen anyone who might understand his restlessness, purposelessness and isolation for the better part of a year.” John noticed how Mycroft’s grip around the coffee mug was tight enough to betray his emotions which barely showed on his serene face; he had long ago come to terms with whatever nastiness he was about to divulge next, but he did not like it.

“Some students found him drowned in a bathtub, fully clothed with a brick on his chest and an bottle of sedatives beside the tub.” John inhaled sharply, he daren’t let it out, his world suddenly collapsing to the table and the person relating his horrific tale. He wasn’t sure how he felt at that point, it would probably hit him later, but right now the only thing he could feel was a cold shiver run through him and his focus utterly on Mycroft’s words.

“Fortunately one of the students knew how to resuscitate him and they were able to get the water out of his lungs and breathe for him before the ambulance got there. After he recovered he was sectioned as a danger to himself, and given the fight that had him expelled from his first school, as also a danger to others.” Mycroft was starting to lose some of his composure, his face was no longer
straight and his conflicting feelings about that particular period in his life were threatening to breach the emotional perimeter. He didn’t say anything for a while, but John knew there was more to come. After all, he hadn’t even begun to talk about his descent into substance abuse.

“Sir,” Anthea came in with a manila folder of documents, looking rather harassed, which John found quite funny, despite the gravity of the conversation, as he had never seen the PA appear so ruffled. He gave her a sharp look, as if reprimanding her with a glance for interrupting their discussion which he obviously ordered her to stay out of. She pressed the papers into his hand, silently telling him they were very important. He scanned the pages in question and raised an eyebrow.

“So now he’s interested in talking to us. Interesting. Still, best not to seem too eager or he’ll think we actually care about what he has to tell us. Message the handler, we’ll meet in an hour, chose the most appropriate location,” he said smoothly in his ‘work’ voice which seemed to come remarkably easily despite the tension still obvious in his body. She nodded and started tapping away at her phone, trotting quickly on her heels as quickly as she could with dignity as he had a feeling she knew what the conversation was about.

“He spent the rest of his teenage years in a secure unit while they used…various treatments to help with his condition. I visited infrequently, my career was taking off at the time and I wasn’t always in the same county to see him. Eventually, when he appeared to be far more stable he said that he was ready to get out. Once the chemical imbalance in his brain had been addressed and his cognitive processes were returning to normal he had used the time to organise his mind. I believe you’ve been introduced to the Mind Palace?” he said, with a little more humour. Sherlock had been rather excited during the days of its construction and had described it animatedly to his brother whenever he did manage to visit. John nodded and chuckled a little.

“Yes, the first time he described it to me I said he sounded like a robot and then he started using the metaphor that his brain was like a hard drive and could ‘manipulate data as such’, ” John explained.

“Yes, well, with my help he was discharged from the hospital, but remained an outpatient and consented to see his appointed therapist and psychiatrist. During this time he enrolled at university, changing course several times before settling for Chemistry.”

“What else did he try?” John now had a picture of Sherlock in his early to mid twenties, slightly vacant from anti-depressants, but still walking all over his peers and most of the professors.

“Oh, he began with Forensic Science, but disagreed with their investigation methods, found them tedious and the lab work appealed far more to him so he enrolled in the Biochemistry course offered, but that was far too restrictive as he had an equal interest in matter outside of organic matter. He drove the university administrative staff half way to early retirement every time he walked into their office and demanded to change course.” John chuckled to himself, it was something else he could well imagine a young Sherlock doing.

“Amazingly, he found the study fascinating enough that he devoted his energies to it and his not inconsiderable mind was occupied for the four years he applied himself to the degree. However, he was naturally leagues ahead of his peers and raced through the curriculum at an accelerated pace, and he took on extra units to fill his time. In his final year he wrote to me, complaining of boredom and, knowing how dangerous this could be, I visited him and convinced him to see his higher education through to its conclusion. Somehow, I succeeded and he reigned in his restless energies. He continued his studies into the Masters programme in the hopes of further intellectual challenges, but when he was studying at that level two years before and he quickly grew tired and bored with the whole process. Through his contact with the students with a penchant for recreational drugs he found that various substances had numbing effects which he found relieving.
One day I received a letter from our father saying that Sherlock had been dropped from the university due to inattendance and for a very long time we had no idea what happened to him. He moved around the houses of various university acquaintances, fellow addicts and eventually in the circles of the drug dealers from whom he was purchasing his morphine and cocaine. He doesn’t speak about the year and a half he spent effectively homeless, but I believe this is largely because he cannot remember it rather than any particular horror befalling him,” Mycroft, noting John’s horrified expression.

“You lost him?!” he said, disbelieving.

“Hardly our finest hour as a family. Mother was mostly insensible on anti-psychotics and father was juggling the problems of one ‘renegade son’ and a multi-national bank. I was on a diplomatic attachment at the time and rarely in the country. I did not possess the resources back then that I have now.” John felt deeply uncomfortable; this was a past Sherlock had very definitely put behind him now, but despite that the shadows of that past still continued to walk behind him and his brother. He could now see the source of their rift; it wasn’t about a competition of intellects or for their parent’s affection (of which there appeared to be nil), it was about Sherlock needing Mycroft when he had no one else and his bitterness when his brother wasn’t there and likewise Mycroft was ever resentful Sherlock would be constantly demanding his attention and carried an eternal burden of guilt for refusing to be there in those dire moments.

“He told me he kicked his habit on his own steam,” John said, moving the conversation on, not sure he wanted to hear any gory details from Mycroft about what his lover did during those drug-addled months or what he did to pay for the drugs he was so addicted to.

“Yes, it was something of a miracle really,” Mycroft said, pushing away the cup with only lukewarm dregs of coffee grinds in the bottom now. “I had a call from Scotland Yard saying I was given as a contact by a drug addict they had in the cells. He had apparently strode into the middle of the incident room for a murder at the time in his pyjamas, completely intoxicated and they had cautioned him. When Mr Lestrade gave me his name I didn’t believe him at first, but the description fit my brother and I went to pick him up.”

“You know Greg told me about that, that’s when he first met him,” John said, realising how much more serious that story was than he first thought.

“Yes. When I took Sherlock home that night he was raving about how he wanted to go into crime and how it was by far the most stimulating distraction for him as the variables were always different and the reactions were never the same, unlike the elements,” he explained.

“I promised I would use my influence to get him a look at some of the police’s cases if he cleaned up. It was an easy bargain. He stopped using that very night. Of course, the withdrawal was not pretty,” Mycroft made a face as unbidden images of his brother writhing in agony, dry heaving and his screams of pain as his body thought it would never be able to cope without the drugs.

John’s pocket buzzed loudly. Mycroft looked displeased at the intrusion, knowing who it was.

“Sherlock,” John explained as he tapped out a reply.

“I know,” Mycroft said with the closest thing to a grumble the man was capable of. “His life story is hardly something I can tell in five minutes.” That was closer to irritable and the petty feud was blossoming again. Something about it made the doctor feel relived; he supposed it was an anchor of normality and nothing too bad could be wrong if they were still fighting like little children.
No. Let him get on with it. JW

“I’m sure Mr Lestrade has filled you in on most of what happened from then. He got involved in some cases, quickly refused to enter the police force on the grounds that he would have to start out as a PC when his mental faculties would put him at Inspector level at the very least. He did have a few relapses, he used cocaine to boost his powers for a time until he realised that he gained far more satisfaction from solving cases without the use of stimulants, however, this did not prevent him from indulging from using while he was bored.

“Prior to meeting you, he had been clean for six months. It seems your companionship has been very good for him. Aside from the one night on New Year’s Eve I don’t believe he has even considered going back to the drugs.” He levelled a stare at John which seemed to be searching his soul and the doctor suddenly felt as though Mycroft was trying to put pressure on him to maintain his brother’s sobriety.

“Oh no, no, no,” John said, physically leaning away from the elder Holmes. “You are not going to make me his personal sobriety coach. If my friendship really has been so good for him then I’m not going to change anything because not only would that just be wrong, he’ll see through it and it’d end up hurting him more. Look Mycroft, I lo….” John abruptly stopped himself before the word had time to fully leave his mouth. “I care for him, deeply,” he corrected himself, but Mycroft had heard enough, enough to wear a very smug smirk on his face. It was a real ‘punch me in the face’ expression John thought. “I care for him and I’m not going to let him just go back to how he was. I know he has his bad days and whenever he has a problem I’m going to be there for him, and I think that should be enough. He doesn’t need someone telling him what to do, he just needs someone to be there.” Mycroft’s smile only widened; this man truly understood his brother and if he was a praying man he would have thanked the deities for sending such a person to his brother’s aid because god knew Mycroft wasn’t up to the task.

“Then I believe my work here is done. Now if you don’t mind, I have business to attend to.” He stood up and straightened his back. The two men shared an understanding look and firmly shook hands.

“Take good care of him, John,” he said, opening the door. “Better than I have,” he added quietly, enough for John to pick up on the shame that had crept into his voice. With a typically dramatic flair, he left the café and the staff re-entered, starting the shop up again.

The noise that built up around him was comforting. There was a hell of a lot to take in after that conversation, so much information to process that he immediately threw out his plans for that afternoon and replaced it with thinking time. It was funny, like his partner, though he didn’t think Sherlock would be nearly as accommodating as John had been during those silent moods. The man who had made their coffee before brought him another one.

“You look as though you could do with this one, mate,” he said with a sympathetic look. It was broad sympathy, meant to encompass any shocking news that had made the army doctor pale and drawn, though he didn’t actually know what had been said. John managed a weak smile and took the paper cup out with him. He walked aimlessly for a while, ignoring the stiffness that was developing in his leg. He must have roamed London for a good hour before he had to find somewhere to sit down and rest his knee. He turned into a small park and found a bench away from everyone else that overlooked a pond and a solitary willow drowning the tips of its branches in the water.

At first his chest had felt tight, as though his ribcage was shrinking and pushing his lungs and heart from all sides. Then he had felt a cold shiver run through his body, in his bones, organs and skin all the way through to the tips of his nails which made him feel uncomfortably aware of his body. A
slight feeling of nausea had followed, beginning like a stone in the bottom of his gut and slowly rising like a balloon through his torso and eventually to the unpleasant taste that he could sense in the back of his mouth. These were all physical symptoms of the emotions that were running hellish riot under the surface of his conscious mind as it had to make sense of the things he had been told before his waking mind could process it. It was like a refining process really; the raw mined material went through a refinery in his subconscious, stripping away the unimportant elements before being shipped through to the conscious mind for distillation and use. The whole convoluted metaphor again made him think he was turning a little bit into his partner.

John had seen the scars of the track marks on Sherlock’s arms, he had not been willing to be ignorant to the fact. He had carefully avoided paying them special attention as Sherlock did to John’s own scars as he thought his lover would react rather badly to it and he supposed he still believed that. John had dealt with the emotions relating to his own traumas in possibly a more complete way than Sherlock; he believed that while Sherlock’s past was very much behind him, he did not wish to go anywhere near it, after all, he never spoke a word about it and changed the topic, sometimes angrily, whenever John had tried to bring it up before. He had always suspected some kind of behavioural disorder, though psychology was hardly his forte and never wanted to speculate, and while he was not surprised by the Asperger’s, he was mildly surprised by the Depression. It was hardly as though it was an uncommon illness, and Sherlock did exhibit a couple of classic signs, yet he had never wanted to believe what the detective did allow himself to feel was always skewed into a negative light by the filter of his condition.

What had shaken John was the suicide attempt. He knew rationally that it had been over fifteen years ago and Sherlock had since found a way to cope with the emotions inside him, and while he still didn’t seem to be able to make much sense of them, he did a lot better at keeping them out of trouble. There was a disturbing poetry about the way he had chosen to do it, to be drowned under the weight of his own mind, to be constantly suffocated by a brain which ran ever tightening circles around itself, devoid of purpose, never tested to its capacity and emotions which he had no idea how to do with. Add to that isolation and John thought he would never be able to fathom what Sherlock had been feeling at that time. He knew it was something Sherlock had obviously come to terms with, he had stared down that old ghost, but the notion of losing Sherlock to himself was more terrifying than John was prepared for. He kept chanting in the back of his mind that it was in the past and was not an issue in the present while his feelings rode a storm of fear, pain and sadness in him as he felt indescribably bad for the teenage Sherlock who had thought himself so disconnected and troubled that he sought to sever himself from the world. Sure the man could be reckless and thought little of taking his life into his own hands, but John knew it was not some kind of disguised death wish, he could see the calculations of risk go through the detective’s head as he planned something stupid/daring.

As he processed what Mycroft had told him he saw the line of fate, the almost inevitable chain of events that began with Mrs Holmes, her own condition which had skipped the first-born apparently, but had not spared her second child. Still, it seemed Sherlock was either coping much better or he had not inherited such a vicious strength of the illness. The genius the two brothers seemed to get from their father was not nurtured, except by each other and the younger began to rely on his sibling for it until he could not manage without. Mycroft would always be tortured by guilt over Sherlock’s breakdown in mental health and his subsequent fall into drug use, even though it was never really his fault; he could not have been expected to be Sherlock’s emotional and mental crutch forever, the break had to happen sometime. Still, this did not mean that he had to like it and the protective fraternal feelings inside him would never go away, no matter how much they inconvenienced him.

John was able to see this much. Judging by his watch, it had been nearly two and half hours since he had wandered out of the café in need of time to clear his head. It certainly wasn’t clear by this point, but he was feeling much less chaotic and well enough to brave the return to Baker Street. Heavily,
got up and, after taking a second to think about the best route home, chose his exit and headed to the main road.

A gleaming black car pulled up alongside the road next to him. He stopped, though did not get close to it, he was wary about strange cars pulling up alongside him since being bundled into that van the day he had a bomb strapped to his chest. The window wound down with a sleek whirr and Anthea poked her head out.

“To Baker Street?” she asked, as though she was really giving him a choice. John rolled his eyes, he should have known Mycroft was going to be watching him, he was probably curious about the doctor’s reaction to some of the most sensitive information he had imparted. Still, John thought it would be good to get a quick ride home rather than take the time to walk, hurt his leg even more and return to Sherlock a limping mess.

“Please,” he said and took a seat inside once the door had been opened for him.

They pulled up outside the flat and John swallowed a large lump in his throat. He was not looking forward to seeing Sherlock again for the first time after being told about his past. He knew his partner would not like an emotional reaction, though John could not bring himself to just pretend as though nothing happened; he wanted to be sensitive to Sherlock’s feelings about it, but could not deny his own. He didn’t want to bring any of that old mess into the present again either by asking something stupid like ‘you’re not going to do that again are you?’ or do anything to undermine Sherlock’s current control of his condition (‘how depressed are you still?’) as he knew that his lover would be ok. He had proved that much and John trusted him.

With no small amount of trepidation he stepped out of the car and rustled around for his keys. He heard the vehicle move off and as he twisted the key in the lock he knew that the silly fear roiling in his gut wasn’t fear that Sherlock was now going to do something stupid, it was fear that John was going to do the stupid something. The last thing he wanted was to put his foot right in it, and as had proven the case when Harry had come out to their parents; he had a wonderful knack for saying exactly the wrong thing at the worst possible time followed by a comment that blew the entire mixture up, even when he had tried to fix things. He hoped he had matured enough in the time since then and hauled himself up the stairs on a painfully protesting knee.

He put on his ‘army face’ as he twisted the handle on the door then quickly realised that wasn’t the face he wanted to greet his lover with at all and tried to wear something more neutral but every time he thought about it his facial muscles just seemed to go stiff and a little weird. He opened the door and looked around, first to Sherlock’s chair, then the sofa, then the ‘composing window’ only to find the places devoid of one consulting detective. He poked his head through the other door into the kitchen, but no such luck; the only thing alive in there was something green and nasty looking in a petri dish on the Experiments Table. He made his way up to their room to shed his coat, but there was no such luck here either. He checked his phone. It seemed in all his thinking time there had been a string of text messages arrive but he had not even realised.

Is he done yet? SH

He’s not telling embarrassing stories is he? SH

Are you coming home? SH

Bored. SH

Bored more. SH
Have found experiment to do. Will be in the lab when you get back. SH

Don’t open the lab door, experiment very photosensitive. SH

Well, that explained that. By ‘the lab’ he meant what used to be his bedroom through the kitchen and if not for the progressive string of texts, John would have thought Sherlock would not be above using it as a place to hide from possible incoming unwanted emotion from his lover.

Welcome home. SH

The phone told him and John had to snort a small smile.

Thanks. I’d offer to make you tea but you’re unreachable. JW

He looked at the umbrella stand in the doorway where his sticks were kept and he considered grabbing one just to get around the house with before he did something to his leg which would punish him for days, but he decided that his vanity and his pride were worth more to him so he limped down the stairs without it. He filled the kettle and started to make himself a cup of tea when it became clear Sherlock was going to have a conversation over text instead of coming out to meet him. John wondered if the experiment really did need the dark to whether the detective was making an excuse to stay away, but either way much of his fear had lifted.

He wasn’t too insufferable was he? SH

He could only mean Mycroft. ‘What a charitable way to talk about him’ John mused to himself, but again, he was glad for the banter between the two brothers, it was one of those strange staples of normality.

You should really be nicer about him, he was very tactful. JW

John heard the incredulous snort from the room next to him and he grinned into the steam that wafted into his face as he poured the water into the cup.

“Tact is a professional courtesy, not a personal one!” Sherlock shouted from his lab. It had certainly wound him up enough to have to vocalise the thought very loudly, but there was no peeve in his voice so John surmised he was ok.

“I’ll be watching crap telly when you’re done,” John announced through the door and took his tea with him to the front room, jumping at the chance to watch whatever the hell he wanted on the box without having to endure the protests of the detective while he tried to watch a programme.

Sherlock emerged some hours later wearing an intense expression and his guard somewhat to hand in case the ensuing conversation did not go his way. He was afraid of sticking his foot in it too. John could tell by the heavy look on his face that they were finally going to have that conversation he had been dreading upon returning home, though since Sherlock was bringing it to him rather than the other way around, he didn’t feel quite so bad.

“Mycroft told you everything I trust? About my school years, my time in hospital?” he said delicately. John muted the television and nodded.

“He did.”

“And you’re…ok with that?” John wasn’t sure what he was asking. He could have been asking if
John was ok in himself with the nature of Sherlock’s past, but since when did the detective exhibit any such insecurity about himself? Perhaps it was more to ask if they could move on past it, or would John keep pulling them back to this moment because he couldn’t get past it himself?

“It hasn’t changed my opinion of you, if that’s what you mean,” he replied. Sherlock gave him a confused frown. “All those things made you who are today, you haven’t changed since this morning when I saw you last, I just know a bit more about you. It doesn’t magically make you into a different person. You’re still Sherlock to me,” he replied with a little thought.

Sherlock found himself in one of those moments, again, where he had found himself speechless before John Watson. He had expected it to go so many other ways, he had made provision for upset, anger, confusion, betrayal but not for unconditional and non-dramatic acceptance and it smacked him in the face. He remembered once describing John as a force, an unstoppable wave of generosity and it triggered a feeling in his chest, an uncomfortable acute feeling of his thumping heart that made him want to close off if not for the gentle and patient face of his partner looking up at him.

In that instant Sherlock understood what exactly Love was. It was acceptance of everything about a person without any conditions, provisos, caveats, strings, ifs or buts. Romance and sexual desire were by-products, pleasant additions for those who had them, but not requisite for love. He could say in that moment that he knew he was honestly loved by John. He could also say he honestly loved him in return.

“Well, good,” he said shortly and after an awkward moment of standing in the kitchen doorway, and returned to his experiment in the lab feeling as though that was all that needed to be said on the matter.

John did not get the same sense of closure Sherlock seemed to get, but after a while he supposed his partner would talk about it when he was ready, if ever and John had been granted more time to ensure his own feelings were in line for that conversation. The mood in the flat shifted for a little better. He unmuted the telly just in time to see the new meerkat advert and he allowed himself to be distracted.
Fastforward a couple of years and Sherlock and John's relationship has become the foundation for their lives. With such security and emotional freedom afforded by John, Sherlock is able to take that one forbidden pleasure he has not before had much interest in.

It had now been about two years since Sherlock’s dramatic return from the dead and the resurrectee in question stood at the window, pen in hand from composing, his violin perched on the table next to him. London outside was under a pall of a gun-grey cloud that was sending sheets of rain upon the city, drenching anything outside. It was about four in the morning and his composition was almost finished; it had taken the longest part of the night to do and now the sun was struggling to light the world for what would be a poor excuse for ‘daytime’ soon enough, the music was nearing completion. He had been working on it for the past two weeks on and off, sometimes he would compose for hours solid as though nothing else in the world mattered but the strings of his violin and sometimes he would be bored with it and could not bear to even look at it.

The composition served two purposes, firstly it was to abate his boredom as cases had been thin on the ground recently, though he had seen many distractions from his usual destructive behaviour, and the second was that he was thinking through his relationship with John quite deeply. In some silly way he could not quite believe that his life had changed so dramatically upon meeting the army doctor, though he would never have admitted it at the time. John was many, many things to Sherlock: a flatmate to help him pay the rent so he could live in a decent part of town; an audience for his genius (he would never grow tired of John’s sincere praise and awe); an agent of sorts in his blogger; a personal guard for when situations got tough; a confidant and friend; cook and domestic aid (i.e. he did almost all of it); conscience and social guide; his attentive, sensitive and deliciously receptive lover; his anchor; his Atlas; his diversion and sometimes entertainment; his doctor; his John. John’s generosity of being never failed to impress Sherlock, much in the same way he supposed the doctor was impressed by the detective’s ‘massive intellect’ as he had once shouted through a letterbox in Chinatown.

Sherlock had thought that he had everything he would ever need alone, he required no emotional upkeep, domestically he just about managed to keep the laundry and the pots under control, he had The Work when it came along and there was always science and music for the rest of the time. He had genuinely believed that all of these things would satisfy his needs (which were purely logical at the time), but it wasn’t until John started to gently prise open his emotions that he saw how rich his life could be with them. Not to mention the possibilities of diversion from ever-looming boredom nearly tripled. He still hated fear and loneliness, but whenever these appeared to raise their heads and bring out the ugly side of Sherlock, John spotted them immediately and brought him back to normal, allaying his fears and ensuring that he did not feel alone. He always enjoyed feeling the sensations of happiness, of loving John (he had so little experience in giving love to another) and the warmth of being loved in return. He had, at first, feared these emotions would be too much for him, that they
would quickly become overwhelming or they would begin to take over the parts of his mind which he treasured as bastions of science and logic, but John had never let them grow out of control. His intuition for sensing Sherlock’s emotional status verged on the psychic; whenever the younger man threatened to be overcome with feeling, when his contentment was too great, or their intimate experiences too strong, he would step back, ground Sherlock and keep him from going under so he could enjoy the pleasant emotions without being drowned by them as he once was.

He had wondered and worried for some time as to what John got out of this relationship, what reasons he could possibly have for staying; Sherlock was well aware that he did not give out nearly as much as he received, his treatment of John hardly fitted into any conventional relationship he had observed before yet still the older man stayed. He thought that maybe it satisfied his need to care for someone, the doctor part of him always wanted to take care of other people and his emotional generosity certainly seemed to confirm it. Yet, there was always more than just this as John was not afraid to do any taking in their relationship; he would seek wordless support after a hard day at work, he would make demands of Sherlock (usually to do some shopping, clean up, do some damn laundry etc) and he was never afraid to ask questions or issue orders when they were on cases. He was also not afraid to ask for exactly what he wanted in bed; the only exception there was to this was whenever they took a major step in their intimate relations, such as their first real sexual experience together. For a whole half day a few weeks ago Sherlock had fretted that he did not provide enough to keep John, that eventually the other man would grow tired of waiting for something from Sherlock that the younger man was oblivious to or unable to give and he would seek love elsewhere. After a few hours of suffering through that resentful fear of inadequacy, he remembered that he trusted John on the most fundamental level and he had trusted John with that sincerity since their relationship was solidified that night at the swimming pool with the bomb vest. He had trusted him right through the torture, the fall, the three absent years and his return. He had trusted in John’s love and never once had he been let down. That, together with remembering that his lover had endured two weeks of torture for him and never once blamed him for it or used it against him, made Sherlock feel sheepish and embarrassed to himself that he had even questioned it in the first place.

All this had been whirring around his mind for the past couple of weeks and the single thing he got out of it at the end, on this dreary morning, was a feeling of contentment. Aside from less Work than he would have liked, he had everything he needed and it was such a good feeling. Speaking of John, the man appeared in the doorway, yawning the night’s sleep away and wrapped in a thick dressing gown that was so warm and comfortable it made him want to go straight back to bed. He peered over to the window and saw Sherlock by the music stand, pen gently twirling in his long fingers, casting his pensive gaze out into the running rain on the window.

“Morning,” he greeted, making his way over. “How’s it going?” he asked, nodding towards the sheet music.

“Nearly done.” There was a long pause. Sherlock noticed something odd. “You’re not down here to complain about it then?”

“No,” John said, looking out at the weather with a slight look of disgust on his face.

“Really? I have been composing through the night for the best part of two weeks and not once have you complained that I am disturbing your beauty sleep,” his tone was suspicious. John just chuckled. He dug into his pocket and produced a small plastic box which he opened. Inside were travel foam earplugs, the sort you might take with you on a long airplane journey.

“Got around it,” he said and put them back in his pocket. Sherlock simply smirked and set down the pen.
“That it for today?” John asked, indicating once more to the music.

“The well has run dry for the moment,” he replied and picked up a book from the shelf and leafed through it. There was amicable silence while they stared out the window at the rain and the weak light barely making it through the thick cloud.

Sherlock noticed John frown with a disturbing thought next to him, but the doctor didn’t say anything. The thinking process in the other man quickly became very distracting and he found he could no longer concentrate on his own thoughts.

“What is it?” he asked, annoyed.

“We’ve been together for over five an half years,” John said. Sherlock noticed how he included the time of Sherlock’s ‘death’ as though his heart had never once strayed during that time. Perhaps it hadn’t, Sherlock had never asked.

“Is that supposed to be some significant time frame?” he pondered, a little obnoxiously.

“No, it’s just that in all that time I don’t think I’ve ever said I love you,” he explained, looking Sherlock directly in the eyes. This floored the younger man for a second, it was certainly not what he had been expecting the doctor to come out with. John looked confused, as though he couldn’t understand why he had never said it before when it was the most natural thing to him in the world. Sherlock’s face naturally lifted into a gentle smile.

“Yes you have, you tell me every day,” he said. John frowned.

“No, I don’t,” he said, thinking back to even just the last week when those words had never left his mouth, or indeed, he didn’t think he had ever said it to his lover’s face.

“Yes you do. You say it every time you make me a cup of tea, every time you insist on massaging my shoulders, every time you hold me in bed,” Sherlock explained. Understanding dawned on John’s face with more clarity and light than the sun’s meagre effort outside.

“I suppose I do, don’t I?” he mused, largely to himself. He brushed his fingertips against Sherlock’s hand for a second in a gesture of closeness (he never over indulged in physical contact outside of the bedroom) and as he withdrew the touch, Sherlock took his hand and pulled the man close to him in an embrace.

“And I, John Watson, love you,” he announced in a low, quiet voice and immediately pressed his lips to his lover’s, indulging them in a languid, sensual kiss; partly to hide from John’s reaction and partly to convey his own little tell so that John might spot it again in future. Sherlock Holmes did not kiss just anybody, and every time his lips connected to John’s skin was a tiny gesture of his feeling. John, after recovering from his initial shock, pressed back lazily, happily moving against his partner to the sound of the rain outside.

The kiss began to get stronger and harder and it soon turned into a battle for dominance and control of the movement of their lips. Sherlock may have had the height advantage, but John could do things to his lover’s mouth with his tongue which would make him groan and submit. Sherlock smirked into the kiss however when he moved and could feel his partner’s morning wood pressed against his leg, made more insistent by the heated kiss.

“I think I need a shower,” Sherlock said into John’s ear after kissing his way up the doctor’s jawline. “Care to join me?” He smirked even more when John almost moaned at the suggestion and the shorter man tugged the detective’s shirt towards the bathroom, not wanting to spare any moments.
The shower always took a few minutes to clunk into life and heat up enough for a pleasant temperature and the two men used the opportunity to quickly swash a toothbrush over their teeth.

John ran his hands over the chest of his lover, his fingers making quick work of the buttons, exposing flesh and peeling the shirt from him. It didn’t take long for them to divest each other of the now redundant garments and consign them to the cold floor before nearly knocking off every bottle on the shelves to get into the bath tub that doubled as a shower. Sherlock immediately ran his head under the hot spray, drenching himself and giving John a truly splendid show of water cascading down the hard lines of his body and his hair, now back to its former length, stuck to the sides of his face and down his neck like some kind of obscene erotic sculpture.

Not for the first time John felt thoroughly normal in the shadow of his lover’s exquisite beauty, but Sherlock’s eyes were hungry for him and showed such desire that it made him feel man enough to take the initiative, ordering the taller man to get on his knees. He thought John was commanding him to fellate him in the shower, probably a fulfilment of some fantasy or another and, since he rather enjoyed performing oral sex upon his partner, he sank to his knees, enjoying the shower spray on his back and he looked up, ready and waiting to receive his partner’s cock. John, though, had a completely different idea, one that was considerably less sexual and Sherlock nearly growled in disappointment at the sight of John pouring shampoo into his hands.

“My arms would get tired if I did this to you standing up,” he explained and worked his fingers into Sherlock’s hair. The effect was almost immediate and Sherlock groaned, his eyes rolling back as he was taken aback by the incredible feeling of his lover’s fingers massaging his scalp, his strong fingers doing incredible things to his head. His neck seemed to lose all use and his head fell forward, completely at the mercy of John’s ministrations. The smell of the expensive shampoo remained a turn on for him, it was inadvertently programmed into them since John would always shower after coming home from work (something about washing the germs of the surgery away) and Sherlock, unless distracted by ‘High Science’ or The Work, never failed to become aroused at the sight of his partner still slightly wet, his hair tousled by a rough towelling and smelling like this shampoo.

The sensation returned with greater feeling when John washed the suds from the dark head of hair, the shower head sending streams of hot water directly onto his scalp, along with John’s fingers and Sherlock felt as though he was melting into a puddle of sumptuous and sensuous desire. A second bottle snapped open and with a slightly irritated growl, swatted it out of John’s hand and it clanged loudly as it hit the tub.

“What?” John asked dumbly.

“As lovely as that is I want to be done in the shower so I can pin you to the bed,” he explained, rising and setting his eyes on John, burning his desire into them. The doctor actually gasped a little when he saw the fierce look in his lover’s eyes and immediately he scrambled for the shower gel, lathering it up and scrubbing himself down as quickly as humanly possible.

“Thank you,” Sherlock said curtly as he proceeded to do the same. It turned out that a sexy shower was something for another day because all of a sudden he was burning for a whole lot more.

The heated couple nearly leapt out of the bathtub when they had finished and grabbed their towels, cursorily passing them over their skin and hair as they all but ran across the landing into their bedroom. The towels were dropped somewhere, forgotten instantly as they crushed their lips together and fell into a heap on the edge of their bed, breathing deeply and quickly with arousal, desperate to touch more of each other, to feel more of the other. John was used to their fumbles together, but there was something different about the way Sherlock was pressing down on him, trying to be all over him at once and he wondered if he was starting to overload on sensation. He pulled back, as far as the
bed would let him, and tried to get a good look at his lover, who had taken his kisses down John’s jaw and over his rough neck (he hadn’t shaved since the day before yesterday and there was a generous helping of stubble on his chin and neck). He tried to slow things down by pushing Sherlock over onto his back so John could take control of the situation, but he found himself being overpowered and rather unable to move.

“I know what you’re thinking John,” the taller man murmured low into the doctor’s ear, that deep voice rumbling through him like a wave. “But this is what I want. I want you, I want you…” he said, trailing off as his lips curled around his lover’s earlobe and he dragged his teeth along the skin, eliciting a completely unintentional moan from the smaller man. John was too busy being thoroughly aroused to understand exactly what Sherlock had just said and it took several moments for it click in his addled mind.

“Wait, what?” he gasped as the detective took a firm hold of his member and was stroking him to complete hardness.

“You’re not being deliberately obtuse are you?” Sherlock grumbled into his ear. “Do I really have to say it?” John sported one of his best confused faces and his partner ceased his ministrations. The taller man rolled his eyes and rummaged around at the side of the bed for something that John couldn’t quite see. He rolled back over with a bottle of lube in his hand and gave John a pointed look. The doctor burst into a furious blush that quickly spread down his neck and peppered the top of his chest. Sherlock couldn’t resist the chance to smirk.

“Judging by your blush anyone would think it was your first time here,” he said with a mischievous grin and kissed his lover.

“Are- are you sure?” was all John could splutter. This was possibly the last thing he had expected, but now the prospect of being able actually make love with his partner provoked both fear and wild excitement in him. He was afraid because he felt he had been caught unawares, without time to prepare and he suddenly felt as though he couldn’t remember what to do, what he could do to make Sherlock’s first time as pleasurable and as painless as possible.

“Would I have led you on just to say no at the critical moment?”

“Well, you do reserve that right,” John said, making it absolutely clear that Sherlock could back out at any time if he didn’t like it.

“Hurry up John before I end up doing you,” he growled into the doctor ear and with a surge of energy, John rolled Sherlock over and seized the bottle, slicking his fingers. He settled in between his lovers legs and leaned over him so they could kiss as John moved his fingers down the rigid line of Sherlock’s cock, over his balls, gently massaging his perineum before circling the entrance, covering it with lube and allowing his lover time to get used to the strange feeling. Gently, he pushed inside, seizing Sherlock in a hot, melting kiss, relaxing him as much as possible, slowly sucking at the tip of his sensitive tongue and he mentally congratulated himself on his apparent moment of clairvoyance last night to have trimmed his nails. Sherlock squirmed at the unusual sensation, trying to find a more comfortable feeling. John knew exactly what he needed and he stroked his lover’s prostate, making him jump in surprise and cry out as he was clearly unprepared for how good it would feel.

Any insecurity John might have had disappeared with that cry and with due care he worked in another finger, taking care to keep Sherlock pleasured just enough to distract him from the inevitable burning and stretching sensation that he would definitely feel tomorrow. The younger man maintained something of a death grip on John’s arm as the doctor worked to stretch him open enough for what was to come, his grip tightening more with pleasure than pain, and later John would come to suppose that pain was something Sherlock was used to, no matter where on the body, and could
dissociate quite easily from.

“Now John,” he said urgently, staring wild-eyed at John who thought he was going to burst from how turned on he was. Sherlock shoved the bottle into his free hand and carefully, John withdrew his fingers from his lover, noting the muffled keen of disappointment. He had to give himself a little smirk, pleased no end as to how much his lover wanted him, because by every god known to man, he desperately wanted Sherlock. Dousing his rigid cock in possibly more lube than could have been useful (though he had been reliably informed that there was no such thing as too much in this instance) he pulled himself up into position, stroking at Sherlock’s lips and cheek with his non-lubed up hand.

“Ready?” he asked, having far more manners than to simply plough on without that last check. Sherlock nodded, his hands having drifted down to John’s hips, and he lifted his knees up before pulling his lover’s cock into the right place. With control that he would later congratulate himself on, John pushed forward slowly and smoothly, freely gasping and moaning at how incredible it felt and he could hear similar cries from underneath him. By the time he had eventually buried himself as deep as he could, he was shaking, his body screaming at him to move, to fuck with pliant body beneath him into oblivion, but he knew he had to wait. After a few seconds, where he could feel a few drops of sweat trickle down his face, he opened his eyes and looked to Sherlock who was frozen in an expression of wonderment and sensation overload as he struggled to get enough air into his lungs for his straining body. Soon enough, his grip on John’s hips tightened and he pulled at them, telling John he really needed to start moving soon.

“Fuck, Sherlock,” the older man swore as he slid out a little way and began a slow process of shallow thrusts, allowing them both to grow accustomed to the incredible sensation; John of the tight slick heat that he seemed to be able to feel all over his body and Sherlock the feeling of utter fulfilment. John had to support himself on his right elbow, his injured shoulder not up to bearing his weight any more, leaving his hand to curl around Sherlock’s shoulder for slightly better purchase as his movements picked up speed and the depths of his thrusts as well. The only word the dark haired man could coherently form amidst the torrents of moans and cries was John’s name, and he chanted it over again as he moved his body, trying to find the perfect angle that would have John striking his prostate every time.

When he found it they both knew, Sherlock shouted out, urging John to fuck him faster with his hands on the doctor’s hips, his bony fingers digging in and sure to leave bruises later. The sensation had Sherlock contracting around John’s cock and he was starting to see tiny white spots behind his eyes, this was just far too much and there was no way he would be able to last much longer. He looked directly into Sherlock’s eyes and could tell that he was feeling a similar way. He shifted his free hand down and took his lover’s straining prick in his hands, trying to time his fist’s pumps with the thrust of his hips, knowing it ended up disjointed, but unable to much care as Sherlock released his grip on his hips, one hand pushing at the small of his back to keep going and the other to hold the side of his face, making sure that John was looking at him. Their ragged breathing and panting moans built to a desperate crescendo as John thrust hard and deep into Sherlock, slamming his prostate and with strangled cry, the younger man came, his entire body shaking and contracting with the force of the orgasm, never once breaking that all important eye contact with his lover. The intensity of Sherlock’s stare and the feel of Sherlock squeezing down on him was enough to send John over the edge as well, a shuddering groan stuttered out of him and his eyes rolled back, his mind barely able to comprehend the force of the climax that overcame him with the force of being blindsided by a lorry. He collapsed over Sherlock while he was still coming, his hands seeking the nearest part of his lover to cling to while he shook and moaned through the orgasm.

Awash with an incredible feeling, John weakly lifted his head to look at Sherlock who looked incredible; flushed, his hair tousled, his grey eyes a beautiful silver as bliss still washed through him.
But there was something incredible on his face that made John’s heart flip, a small smile that he probably wasn’t even aware he was wearing and that told the doctor everything he needed to know about the state of contentment his lover was in. Sherlock himself committed the sight of the sex-exhausted doctor, his face damp with sweat, his hair, still wet from earlier at all angles, his magnificent body lit by the warm desk lamp. He could say with utter certainty that he had never had another experience like that, and the post-coital bliss of chemicals flooding his brain was perhaps close to a high, but never had they been this warm or complete. He had his drug right here.

Never had he imagined that entrusting himself to another human being would bring him such happiness and a sense of completion. He had given everything he could to the doctor, who never asked for anything, but was oh so worthy of Sherlock. Suddenly caring was the greatest advantage known to man, and he held the man close to him, knowing this was an appropriate time and place for physical displays of his feelings. They had not overwhelmed him, as he had been so afraid of for so long, he had trusted John to swim alongside him in the ocean of emotion and never once had he let Sherlock’s head so much as dip beneath the surface. For repaying his trust in spades, Sherlock Holmes loved John Watson with every measure of feeling he was capable of.

The doctor in question was lying on his side, curled into Sherlock, his eyes closed and his breathing still taking its time to even out after the exertion of before. The detective tried hard not to roll his eyes but failed; John always seemed to be sleeping, and he certainly almost always fell asleep after whatever fumble they had in bed. He realised that there was a release of chemicals that induced sleepiness after orgasm, but Sherlock very rarely succumbed to the post-coital nap and it left him with the potential to get rather bored quite quickly. He wriggled out of the bed to get something to clean them up with and he felt John’s jelly-limbs simply flop where he left them and he knew his lover would be asleep by the time he got back. He ignored the ache in his back and legs and cleaned himself down before warming the cloth and taking it through to the bedroom where John seemed to be at least making a token effort to stay awake while Sherlock was up and about. He encountered no resistance as he gently wiped John’s skin down, naturally as gently as he could and before he climbed back into bed he put a book on the bedside table for after he had settled.

He set himself sat up against his pillows and he twitched a smile when John instinctively in his near-asleep state put his head into Sherlock’s lap and within a few seconds was deep in the land of nod. Sherlock knew he had a few hours before John would wake up and he picked up his book, determined to get through a large chunk of it before his lover disturbed his reading time by waking up, or at least until he got bored.
Chapter Summary

Sherlock got sentimental a little while back and made what he considered to be possibly a rash purchase. What his money bought has remained in his coat pocket for days. As time has progressed, his resolve to give it to John has waned until his lover storms off to spend the day of Sherlock’s ‘death’ in solitude. Confessions and much-needed explanations about, including Sherlock's motivations. Also featuring Donovan stupified.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sherlock looked at the clock for the umpteenth time in the last hour, but it was crawling by irritatingly slowly. John had not been his usual self since his woke up this morning; he had not spoken a word that morning, and although he had made tea like usual, there had been none of the usual prattle John liked to distract him with. The doctor had slipped out the door while Sherlock was washing the toes he had managed to acquire in a special solution he had spent the last three days mixing. He thought about the state of the fridge and supposed his flatmate had gone out to get food and groceries as he usually did. Now that he came to think about it, John had not slept well that previous night; his partner had been fitful, restless and murmuring incoherently for most of the night to the point where Sherlock could not sleep and got out of bed and went to his experiment before the fidgeting drove him mad.

The younger man was no stranger to his lover’s nightmares and the occasional night terror; John had not tried to kill him again since that particularly terrible night, but he had been woken once or twice by a soft punch to the chest which he never bothered to mention in the mornings. On those nights, while vastly irritating due to the nature of being so violently woken, he always carefully wrapped his arm around John, not so much as to make the sleeping doctor think he was being restrained, but enough to be a recognisable gesture of comfort that would calm the other man and return him to more restful sleep. The last four of six nights had seen John waking from the intensity of his nightmares, one from his time in Afghanistan, one which seemed to involve spiders according to his mutterings and two were from his torture under Moran. The latter type of nightmares always made Sherlock feel rather uncomfortable and he found that more often than not he could not bring himself to sleep after getting John back to rest and his bodily tension levels would leave him stiff in the mornings. He supposed that he might always feel the guilt associated with those memories, with what happened to John but it bothered him less as time wore on. John never planted a word of blame or resentment on him and he was happy to be comfortable with it if John was, there was no point in creating unnecessary emotional conflict, especially when John didn’t like to talk about it as it was. The only time they really communicated anything to do with that time was when Sherlock traced his scars during their intimate moments in the bedroom. Maybe this increased frequency had led to stress which made John go on one of his famous walks or maybe even a trip to his therapist, but it was unusual that he had not said anything to indicate his plans for the day (normally Sherlock couldn’t escape the day’s itinerary no matter how mundane).
His thoughts flickered to his coat upstairs and the small items buried in a hidden pocket in there. In an unusual attack of sentimentality Sherlock had thought that purchasing a token of their relationship would please John but his courage to confront those emotions with his partner had faded as soon as he had returned home and they had remained hidden for the best part of two weeks. He looked at the clock again, it was getting on and he wanted to know where John was. He cleaned his hands from the slurry of chemicals he had been working with and jabbed a text into his phone. He was surprised when half an hour drifted by without an answer. Sherlock decided that John was probably brooding somewhere or busy with something terribly mundane and either way he would get grumbled at when the doctor finally returned home, so he didn’t bother to pester him for now, especially as the toes had warmed to the perfect temperature by now. Distracted by his experiment, he returned to the kitchen and took the dish out the back into his lab.

John was not having as much luck with distractions. It was getting to that time of year again when, those several years ago, he was kidnapped, tortured and Sherlock threw himself off a rooftop, apparently to his death. The horrific chain of events replayed themselves in John’s mind every so often and more so around the anniversary of it happening. This year it had seemed more oppressive than previous years, even though Sherlock was alive (very much so) and he was content with everything that he had in his life; he couldn’t seem to stop the past seeping into the present though. His therapist had told him that it would take a long time for the memories of the torture to stop being intrusive, for the phantom pain to vanish entirely, for the nightmares to recede, and boy was she being proved correct. The last week had seen two vivid dreams and he had woken up in a considerable amount of sympathetic pain. Two nights ago he had been trapped in a dream recalling in every sickening detail of how Moran had dug into his ribcage and he woke up barely able to draw breath from the aching and fear in his chest.

What on earth had brought him up here he didn’t know, but his feet had taken him to the rooftop of St Bart’s without him much realising it until he recognised the landscape around him and the chill of the wind as it whipped across the top of the tall building. He looked out over the concrete ground before him, mentally mapping out the course of events those years ago. He remembered being drugged in the cell and waking up being hauled up the stairs to the rooftop, bruised, broken, bleeding and desperate to get away. He could feel Moran’s unyielding hands gripping him in the ribs, constantly hurting him as a way of controlling his movements; the less he struggled, the more the sniper lessened his grip on the salted wounds. His eyes flickered over to the vent where he was ditched by Moran and he noticed a dark stain under one of the flaps; his blood was still there after all these years, this roof top still remembered him. He recalled the sickened feeling he had felt in his stomach when Sherlock had turned up at the roof; his heart singing for joy at the sight of his lover again, but simultaneously sinking as he instinctively knew that the other man was there to trade his life for John’s.

He found a space on the floor sheltered from the wind and sat down, able to see the tops of surrounding tall buildings, but not looking down at the streets below. He thought about Sherlock’s ‘goodbye’, how he had come over, told him to trust the detective. John’s eyes slid closed as he remembered the feel of Sherlock caressing his face, a gesture so rare that he had only felt it a handful of times in their time since the reunion. He recalled, with a pained breath, how the younger man had kissed him so desperately through the tape that was gagging him, he remembered feeling the hard push of needy lips and how he had wished with all his might that he might be able to feel those lips properly, and reciprocate fully. He had felt so desperate at that moment, because he knew it was a goodbye kiss and Sherlock did not remove his gag because of the things John would say to dissuade him from his apparent suicide that followed minutes after. His gut flipped at the memory and he took in a slow deep breath.
His phone had buzzed in his pocket some time ago, but he had been so wrapped up in his thoughts he had ignored it. Last night he had relived the times Moran had forced his head into the bucket of water that was cold enough to make it feel as though he had been hit with a block of ice and then kept under until black spots formed behind his eyes and he was on the brink of passing out. He had replayed that last kiss and farewell in his dreams so many times last night that it had left him feeling drawn out and wired this morning. He still wasn’t sure what he was doing on this particular rooftop, but it seemed to be the place he needed to be while he worked through everything that had happened on that god awful day.

He must have been lost in his thoughts for a good hour or two when the door clunked into life and it swung open. Perhaps one of the doctors had come up for a secret smoke or something. John tucked his legs into himself so his limbs couldn’t be seen from the door, there was no need to get into a situation with a doctor because he was trying to work through his issues.

“I was not expecting you to have come here,” Sherlock admitted. John looked up, the man was looming tall over him, his eyes analysing the doctor.

“Nor did I,” he replied and shuffled up a little as Sherlock sat down next to him. The man’s face was as impassive as ever. “Don’t you feel strange, at all, being here again?” John asked, knowing it was foolish to expect a standard emotional reaction from his partner who felt very little in general, let alone things that carried sentiment.

“Of course my death was not real to me,” Sherlock said, pulling a face as if to say his partner was an idiot. Silence followed for a few moments. It seemed as though John’s feelings were bleeding through into him as well, because he was starting to make emotional connections now that might make more sense to his lover. “But,” he said hesitantly, “here I…did something for you. For Lestrade and Mrs Hudson too, but mostly for you.” He instantly thought this was bad idea; John needed clarity, not more emotional detritus to clog his mind. The heart was so messy and Sherlock sometimes rued having to get involved in its affairs. John’s fisted hands unclenched, a small wave of relaxation flowed through him at Sherlock’s admission; he supposed here he declared his love for John through his actions. There was no way he would have done it if he did not hold those feelings. The silence that followed was horribly awkward; John felt as though he was pressuring Sherlock to share and the detective didn’t like having to take the lid off of his feelings unless they were at home and usually during moments of intimacy.

“Sorry about this,” John said, waving a hand vaguely. “I needed to clear my head. I haven’t slept well…”

“I know,” Sherlock interrupted. John closed his mouth and nodded.

“I don’t suppose there’s anything I can keep from you,” he said.

“No, there really isn’t,” Sherlock said, always glad to take a little flattery.

“Except your cigarettes,” John laughed and he chuckled. Sherlock thought it would be expedient to take that one ‘on the chin’ as it were as it clearly made his partner feel better. “You know, I thought
about following you off that ledge or, when I couldn’t get back up here, I used to spend hours looking at my pistol,” John admitted. He kept his eyes fixed on the concrete below him, not able to look in Sherlock’s eyes while he got this off his chest. He didn’t need to see the detective to gauge his reaction; he felt the lean body go stiff and the tension rose again.

“How did you think that would be a good idea? As far as you knew I had given my life so that you might live, I thought you would have said that was a bit not good,” he chided.

“I know it was stupid. But those pesky feelings you hate so much make the rest of us do stupid things,” he said, throwing a bit of subtle self-deprecation in there.

“And I see it every day,” he replied, determined not to fuel John’s conflict and residual self-loathing from the depths of his depression. Sherlock hated talking about this, and he had long ago come to the conclusion that it was because he felt guilty for having caused John such pain in the first place, even if it was to save him.

“I thought of all the things I wished I had said to you before you…died,” John said. Sherlock managed to resist the urge to roll his eyes and walk away, he did not like John ambushing him with all this emotion; he could have done with some kind of warning or notice period so he could come to the conversation better equipped to handle the seemingly random waves of feelings that his partner seemed determined to subject him to. He had already told John he was emotionally unaware, how did he expect him to cope when he was barely able to pick up on all the cues normal people apparently recognised?

“I guess the thing I really wanted to tell you was that I loved you. That was the thing I regretted, not telling you. I didn’t because I didn’t want to ambush you with all the emotional stuff,” John said. Sherlock physically bit his tongue to stop a scathing remark about how John was essentially doing that right now. “But at least you knew something when you went away. You already knew that I was willing to do anything for you, so I suppose it’s close enough.” Sherlock took a deep breath, gathering himself and his nerve.

“John, listen to me very carefully because I am not going to repeat myself,” he said. He pointed over to the ledge where he had fallen to his ‘death’. “I jumped because I love you. Then and now. If I had to I would do it all over again. Don’t make me get mushy John, you know how bad I am at it,” he commanded sternly and his partner managed a weak smile. “Look,” he said and rummaged around in the lining of his coat to the hidden pocket and pulled something out.

“What’s this?” John asked, peering over, trying to see what he was producing from his coat.

“What happens when I get sentimental and start researching relationships,” he said with a certain degree of irritation at his own conduct.

“You? Sentimental?” John chuckled, genuinely amused at the thought.

“Don’t get used to it,” he bit back and passed the little velvet bag over, purposely staring straight ahead and avoiding eye contact with his partner. John frowned a little in confusion and opened the string and poured the surprisingly heavy contents into his hands. Two gold bands. John nearly choked in shock.

“Wha-?!” John spluttered.

“Apparently a show of commitment it important in a relationship, but just so you know I don’t want any of the foolishness that normally surrounds this kind of thing,” he said firmly. “I read that the requisite for this kind of commitment is a well-developed emotional bond. Considering I killed
myself for you I would say I passed that test,” he said and risked a glance sideways to his partner. John was sat still open mouthed, gaping and unbelieving, the glistening gold shining in the sunlight and sat still on his raised hand.

“Was I wrong?” he challenged at John’s stupefied face.

“No…” he croaked. Sherlock frowned, not entirely understanding John’s reaction. He looked surprised and shocked (so maybe that was understandable, they had never even spoken of this before) but it was to the point of horror that made the detective wonder if he had misjudged the doctor. He certainly hadn’t misjudged his feelings, he knew John had the requisite amount of love for a life-long commitment, so what was so wrong?

“Then are you going to say something or remain staring?” he said a little defensively.

“If I knew what to say I would be saying it,” John said, but there was no antagonism in his voice. “You do know this kind of thing is traditionally meant to mean forever, right?” he said, needing to clarify that little point before he said anything else.

“Of course,” Sherlock snapped back, but his comment too lacked any real bite. John’s face relaxed and a small smile pulled his mouth and eyes into pleasing shapes of happiness.

Instead of saying anything, he pulled Sherlock’s left hand over to him and slid the tasteful traditional ring onto the appropriate finger, giving it a good push at the knuckle; it was deliberately a little too small to make sure it would not come off with any degree of ease. John looked up to his partner’s face and was hugely endeared by the faint pink dusting on those pale cheeks, telling the doctor that this meant more to Sherlock than he was letting on. The younger man couldn’t say anything, he barely understood what it was he was feeling, but John could tell nonetheless. Sherlock took John’s hand in return with surprising tenderness and with little ceremony fitted the other ring onto the finger and quickly looked away, the whole scene threatening to become dangerously sentimental.

So technically it wasn’t official, it wasn’t recognised by the law or anything, but then the whole idea behind getting the rings had never been about conforming to the strictures of marriage, but about demonstrating to John that he was emotionally invested to the level that he wanted him around for the longest time. John had long ago given up the idea of ever looking down on his hand to see the glint of a ring as he knew Sherlock would be repulsed by the idea of a wedding, but this commitment was just perfect. It was the only bit that mattered that end of the day.

“Feel better?” Sherlock asked after a while, after he was sure the heat in his face had disappeared.

“Things are definitely looking up,” John replied cheekily.

“Do you want to stay up here?”

“Not really,” he replied and got to his feet, the ring feeling heavy on his finger; it would take some getting used to.

“Home?”

“Bed.” Sherlock raised an eyebrow.

“Tired already? It’s only half eleven in the morning,” he said with utter innocence.

“You remember what I said about you being ignorant?” John teased as he made for the door.

“Ohh, you mean sex?” Sherlock said, jogging to catch up as the doctor had got a head start on him.
“Yes, Sherlock, I mean sex,” John said with a teasing air of weariness.

“Excellent. That sounds acceptable,” he said with a broad smirk on his face and raced down the steps as fast as he could.

To any other observer they would see John in a hurry to get home with a vastly irritated look on his face and Sherlock examining the doctor like a specimen in his petri dish. In fact, Molly did see this as they went through a corridor where she was walking on her way back from the stores room and barely had time to utter a greeting to her friends before they were practically running past her and they had turned a corner with an apologetic hello and goodbye from John who did not even stop to speak to her. She surmised that Sherlock must have said something wrong because of the way John was walking ahead of the taller man with a determined look and the detective trailing behind with intense eyes, but an ultimately submissive stance, as though trying to figure out how best to please John and earn his forgiveness for whatever he had said. Molly sighed happily and went back to her office knowing that the two of them would make up soon and she really needed to get around to asking John round to her and Greg’s house for a drink and catch up.

John spared a second to feel bad for being so rude to Molly but he knew that if he had stopped to make conversation that he would not have been able to get away very quickly and considering the two of them were rearing to go he was afraid Sherlock would start disrobing him in the middle of the hospital and try to take him on a morgue slab or something. He checked his wallet for cash while Sherlock waved down a taxi and within a minute they were bundled into the back of a black cab heading for Baker Street. The taller man was impatient beyond words: he was giving the cabbie very specific directions to their flat making sure that they got there in as little time as possible and he didn’t try to elongate the fare at all. John would have intervened on any normal day, but right now he was on Sherlock’s side and was barely able to sit still for the thought getting into their bedroom and doing things to that delicious body which was making his brain haze over in desire. He laughed instead at the look of outrage and annoyance on the driver’s face and made up for it by giving him at least twice the required fare and they practically leapt out of the taxi. Sherlock threw himself against the door, jamming his key in and fighting with the lock for a couple of seconds before all but shoulder barging the door open and they rushed in as though the devil was on their heels.

“John…” Sherlock muttered as he seized his lover’s mouth with his own, the kiss crushing and hungry. After the first few bouts of experimentation and adjustment, Sherlock had taken quite well to sexual contact and John found that on the times his partner did get horny the man was a machine until he was satisfied. But on this occasion, John was allowing his appetite to guide the situation as usually he allowed Sherlock to take control of the pace and types of things they did in the bedroom as he was a generous lover by nature and was more than happy to get off on getting his lover off. Now, though, John wanted it to be the other way round for once and pulled himself off of Sherlock’s lips and grabbed his shirt, pulling him up the stairs all the way up to the bedroom, not bothering to make a token visit to the living room. He manoeuvred them into the room and pushed Sherlock back hard enough for the younger man to fall back onto the bed. He took a second to appreciate the sight below him before he turned to lock the door, shed his coat and toe off his shoes, noting his lover do the same. Sherlock grabbed John by the belt buckle and pulled him close to stand in between his legs while his hands pushed the fabric of the jumper and shirt up, exposing skin which he lovingly pawed and kissed.

John’s stomach flipped when, as he took off his upperwear, he caught a glimpse of the shining gold around his finger and he felt heady and alive, digging his hands into the luxuriant black hair by his abdomen. Sherlock was flushed slightly, his movements were restless and his eyes were wide and wild, all sure signs of significant arousal in the younger man and John felt incredibly privileged to have been the only person to have seen him like this, to be the only one the detective had deemed worthy and whom he trusted enough to let himself go like this. Soft pink lips were greedily kissing,
licking and nipping his skin and scars that dotted his skin in an erotic appreciation of everything his lover had been angisting about earlier. John wondered for a second or two if sex really was the best thing for him right now considering his substantial emotional distress earlier but Sherlock’s unthreading of his belt shoved that thought out of his mind. This was an affirmation that everything was alright and good between them, that the past wasn’t going to creep insidiously into their relationship.

John groaned as Sherlock made quick work of his jeans and boxers, leaving him to step out of them and kick them into the corner. Warm arms encircled John’s waist and brought him close into a suspiciously sentimental hug which he happily reciprocated by bending over to run his hands over Sherlock’s back and he pressed his nose into the top of his lover’s head, delighting in the feel and smell of his partner. Soon that sweet mouth was tumbling hot breaths along his cock and John gasped at the sensual feeling that was making him hard. The wet muscle flicked over his head and he couldn’t stop the hiss pushing through his teeth as Sherlock took him slowly into his mouth, swirling his tongue and sucking enough to hollow his beautiful cheeks out a little and make John want to melt with the erotic sight of the blow job. The doctor loved oral sex, not only did it feel incredible and wonderfully indulgent to the point of debauched, but there was something about Sherlock putting that mouth to a completely different use than normal. He would have happily allowed his partner to go on forever using that delightful mouth on his cock, but there was something more important than keeping Sherlock shut up this evening; it was one of those few times when John did not want his lover to keep quiet.

He slowly pulled Sherlock’s head away from his cock and looked into the silver eyes and down to the plumped up pink lips, feeling the sight shoot up his body in a shiver of arousal. With a gentle push, he laid Sherlock down on his back, climbing over the man and shifting them up the bed until they were comfortable. His hands travelled lovingly down the white skin, delighting in the feel of it beneath his hands and hooked his fingers into the waistbands of his lover’s trousers and underwear, dragging them down with a hot trail of kisses that burned paths down his thighs and calves. The sight of his fully naked lover never failed to impress and humble him and he laid himself possessively over Sherlock’s body, clutching him close, determined to never let go. Long arms returned the gesture and John took the chance to smirk into the crook of an arm where he knew where the Eye of Sauron (AKA his lover’s observational powers) would not be able to see him as he enjoyed the warm expression of feelings and sentiment from Sherlock who was only ever this open when they were in bed together.

John rued the loss of the warmth of Sherlock’s body when he sat up and reached for the bottle in the drawer in the nightstand and he splashed a large amount on his fingers. He didn’t want to prolong the foreplay too much, this wasn’t about getting laid as it was about making love (another phrase he would not dare to use out loud) and as such he wanted to be in his lover’s most intimate embrace as soon as was comfortable for them. His practised touch opened Sherlock fairly quickly and it took only a few minutes and two fingers to have the taller man beneath him become a squirming mess of trembling desire and grunting impatience.

“John, now,” he growled and swatted the hand away which had curled into him. He took the bottle and slathered his lover’s hard cock with the cool substance before pulling John’s hips close to his, trying to communicate the hint without having to concentrate on forming the words accurately. With a little endearing fumbling, John aligned himself accurately and began the push into his lover; the deep velvet heat was overpowering and a moan escaped the doctor’s mouth before he had finished burying himself in his partner.

“Oh God, Sherlock,” John gasped out and he fell over his lover, electricity sparkling between them as they held each other close, skin upon skin as close as they could become. John wound one arm under Sherlock’s and snaked it up to hold the back of his lover’s head, guiding him to his lips as they
kissed deeply, trying to speak all the words of love known to man in a kiss and in their actions. Sherlock wrapped all his limbs around John, his legs locking his partner’s hips in place as the gentle drag in and out began; his arms clung to the strong back and square shoulders of the doctor.

John didn’t rush into anything, just being inside was enough to dismiss the urgency they had felt before and he began a languid pace that stimulated them both slowly and the grinding of their bodies caused jolts of pleasure through Sherlock’s trapped cock. There were times when the doctor and the detective simply retreated to their bedroom to fuck, sometimes it was as part of Sherlock’s experimentation and sometimes it was because one of them came home simply in the mood. But this time, through the haze of their arousal, they were making love, though neither would ever say it aloud, there was no need. To label it with words would only be necessary if they were explaining it to someone else and since their sex life was no one else’s business there was no need. John wasn’t going to gush with over-emotionalism at his lover; he simply revelled in the moments when Sherlock let down his intellectual guard and allowed himself to fall into John’s care and indulged in those emotions where he was safe to do so.

Sherlock began to move more and more under John, he was becoming restless as his pleasure was building slowly, dragging out as John responded by quickening his pace fractionally but not enough to bring a short sharp release. The doctor adored and was awed by the way his lover moved, like liquid, his muscles undulated under his white, taut skin and he moved a little harder. Sherlock’s breathing was becoming deeper and more laboured, his head was started to shake from side to side and he muttered his lover’s name repeatedly under his breath, surrendering slowly to the climax that was building inside of him. The murmurs turned to whimpers and short gasps to each of John’s deep, hard thrusts which were finally picking up with speed as he felt himself get closer as well. He backed up a little to try and reach down to touch Sherlock’s straining cock but was yanked down by insistent arms back into their embrace and he knew he was not allowed to change position again, his partner clearly needed the closeness they had established.

“John, I love you,” he said breathlessly, his voice raw with desire and unguarded emotion which John had never heard before. Sherlock’s emotional unwinding in bed was often restricted to his body language, to his facial expressions, he very rarely talked during sex except to issue orders. From that the doctor knew Sherlock was going through his emotional peak, he was riding that high which came from all the right hormones in the brain when combined with the complimentary feelings of the heart.

“I love you too,” John gasped out in reply and moved his hand to lace his fingers with Sherlock’s while continuing to hold him close, relishing the slide of their skin over each other. Sherlock groaned deeply, John able to the feel the rumble in his chest. He pistoned a little faster, the angle now ideal to maximise Sherlock’s pleasure, and their moans tumbled over each other as the end was so very close.

Sherlock’s grip on John’s hand tightened and John used his free hand to stroke his lover’s face, keeping their eyes locked; he was to be Sherlock’s anchor while the younger man surrendered to his feelings for those precious moments of climax. His own pleasure was ready to burst and it was getting increasingly difficult to postpone the inevitable until Sherlock very visibly came; his silver eyes flashing and making that connection to John which pulled the doctor over the edge as well, letting him express his orgasm with desperate gasps and fractured breathing, while the detective had no compunction in verbalising his pleasure and he cried out to John as his entire body shook and ran with too many sensations to ever register fully in a single moment.

They lay like that for a long while, panting and relishing their complete unity and while John was still in the post-coital haze, Sherlock’s mind was busy at work. He was cataloguing the feelings from just now and wondering how much they were supposed to intensify; he remembered feeling alarmed at the first suggestion of attraction to John, that had been intimidating enough at the time those
several years ago. The amount of emotion he was feeling and could now handle surprised him and
the whole thing had not resulted in mental disaster as he had once hypothesised it would. In fact, he
had no trouble admitting to himself (but never out loud) that he did not want to think of life without
the connection to his partner, he had found contentment that most of the normal people could only
dream of and he allowed himself a tiny smile at the thought that he had John. So many plebeians had
told him that he would be sad and alone for the rest of his life and no one would ever love him
because he didn’t behave like the rest of them; they had spat that he wasn’t entitled to happiness and
he had allowed himself to believe them and redefined the conditions of happiness on his own terms.
But it turned out that the answer to the whole conundrum was simply John and he was content with
that.

His thoughts were interrupted by a gentle shower of tired kisses on his face, neck and shoulder from
his sleepy lover who was pulling himself up and gently withdrew from Sherlock’s body. He was
struggling to stay awake and stand up, but he looked determined to be the one to go to the bathroom
to get the flannel to wipe them down with this time as he clearly felt bad that it was always Sherlock
who went.

When he was finished, John collapsed into his lover’s willing embrace.

“It’s barely lunchtime and you’re going back to sleep,” Sherlock chided with a satisfied smirk
playing on his lips.

“Just a nap,” John said sleepily and was away.

John’s nap was rudely interrupted by the obnoxious call of a too-loud ringtone. Sherlock scrambled
to pick it up and answered the call a little too eagerly.

“Sherlock? Are you free? We’ve got a body in a shipping container…” Lestrade began, but the
detective had already sprung out of bed.

“Text me the location, we’ll be there in thirty minutes,” he announced.

“‘We’?” John protested. “You can go, I’m not moving.” Sherlock gaped for a moment.

“Don’t be ridiculous John, of course you’re coming with me,” he snapped, as though the doctor had
said something childish and threw clothes over the sleepy form on the bed.

“Put those away, I’ve got things to do this afternoon.”

“‘Things’? You’ll waste the day in bed,” he replied irritably and started to pull out his own clothes.

“It’s not a waste-“

“Sherlock!” Lestrade’s voice came from the phone. “Do you want to put the phone down before you
have a domestic?”

“Don’t be ridiculous, this is not a domestic as you so quaintly put it. It’s John’s inability to show
some stamina after intercourse-“

“Sherlock!” both Lestrade and John cried out. Too much information. John glared red hot daggers at
him, his sleepiness forgotten in his anger.

“And now you’re awake,” Sherlock said triumphantly.
“I’m not going now you’ve said that!” John snapped.

“Then it’ll be a very one-sided account.” Sherlock threatened.

“For the love of God John, come with him. He’ll be unbearable otherwise and I’ve got some new forensics guys I’m trying to break in,” the voice from the phone pleaded. John growled as he threw himself out of the warm bed.

“You-” John said threateningly, pointing a finger at Sherlock, but his words failed him and instead he grabbed the shorts that had been throw at him. His lover simply smirked and pressed the end call button on his phone and stepped into his trousers.

“Seriously, though can you put these back, my clothes from this morning will do,” John said, reaching for the khaki shirt he had worn that morning. Sherlock wheeled by, grabbing the morning’s clothes and dumping them in the laundry bin. “But-!”

“I’m pretending that certain bits of this morning never happened,” he announced, threading his belt through. “Such as me finding you on St Bart’s roof top this morning telling me you wanted to kill yourself because of me.” His voice lowered towards the end of the sentence.

“So you’re trying to forget this as well?” John said, holding up his left hand, clearly indicating to the gold ring.

“As far as I’m concerned I gave you that in bed this morning just before the magnificent sex that has made you so sleepy and grumpy. You know, I thought the hormones released during intercourse were supposed to make you happy, but you’re finding any excuse to complain now,” he said and John couldn’t tell if he was winding him up or being serious. To be safe from further baiting, he rolled his eyes and tightened his belt.

The shipping container smelt horrid; if it wasn’t for the fact that the body was fresh (to a medical certainty), he would have said that it had been the grave for dead bodies for some time.

“Get out all of you!” Sherlock barked, his curt and grumpy persona back in force as he chased out the new forensics team, leaving Lestrade to facepalm quietly in the corner by his car.

“Sorry about earlier,” John said, red faced as he had been expelled from the crime scene as well. Lestrade looked up and grinned. John’s face fell. It was the kind of ‘I’ll have this on you for a long time’ shit-eating kind of grin and he wondered what exactly his friend intended to use the information for.

“You’re off the hook for now, it’s been a good day,” he informed John.

“A dead body turns up and it’s a good day? God you’re starting to sound like him,” John jibed. But Greg couldn’t even bring himself to give John a withering look, he was too happy.

“Jeanette lost her appeal, I get to see the kids at least two weekends a month,” he revealed.

“Nothing from the watchman, boss,” Donovan announced as she sidled over, her heels clicking loudly.

“Long-shot anyway. Did you get the manifests?” She held up a bundle of papers from under her arm.
“Hello, Sergeant Donovan, it’s nice to see you. How have you been?” John said his voice laced with sarcasm, clearly calling her on her rudeness; she had stopped speaking to John since she realised he wasn’t going anywhere from Sherlock’s side.

“Fine thanks,” she said through gritted teeth. Lestrade didn’t bother to hide his snicker.

“JOHN!” Sherlock barked from inside the container, his voice echoing and the bark an undeniable command for his immediate presence. He jogged over to the open door and Sherlock’s arm appeared from inside holding a small plastic evidence bag which contained a shiny sharp instrument. John recognised it immediately as part of a dental drill.

“This looks nasty,” he said and took it over to the DI. “Dental drill, blood still in the mechanism. Probably used to torture the victim,” John reported and held the bag up to the light so he could get a better look at it. A flash of gold caught Sally’s eye and she practically squealed.

“You-!” she cried and looked frantically over to the shipping container. Greg followed her gaze and saw the ring which had caused her such alarm. He smirked, trying to cover his laughter at Sally’s reaction.

“Congratulations,” he said and John beamed.

“Nothing legal, but it’s the idea that counts,” he explained and Greg nodded in understanding.

“I’d ask if you were happy but it’s pretty obvious you are,” he said. John simply smiled in response and turned to watch the spectacle Sally was making of herself, interrogating Sherlock about their nuptials from one step outside the container.

“What’s the matter Donovan?” Sherlock said. “Angry I asked John to marry me before Anderson asked you?” She spluttered and told him to shut up before storming off to the police van to throw the shipping manifests into a container of evidence.

“Did she really think she could get the last word?” John snickered as she stomped off.

“JOHN!” Sherlock called again and this time he was halfway down the dock, throwing soiled latex gloves into a bag of medical waste as he passed.

“Looks like he’s got something. I’ll text you later,” John said to Greg, passed him the evidence bag and they nodded their farewells to each other as John turned and jogged to catch up to the detective who was moving with long, purposeful strides; he clearly had a lead, if not several.

“Is the game on then?” John asked, wanting to know what had been gleaned from the body.

“The game is on!” he cried and launched into a list of everything he had seen and where it was going to lead them. Greg watched them go, John’s adoring and awed face as he looked up at Sherlock while he was animately explaining of his deductions, happily showing off to his captive audience. They did not hold hands or touch or kiss in public like other couples, but he could see in the way they stood closely to each other, walked in time (Sherlock had even slowed down marginally to accommodate his partner’s shorter gait) and made comfortable eye contact that showed they were inseparably close. Having seen Sherlock before John came into his life and then the doctor’s misery when the detective left it for those three years he was glad to whatever higher power that they had found each other; they balanced each other out and with any luck it would be permanent.
Chapter End Notes

This is technically the end! There will be very infrequent updates with little bonus chapters on, but otherwise this baby is finished. This was a real odyssey when I first started it and I can only hope it has been good for you. Please do let me know what you though, I would be thrilled to hear from you.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!