To Throw Away The Map

by afteriwake

Summary

Six months after the events on the plane, Sherlock is trying to make a fresh start. He has to
renew friendships, rebuild his career and try his best to keep his life together when the first case he's allowed to work again ties directly into the Moriarty conspiracy. But with those he holds close near and willing to support him, with one person in particular being extremely supportive, perhaps he will be able to make it after all.

Notes

So this is a post-"The Abominable Bride" Sherlolly fic that will be at least 60K long, focusing on a case and the two of them rebuilding their relationship with each other that was requested by Ceeya (joycehuisia). I just now started it even though I haven't gotten to watch the episode yet (I'll be doing so this week when my mother comes back home, as she asked me to wait, but I figured I could write this part based on what I've been spoiled on since it aired). I'm super excited for this, to be quite honest, and hopefully I will get to update it a bit more frequently than I have some of the other ones, provided the surgery I should have in the next month works out well. The title comes from a quote from Finding It by Cora Carmack ("The best parts of life are the things we can't plan. And it's a lot harder to find happiness if you're only searching in one place. Sometimes, you just have to throw away the map. Admit that you don't know where you're going and stop pressuring yourself to figure it out. Besides...a map is a life someone else already lived. It's more fun to make your own."). But anyway, please enjoy!
Hampshire, England
six months later

Sherlock looked around the place he had called home for the last several months. It wasn’t Baker Street, that was for sure. It wasn’t even close to being Baker Street. To be quite honest, he was surprised he was being allowed to go back, after...well, everything. He had thought that all of the people who had been working with him through the process of working on his sobriety would have put the kibosh on him going back there, but he was thankful that they were allowing it. Being able to go home had been a goal he had been working towards. He had missed so much over the last few months that to have this taken away as well...he would have thought it would have been pointless.

He finished gathering up his things and then gave the room one last look. The white walls and light cabinetry had grated on him when he had first moved in, and it had seemed more a cage than anything else. He had wanted to escape, spending each day devising ways out of the house, off the grounds, out of Hampshire and back to London...out of the bloody country, to be quite honest. The more news he got from friends of the events he was missing, the more he felt he was in a prison and the less he wanted to cooperate and instead simply escape.

But soon the people there wore him down, broke down his walls. He didn’t let them all down, of course, but he let them down enough for their help to make a difference. He knew that he would lose everything if he continued down the self destructive road he was on. Moriarty would win if he sank back to old habits, if he let the allure of heroin take over. He had lied to his friend in the lab the day John had fished him out of the drug den; that was not the only time he had done them since his return. No, he had dabbled often since coming home and finding life had moved on without him. It had only been the incident on the plane where he had not cared about how much he had taken. But it was when he had been saved that he knew it could be his downfall if he didn’t get a grip. When his brother carted him off to rehab, he didn’t fight as much as he could have.

And now...now he was going home.

He went to the car waiting for him, saw that it was one of Mycroft’s. He supposed he was going to have increased surveillance to deal with for a time, if not the rest of his natural born life. The driver had gotten most of his bags already and he handed him the last one to put in the boot before he got into the back of the car. It was a nice enough car, he supposed, and he would be comfortable for the hour and a half long trip from Hampshire to London. He had a lot to think about on the trip there.

He knew that he was not going to be allowed to consult for Scotland Yard. That was gone, at least for the time being. What he had done to Magnussen was common knowledge, he knew that, and it was taking quite a bit of negotiations to even get Scotland Yard to consider the use of his services, negotiations that were slow going, if they were going at all. He wasn’t sure if he had any clout left for private clients at all, either. His reputation could well be in tatters; his brother had kept him sequestered in his home for most of the time until he boarded that plane and then shuttled him off to the facility almost immediately after he had deboarded, and it had been decided it was in his best interest to keep him away from news and the internet.

Nearly seven months without much contact with the outside world would almost have been pure torture, if he hadn’t gotten used to it. Now he was used to it. It would be strange to be immersed in it again.

Thinking on that, he pulled his mobile out of his pocket and palmed it. He hadn’t turned it on upon
getting it back. He was hesitant to allow himself contact with the world at large again, to be quite honest. He wasn’t sure he wanted to know what the world thought of him, or what had been speculated about his disappearance. But there was more than that. He wasn’t quite sure he was ready to face his friends. His brother and parents had been the only people he had had consistent contact with, while he’d had sporadic contact with John and Mary, and he wasn’t sure he could face them while he was still trying to sort out what he was going to do with himself while he waited to find out what he was allowed to do.

But most of all, he wasn’t sure he could face Molly.

He cringed slightly as he thought back to their reunion once he had gotten off the plane. Oh, she had been absolutely *livid* with him. If he had thought the slaps in the face at the lab had been bad enough when he had been drug there by John and Mary the day he ended up being shot, that day was nothing compared to what their reunion was that afternoon after he got off the plane. She had spoken in clipped, short sentences, and it had been obvious someone had told her beforehand and she had sobbed over him because her eyes were puffy and red and her voice was raspy when she did speak.

But it was the look in her eye that she was done, absolutely finished with him, that had been the knife to the gut. That look had been the real reason he had decided to do the rehabilitation treatment that Mycroft told him to do. He would have given anything to take that look out of her eyes because Molly had always been the only person to be unconditionally kind to him, to never stop caring about him, and for her to look like she had given up all hope for him...he had never felt so low in his life.

And now, all these months later, he wasn’t sure he could face her again.

He turned his head and looked out the window as they pulled away from the rehabilitation center, deciding to shelve the thoughts for now. There would be time to dwell on everything later. For now, he just needed to clear his head before he returned to London and tried to pick up the pieces of his old life.
He had left the rehab center after supper, so it was dark when he arrived back in London. He was not surprised when the car pulled up at the fortress Mycroft called a home instead of Baker Street, and when the door was opened for him he got out and strode to the door, not at all surprised to see it being opened by his PA. Anthea, in turn, did not seem surprised to find him in casual clothing: denim trousers and a button down chambray shirt. “Your brother is in his study,” she said when he got close enough.

“Thank you,” he said. That, apparently, did surprise her, he noted as her eyes widened slightly. Yes, some semblance of manners had been pressed upon him in rehab. To thank people for things they did was a small matter but it was a habit he had gotten into and he didn’t find it entirely loathsome. Apologizing, too, was another habit he had adopted. That would be quite a shock to those who knew him best when he began doing that. He almost couldn’t wait for the opportunity.

She shut the door and then stepped in step with him. “You look well,” she said.

“It was a good facility,” he replied. “My brother always had the best taste.”

She was quiet for a moment. “And you feel...”

He paused. “Andrea, ask what you want to ask,” he said simply.

She nodded. “You hold no ill will towards your brother for making you go?” she asked.

He was surprised that that was the question she had wanted to ask. She had thought she would ask about his sobriety, if the urge was gone, but he should have expected she would protect his brother. Mycroft did not always recognize the treasure he had in her. He nodded slowly. “As much as I might have fought it in the early days, it was for the best,” he replied. “This is one of the few things I will choose not to hold against him.”

“Good,” she said, and he could see her visibly relax. She stepped forward again and he continued to walk with her, the rest of the trip in silence, and they made their way to his brother’s study. She opened the door and then spoke. “He’s arrived.”

“Good,” Mycroft said from the chair he was sitting in by the fire. “Have a small meal brought in. I imagine Sherlock might be hungry.”

He was not at all surprised that Mycroft had guessed he did not eat much of his last meal at the center, and he nodded towards Andrea. “Thank you,” he said towards her.

Mycroft tilted his head slightly. “Manners? The place has changed you, I see.”

“Do not mock me,” Sherlock said, an edge to his voice. “I may have changed, but I do still have my temper, even if I am better at controlling it. If you press the buttons you always wheedle, however, I may still lose it.”

Mycroft gave an inclination of his head. “Then I will endeavour to stay on my best behaviour,” he said. “Now is not the time to undo your hard work.” He indicated the seat to the side of him. “We have much to discuss.”

“I had thought we might,” Sherlock said. He moved to the chair and then sat down, trying to rein in the nervous energy that ran through him and finally allowing himself to tap his fingers on the arm of
his chair in a staccato beat. “I am still to be allowed to remain at Baker Street, am I not?”

“Yes,” he said, and Sherlock relaxed, the beat of his drumming lessening a bit. “Though you will have a flatmate. Temporarily, of course.”

The drumming stopped abruptly as he jerked his head to look squarely at his brother. A flatmate? Surely not John. He had an infant daughter to care for and leaving the child in just Mary’s care was inconceivable, even if it was to help a friend. Not that they had been the closest of friends since his return; he had looked long and hard at their relationship and seen the flaws in it and knew there were things they would need to work on for their friendship to be healthier, and him giving up wife and daughter would not be the way of doing that. Lestrade was an option, of course, but that made little sense as well. It could also be some random government agent, though that was depressing and angering at the same time. But he reined those emotions in and tried to play calm. “Who is it to be?” he asked.

“Dr. Hooper,” Mycroft said.

Sherlock’s eyes widened. Of all the people he could have thought of, Molly would have been the last. The look on her face at their last parting...he had thought she was done with him, had washed her hands of him completely. And now she was to stay at Baker Street with him to...to what, exactly? Babysit him? Monitor him? “Why will she be there, exactly?” he asked.

“If you have need of her,” he said. “She volunteered so that you would not be alone, as you have trusted her in the past. She’s just planning on staying for month or so, less if you want her to stay less. She had thought you might want company since Mrs. Hudson is visiting her son in Manchester for the next month. Though if this displeases you, she’ll go back to her own flat.”

He pondered that. She cared. He had not thought she still cared. But he was not sure he was ready to see her, not after the way he had disappointed her. “I...am not sure it is a good idea,” he said. “But I also do not want to be at Baker Street alone. I am not sure that is a good idea, either.”

“I’ll inform her to keep to her room for the time being,” he said.

“No, I can keep to mine,” he said. “I prefer solitude.”

Mycroft nodded. “Very well,” he said. He was quiet for a moment. “You’ll have a stipend from what’s left of your trust fund, from our grandfather. You will not need to work for a time, while Lestrade and I sort out whether you will be allowed to consult for Scotland Yard. It’s a modest stipend, but it can be supplemented if need be.”

“So my reputation isn’t in tatters?” he asked.

“It is damaged, but Magnussen’s dirty laundry has come to light by groups such as Anonymous, so you have come off as a sort of hero in most circles,” he said, pursing his lips slightly. “Law enforcement is not happy with the situation, as you are considered something of a vigilante now, and that is why they are hesitant to allow you back to consult. But there were exigent circumstances and I am trying to remind them of that without directly bringing the Watson’s name to light. The more we can keep Mary Watson’s past buried, the safer they will be.”

“Of course,” Sherlock said with a nod.

“I am, of course, having my top people hard at work sponging out all records and all traces of her activities of the...freelance variety,” he said. “Though she may owe some favours in exchange.” Sherlock’s eyes widened and he held up a hand. “She has skills I could greatly use. You were high
as a kite and did not see them put to use. If she can help me, I can have official protections put in place. She is still considering her options, as is her right. She is looking at what is in the best interest of her family and conversing with her husband, and I am giving her time. But I do believe I can protect her now that Magnussen is gone.”

“Good,” Sherlock said quietly. So perhaps, even though it weighed on his conscience still, it was not all for naught. He was quiet for a moment. “And the Moriarty conundrum?”

His brother was quiet. “It is being handled,” he said evasively.

“But I was right?” Sherlock said.

Mycroft nodded. “You were right. Moriarty is merely a figurehead now. A virus in the machine, so to speak. The real man is no longer a threat. But that is all I can speak on the matter. Your security clearance has been significantly lowered and you are no longer privy to the information.”

Sherlock nodded and then looked at his hand, which had resumed its tapping. Curiously, it had begun to tap the beat that Moriarty had tapped so long ago. Even now, the man was a virus in his own head, and he wondered if he would ever be rid of him. After a moment he straightened his hand and then gripped then end of the armrest. “So I suppose I should spend the next few days or weeks reacquainting myself with my friends and with London?”

“Yes, I do believe that would be best,” Mycroft said with another nod. “Lestrade and I will continue to try to secure your consultancy. But for now, work on rebuilding your bonds, as you can. I believe that would be best.”

Sherlock was saved from answering by the arrival of his food. It was all so simple for his brother, he supposed, but so much of who he was was tied up in his identity as a consulting detective. He had spent the last seven months not being one, and now he was back in the “real world” and unable to be one again, and he wasn’t sure where he stood in that world because of that, or who stood there with him. It was going to be tricky to navigate it, but he supposed he would have to. And the first step would be navigating his way around Baker Street and trying to avoid his flatmate until he was sure he could speak to her without making a complete and utter fool out of himself.

And he had no idea when, or if, that would happen.
Chapter 3

Eventually, he was allowed to leave Mycroft’s home and was taken back in the car he’d arrived in to Baker Street. He could feel his entire body humming with a sort of frenetic anticipation as they got closer, as the sights became more familiar. There were differences, of course; seven months had passed and London was an ever changing city. But as the car pulled up to a stop he saw Speedy’s looked the same and the door to his home was still the same as it ever was.

And a familiar figure was waiting outside.

He hesitated a moment before opening the door. Mycroft must not have gotten word to Molly about them avoiding each other for a time, or perhaps she had decided to ignore whatever it was he’d had to say. He studied her in the dim view of the tinted windows of his car. Her hair was shorter now, somewhere between chin and shoulder length, and it curled more. She seemed to have changed her style of dress slightly, opting for something a tad more sophisticated but still very much her. Tonight she was in a dress, a dark coloured one with what looked like cherry print, and a white cardigan over it. And she looked...nervous. Almost as nervous as he felt, he supposed.

After another few seconds, he opened the door while the driver took out his bags and he saw that her dress was navy blue and it indeed did have a cherry print, and her hair was auburn now, a warm reddish brown that suited her and made her look rather lovely. He was surprised at the thought, as he’d never really thought of her that way before. Perky, yes. Cute, in a “trying too hard” sense, sometimes, like at John and Mary’s wedding. But tonight, here, he felt she looked lovely. “Hello,” he said quietly, still slightly stunned by the observation.

She gave him a small smile. “I know your brother said you didn’t really want to see me, but...I didn’t want you coming home to an empty house,” she said, her hands moving to the pockets on her dress. “It just seemed wrong to me.”

“No, I appreciate it,” he said, and he found that indeed he did. He was going to say more but the driver cleared his throat and indicated the bags. “I can handle them.”

“We can,” Molly piped up, looking at the driver, and Sherlock gave a small smile in her direction as she went and picked up the two heaviest ones. She hadn’t needed to but he knew she could maneuver heavy bodies with ease so they would be no problem. He went and got the rest and then followed her to the door, which she opened. Inside it looked as though Mrs. Hudson had kept the foyer exactly the same. Molly glanced at him and smiled. “She hasn’t changed a thing.”

“That’s good to know,” he replied.

“I put fresh linens on your bed, though. I...um...hope you don’t mind,” she said.

He shook his head. “Thank you,” he said. They made their way to his bedroom and Molly went in first, and he paused at the door and took it all in. He was really, truly home. He looked around and then set his things on the bed before beginning to go to the various hiding spots where he had kept his heroin, wanting to make sure it was all gone.

“Your brother brought in drug sniffing dogs, if you’re checking for drugs. It’s all gone. So is the paraphernalia,” Molly said quietly, twisting the hem of her cardigan in her hand. “I helped dispose of it, with Greg.” He gave her a curious look. “Lestrade.”

“Oh,” he said.
“He had the entire room detoxified after that. The entire flat, actually. Any place you had drugs has been scrupulously cleaned by a hazmat cleaning crew. There shouldn’t be anything here.” She lifted her hand up and ran it through her hair. “Do you...I mean...are you...?”

Sherlock could see there was quite a bit she wanted to ask and wasn’t sure how. With almost anyone else, save the select few he considered friends, and maybe not even them, he would get annoyed, but he decided to spare her from having to ask. “I still have the urge, every once in a while, but I have someone I can call until I find a Narcotics Anonymous group to attend here and get a sponsor I trust,” he said. “I don’t need to lean on you if you aren’t comfortable.”

Her eyes widened at that. “Oh! Um...no, Sherlock, if you need to, I...” She moved to sit on his bed near his things and then looked down at her hands. After a moment, he sat next to her. “I was so angry at you, when you got off the plane. About how foolish you were for nearly overdosing. I didn’t want to see you ever again. But it was more than that. I care about you very much. You’re a very important person in my life, and even though I knew that the trip to Russia had been meant to be one way, I had thought you could find a way out of it. You could find a way to survive. You’re the smartest man I know! To know you’d purposely overdosed and you didn’t care whether you lived or died...I didn’t think you cared about any of us. About trying to get back to us.”

He nodded, listening to her. He hadn’t considered she might feel that way in any of the months he had been in rehab. He had just felt she had been disappointed in him, like she had been the morning in the labs when he’d pulled out of the drug den. To know it was more than that meant more to him than he had thought it would. “I never realized,” he said.

“I know. I asked Mycroft if I should tell you while you were in rehab but he said it was best if we talked when you were out. And then when it came out that you were being released now, while Mrs. Hudson was away, I knew you couldn’t come home to an empty flat. I wasn’t sure you’d want to be around me because you’d think I hated you or maybe you hated me, I don’t know, but I wanted to be here to help. I don’t know if I can help every way you might need, but I’ll help as much as I can.” She lifted her head up to look at him. “I’m sorry if not telling you sooner made things worse.”

He hesitated a moment, then slowly put an arm around her shoulders to pull her closer. She stiffened for a moment in surprise, which he should have expected, but he felt the need to give her a show of affection. He had not realized until now just how special to him she really was. After a moment he rested his cheek against her head and she relaxed more against him. “You being here now will be a very large help, I think,” he said, keeping her close. And it would be. He would not avoid her, he realized. He would start with mending their relationship first, and then work on others and see if the skills he had learned did him as well as he hoped they would.
Chapter 4

He found he woke up at seven, the same as he had at rehab, and for a moment he was at a loss. There was no routine here at Baker Street, and he knew that was, for at least until such a time as he could formulate one of his own, hard to deal with. He had been surprised that he had adapted to the schedule eventually; initially, he had fought it with all his might, enduring the consequences for breaking the rules with all the sullenness of a child. But, eventually, he found a sort of peace in having a routine.

A peace he wasn’t sure he was going to be able to find without some purpose, and seeing as how cases were not an option…

He went to the back of his door and got his dressing gown. He hadn’t bothered to unpack the night before and so he was left using clothing that had been left behind in his absence. It was the tartan one, which smelled faintly of something he couldn’t quite place. His whole room had the smell, but he supposed it was something lingering from when the place had been swept for drugs. The rest of the flat must have been aired out better than his room had. He supposed everything that hadn’t been sent to rehab would need to be laundered.

It was with surprise that he saw Molly up and moving in the kitchen when he entered. She gave him a smile as she began to make coffee. “I know you never really liked my coffee before but I swear, I got better,” she said.

He gave her a small smile. “I still drank it, didn’t I?” he said.

“That is true,” she said with a soft laugh. “Mycroft told me you had been on a schedule and you were usually awake this early. I thought maybe you’d want company. I mean, if you don’t, I can take my coffee to my room.”

Sherlock frowned. It was past time for her to be getting ready for her post, normally. Any time he had used her flat as a bolt hole and stayed later than seven she was bustling around much earlier than that, using the washroom and making breakfast and having coffee and taking care of her cat. “Don’t you have to go into Barts?” he asked.

She shook her head. “I am on an extended sabbatical, of sorts,” she said. “Post-mortems isn’t the only thing I do for the hospital, so when I volunteered to do this Mycroft threw a bit of his weight around and I have time to work on papers I’ve been putting off for a long while.” She tucked a strand of hair back behind her ear as she moved to begin making toast. “When you think you’re ready to go to the hospital for any lab work I need to do, you’re welcome to help me. I’ll even add your name to the papers.”

Sherlock blinked. “You’ll include me in your published papers?” he asked.

“Well, yes. I mean, a lot of things can be done here at Baker Street. There are at least ten different papers I have planned to write, so we can put off going to Barts for at least a few months. If you help me now, of course, I’ll add your name. Fair is fair, after all.” She turned and looked at him. “And maybe it will give you something to do where you can use your mind and not stagnate.”

“That would be nice,” he said, moving to the refrigerator. “What about the others?”

“You mean John and Mary and Greg?” she asked. Sherlock nodded. “For now, they’re keeping their distance, at least until you get settled. To be honest, Mycroft wasn’t sure you’d want to even see me,
but...I insisted, I suppose, because I care and I wanted you to know that.”

“And they do as well?” he asked quietly. She remained silent. “It’s alright if you can’t answer for them, you know.”

“I know John was conflicted, about a lot of things,” Molly said quietly, slipping the bread into the toaster. “He went back to therapy, both on his own and with Mary. A special therapist, mind you. One Mycroft vetted, who had the clearance to touch on Mary’s past. And so John knows more and they’re working things out. But they’re happy, and they do miss you. I think you’ll find John’s different. He’s not so...” She groped for the word. “In search of an adrenaline fix, I suppose?”

Sherlock nodded. That was good to hear. He knew there were problems with the type of friendship he and John had, that they had not had a healthy relationship. He had done his own work on things, and it was nice to hear that John had done the same. “And Lestrade?”

“He was a bit disappointed about the whole affair when your brother told him the truth, which Mary insisted he do, but he understood. He knew that there was no way that Mary was safe as long as that bastard was alive. And I think he knows that you were backed into a corner.” Sherlock noticed she avoided looking at him. It was true, in one way, he’d been backed into a corner, but he had admitted to himself in the past months he had put himself in that corner to begin with, and John as well. Even if Lestrade understood what he had been told, he wanted all of a sudden to make sure she understood that everything that had happened on Christmas was his plan and therefore his fault, and things could have gone so much more differently if he had not been so brash and foolish.

He was about to speak when her toast came up and she busied herself with preparing it, so he opened the refrigerator and looked inside, finally deciding on orange juice. He still didn’t have much of an appetite, even though there were no cases on the horizon, though he supposed if Molly offered to feed him he would accept. He had rather gotten used to regular meals but he still didn’t quite trust his skills in the culinary department beyond the basics. And to be honest, if they began work on the papers soon, he might forget to eat altogether.

After a moment he poured himself some juice and then leaned against the worktop, looking at Molly. “I regret taking a life,” he said. “I don’t regret it was specifically his in that instance.”

Molly stilled in eating, and then swallowed the toast she had been chewing. “We...never talked about what happened while you were gone,” she asked quietly. “Did you kill people then?”

“Only in self-defense,” he said.

She set the toast back on the plate. “Did you start doing drugs again while you were gone?”

“Occasionally. I needed my wits about me so it was never heroin. Usually something much less potent, and usually only for the sake of a cover. It wasn’t until the planning for John and Mary’s wedding it became more than recreational. I was having trouble coping,” he said. “When I boarded the plane, part of it was to dig deep into my mind palace for the Emilia Ricoletti case, because I suspected I would get a last minute reprieve and be taken to hospital in time. But if I wasn’t...”

“If you weren’t, it wouldn’t matter,” she said quietly.

“Yes,” he said. He moved closer to her, setting his glass on the worktop next to her plate. “If I didn’t get that reprieve, I knew there was no chance I was coming home. I would rather have arrived dead in Russia than had to go through anything else like what I had gone through taking down Moriarty’s network.”
“Have you talked to anyone about it?” she asked, looking up at him.

Sherlock nodded. “Mycroft arranged for me to have a special therapist unaffiliated with the rehab program with the clearance level needed to talk about the Moriarty mess and Magnussen. That was most likely one of the few signs I’ve seen that my brother has cared. But it has helped. I was adamant about keeping it to myself, stuffing it into locked rooms in my mind palace at first, but slowly I opened up, and it was for the best.”

She looked at him for a long moment and then tore her gaze away, shaking her head. “I...I don’t expect you to tell me anything,” she said. “I mean, it’s not my place to ask and those memories are painful and really, it’s best just to--”

“Perhaps later, after I have a sponsor and have sessions with my therapist again,” he said, placing a hand on her shoulder and squeezing. “I may tell John, someday, but we’ll see how telling you goes first.”

She nodded, giving him a small smile in return before stepping forward and wrapping her arms around his waist and standing there for a few seconds before speaking. “Do you want breakfast?” she asked, her voice muffled because her mouth was buried in his chest.

“I would,” he said, lightly embracing her back.

“Alright,” she said. She stood there with him a few moments more before she pulled away. “We really need to wash your clothes, Sherlock. They smell...off.”

Sherlock gave her a wider grin at that and then nodded. “Later. I think we have the whole day ahead of us.”
Chapter 5

He found peace in the routine Molly set up for the two of them. Not just him, thankfully, because he knew she needed routine as much as he did and not going to her post made her routine nonexistent. But they would both wake up at seven, have coffee and breakfast together, and then spend four hours doing research for the papers that interested them most before she began to make them lunch. Sometimes he would continue to work on research but most times he would go and help. He could, had always been able to, but he’d never really done it much because it didn’t matter to him. But his time in rehab had persuaded him that his health was something he needed to focus on. He’d gone to meetings with a dietitian and helped make communal meals for everyone at the center, and he found a sort of natural ability in it all.

When lunch was over they would go back to research for a few hours and then work on tidying up the flat, at least the first few days he was there. There was all the laundry in his bedroom they had to do, and giving the room a proper airing out. He found he had gained enough weight he would need to have his suits adjusted, and other pieces of clothing were given to donation. He had let Molly deal with that but he swore he’d heard Wiggins’s voice in the foyer and felt most of the clothing had ended up with his homeless network. Molly had said Wiggins had been clean since he went into rehab and was volunteering at Barts since his time with Sherlock had inspired him. Sherlock wasn’t sure he wanted to see Wiggins just yet, not until things were more settled, but knowing even at his worst he’d inspired someone to do better had pleased him.

He’d been home for nearly two weeks when Molly suggested a walk in one of the parks. It wasn’t that cold of a day so they decided to walk to the park itself, and Sherlock was sure Molly had something up her sleeve. He was proven right when Molly led him to a bench that was occupied by two familiar blondes with a pram parked in front of them. “They wanted it to be a surprise,” Molly said. “Are you alright with that?”

Sherlock nodded. “It will be good to see them,” he said, a small smile on his face.

They got closer and he saw, indeed, marriage and parenthood had done both John and Mary a world of good. John was busy occupying their daughter in the pram when they approached, so Mary saw them first. “Sherlock!” she said with a wide, warm smile on her face. Her hair had grown out fast and was longer and curly. It looked quite nice on her. She seemed to have some sway over John’s wardrobe because while he was still wearing a jumper it looked more sophisticated, and the khakis were a better fit.

She got up and embraced him when he got close enough, and he embraced her back. The fact there was even a moment like this meant, in some way, he had done the right thing in the end. His girls and John were safe. After Mary let him go she went to the pram and Jon stood up, coming over to embrace him as well. This was a far better reunion than the one they’d had when he came back from the dead, he realized. There was no violence on John’s part, no smug assurance on his that John would be delighted to see him, even if he actually was. In their entire friendship the two had never been particularly familiar in a touching sense, but this...this wasn’t so bad.

“Molly said you’d been doing well and maybe you might like a slight break in your routine,” John said when he pulled back. “So we thought maybe some time with your goddaughter might be something you wouldn’t mind too much?”

Sherlock blinked as he watched Mary lift an infant out of the pram. “Goddaughter?”

“We weren’t about to let anyone else be the godfather of Ashleigh Wilhelmina Watson,” Mary said
gently, bringing the girl in question to him. “Not after everything.”

“I thought her name was going to be Rosamund,” Sherlock said, peering down at the little girl. The last he had heard from them, before their daughter’s birth, was that she was going to be named Rosamund Mary Watson. This was yet another surprise, though another pleasant one.

“Well, John and I talked, and we’ve been seeing someone. To sort things out. Naming our daughter after me seemed selfish, and there wasn’t really anyone in either of our families we wanted to name her after, except you,” Mary said. “So we asked Molly and Mrs. Hudson for names because despite what you said Sherlock is not a girl’s name. Mrs. Hudson suggested her first name, and Molly suggested her middle name.” She gestured to his empty arms. “Do you want to hold her?”

Sherlock nodded slowly, and Mary carefully transferred Ashleigh to his arms. She was bigger than he would have thought for her age, heavier but not too much so, and she didn’t rouse from her slumber as he got her settled in his arms. He saw Molly had her mobile out and snapped a picture of the four of them, with Mary on one side and John on the other, and he could have sworn there were tears in her eyes.

“She has the best of both of your features,” Sherlock said, getting a chuckle from John.

“Yeah, she sure does,” he said. He looked up at Sherlock. “So the godfather thing. You’ll do it, mate?”

“Of course,” he said as Ashleigh yawned and stirred. He panicked that she would start wailing when she realized she was in a stranger’s arms, but she just stared up at him with a curiosity he recognized. “Hello,” he said quietly to her.

“One more picture of all of you?” Molly asked. He looked up and felt two arms slip behind his back as John and Mary pressed closer and he realized that if his initial plan had succeeded, this would not be happening, and what a shame it would have been. He wore a genuine smile as Molly counted before her flash went off. Perhaps this was all off to a good start after all.
He had expected to feel antsy about the lack of cases, even with the work that Molly was having him do with her papers, but it wasn’t as bad as he had expected. It had helped that Molly had adjusted their schedule to include plenty of time with his goddaughter, and he found a sense of peace had settled over him when he was in Ashleigh’s presence. But still, he knew there was something he needed to do, and he was surprised he had been putting it off, though as Molly had pointed out, the A in NA was for Anonymous and he was far from an anonymous person.

However, Mycroft had said he was making arrangements for Sherlock to join a group of those who had problems and could not go to any regular group. Upon stepping into the room for the first meeting, held, at all places, at the Diogenes Club, his brother leaned in. “You are not to use this knowledge for your own advantage,” he said firmly.

“I know the rules of NA, Mycroft,” he said, resisting the urge to roll his eyes.

“I’ll leave you now, then. Join me in my room when you are done, please.”

“Alright,” Sherlock said with a nod. Mycroft left the room then and Sherlock wondered if he had gathered this group of prestigious government officials. Normally, before everything, these would have been a group of people he would have despised, but now, he felt nothing towards them other than a sort of respect that they were addressing their problems as he was.

He was surprised, however, by one familiar face, and went to sit next to his brother’s assistant. “You have a problem?” he asked, leaning in. “Or are you spying on me?”

“Prescription drug habit I had in college that has, unfortunately, flared at times in your brother’s employ,” Anthea said. “I would not even let your brother talk me into spying on you at a meeting.”

Sherlock nodded. “How long?”

“Four years now, thankfully. Not even your shenanigans as of late have gotten me to relapse.” She gave him a small smile. “At least the coffee here is of the best quality, and Mycroft makes sure the baked goods served are better than boxed biscuits.”

“He would, if he’s helping you,” Sherlock said.

“And you, too, now,” Anthea said. “He knew you dabbled and were never serious about getting sober, but now...that’s why you’re here.”

Sherlock nodded again and lapsed into silence as the rest of the group came in. He made it a point to listen to their stories; group therapy in rehab had not been his favourite part of the process of overcoming his addiction but it had been far more helpful than he had thought it would be, and it was run much like a meeting. While he personally was agnostic it did help he believed that there was some higher power aside from his brother watching over him.

The meeting itself ran smoothly and when everyone got up to indulge in more coffee and sweets he continued to sit, as did Anthea. “Who would you recommend I approach for sponsorship?” he asked her.

She pursed her lips. “Thomas has experience in MI6 and doing things he regrets. He might be good.” Sherlock nodded, knowing Thomas was not a good choice as he should be attending AA meetings as well since he’d turned to the drink to cope. “Anyone else?”
“Marlene. She won’t put up with your shite.” He grinned slightly at that and nodded. Marlene was a better choice, but still not quite what he felt he needed. He wasn’t sure if he should ask Anthea, knowing her position in regards to his brother, when she spoke again. “Of course, I know all your dirty little secrets. I might be a good choice.”

“And I know none of yours,” he pointed out.

“There are some I can give,” she said, turning towards him and extending her hand. “Andrea. Andrea Thompson.”

“William,” he said, taking her hand in his. “William Holmes.”

“That’s a good start,” she said, shaking his hand. “Though I prefer Sherlock. It suits you more.”

“And which do you prefer?” he asked as she let go of his hand.

“Andrea in private, Anthea in public.” She gave him a small smile. “I have to go out the secret exit, so the distinguished gentlemen at the club know there was no women in their illustrious midst, but perhaps we could get a crappy cup of coffee at the shop near Baker Street and hash out some rules after you speak to your brother?”

Sherlock nodded, his smile genuine and relaxed. She would, indeed, be the best choice. “That sounds like a good plan,” he said as he stood up. “We’ll meet in an hour or so, perhaps?”

“Sounds good to me,” Andrea said with a nod, standing up and smoothing her skirt down. “See you then, Sherlock.” And with that, she turned away and met Marlene at the bookcase, and he watched as she pulled down a book and a panel opened up that they walked through. As the panel closed he turned and made his way to his brother, a sense of peace settling over him. He had a meeting that he could go to, a sponsor, and all in all, things were looking up.
He wasn’t really all that surprised that Lestrade had stayed away. As his brother had said, he was considered something of a vigilante and that would sour how Scotland Yard treated him. And while Lestrade was friendly he knew that if he wanted to keep in an upward career trajectory avoiding him until he was officially cleared was the best idea.

It was with surprise, then, that he saw Sally waiting at the stoop of Baker Street one day not long after his first NA meeting in London. He and Molly had taken to locking the door until he went back to taking cases, just so no looky-loos came about. “I’m not consulting,” he said slowly as he approached her. Then he realized she had bandages on her face and an arm in a cast. “What happened?”

“Car accident. I was the passenger, Greg was the driver. He’s got two broken legs and he wanted me to tell you before anyone else did. I thought Molly might be here, but…”

“She’s off with her friend Meena while I was…out.” He didn’t want to mention he’d been having a coffee with his sponsor. “Would you like to come in and sit somewhere more comfortable?” Sally nodded and he unlocked the door for them and they made their way upstairs, Sally more slowly. “Do you want me to call Molly?”

“No, no. I just…I’m sore. Feel like I got thrown into a brick wall or something.” She gave him a wan smile. “I already made DI, I told Greg I’d come to tell you what happened so he didn’t have to worry.”

“Thank you,” he said. “Would you like tea?”

“God yes,” she said as she sat in the chair Molly tended to use. He and Sally had let the ice between them thaw before the Magnussen incident, but he hadn’t been sure how she’d felt about that. After all, she was the one who had said they’d be standing around a body one day and he’d put it there, and she’d been right. He went about making the tea. “It wasn’t even a chase or anything. We got hit by a bloody truck.”

“And scrapes and a few broken limbs were all you had?” Sherlock asked, surprised. “Someone was looking out for you.”

“Yeah, I suppose they were. It hit Greg’s side so he got the brunt of the injury. I just got tossed around like a rag doll myself. The suspect didn’t even get injured.”

“They didn’t escape, did they?” he asked.

“No, but she panicked a good bit. I swear she was closer to having a panic attack than either of us were.” They lapsed into silence as he made them tea, and then brought her a cup made the way he knew she liked it: a little milk, three sugars. She took a sip and he could see her relax. “You look well, you know. Molly had said you were doing well but I’m glad I got to see it for myself.”

“Thank you,” he replied. “You don’t have a concussion, do you?”

“Small one, yeah,” she said.

“Want help staying awake for a while?” he asked. He didn’t have anything particularly pressing to do right now and he thought, or at least assumed, she was still alone.
“Yeah, I think that would be nice,” she said. “But you should go see Greg soon. I think it won’t hurt for a friend to visit an injured friend, you know?”

“Does he want me too?” Sherlock asked.

“He misses you. Has since you were gone. And not just as a consultant. You are friends, whether you admit it or not. And he missed his friend.” She had some more of her tea. “I rather missed you too. But if you tell anyone, I’ll castrate you.”

“Duly noted,” he said, giving her a small smile which she returned as they had more of their tea. Not exactly the best news or even the best situation to come home to, but he felt that, perhaps, it wasn’t the worst, either. If Sally was still willing to hold out an olive branch to him, maybe others would as well.
Chapter 8

He decided it might be best if he and Molly visited Lestrade together. That way it appeared more or less exactly as it was: two friends checking in on an injured friend. He was still in the hospital, which helped, and as they walked in he saw Molly’s vase of flowers would fit in with what appeared to be the entirety of a florist’s shop surrounding Lestrade.

“Molly!” he said warmly as she opened the door ahead of him. Then he stepped into view and if anything, Lestrade’s grin widened. “It is good to see you, Sherlock.”

“It’s good to see you, too,” Sherlock said. “Though I imagine you’d prefer the circumstances be different.”

“Yeah, being cooped up in this bed is not fun at all, especially with the crap telly I’m forced to watch. Sally tried to bring me a portable DVD player but the hospital staff said it could get stolen. I’m a Detective Inspector! I can investigate the disappearance of a missing DVD player. I solve murders, after all.”

Sherlock grinned at that as Molly laughed and went to hug him. “Well, maybe we can get Mycroft to post a guard at the door and she can sneak it back in.”

“Your brother owes me,” Lestrade said towards Sherlock thoughtfully.

“I’ll see what I can do.” He moved closer to his friend. “Do you need anything?”

“I’d kill for a nice juicy steak, but I think that will have to wait until I get released. But maybe keep me company for a bit?”

“Even me?” Sherlock asked.

“I know you did what you did for reasons that are important. And while my superiors would very much like it if I limited my contact with you, you’re...a friend.” Lestrade studied him as he said that. “I think.”

Sherlock nodded. “I suppose I am.”

“Well, glad you finally recognized that. So stick around, watch the crap telly with me, and tell me what you’ve been up to since you’ve gotten back,” he said. He pointed towards one of the chairs. “They aren’t all that comfortable, but it’s all I’ve got.”

“It’s fine,” Sherlock said, seeing Molly give him a smile as he sat down. She sat next to him and the two of them filled Lestrade in on what they had been doing, and Sherlock told him a bit about the things he had learned in rehab. Lestrade seemed to relax the more they spoke, as though he had been worried but now saw there was no real reason to be worried, and by the time they left Sherlock had agreed that on the first visit after he was released he would visit Lestrade at home with a juicy steak.

He and Molly got into a cab to go back to Baker Street and he relaxed. “That was...almost pleasant,” he said, turning to face her. “Not that hospital visits usually are, but...”

“No, I agree,” she said. “It was nice to see he was well, or at least as well as he could be. And that was nice of you to offer to bring him the steak. I thought that was rather sweet.”

“I understand cravings,” he said with a sad smile.
“I know,” she said, placing a hand over his. He turned his palm up and intertwined his fingers with hers. “Do you...do you miss what you usually do?”

“A bit,” Sherlock said. “Not enough that it’s detrimental to my recovery, though. It would be nice to go back to it but if I can’t, I’ll find something else I can do.”

“You know, you could try and take private clients again. I don’t think your name has been sullied as much in the private sector.”

“Yes, but it will indubitably lead back to bad habits if I were to do it now. I’ll wait a bit longer, I think, and continue to help you with your research.”

“Well, we’ll need to go to the path lab to do the next few parts for our current paper. Are you up to it?” she asked.

“I think so,” he said with a nod. “If not...I can go back to the other papers until I am.”

“Okay,” she said, squeezing his hand, and then they lapsed into silence. It was good that his friends cared, he thought to himself. If they hadn’t, he wasn’t sure what he would have done. To come back with no support would have been hell on earth, but this? This led him to have true hope that things would be fine for the first time in ages.

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