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### No More Heroes

by [afinecollector](orphan_account)

**Summary**

Sherlock is injured whilst on a case for Mycroft. Suddenly, the entire world changes - and not just for him. He's faced with the uncertainty of a new way of life, and ghosts from the past threaten to break what he and John have built.

**Notes**

With the kind approval and permission of the original writer "Alioseven", I have begun a rewrite and continuation of her amazing story No More Heroes. As a hard and fast fan, I was so sad when she stopped writing due to working commitments and so I was absolutely amazed when she gave me her blessing to take what she already had written to run with myself and take Sherlock, John and their new addition - Sherlock's chair - as far as I could in finding out who shot Sherlock and how life will change for them all. I really hope I do Alioseven proud, and I really hope that the original readers for the story will like what I have to offer.

- afinecollector
Chapter 1

They say that you shouldn’t make people into heroes, that heroes are useless and they only let you down. But John Watson had heroes growing up that he was lucky enough never to be let down by. Some people might even have considered him to be a hero, going off to war and bearing the brunt of repeated open fire on the camp’s hospital. But John wouldn’t consider himself a hero, nor would he consider the work he did before his medical discharge from the Army to be heroic - he’d tell people he was doing what was necessary, doing what had to be done for the greater good. He’d say that there was no sense in it, no glory in it, but it was vital that he did it. To John, that was nothing close to heroism. Heroes, to John, were the medical men and women who ensured the injury to his shoulder didn’t mean permanent disability beyond a few aches and pains.

John had always liked the old saying that the measure of a man is in the company he keeps; the people he surrounds himself with define who he is and are a projection of who he wants to be. John fought hard not to surround himself with anyone while in the military despite his personality, he fought to hide his sexuality and, since leaving, had fought ten times harder to hide the soldier in him. When he returned to London after his discharge, John didn’t think he’d ever be able to have faith in anything like he had done when he was a child. He’d seen things, experienced things, that nobody should ever have to face in their life and he had changed. He agreed that heroes didn’t exist, he agreed that nothing could be heroic in this world. He quickly became a version of the person he never wanted to be or be surrounded by.

And then, of course, there was Sherlock. All dark curls and piercing eyes and a smile that was rarely one of genuine intent but absolutely always enigmatic. Sherlock encapsulated all that John had been avoiding from when he was discharged. Hide as he might try to, he was an Army man and he needed that drama, that excitement - Sherlock brought it all.

And suddenly, John was a kid again, staring up at his father - his hero - with utter trust and acceptance, and absolute pride at knowing him. Because Sherlock Holmes was his drug, an addiction that overtook the monotony, and John was addicted from the get-go. Totally, utterly and fully in love with every inch of the raven haired man.

Sherlock was as reciprocal as he could be. In his fashion, Sherlock loved John just as much. In John, Sherlock had found a man of stability and integrity, who had waltzed into his life and made it whole and grounded, made him feel validated where he had usually been dismissed. In that feeling of freedom at finally being accepted, Sherlock flowed somewhere close to love as his imperfections and flaws were accepted fully, without judgement or question.

And again, John Watson found it within himself to see the possibilities within a human, and would snort at anyone who believed you shouldn't make anyone into heroes.

He was yet to be let down.
Chapter 2

Leaving Baker Street with Sherlock on a rainy Soho night, John couldn’t help but think that this was not exactly what he had wanted to do on the night of his and Sherlock’s one year anniversary. A meal, perhaps; a night in; a movie or a takeaway on the couch; maybe even Greg over for a beer and a laugh. Alas, it was not to be. But would Sherlock be Sherlock if he had thought of any of that? Still, John hailed himself and Sherlock a taxi bound for Scotland Yard in search of Greg Lestrade as, once again, Mycroft had summoned Sherlock to his aid with a case and, to prove his worth as was his wont, Sherlock had snatched it up out of the sheer need for something to do. Sherlock’s relationship with Greg Lestrade, that spanned almost a decade, opened up doors for him within the Met, and he took advantage of the links whenever he needed to, just as Lestrade would come to him, cap in hand, when his team were stumped. Mycroft’s case was shrouded in mystery and presented potential national security risks wrapped up in a drugs trafficking circle - Sherlock was determined to shut it down as quickly as possible and needed to obtain a warrant or police escort to a top-floor flat on Northumberland Street.

“Mycroft really didn’t have anyone else for this?” John asked as he shuffled into the back seat of the taxi.

Sherlock looked at him bluntly. “Like the SS?” He smirked. “There is no one. England’s constabulary fall dramatically short.”

“I don’t like this.” John sighed, staring out of the window onto the wet street as the taxi bumbled along the road, the rain hitting the glass and splintering out like spider legs in the glow of the golden street lights outside. “I’m not sure about any of it. You do know Mycroft is using you. You’ll get no credit for this - and all he’s going to do is bitch at you throughout….” Of course, John’s concerns were met with a wall of nominal silence from Sherlock, whose feet tapped impossibly quickly in a random rhythm as his idle thumbs tapped out text after text on his damnable iPhone.

It took little persuasion on Sherlock’s part to have Greg accompany him to the flat when they arrived at his office, but the forensic team that followed behind Lestrade were less than enthusiastic to be pursuing another ‘hunch’ from Greg’s ‘care in the community project’. Under Greg’s orders, the property was searched thoroughly. Sherlock stated that they were looking for any indication as to who was using the building and for what; drugs, computers, anything that would help stem the stream of ideas in his mind and alone him to hone in on one, sure track to ensure a successful closure of the case and that euphoric, settled feeling in his mind that came with the assurance that a case had been closed by his sought-after abilities.

When an hour and a half of rambling through the small space turned up nothing, Lestrade called the search off with finality, glancing at Sherlock’s petulantly pouting lips. “Sherlock, I can’t just magic evidence into existence,” he said softly, shaking his head though there was a fatherly amusement to his tone. There was always a fatherly-something when he was with Sherlock - seven years and nine months with the man whom he had seen at his best, worst and somewhere in between served to turn Sherlock into something close to a son, something closer than he’d ever had in his life at least. That thought made Greg feel sick. His wife - ex-wife - had left him two years ago, taking with her the dog and their daughters, Maisie and Ellen. His fathering of his daughters now amounted to weekly phone calls, birthday and Christmas cards, and a forced visit on the girls’ part when the summer arrived.

“I didn’t ask you to,” Sherlock’s tongue was sharp and bitter as he spat his response, and Lestrade simply rolled his eyes, more than used to the man he’s seen turn from a twenty-something, dependent on drugs, alcohol and the promiscuous lifestyle he’d fallen into - a thirty-year-old man with a partner
and, by all accounts, a rocketing career as a Private Detective.

“C’mon,” Greg nodded to the doorway which led to the staircase that granted access to the street, “I’m off in an hour, so why don’t you and John come back to the station with me and then we can go and grab dinner. I’m sure John would prefer to celebrate your anniversary with a meal...” John smiled at him lightly.

Sherlock looked to John, standing behind Greg, and stuffed his hands into his pockets as his attention was momentarily stolen to watch the various members of Lestrade’s team who were filtering out of the flat. “I’m not hungry,” he grumbled into the upturned collar of his coat.

“I don’t care about you,” Greg muttered, “I’m starving. And you owe John dinner.”

“Sounds great,” John stepped in, casting a look of annoyance at Sherlock, “I’ll follow you down now,” he indicated as Greg turned to leave.

Sherlock loitered behind, with only Sally Donovan still left lingering as John and Greg clambered noisily down the uncarpeted stairs that led them back out onto the cold, wet street. “Freak!” Sally snapped, “We’re leaving - so you are no longer authorised to be here; beat it.”

“Pleasantly put as always, Sally,” Sherlock cocked his eyebrow as he smiled at her with sickening sweetness, but conceded to her demand. He walked ahead of her down the stairs and out into the rainy night. He glanced around, the street illuminated by intermittent street lights, trying to locate John and Greg. It took a moment to find them, at the far end of the street, both about to climb into the DI’s ageing but reliable, silver car.

“Sherlock,” John called out, waving his arm to catch his attention. “You coming?”

“Right behind you,” Sherlock called back, which seemed to annoy the shorter man as he shook his head and slipped into Greg’s car without another word.

Sherlock watched the car pull away, the red reverse lights glistening in the rain, and waited for Sally to reappear. She approached a young man - a new recruit named Charlie Hawkes whom Sherlock had met earlier that evening - and pointed him toward the waiting car on the corner of the street, adjacent to Angelo’s restaurant. “Oi, Freak,” She called out, smiling with a shark-like quality at Sherlock as he watched her. “We’re going back to Scotland Yard, are you walking or getting in?”

Sherlock bunched up his shoulders and began walking toward her as she approached the car. He wet his lips with his tongue and reached out his right hand to pull open the left door so he could slip into the warmth of the back seat. The latch clicked, the noise muffled in the rain that began to fall heavier and a blustering wind that was slowly picking up speed. “Bloody awful night,” Charlie commented, reaching for the handle on the driver’s side door. “You pick ’em, don’t you Mr ‘olmes.” he smiled at the brooding man over the roof of the car, “Couldn’t have brought us out on a drier night or anythin’,” he grinned.

“Indeed not,” Sherlock’s nose crinkled and a hint of a smile took his lips, “Where’s the fun in that?” He asked, crooking an eyebrow, “The thrill of the case is intensified by a bit of suff....”

Suddenly the night went silent but for the deafening echoic ringing of three, successive gunshots. Sherlock tumbled forwards, his collarbone hitting the body of the car before his knees went weak and he dropped to the floor, falling onto his back, his head hitting the cobbled road, leaving his body sprawled across the wet street. Charlie rushed to his side and, possibly inappropriately, gently pulled Sherlock’s body away from the car to give him and Sally better access and they both crouched at his side. Their knees were wet from the floor below, their minds suddenly shut off to the rain, as they
watched a darkening river of blood float away from Sherlock’s form.

They couldn’t see the bullets anywhere, hadn’t heard the tinkle of metal as they hit the ground, but it was pretty obvious why; Sherlock was injured and two, thin trails of blood drew a line on the cobbles from where Hawkes had dragged him half a foot across them. He’d been shot in the back and in the thigh and both wounds were oozing blood. Sally’s knees leant painfully on the cobbles and she glanced across Sherlock’s lifeless body at Charlie, “Jesus...I...what...” she breathed out, “…what the hell?”

“We need to call this in - we’ve gotta get hold of Lestrade,” Charlie got to his feet and anxiously paced beside her, his hands in his wet hair as he thought frantically. It had been some time since he’d been confronted with anything like this.

“Stop it! Let’s just sort him out, he’s bleeding, we need to...” she leant over Sherlock and turned her head to the side so that her ear hovered over the Consulting Detective’s mouth. “Oh, thank God!” she sighed, “Charlie, he’s breathing.” she informed her colleague.

“Christ,” Charlie rubbed his hands over his face, spreading the raindrops, “That’s nothin’ short of fuckin’ miraculous.” he crouched at Sherlock’s other side, “Is he conscious?”

Sally seemed to lose herself staring at Sherlock but came back to the question after a moment, “In and out - his eyes are fluttering but his pulse is steady. Charlie, look, he’s losing a lot of blood,” she glanced at her colleague again. “He’s trembling, give me your coat.” She held out her hand as Hawkes removed his coat and passed it over. Sally carefully wrapped it around Sherlock’s torso and crudely tucked it around his shoulders and arms before reaching for her radio. “Lestrade? We need an ambulance on Northumberland Street; there’s been gunfire, Sir. Sherlock Holmes is injured.”

“What?”

“He was hit by at least two bullets - and there’s a possible head injury. He’s bleeding badly.”

“I thought you were right behind us, Sally, in the car?”

“We were just coming when the shots were fired. I’m going to call it in, we need an ambulance, it’s serious - he’s got two, possibly three bullets in his back! Make sure Doctor Watson get’s to whichever hospital the ambulance is going to.”

“Call the ambulance. Let us know what hospital. Do not leave his side. Got it?”

Sally’s voice wavered when she finally replied, “Yes Sir.” She pushed the radio into her coat pocket and busied herself tucking the coat in tighter around Sherlock’s paling body; his lips were turning purple, his skin impossibly white. She stole a look at Charlie and his face matched what she assumed her look like - an unnerving concoction of confusion and terror.
Chapter 3

The surgical waiting area of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital was as sparse and clinical as any room you could imagine; brightly lit by overhead strip-lighting that buzzed and flickered occasionally, it was migraine inducing in the extreme. And yet, to John, it was acceptable - it was the norm of every NHS hospital across the country to have uncomfortable chairs, inadequate coffee, nauseating smells of disinfectant while the hospital still crawled with bacteria and an alarmingly low ratio of staff to patients. To John, all hospitals were matched in their disappointment, so why would the QE be any different just because Sherlock had been admitted? It disgusted him to think of all that was available to the NHS and yet the standards were increasingly poor; he’d been part of a medical team in Afghanistan and had coped infinitely better; what right did they have? Exhaling loudly, he rested his head back against the wall his seat lined and closed his eyes to the tension that bared down on his skull. He didn’t know anything about Sherlock’s condition, there had been no nurse to update them, no briefing from the medical staff of any, real substance. All he knew was what he’d heard crackle through the radio in Greg’s car from Donovan; Sherlock had been shot and it was serious. He opened his eyes, staring at the crisp, white ceiling tiles and sharp lights above his head and asked himself all the questions he couldn’t answer: what now, how’s Sherlock, what’s next, will he recover?

Beside him, Greg’s feet mapped out unpatterned taps and he sighed, his cheeks puffed up dramatically. He’d taken John straight to the Queen Elizabeth after receiving the calling from Sally telling him where the ambulance would go. They’d inhaled cups of coffee, Greg had smoked cigarettes he’d promised himself he’d never touch but still kept in his coat pocket, and then they had both descended into a thick, tense silence that neither knew how to fill. What words could, anyway?

He clasped his hands into his lap to prevent more nervous ticking, “God, what’s taking them so long?” he frowned, his chest aching as he sighed again, and ran his left hand through his silver hair. “I thought there’d at least have been an update, he’s been in surgery for hours.” John raised his eyebrows silently in reply and shrugged his shoulders. He didn’t know how to answer; he didn’t know what was happening to be able to brief Greg on how long it would take, and he wasn’t sure that if he opened his mouth that he would be able to find words anyway. Greg got to his feet, his shoes squeaking against the polished white tiles and began to pace with his hands pushed deeply into his trouser pockets so that his shoulders bunched up. The air conditioning above his head made the hospital cool and did work a little to relax his tense shoulders. “Did you reach Mycroft when you called?”

“Yeah...” John broke his silence and scrubbed his hands across his face, running the brief call over in his mind...

“Yes?”

“Mycroft, um - it’s John Watson.”

“Mobile phones are manufactured nowadays with built-in caller ID, John. I know who you are, the question is what do you want?”

“There was an accident tonight, involving Sherlock.”

“Yes?”
“At the minute, he’s in surgery at the QE - he was shot.”

“I had kind of hoped I’d be able to leave a message but he picked up. I didn’t elaborate, I just told him what I know, just said he was in surgery.” He looked up at Greg through scared eyes and found that Greg’s brown stare matched his.

Halting his pacing, Greg pulled his hands from his pockets and folded them across his chest, “Did Charlie or Sally mention anything at all to you, did they say what happened?” He asked, uneasy in his tone and stance, “I know Dimmock interviewed them briefly at the station when they got back but I was here, so…” He shrugged his shoulders as he trailed off.

“I haven’t spoken to them, Greg. You know I haven’t.” John sighed his response and widened his eyes, then rolled them back into his head as he felt them heat up, tears brimming that he didn’t want to shed. “I only heard what you did; she told you over the radio that it was three bullets, yes? Jesus Christ, Greg, three bloody bullets in his back! I just want to see him, I want know what the damage is or what to expect. I want to know that he’s okay. I can’t use the medical side of my brain until I know what I’m up against, which just leaves me with the side of my brain that loves him more than anything, that’s consumed by spousal guilt and trying to piece everything together with no bloody information.” he held his breath, his tongue pointed and resting on his top lip as the tears won their fight and began to trickle into his lashes and down his cheeks, “I need to know what’s going to happen from here,” He stared up at Greg and shook his head, embarrassed at his open crying. “I mean, we don't even know if he's alive.”

“John, stop it. You can’t torture yourself like this,” Greg stepped closer to John and sunk back into the chair beside him with his hand resting on John’s tense, trembling shoulder. “I guess that if the bullets have hit his spine,” Greg began as calmly as he could make his voice and tried to sound professional and in control, “He could be paralysed.” He sounded terrified, hating to admit the words, but when John nodded his agreement, confirming that he was thinking that too, it felt a little less harsh to be the one delivering the verdict.

Greg had been around the block enough times to know what shootings like this could do to the victims. He kept his eyes on John, even as he drew back his hand and rested them on his lap while his mind swam with a million ‘what ifs’.

John swiped his hands across his face, brushing the tears from his cheeks even as his eyes filled with more, and willed them away. Crumbling wasn’t an option, he couldn’t fall to pieces; Sherlock needed him.

“I'm going to question the two of them myself, Donovan and Hawkes. First thing in the morning. I'll see what I can draw from them. I'll get everything I can, John, and we’ll find out how it happened. Whatever it is, we’ll get the son of a bitch.” Greg promised with conviction as John leaned forward, arms on his knees and his spine curved forwards at such an angle it made Greg wince.

“I know,” John cut in as he got to his feet, hands pushing into his pockets as he paced in a similar fashion to the way Greg had moments before. “I know. Thanks.” He was serious - he was thankful for Greg’s promises, for his conviction and his presence, but he knew that nothing would happen: something inside of John told him that nobody knew a thing - the world was blind, deaf and dumb - and he couldn’t allow himself the rose-tinted naive belief that this case would be easily solved and closed with a cathartic experience for all involved. There would be no closure, he was sure of it. Both Sally and Charlie had already expressed their confusion, and for Sherlock to be shot in the back it meant he wasn’t facing the direction of the armed person. So who knew anything? Precisely nobody.
Greg rested back into the uncomfortable chair and watched John’s nervous pacing. He needed to leave but he wouldn’t, he couldn’t do that to John or Sherlock. He had been through so much with Sherlock since meeting him – there’d been many hospital and clinical visits throughout their relationship, almost all of them had included the same sense of doom and pain that he felt now. He wasn’t entirely sure he had it in him to go through it again. He got to his feet, considering that freshening up in the toilets around the corner would help, and stopped after two steps when John reached out and grabbed his arm. Looking first to John’s face, Greg followed his line of vision until his eyes landed upon two men in green scrubs walking towards them. His stomach clenched and he could feel John’s trembling right to his fingertips.

“John Watson?” The younger of the two men asked as Greg and John edged back nervously to their seats and the two doctors sat down in front of them.

“Yes,” John croaked then coughed lightly, clearing his throat. “Sorry, yes. That me.”

The young surgeon smiled softly at him and nodded, “I’m Rick Chancellor and this is Alec Palmer, we led the surgical team for Sherlock.” the man’s face was kind but John and Greg found it impossible to find it comforting. “The surgery was successful; there was damage to his left thigh where one of the bullets tore through, there had been profuse bleeding and the damage has been repaired, but he has a drain in situ to prevent further complications. Removing the two bullets that entered the spinal column, however, did prove to be a more intricate task. Rather remarkably, there was no major damage to any of his internal organs. His left kidney was grazed as one of the bullets that passed through his lower back, but it wasn’t perforated and so far both kidneys have shown no decreased ability to function. We will continue to monitor his kidney function over the next forty-eight hours.”

Though Rick gave a soft, encouraging smile both Greg and John knew something more serious was coming and braced themselves for it.

“The muscle damage caused by the bullets is extensive, and the damage to the spinal cord is great. Though we cannot say for certain until he has woken up and been assessed more thoroughly on his motor skills, it would be realistic to assume, given this widespread damage, that Sherlock will not be able to regain a full range of mobility.” He drew in a deep breath.

“Paraplegia?” John asked, bluntly and openly, his voice firm and authoritative.

“Taking into account the precise nature of Sherlock’s injury, what we call a T12-L1 spinal cord injury, we would anticipate complete paralysis from the lower back, yes.” Doctor Palmer picked up in place of his younger colleague. “The precise amount of damage and paralysis will need to be evaluated, but we are anticipating paraplegia from the pelvis.”

Greg inhaled sharply and his eyes quickly felt hot with tears but he held strong. At his side, John was silent and still. They had expected this, known it was the only outcome, but the truth in words was a painful blow. And now they sat, stunned and frightened, and considered that the world had turned and they had been thrown off with vigour.

“You’ll continue to assess his kidneys?” John cleared his throat, his voice strained despite the action.

“He’ll be catheterised for the next twenty-four hours at least and continuously if paralysis is present; his urine output will be measured, as will his fluid intake, and we’ll be able to assess him that way, yes. An ultrasound of his kidneys in a day or two will also give us a view of how well they’re functioning.” Doctor Palmer explained. John nodded silently, trying to absorb it all.

“And the head injury?” Greg asked quietly.
“There hasn't been any intracranial swelling, but again his cognitive function will be monitored and thoroughly assessed as he recovers from the surgery and is taken off the pain medication.” Doctor Chancellor explained. Greg felt appeased by their diligence.

They were given time for the news to settle in a little before they were guided by a young, rotund female nurse to the surgical ICU to see Sherlock, both under strict instructions to be as unintrusive as possible. The small room that Sherlock was in was without a door or even a curtain for privacy, but was silent to outside noise while alive with electrical appliances: beeps and pulses battled to be heard over the low, static hum of electricity that filled the room. There was a dim light in the corner that seemed to glow a spooky blue rather than a crisp white, and it illuminated the room just enough to allow Greg and John to make out Sherlock, while casting frightening shadows across the angles of the man’s face.

The bed was raised high and, in it, Sherlock lay completely flat with the rails at the sides pulled up and made safe with colourful, padded guards to prevent injury, looking like they belonged in the paediatric department rather than at Sherlock’s sides. With his curls pushed back from his face and his body nude to the waist before disappearing beneath a blue, cotton blanket, Sherlock looked like a two-year-old swaddled in a cot. His head was held still by a neck brace and his skin seemed so pale that he was almost translucent. The light dusting of ginger freckles that covered his almost hairless chest were invisible beneath the pads of the twelve-lead heart monitor that was to the right of his bed.

There were tubes, wires and lines that seemed to be fixed to every conceivable part of Sherlock’s body - the IV, the catheter, the drain, the monitors...but Greg’s eyes were drawn to Sherlock’s face, cut and beginning to bruise, partially obscured by an oxygen mask that fogged and cleared as he breathed unsteadily but deeply, his chest rising independently. Greg considered that Sherlock was breathing on his own had to be clung to - a bright side to the entire tragedy of the night.

John got as close to Sherlock as the bed rails allowed, reaching over to take hold of Sherlock’s hand as tightly as he could before the fear of breaking him took over. Sherlock’s lashes fluttered against his cheeks and his hand twitched around John’s as though he were attempting to grip John back just as tightly. John knew, though, that between the medication and anesthetic, and the head injury that Sally had mentioned, Sherlock wouldn’t feel much like waking up and communicating any time soon, and John didn’t envy him the fuzziness he knew he would feel in his head.

“Hi,” John’s whispering voice was low and sweet, soft and gentle, and Greg watched them intently from the foot of the bed, his hands in his coat pockets. He wanted to touch Sherlock, to feel that he was real, but he couldn’t; he had known Sherlock for so many years and this was killing him - seeing the man he’d taken under his wing splayed out on a bed, injured beyond repair, left him feeling like a bereft father. “It’s okay, Love. It’s going to be alright - Greg and I are right here.”

John’s tone and words were so gentle and sincere that Greg felt as though he was intruding upon an intimate moment. The world didn’t get to see this, the loving, relationship moments between them - Greg’s team was never privy to the tender, personal moments - and Greg felt his heart beat a little faster and a drop of relief in his stomach to see confirmation of what he’d always suspected of the two: the Army Doctor and the Consulting Detective were as in love as any couple could be.

Sherlock gave a soft, echoic whimper behind the oxygen mask followed by a bubbled groan deep in his throat. He moved his head a tiny fraction, a half-snuggle into the restraint of the collar, and a half-hearted attempt at pulling toward John. John placated him quickly, reaching up with his left hand to softly touch against Sherlock’s cheek whilst keeping his right hand tightly locked around Sherlock’s. “Shh, it’s okay, Love, relax, it’s alright. I’ll explain everything when you’re feeling better. Just relax.”
When John peered over his shoulder, searching Greg out, the Greg couldn’t fail to spot the tears in his eyes. “What do you need me to do, John?” His voice was small and husky, pushing past the emotion building in his throat and barely escaping his lips.

John inhaled deeply and tried to look and sound braver than he felt. "Will you do one thing for me, if you don’t mind? Can you go to the flat?" he asked and Greg gave a swift nod. "Just pack a bag - changes of clothes, raid the bathroom cabinet, my phone charger...anything you see and think we might need for a couple of days, then when he's settled I can come and go a bit more freely. I just want to be able to stay for now." He licked his bottom lip and tried to access the rational side of his overwrought brain. "If you get stuck, just ask Mrs Hudson..." he pointed to the doorway of the cubicle, to a plastic chair where John had dropped his coat when he’d entered. "The key's in my pocket."

Greg strode quickly across to the chair and dug around in John’s coat to find the keys. Turning the cold keys over in his large hand, Greg lifted his gaze back to John and couldn’t miss the subtle but definite shift in his expression, “John?” he frowned, “What is it, I can see smoke in your ears.”

“Nothing, it’s just-,” John sighed, “Baker Street.” He shrugged and kind of laughed, resignedly. “We’re going to have to leave, aren’t we. The flat, Mrs Hudson...?” John’s face flushed with fear.

“No,” Greg jumped in dismissively, “Not necessarily. I’m sure there are things that can be done,” he shrugged his shoulders, “Stairlifts or something; get those Occupational Health guys in to jig things up and the job’s a good’n.” The smile that accompanied Greg’s words was as hopeful as he could make it.

“No,” John shook his head, and sighed again, “Not in places like that.” He closed his eyes and wet his lips with the tip of his tongue as his head lulled back heavily on his shoulders. When he opened his eyes again, he straightened his neck and focused his eyes on Sherlock.

Greg could see John wanted to say much more but daren’t. He took a deep breath and sighed, the sound of his exhale lost into the static, electric hum that filled the room, and pushed the keys into his pocket. “I’ll be a phone call away, John. If there’s anything you need just ring and I’ll be right back.”

“Thanks Greg,” John nodded slowly without looking around at him.

Greg approached the bed nervously and drew his hand from his pocket to reach down, fingers quivering, and touch Sherlock’s bare arm. “We’re doing everything we can, Will, okay? Just get some rest and get better, alright?” He retracted his hand quickly and turned, his body stiff, and left John alone with Sherlock.

Watching Greg leave with a crane to his neck, John felt his tears welling thicker and faster: despite appearances, so many people held onto something special when it came to Sherlock. John may just belong to Sherlock, but Sherlock had a little piece of himself somehow invested in everyone he met, despite whether they were amicable or not - something in people just couldn't help it. Just hearing the way Greg spoke to him was painful - Greg was family to Sherlock. I mean, God, he even called him William for Christ’s sake!

Alone, scared and painfully vulnerable, John let his tears fall with Sherlock's hand gripped tightly in his. It took it's toll and the tears were hard to stop, but he managed to rein his emotions in after ten minutes or so. The emotion wasn't gone, the pain no where near lessened, but the urgency of his sadness had eased. He could be stronger now - he had to be, because what else was there to do but be strong?
Chapter 4

Time had moved on to the early hours of the morning quickly, although Greg had considered time to stop whilst waiting at the hospital, and now it was descending into the funny time that could be considered both ‘too early’ and ‘too late’. All the while, ice-cold rain continued to thunder down upon the streets. Greg stopped the car in Baker Street outside of 221. The light was on in the hallway, shining through the glass arch above the black door, and Greg didn't doubt that Mrs Hudson was pacing inside, wearing the carpet away with worry. She'd known Sherlock for some years - they'd met on a case not long after Greg had met Sherlock himself - and he knew that despite Sherlock's age, Mrs Hudson had done almost the same as he had and grown fond of the tall, thin, enigmatic man in a familial, maternal way. He climbed out of the car and into the wet night, racing to the door, and unlocked it as quietly and quickly as he could, stepping in out of the rain. He groaned as he felt the droplets tumble beneath the collar of his coat and into his shirt.

He looked up, hearing a click and rattling of chains down the small hallway to the right of the stairs that led up into 221B, and wasn't surprised a bit when the door dragged open to reveal Mrs Hudson's ashen face, eyes alive with worry, dressed in her nightwear and dressing gown. John had called her on his way to the hospital, telling her Sherlock had been injured and he'd be in touch, but he couldn't recall him ever phoning her back and her fear was obvious.

"Oh" She straightened and stepped into the hallway, pulling her dressing gown a little tighter around her body. "I thought you might have been John."

Greg's lips thinned into a smile but it didn't touch his dark eyes, "He's with Wi-Sherlock - he had to have surgery, and it went on for some time. John asked me to come and pick some things up for them, I didn't mean to disturb you." He apologised, feeling embarrassed at how unprofessional he felt.

"How is he?" Her hand flew to her chin in dismay, "Both of them, I mean. Do they know what's happened yet, if Sherlock is going to be alright?" Her eyes search him for truth.

Greg sighed and shrugged up his shoulders. How was he supposed to tell her? What was he supposed to say? He looked at her, blinking and opening and closing his mouth wordlessly, his eyes threatening to shed tears. “He’s, um…”

"Detective Inspector," Mrs Hudson stepped toward him, "Would you like a cup of tea?"

Greg's sigh was loud and his shoulders dropped as a small surge of tension fell from his body, "Please." He nodded his head quickly and followed behind her with heavy strides.

Mrs Hudson's own little, private corner of the multi-storied Baker Street house was everything Greg had expected it to be and yet nothing like he'd imagined. It was warm, inviting, modest and cosy but not chintzy or too like an 'old woman'. She pointed him to a small, two-seater sofa as she led him into the lounge that joined seamlessly with a small kitchen. Greg smiled gratefully as he sat down and glanced around the room.

"Sugar?"

Nodding, Greg pushed his eyebrows up to try and look less severe, "Yes - one. Thanks."

A moment later, she joined him on the sofa with a small tray holding two, delicate teacups and a jug of milk. "I'm sorry," she said softly and pointed him toward the tray as she set it on the coffee table,
allowing him to help himself to milk. "I don't have any of those mugs that the boys use upstairs; much too chunky for me."

"The cup is perfect, Mrs Hudson." He dismissed her softly as he took a sip.

“Oh, Martha, please. Martha.” She insisted, smiling delicately at him.

Greg returned the smile as honestly as he could, repeating her name, aware that before now he’d never even contemplated her being anything other than Mrs. Hudson, like Sting, Madonna or Prince. “Martha.”

A silence fell between them, stopped from descending too far only by the clock on the wall above the door. Greg drank his warm drink gratefully, glad to finally be feeling warm from the cold outside. A small amount of peace settled into him for the first time in hours and he sighed at the momentary contentment.

"Detective Inspector Lestrade," Mrs Hudson spoke up.

"Greg," he insisted and she smiled.

"Greg," She repeated with a nod, her hands clasped around the teacup. "Tell me honestly about Sherlock, please?"

Nodding, Greg took a deep breath and licked his lips. He placed the cup onto the table and straightened his back, trying to drum up his professionalism. "He was shot outside of a residence in Northumberland Street. He’s in recovery in Intensive Care. They removed the bullets, repaired what damage they could but - his spine was damaged, and they’re, um. They’re certain...." He swallowed hard, watching her face as her brow creased deeply, "They are pretty certain that he'll be left with permanent damage."

Her eyes closed as her right hand came to her face in dismay. Part of her had expected it, or something as severe, but the actual, sound of the words and knowing them to be true was harder to accept than she'd imagined. She blinked her eyes open, trying to dispel the tears, and looked sadly at Greg. "Let me help you," she said, placing her cup onto the table, "Upstairs," She nodded her head up, "Collecting the boys' things, I want to help you."

Greg nodded, "Thank you." He reached out to her and touched her arm, "I'm so sorry."

"We should send some food, for John. I can't imagine he'd leave Sherlock to eat." She said, stiffening her upper lip, and rose to her feet. "Why don't you go on up to the flat, start collecting their things while I pack something for John to eat. I'll find you once I'm done." She smiled at him as he stood, towering over her.

Nodding, Greg took that as a dismissal, as wanting a few moments to herself, and walked slowly toward the door. "Thank you for the tea," he said politely, letting himself out.

He took a deep breath as he stepped into the hallway, feeling embarrassed as he heard the high sob that escaped Mrs Hudson in the room behind as the door closed. He nodded, steeling himself, and climbed the stairs up into 221B.

He felt like an intruder as he strode into the flat through the kitchen. He flicked on the light in the archway and glanced around - the surfaces and sink were littered with beakers and used cups, and Greg knew that at least eighty percent of the mess was down to Sherlock. The flat was looking a lot better since John had moved in, despite Sherlock only being there a few weeks before John; Sherlock seemed to allow Mrs Hudson in a little more readily these days to neaten things up, and
John was much more domestically minded than Sherlock would ever be. But still the flat was heavily influenced by Sherlock - cluttered with science, an outward manifestation of the obsessive, autistic mind that was so often chaotic and disorganised and simultaneously in exactly the right order for Sherlock, Greg often thought.

The light illuminated right into the lounge and he could see John's phone charger beside the TV. At least, he assumed it was John's, going by it being neatly wrapped up around itself, it seemed rather too tidied away for it to belong to Sherlock. He stepped in and retrieved it, clutching it in his right hand as he glanced around quickly before turning back and heading into the bedroom beyond the kitchen. He'd assisted an injured or intoxicated Sherlock into this room once or twice before - and since - John's arrival and knew the navigation well. The room was tidier than he remembered it being and, as always, his eyes were drawn to the photograph on the dresser along the furthest wall of the room, a frame snapshot of Sherlock and Mycroft as children. Mycroft couldn't have been more than twelve, landing Sherlock somewhere around six, and both sweet and innocent looking as they smiled. Both boys were bright-eyed in the photograph, and it always caught Greg's eye and sat warmly on his heart as a reminder - should he ever doubt it - that the Holmes boys were bound by love.

He cleared his throat and marched across the room, searching in the wardrobe and beneath the bed for an overnight bag to fill. It was an odd feeling, to be searching through the draws and belongings of his friends, and even more odd was the atmosphere in the house: a fully functioning home twenty-four hours ago, the place now felt empty and devoid of life, somehow absorbing the sadness that was going on a few miles away. Odd, that a building should be personified, but it truly seemed to be.

He threw clean underwear, shirts, jeans and socks into the bag for John, with a few pairs of pyjama bottoms for Sherlock, and John's laptop and charger from the bedside locker - he didn't know if it was useful, but it would be there should he want it. He tossed the phone charger in with it and fastened it up, standing with his back straight and his hands on his hips in the centre of the boys' bedroom and tried to think of something he could do besides breaking down and sobbing or lashing out in abject anger.

But the anger bubbled through him without permission but with full justification: it made no sense that they could go from inspecting a flat suspected of being used for drugs trafficking, to surrounding one of their own with bullets in his back. The flat had been empty, that much he was certain of, so how did it go from empty to housing a gunman? Because he had to be there, didn't he? The shooter. It had to be that flat he was in or it was all too... coincidental. He couldn't work anything out and his anger only grew from the blank his mind drew. He wanted to go to Northumberland Street and shoot the sorry son of a bitch! An eye for an eye in the most perfectly cruel of ways. And it would be just, Greg assured himself; revenge it might be to want this so badly, but it would be just.

Shaking his head, he picked the bag up from the unmade bed and left the room, striding steadily back through the kitchen and plunged the flat back into darkness as he left, descending the stairs. He left the bag on the bottom step and turned down the corridor toward Mrs Hudson's flat. He knocked gently against the door and called out to her, "Mrs Hudson? Um, Martha?"

The chain and bolt slipped across before the door was pulled open and Mrs Hudson's head poked around the frame. She'd been crying, her eyes were red and her face was pale, but Greg didn't say a word. He gave her a soft, sad smile as she held out her hand to him, passing him a lunchbox. "There are sandwiches for you and John in there, and some fruit and biscuits. Make sure he eats." She nodded, "He never eats. He says he will, but he never does. He gets that from Sherlock; he used to eat but now…" She shook her head. "And here, a flask of tea." She handed over a Thermos.

"Thank you, John'll appreciate it. And I appreciate it," he smiled graciously despite wanting to join
her in her obvious grief.

A sad look crowded her features and she scanned Greg’s face. "You'll look after them both for me, won't you?" She asked, her voice catching. "Sherlock's been, and well so has John, they've - they've both been like sons to me, and to know that they're hurting is hurting me. But I know that you mean a lot to Sherlock, and to John - to them both...and it would mean a lot to me if you could look after them for me."

"I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't, as their friend as well as professionally. They are in safe hands now, both of them, I promise you." He kept his voice as soothing as he could, wanting to placated her frayed nerves. "They both mean a lot to me, too. I'll do everything I can to make sure they're both alright."

Her brows knitted together sympathetically as she attempted to smile, "Thank you, Greg." She nodded once before turning back into her home and pushing the door closed tightly. Greg waited until he heard the locks slip back across before he left her.

He walked back down the hallway and collected the bag, pushing the treats from Mrs Hudson inside and zipped it closed again before he threw it over his shoulder. When he reached the car, he set it on the passenger’s seat before he fastened his seatbelt. He forced the keys into the ignition, gripped the steering wheel and inhaled deeply, holding it a moment before pushing it forcefully from his lungs. Everything was fucked, royally fucked. As if there hadn't been enough for the boys to deal with.
Standing beside Sherlock’s bed, John turned his upper body to look toward the walkway when he heard footsteps behind him. He was relieved, oddly, who he saw there. "Mycroft."

Mycroft, ever in control of himself, nodded his head curtly. "John." He lifted his folded umbrella up and hooked it over his arm as he stepped into the room.

John turned back to the bed as Mycroft came further into the room with sure, sharp steps. "He's...

"I'm aware, John. I’ve seen his notes," Mycroft cut in, his gloved hand coming up as if to physically silence the shorter man. He removed his coat and hung it over the chair with John’s. He rested his umbrella against the wall before working his gloves off of his hands. He pushed them into his coat pocket and clasped his hands behind his back as he walked slowly toward Sherlock’s bed. He walked right around to the other side and stood, a foot back, with his hands resting at his sides.

“Of course you have.” John raised his eyebrows, all relief now replaced with annoyance at his sheer arrogance.

"I’ll have Sherlock transferred to a private hospital first thing in the morning." He said, his eyes set on Sherlock's pale, sleeping face. "From there, everything will be organised. New accommodation, physical therapy and equipment, whatever that might be." He looked up, his eyes settling on John.

“Excuse me?” John was physically taken aback by Mycroft’s bluntness. “Private hos-, new accom-, I can’t - I can’t even make sense of what you’re doing right now. Mycroft, your brother has just been shot by some wacko, he’s lying here with wires and tubes in every conceivable place and we’ve been told that he’s probably never going to walk again. Surely the last thing on anyone’s mind is to ship him off to some money-pit hospital and then turn the two of us out of our home?”

“What I’m doing is looking after my brother. I want the best care, and the best opportunities for him for whatever is lying ahead. The sooner he gets targeted care, the sooner he’ll…”

“What? The sooner he’ll what - walk?” John snapped. “Mycroft he isn’t going to walk. You read his notes, umm? His spinal cord is almost severed. In all likelihood, he’ll go through another surgery to fuse his back because a severed spinal cord is useless, yeah? He isn’t going to recover, not how you’re imagining. Recovering now is getting over the surgery, his wounds healing, and moving on with his life - a life that is going to be painful, and drastically different. No amount of physical therapy is going to make him walk.”

Mycroft stood close to Sherlock’s bed, his eyes not leaving the younger Holmes’ sleeping form. “We need to try.”

John shook his head. “No.”

“It’s his decision.” Mycroft looked at John briefly, then back to his brother. “He has to chose this, not you.”

“And not you.” John said firmly. “You can’t move him. By all means, find him a physical therapy centre once he’s recovered from the surgery, but moving him somewhere now whilst he’s this weak is cruel. And planning to give him false hope that the therapy you’re thinking of is going to help is cruel too. He’ll need to build upper body strength - no amount of therapy on his legs will make him walk, Mycroft. All we’re waiting for here is for him to wake up, and for the consultant to say the same thing I just have - that he won’t walk, that the damage was too great. Because that’s what
they’ll say.”

Mycroft shot his eyes back to John and sighed quietly. “You really believe that?”

John nodded sadly. “I’ve seen men with less severe damage to their spines lose all mobility. The damage they’re talking about with Sherlock is unreal, it’s apocalyptic - it’s over, Mycroft. It’s done. He won’t walk again.”

Mycroft closed his eyes. Deep inside, he’d known that to be the truth himself, but he’d hoped that projecting high hopes and expectations would be mirrored and would, somehow, psychically inflict his will on the world to make it so. To make it the truth. “How has he been?” He asked in a careful voice, his hands resting on the cot sides of the bed.

"He’s in a lot of pain but they’re doing their best to control it without morphine. He has been awake occasionally but he’s not lucid, and though they have him medicated as much as they can it only does so much - they’re keen to be careful with what they give him." He licked his lips, "They're trying to be diplomatic."

Mycroft's jaw stiffened as John ploughed over the past and then fixed the Doctor with an icy stare, "So you have actually spoken to his surgeons?"

John inhaled deeply and nodded his head, "Yes, Greg and I were here. They’re sure that he won’t have any long-term health conditions." He began confidently, "The wound to his thigh was clean and, rather miraculously, there is no major organ damage from the bullets in his back. They’re keeping an eye on his kidneys because one of the bullets traveled slightly but his liver, spleen, stomach and bowel are all untouched which, as I said, is nothing short of a miracle." He looked up at Mycroft with bitterness in his eyes but found the man looking at his brother, Mycroft's eyes fixed on Sherlock's lightly twitching eyes.

"Indeed," Mycroft nodded, facial expression unchanging.

"Mycroft, there were three bloody bullets. That’s not an accident, no misfire or flying bullet, this was deliberate; it was premeditated." John spoke passionately, hoping to evoke something in the man. His voice dripped with anger and Mycroft looked up at him, their eyes crashing together. "Somebody shot your little brother, someone was trying to hurt him badly and, Jesus, Mycroft! They could have succeeded, they have succeeded. Look at him," he pointed to the bed. "Look at him!" Mycroft's brow twitched the tiniest movement and his eyes cast to Sherlock before back to John with the same, sharp stare as before. John shook his head, his anger bubbling over as it boiled beneath the surface of his skin, making his insides twist and his skin feel tight and prickled. "I just hope you're happy."

"Happy?" Mycroft's frown deepened, sharpening his eyes further. "How could this make me happy at all, do you really believe I wish ill-will on my brother in this way?"

"Then show an inch of emotion, for God’s sake! It was your case he was in that bloody flat for!" John's hands flew out, "I told him no, I said not to get involved - international security, terrorism, drugs. I told him not to take it but he had to prove to you that he was better. He had to be better than you!" John swallowed loudly, wetting his constricted throat. "In trying, as he has always done, to prove you wrong, to prove to you he isn't worth the ridiculous jibes you throw at him, in fighting for your respect, he has ruined his life." His face contorted in anger and he shook his head, his chin jutting out. "You have ruined his life."

“John, I…” Mycroft began firmly, but was surprised to see John continued, completely enraged.

““You need to accept responsibility here, Mycroft. He’s your little brother! This could have gone so
much worse, don’t you get that? Your brother is lying on a hospital bed, gravely injured. This could have just as easily been a coroner's slab.” He stared at Mycroft for a second before stalking from the room, his shoulders squared. His limp was back, small but evident, and it twinged at Mycroft's heart - such as it existed for anyone other than Sherlock - and watched John disappear into the hallway.

Mycroft cast his eyes back to Sherlock, his eyes rolling over the cuts and bruises, and took a deep breath. He leaned over the padded sides of the bed and placed a tight-lipped kiss on Sherlock's left eyelid. "I am so sorry,” He whispered.

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John planted himself in the corridor for a moment, his breathing threatening to spiral out of control, and tried to calm down. Anger seeped from every pore, his blood thumped through his body and he clenched and relaxed his fists rhythmically at his sides. Mycroft was here, and perhaps he should have taken that as a sign that he wasn’t as heartless as he often came across, but John couldn’t get out of his mind that this was all Mycroft’s fault. It all came back to him.

Inhaling deeply to try to lower his blood pressure, he headed along the corridor toward the visitors toilet and shut himself inside. He stared at himself in the mirror adhered to the wall and continued to suck in dizzying breaths in an attempt not to vomit, brought on out of pure rage toward Mycroft. His hands gripped tightly to the small sink and the only sound to occupy him was that of the blood that pumped loudly in his ears; his face was red, his eyes wide, and he looked as awful and soulless as he felt. The sinking in his stomach hadn't lifted, the nausea and anger hadn't subsided, but like the emotions of earlier in night, the urgency that the feelings came with had passed. Everything was broken; it was like a cruel joke that nobody was laughing at.

John examined his reflection in the mirror. The anger he felt at Mycroft was immense but it was absolutely nothing, comparably minuscule, to the upset he felt for Sherlock and all that they stood to lose. Ahead of them lay the likelihood that Sherlock’s life as the Consulting Detective, the very thing that kept his brilliance controlled to keep him sane, would cease to be, at least in the capacity with which it had dominated and defined his life to this point; he wouldn’t be as free to move about the city after potential threats in a wheelchair as he would be on long, graceful legs, would he? And what was it all for? They hadn't even solved the case! And now, here they were, lumbered with another: who shot Sherlock Holmes?

It was another of those jokes, John assumed. One of those jokes that was supposed to be oh-so-funny but, in which, nobody found a shred of mirth.

Still harbouring mostly anger, twined now with a pang of guilt, John knew that he'd have to talk to Mycroft. Blood was thicker than water and what he’d said, laying total blame on him, had been wrong. He straightened his jumper and glanced at his pale face once more in the mirror before leaving the bathroom. He walked back to Sherlock's cubicle slowly, his hands in the pockets of his cords and his steps scuffed and unhurried, glancing around him at the numerous turnings down dark corridors that he passed. But the toilets weren't far from Sherlock's small room and he was at the open entrance before he knew it. He peered inside and Mycroft was gone, though the man's coat and umbrella remained against the chair beside the doorway, so John knew he couldn't have gone too far. He couldn't decide whether he felt relief at that or anger, but told himself that for Sherlock, Mycroft's presence was paramount; Sherlock needed all the love and support he could get right now, whomever offered it.

Taking his hands from his pockets, John approached the bed and pushed up the sleeves of his jumper. Resting his elbows on the padded bars, he reached into the bed and took Sherlock's right hand in both of his. When Sherlock's fingers twitched and closed very loosely around John's, he took
it as a sign that Sherlock had some awareness as to what was going on around him in the room, even though he wasn't fully awakened.

"Can you hear me, Love?" he asked softly, his voice quiet and gentle. Once again, Sherlock's fingers twitched around his and a small noise escaped his mouth into the oxygen mask. "I know you're fuzzy-headed and confused, you had surgery and you're on pain killers, but you're going to be okay, alright?" He held Sherlock's hand tighter, shuffling up a little higher along the bed. "Greg's at Baker Street right now going through your pants," He smiled with damp eyes and Sherlock gave a grumbled groan into the mask.

John watched Sherlock's face, studying for signs of pain where Sherlock mightn't be able to word it. As his eyes scanned across Sherlock's, screwed closed with his brow furrowed, he watched a tear roll slowly from the corner of Sherlock's left eye and run down his cheek and disappear behind the support around his neck. "Shh, it's okay," he reached out and pressed his fingers to the tear trail, "It's alright." Sherlock gave another groan from deep in his throat, attempting to lift it to his face before he sluggishly dropped the heavy limb to his chest and groaned, trying to turn and face John. John glanced behind him before leaning over the bed and pulling the oxygen mask down from Sherlock's chin, letting it rest against his neck, "Shh, it's okay, try to calm down." He said softly, his hand on Sherlock's cheek.

Sherlock took a deep breath in, coughing a little over a moan, his nose scrunched up in discomfort. "Try to stay still," he kept his voice soft, his hand against the curls that were reachable through the straps across Sherlock's forehead to keep him in place. "Listen to me, Sherlock, it's okay but you need to try to stay still." He smoothed his thumb back and forth across Sherlock's warm forehead. "There you go," he spoke slowly as Sherlock breathed snuffly through his nose.

Keeping up the apparently soothing motion with his thumb for a while longer, John watched Sherlock succumb to the pain, medication and shock as he slowly drifted back off into a thick, heavy and motionless sleep. So still was his body that John found himself watching Sherlock's chest, just to be sure. He leaned heavily against the bars, his hands in Sherlock's, watching the rhythmic misting and clearing of the oxygen mask as he breathed steadily.

He wasn't sure how long he stood, just watching over Sherlock, but he knew it was a long time when he was disturbed by the sound of footsteps behind him. Keeping hold of Sherlock’s weighty hand, John peered over his shoulder to see a young nurse enter the room, walking toward them with a soft smile. Approaching the bed, she silently and efficiently checked Sherlock’s vitals, checked his urine output and temperature before leaving in much the same quiet manner she’d arrived in. For a moment, the only noise surrounding them was the quiet ticking of the machines and the soft squeak of the nurse’s shoes as she disappeared down the corridor.
When Greg finally returned to the hospital it was pushing on for three am. He walked the corridors with Mycroft a step or two behind him, and cleared his throat as he walked into the cubicle. "I found a visitor outside." He offered as his announcement with an attempt at joviality, "Would have been back in a bit sooner but the overwhelming urge to smoke myself into oblivion called." He raised his brows apologetically at John.

"It's okay." John smiled, nodding politely at Mycroft. "He’s still sleeping anyway, it’s not like there’s anything you’re missing that’s vital."

Holding up the bag in his hands, Greg waved it in John's direction, "Yours and Sherlock's things are in there, I threw in your laptop too. And Mrs Hudson sent tea and sandwiches, though I’m to call her Martha from now on." He set the bag down onto the chair that was fast becoming a resting post of possessions and rocked nervously on his feet, his hands pushed into his pockets. His gaze moved between John and Mycroft as the elder Holmes moved around to the left side of Sherlock's bed, standing opposite John silently. "Do you need me to stay, John?" he asked, offering sincerely. "I mean, do you want me to stay?"

John turned to him fully with a small, sideways smile, "No, no. Go home, Greg." he insisted, "Thank you for everything you've done tonight."

Greg shrugged up one shoulder and stepped closer to the bed slowly, standing up beside John, "I haven't done anything, not really."

"You have," John looked to him, "Honestly, you came here straight after work and stayed - you've gone above and beyond professionalism and friendship, it means a lot." He crooked another, small smile across his tired face as Greg nodded at him, embarrassed, and reached over the bars into the bed.

"You get some sleep, okay Will?" Greg placed his hand nervously onto Sherlock's blanketed hip. Mycroft's jaw tightened as he watched Greg with his brother, the sweetness of the shortened form of his given name used as a term of endearment toward Sherlock only serving to slap the older Holmes in the face. "Just rest and make sure you get better, alright?" He straightened and stepped back, running his right hand through his silvery hair before pushing both paws into his coat pockets, "Just call, yeah? If there's anything you need - whatever time, however big or small - just pick up the phone."

John blinked slowly and nodded a shy thank you, "Thanks, Greg."

Nodding politely in Mycroft's direction, Greg walked backwards a couple of steps before turning and exiting the small room, leaving John and Mycroft alone with Sherlock and the electrical buzz that choked the atmosphere.

John knew this was killing Greg too; seeing Sherlock sprawled out on a hospital bed was proving more than anyone knew how to handle. He wondered if it were to do with Sherlock's rocky past and the relationship that he and Lestrade had built up in it's wake. He knew there's been drug addiction and wanton behaviour, disregard for his own life, and that it was Greg - in that fatherly manner of his - who'd waded in and saved him and then sort of just stayed. Turning back to the bed, he glanced at Mycroft a moment then licked his bottom lip, slipping his hands into his trouser pockets. He felt uneasy, unwelcome almost, and his earlier anger at Mycroft gave way to something more like guilt.
"I'm sorry for the things I said earlier, I had no right at all to lay the blame on you. Sherlock’s his own man, and despite doing things to spite people, he never does things he doesn’t want to."

"You have every right, John," Mycroft cut across his apology before it became too cute with his references. "I appreciate that this is a stressful time. But it is important that you understand that, above everything, Sherlock is first and foremost my brother, and that is the most important thing to me. I’m not given to breaking out with sentimental babble, but then I’m not given to standing beside my brother when his projections look this bleak. But I have stood by him through his past mistakes and I shall stand by him through this, and more. And, John, I cannot stress enough to you that there is nothing in this, absolutely nothing, that brings me even one ounce of happiness. Losing Sherlock would..."

Though his brow set firm, John could see Mycroft's chin tremble: emotions existed in the ice-cold creature after all. "I know." He said, simply, letting Mycroft off the hook. "Now, he needs everybody's support, a united front. He's probably going to need it for a long time to come. And you're right, you're his brother and that is important, and it will continue to be important." John rested his arms against the bars and clasped his hands.

"You're the doctor," Mycroft's tone lightened, his body loosening almost unrecognisably. "Don't hold back the truth. What lies ahead for Sherlock, if indeed the worst case scenario is realised?"

John's sigh was louder and more forceful than he'd intended it to be and Mycroft's brows arched up. "Whatever the outcome, I'm sure we can bear it. Life for Sherlock confined to a wheelchair; how will it be?"

John shook his head. "It's not just the worst-case, Mycroft. It's the likelihood. This is going to happen, unless you have some super-secret government cure for a severed spine?"

"John." Mycroft held up his hand as a silencer.

"Don’t shrug me off. Mycroft, we can’t pretend this isn’t happening. There is extensive damage to his spinal cord," John shook his head again, losing his temper. "You’re a whole page behind me here. There isn’t a waiting period, like you’ve done for his drug-induced comas. There’s no coming back from this. Sherlock will be paralysed, he will not walk again. I’m not a specialist, but basic biology tells you that a spinal cord this damage will not work. From the injury point down, he will be completely paralysed. You’re kidding yourself if you’re hanging onto a hope that he won’t be. He’s going to wake up and he’s going to be angry, scared... And it doesn’t stop when he’s out of hospital. He’s got to get used to moving through life in a wheelchair, catheters or wearing nappies. He’s got to face losing all his dignity until he learns ways to cope and you know as well as I do that Sherlock coping with a body he has regularly kicked to the curb in the past is going to be one of the hardest things he’ll have to do in his life."

Mycroft faltered and John saw it, despite his efforts to hide the hitch in his chest. Mycroft watched Sherlock sleeping, silent for a moment, then looked back up at John. "I can provide a counsellor."

John nodded, sighing. "Yes, you can, but he'll only go if he wants to. And if he does go, he'll only say what he wants to. Sherlock barely says anything to anyone, even us. What makes you think he'll talk to a complete stranger?" Mycroft shook his head, stopping John's line of thought. With that, Mycroft took a deep breath and straightened his back. The Mycroft that John had come to know seemed to zap back into the reality he'd avoided for a short while as he fastened his blazer and crossed the room to retrieve his coat and umbrella. "You're leaving?" John frowned.

"For a short while." Mycroft replied.

"You can’t go!" John stepped away from the bed, throwing out his arms as he approached Mycroft.
“He’s your little brother, and try as you do to pretend like nothing like that matters, you can’t fool me. He nearly died tonight, and he’s been seriously injured and, when he wakes up, he’s going to be scared and confused and faced with the worst kind of life-changing news. Don’t you think you should be here for that?”

“I will be here.” Mycroft said firmly, sharp eyes fixed on John. “I have business to attend to. I’ll be back shortly.” he assured. “In the meantime, when he wakes and is lucid, please let me know.”

John nodded his head, giving up the fight. “Of course.” He sighed.

“Goodnight, John.” Mycroft called, already rounding the open doorway and disappearing along the dark corridor.

“Yeah…” John whispered to himself. “‘Night.”
Chapter 7

He wasn’t sure how, but at some point around five am John had managed to nod off into a light sleep. He woke, still on his feet and leaning his weight against his arms on the safety rail of Sherlock’s bed, with painful spasms in his lower back. He tried to contain a groan as he straightened up, stretching and twisting his back awkwardly, trying to work out the kinks. He pushed up the sleeve of his jumper to check his watch. It was almost eight am and he assumed that a nurse, or even the consultant if they were lucky, would be around soon. He yawned and stretched his arms up, blinking furiously to try to wake himself up a bit more.

He rested his hands back on the bar again and tilted his head as he glanced up at Sherlock’s face. He smiled softly, his cheeks pushed up, as Sherlock’s big eyes blinked back at him. “Hi…” he gushed, “Good morning.”

Sherlock’s reply arrived slowly and muffled behind the mask, but the lettering his tongue attempted to form was deliberate and split into two, soft breaths, “Mor…ning.”

John’s lips softened into a flat smile and his eyes misted up, “Want to take this off?” He lightly touched the mask with the fingers of his left hand. Sherlock’s nod, though small, was definite. John was professional but far from clinical as he carefully worked the elastic from Sherlock’s cheeks to pull the mask down, resting it to the side of his neck. "There - I can see you better now."

Sherlock blinked slowly and tried to lift his right hand to John but, finding the limb far too heavy, he sluggishly dropped it back down. John reached down and took Sherlock's hand in his. Sherlock stared up at the ceiling above him, to the florescent lights that weren’t on, examining the ceiling tiles in great detail. His throat hurt with the emotion he held back. His body felt different, some of it felt weightless, felt of nothing. He wanted to ask, to quiz John for the facts, but his mind and mouth weren’t working in sync and a tiredness like he'd never felt before continued to plague him, fuzzing his mind and making it hard to keep his eyes open.

“I should call your brother, let him know that you’re awake. He was here before.” John said quietly. “He wanted me to get in touch when you were woke up this morning.”

Sherlock shook his head in a small movement, “No.” He said hoarsely. “Not yet.”

“He’s worried about you.” John said carefully, his thumb sweeping back and forth on Sherlock’s knuckles as he held his hand. “He wanted me to…”

“No.” Sherlock repeated more forcefully.

John shushed him softly and nodded his head, “Shh. It’s okay. I won’t call him yet.” Sherlock gave as much of a nod as the brace around his neck would allow, blinking as he brought his gaze back up to the ceiling. “Hey…” John leaned forwards, rubbing the thumb pad of his free hand lightly on Sherlock’s cheek as tears fell. “It’s okay.”

“It isn’t okay.” Sherlock licked his dry lips slowly, and blinked the tears away. “I know it’s bad…”

John nodded his head, “Yeah, it is bad, but it will be okay.” Sherlock closed his eyes tightly, and when he opened them again he fixed them back on John. “I’m going to call your brother, okay? I’ll be gone for two minutes and I’ll be right back.” Gently touching Sherlock’s arm, John pulled away from the bed with a lump strangling his throat and closed his eyes tightly to the burning tears in his eyes. He wouldn’t cry - he wouldn’t allow himself that option. He could do that on his time, and
right now it wasn’t anyone else’s time but Sherlock’s.

Taking his phone out of his pocket as he left the room, John first scrolled through for Greg’s number and sent him a quick test message. **Sherlock’s awake. Come if you can?** After clicking send, John selected Mycroft from his contact and placed the call. The conversation was brief.

“John?”

“Mycroft, hi. Um, he’s awake. He’s a bit groggy and confused, but he’s trying to figure out what’s happened.”

“I’m coming.”

Around him, the hospital was coming to life despite their bay area being a routinely quiet section of the building. John knew that at some point there would be a doctor in to confirm what everybody already knew for Sherlock's future, and it made his stomach drop to his knees. He didn't want to be alone for that, unsure he could stomach the burden of the news himself, let alone carry it for Sherlock too.

John pushed his phone back into his pocket and strode down the corridor toward the toilets, kicking himself for not having thought to bring his toiletries from the bag Greg had left in that night. Still, relieving the bladder he'd ignored for hours and washing his face with cool water was enough of a luxury to make him feel a little calmer, fresher and a bit more awake. He wasted no more time in getting back to Sherlock, though, shuffling past staff who looked infinitely more rested than he felt, and crept back into the small room. He was startled by the deep voice of a male doctor stood at Sherlock’s bedside, dressed in cream trousers and a lightly checked, sky blue shirt, that echoed through the room as he stepped inside.

“And if you could just push as hard as you can against my hand…”

There was a nurse and a healthcare assistant on respective sides of Sherlock's bed. John immediately was drawn to the fact that the brace around Sherlock’s neck had been removed, the oxygen mask replaced with a clear nasal cannula and that his head was propped up, his shoulders surrounded and supported by an orthopedic pillow, the head of the bed was raised just enough to tip it slightly from it's previously flat position, giving him a bit more life and colour in his cheeks.

The heart monitor had been moved out and the pads of the twelve lead removed from his chest. The healthcare assistant was compassionately helping Sherlock into a white gown with a yellow trim around the neck and arms, tucking it into his sides without moving him too fast to fasten it round. He saw how little movement Sherlock had even at the simple task and it made his throat tighten. He coughed gently and, when the doctor turned, he held out his hand to him, "I’m John Watson," he introduced himself with what he hoped was confidence.

"Yes," The doctor with his thick mustache smiled and shook John's hand. "Doctor Webber, I'm the chief of orthopedics," he introduced himself. "I’m here as a musculoskeletal specialist."

John smiled nervously. "You've completed your evaluation?" John asked, nodding at Sherlock and folding his arms across his chest, wincing at the sharpness in Sherlock's eyes as the nurse replaced the cannula in the back of his hand. "Look, I'm aware that the outlook isn't good, I studied medicine myself. Please, just - don't sugar-coat it over" he lowered his tone, "I need to know the facts."

Doctor Webber responded with a calm nod, "He shows no sign of response to stimulation or the ability to complete motor tasks in the lower quadrant. Regaining sensation or movement here now would be miraculous," Demonstrating against his own body, he explained further. "Here," he placed
his hands on his hips and moved them around to the centre of his back, "The point of entry of both of the bullets," his index and middle finger on his left hand pointed to two, close spots above the curve of his spine in line with his hips. "Taking into account the severity of the damage they caused, and his subsequent movements following the shots at the scene of the accident which could well have caused further damage, expecting anything greater than the range of movement he has now is unreasonable."

"So he does have some movement?" John asked, his brows shooting up.

"No," the doctor shook his head, "I'm sorry - I mean that to expect him to regain more than what he has now, which appears to be complete paralysis, is naive." He brought his hands back around and brushed them down his stomach, "Loss of feeling and movement occurs right to the toes from the pelvis, that's all indication toward what is called a T12-L1 spinal cord injury, indicating severe damage at this junction of his spine - essentially, paraplegia from this type of injury means permanent loss of feeling, from the pelvic region, specifically the groin." he dropped his arms then reached out with his right hand, touching John's arm. "I'm sorry - perhaps there is a light at the end of the tunnel, I have seen individuals regain feeling if not strength...but...." He stopped, realising he was perhaps giving false hope. “With a complete SCI at this area of the spine, Sherlock will maintain full upper body use.” He said with hope. “But the truth is it is very unlikely that he will ever regain movement or feeling.” He sighed, “I'm sorry that there isn’t anything more hopeful that I can offer you.”

John rubbed both of his hands across his face and let out a deep sigh. “I know - it’s…” He shook his head, he didn't know what was going through his mind. "When will you start physio?" He asked, a little defensively. Where was Greg and Mycroft? He wasn't supposed to be doing this on his own.

"As soon as possible. Although the head injury he sustained wasn't serious and there is no intracranial swelling, he was left with a mild concussion and will be a little out of sorts for a few days. The medication he has been prescribed for pain management will obviously make him weaker and woozy. He needs to heal from surgery, too. But the good news is there are no signs of infection, the wounds are clean and there doesn't appear to be any swelling at the surgery sites. We will complete a renal ultrasound and dip his urine next, and check up on his kidneys as there were concerns due to the path of one of the bullets. Time is of the essence, Mister Watson, but let's give him time to rest and adjust before we tackle the big fight." He patted John's arm before peering over his shoulder, just as the nurse finished up with Sherlock and promised to call back soon, and nodded at Sherlock in lieu of a spoken goodbye.

"Doctor." John said abruptly. "It’s Doctor Watson.”

With a terse nod, the Doctor Webber and the nurse left together with the healthcare assistant, their feet noisy on the floor but no more words were uttered.

John inhaled and exhaled deeply on the spot, watching Sherlock's as he fought the tiredness he felt, his eyes blinking slowly as he looked back at John. He walked close to the bed and smiled down at Sherlock, bending over the bars still pulled up for safety and laid a kiss on Sherlock's warm forehead, "You doing okay?"

"I'm tired." Sherlock admitted, his voice groggy.

John nodded, his eyes flooding with warm tears, and he licked his lips, "Yeah, Love, I know."

"It’s really bad." Sherlock said, a statement not a question. He looked at John, eyes wide despite his fatigue, and John nodded. “I can’t feel...anything.”

Sherlock's eyes closed slowly and John waited for the anger, the wailing, but it didn't come.
Sherlock's breathing grew soft, snuffled through his nose, and he fell into a light, almost contented
sleep. John felt relieved - the seeds of truth had been planted - and apprehensive at the same time:
there would be a time, very soon, when he'd have this conversation again with Sherlock and the
reaction would be much, much different.

Confirmation had come and that was that; life had changed irreversibly and with more conviction
behind it at the doctor's words, finally settling into John's mind – finally becoming official. Sherlock
was paralysed, no feeling past his hips. Sherlock could no longer walk nor read the signs of his body.
A sarcastic laugh escaped breathily through John's nose as a thought occurred to him; would there be
any physicality to their relationship anymore? It had never been a big part of their live as a couple –
Sherlock was Asexual and though he loved John, sex wasn't a necessity – but was what little
intimacy of a sexual nature they did have going to be possible at all?

Not walking John could get around – it changed nothing; the personal care he could do, too – he was
a doctor and squeamishness and blushing didn't factor into it. But sex with Sherlock – such as it was
– wouldn't be the same anymore, it would be one-sided and down to John to inform Sherlock if he
even had an erection, if indeed there was even the ability to stimulate him to arousal at all. Fifty
percent of the things he loved about Sherlock had gone or been damaged and all at the hands of a
man John knew would never be caught. Anger wasn't the paramount emotion, but it was second
only to grief.
“Shit, I’m really sorry, John.” John heard Greg’s voice before he saw him, as the Inspector entered the room looking flustered, dressed in his work clothes but looking more like he’d just woken up.

“Traffic, and getting out of work - I’m really sorry.”

“Don’t be.” John spoke from the far corner of the room, resting in a cheap-looking fireside chair with his laptop on his knee. “You’re here now.” His voice was quiet, as Sherlock was sleeping, but it was clear and audible, and Greg nodded, feeling slightly less like a shitty friend.

“Writing a blog?” Greg asked, feeling nervous. He wanted to avoid getting down to the real questions for as long as possible. Avoiding the truth and facing it head on had to be better, didn’t it?

John curled his lip, “Kind of.” He nodded. “Notes, maybe. Stupid, I know, but there are people who’re interested in what he does - I suppose I want to tell them what’s happened.”

Greg removed his coat and chucked it onto the chair alongside John’s bag. He didn’t comment, couldn’t think what he should even respond to it with. Instead, he bit the proverbial bullet. “Has the doc been ‘round, then?” Greg asked, taking slow steps toward Sherlock’s bed, relieved to see less machines and something akin to Sherlock’s normal colour skin on the young man’s face.

John closed the lid of his laptop and rested it on the floor beside him. “Yeah. They ran a few tests, physical response tests, and that kind of thing, as much as Sherlock could be bothered with. He confirmed what the surgeons said, this T12...L1 damage; it’s complete, as opposed to incomplete which I’m given to believe there’s the possibility of recovery with. So, given that it’s a complete injury, the nerves and mechanics of his spine are all severed and he has no apparent feeling from his pelvis to his toes. They scanned his kidneys about an hour ago, too; there’s some damage on the left side - kind of explained why the IV fluids were going in and there was barely anything in his catheter.” John got to his feet and he and Greg faced one another on either side of Sherlock’s bed.

“Fu-shit.” Greg groaned, deep brown eyes scanning Sherlock. “John, I am really sorry that I wasn’t here, mate. I promised I’d...and… I’m sorry you had to take all that on on your own, you and Sherlock.”

“Don’t be sorry. You’re here now and that means a huge amount. Besides, his brother wasn’t here either.” John shook his head with a sarcastic smile. “He stayed a while last night, though.”

“Mycroft?” Greg questioned, brows crooked in surprise.

“Yeah, for an hour or so.” John nodded. “He wants to move Sherlock to some hoity-toity private place out near Sussex.” He rolled his eyes. “Doesn’t he realise money won’t fix this?”

“You haven’t learned yet that that’s how the Holmes boys work? Sherlock breaks and Mycroft throws money at it until it’s fixed again.” Greg shrugged his shoulders.

“Not this time.” John looked sadly at the older man. “He did kind of show emotion, though - for the first time in...ever, I saw how much he loves him.”

“He does.” Greg nodded firmly. “He might be a stuck up prick, but there’s no denying that Mycroft really cares for him.”

“In his fashion.” John smiled. “Still, I was glad he was here.”
Greg relaxed his expression, “I suppose that’s the thing about family tragedies? They break down all the falseness and get you to really give a shit.” He placed his hand on the bar of Sherlock’s bed and looked at John squarely. “And how are you?”

John shook his head slowly, “I’m fine.” He dismissed initially, but broke under Greg’s warm eyes. “I dunno...I’m scared for when he’s properly awake; he’s been in and out, was with it a little more when they brought him down to renal, but not for long. But, Jesus, once he’s lucid and he knows what’s going on, he’ll work it out. I don’t want him to wake up alone and figure things out when I can’t be there to tell him it’s going to be okay.” He looked up at Greg with tear-filled eyes.

“But sleeping in a chair isn’t good for you, either.” Greg reasoned, caring eyes wide and mouth smudged into a marshmallow, closed-lipped smile.

John gave a sharp nod. “I know, but I can’t leave.” His tone was a lot sharper than he’d intended and he immediately felt bad. He pushed his arms against the cot sides of the bed and stared at his feet. “I’m sorry - I guess I’m just venting. I’m...exhausted.”

“You’re allowed to let off steam, mate.” Greg said with feeling. “The man you love is different now, and you can't be expected to just be okay with it. But you're one of the strongest people I know, and if anyone can take this on and continue to make life great - it's you. And I swear, Sherlock is a lucky bastard having you in his corner for this fight. I know that you'll bring him out the other side of it stronger than ever. You both will be.”

John found himself smiling. “I hope so.” He was about to add a ‘but’ to the end of the sentence, and delve into how frightened he was about everything that lay in front of them, but he watched as a shadow in the doorway turned into Mycroft’s form and he decided against it. Instead, he steeled his expression and exhaled. “Mycroft.”

“John.” Mycroft said firmly, removing his coat. “Detective Inspector.” He lay his coat on the chair, along with the bag of John’s belongings, and approached the bed, standing stock still beside Greg.

“The consultant was here after I called you.” John explained. “He just confirmed what the surgeons had said, and what we’ve been expecting. And although he’s still a bit sluggish, he was a little more lucid earlier. He was able to respond for the evaluations. They’ve confirmed the suspected complete spinal cord injury, identified where there is loss of feeling - he’s paralysed from the pelvis. And they’ve confirmed damage to his left kidney, too.”

Mycroft nodded his head once. “I made arrangements with an associate of mine, the private hospital is ready to receive him whenever you think he is ready to move.” He was quiet for a moment, watching John’s expression. “And, there will be a house available to you and Sherlock that will be fully functioning for ease of access for a wheelchair. There is one built, that has been lived in, and there is one being renovated. I’ll allow you the final decision over the property you take.”

John widened his gaze. “Jeez.” He exhaled slowly, “That’s...fast. And...I don’t...I mean, I appreciate it. But Sherlock is a long way off going home.”

“But he will go home, and the kind of adjustments he would need making for Baker Street are beyond reach, particularly for a rented accommodation on the second floor of an old townhouse. This house will be fully functional, equipped with everything Sherlock will need, and it will be owned.” Mycroft explained fully, with a twinge of concern in his eyes that John didn’t seem to pick that up.

“I’m grateful.” John said sincerely, “Honestly, Mycroft, I am. But I can’t think about any of that at the minute. All I can focus on is seeing him wake up properly, feel better, and on working out how
I’m going to tell him.”

Greg looked between them, trying to look less uncomfortable than he felt. “Guys.” He said carefully, arms folded across his chest. He gestured toward Sherlock with his left hand as the younger Holmes stirred and coughed, turning his head and slowly waking up.

“Hi sleepyhead.” John smiled, meeting Sherlock’s eyes. “How’re you feeling?”

“Less sleepy.” Sherlock replied, though a yawn that stretched his jaw tight belied his claim. “And everyone’s here - I must be dying.”

Greg snorted, his eyebrows rising up his forehead quickly in a smile, “No chance, son. You think this guy would let that happen?” He pointed to John. “How’s your head?”

Sherlock thought for a moment before crinkling his face. He didn’t know, he wasn’t sure how he felt really. “Clearer.” He decided upon.

“That’s good.” John nodded hopefully. He took a deep breath and steadied his weight against the cotside. Licking his lips, he bit the bullet. “We should probably talk - about what happened, about what happens now.” He fixed Sherlock with an empathetic frown. “It’ll be naive for us not to assume that there’s things you’ve already worked out, so what do you know?”

Sherlock looked at each of the men surrounding him in turn, then back at John solely. “I remember bits. I’ve heard conversations, I think. But I’ve been so tired that I can’t work out if they were real or I’ve dreamed them.” He took a steady breath. “I remember leaving the flat; I...I remember waking up and feeling like my head would explode, but you were here.” He gestured to John. “I remember...no, I remember thinking that I felt like I had...like pins and needles. But then nothing.”

Mycroft watched John’s face, wondering if the man would go through with the truth or not. He and Greg exchanged a glance before they both looked back to John as he began to speak.

“You were shot when you left the flat. We don’t know who by, where the shooter was...But you have been hurt very badly...” John said carefully. Sherlock frowned, the fogginess he was still experiencing in his mind was clear on his face as he processed John’s words. “The bullets penetrated your back, and they seriously damaged your spine. From the damage, and some of the tests the doctors have done, they’ve come to the conclusion that your spine is too severely damaged...um...” John faltered. Greg winced in sympathy. “Sherlock, the damage to your spine is extensive, and there was only so much that the surgeons could do in an attempt to help. There was no indication that you were able to feel any stimuli in your legs, they’re anticipating that the paralysis is as widespread as to your pelvis.”

“Paralysis.” Sherlock nodded. “I heard that...” he frowned. “I remember that. I tried to move...and I couldn’t. But I was so tired.” Sherlock pieced together John’s words with the mangled mash of dreams and thoughts in his mind.

“There were a few complications, but they are treatable, recoverable...” John continued carefully. “When you’re feeling stronger and you’re recovered from the surgery, you’ll begin rehabilitation with physical therapies to help to strengthen your back, and your upper body. None of the therapies that can be offered will ever regain your mobility. There’s nothing they can do.”

John reached down and touched his hand to Sherlock’s arm. He was a bit startled when Sherlock pulled his arm away. “Don’t.”

“Sherlock...” John’s voice was sad, breaking a little.
Sherlock’s face crumbled in a frown. “No. I just - I need space.”

Mycroft watched his brother’s face. “Perhaps that isn’t wise?”

“Yeah,” Greg agreed, “Maybe being alone isn’t a good idea at the minute,” He said gently. His dark eyes were sad and wide, absorbing the tension and sadness filling the room.

Sherlock swallowed hard, his throat felt dry and tight. “Well I want to be.” He flicked his eyes over all three of them. “Go away.” He closed his eyes lethargically, and laid still and silent in that way until he heard all three pairs of feet retreat.
I want to say an enormous thank you to every last person who has read, commented, left kudos and subscribed to this story. I didn't know how it would be received, having been 'taken' from somebody else and changed but your response and dedication this far has been touching and I am so thankful that you are all supportive with this rewrite. I've been in a lucky position for a few days, allowing me to write a back-log of chapters to update, ensuring I'll have something to post for you even when my annual leave finishes and I return to work on Tuesday. Once again, thank you very much for the immediate dedication shown, it has helped me to be brave in changing what Alioseven built (which is phenomenal) to allow me to make it my own.

- afinecollector.

Sherlock lay with his eyes closed until he could hear nothing but the sound of his own breathing. He opened his eyes slowly and glanced around him. He was alone, and now that he was he felt absolutely isolated. The idea of being placated after being told he would spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair had made him want to throw up, and now that he was without that gentle touch, he felt out in the cold on the edge of a cliff, faced with jumping or finding the courage within himself to step back from the cusp. He stared at the ceiling above him and reached up to his face with his right hand to pull the nasal cannula away, dragging it from behind his ears, and let it slip from the side of the bed to hang over the cotside. It was tempting to rip the cannula from his hand and watch the blood drip from the puncture site, but he resisted the urge somehow.

He gripped his hands over the bars each side of him, squeezing the material that covered them, and pushed against them with as much strength as he could muster from his weak body. It took a lot of effort, and made his face feel prickly and hot, but it got him nowhere. He slammed his balled fists into each of the sides before growling at himself in annoyance. Hot tears swelled in his eyes and his face contorted as he fought not to cry. How could somebody walk out of a building just fine, and then be unable to move his legs at all twelve hours later? It wasn't logical. But - whatever remains must be the truth…

He moistened his lips with a slow swipe of his tongue and willed his tears away, blinking until he could see without a waterfall accompaniment. He swallowed, trying to push the emotional lump down as far as it would go, and inhaled deeply before expelling it with pursed lips. He reached for the call bell and jammed his thumb down onto the button with his right hand whilst working his blankets down as far as he could with his left.

After a minute, a very young healthcare assistant stepped into the room with a helpful smile on her pretty face. “Hi William.”

“Sherlock.” Sherlock said bitterly, releasing the call bell.

“Sorry,” She smiled again. “Sherlock. What’s the problem, sweetie?”

“I want to get up.” He demanded, thrusting at the blankets with both hands but unable to seemingly get them past his mid thigh.
“You haven’t been seen by the physio team yet, and you just had surgery - you need to rest, let your body recover.” She tried to sound just as sweet as she had upon entering the room, despite being able to see how agitated Sherlock was. She reached for the blankets and drew them back up to Sherlock’s waist.

“I don’t care.” Sherlock spat through gritted teeth, reaching back down to move the blankets again. “I can’t lie here any longer.”

“Please,” She continued gently, tucking the blankets back in. “Try to rest - you’re only going to cause yourself more damage if you don’t let your body heal from surgery. You’re catheterised, you have no physical need to get up. The surgeons would prefer you to wait for twenty-four to forty-eight hours before even considering beginning movement…”

Sherlock shoved at the blankets again, undoing her tucking in quickly. “I want to get out of this bed. I cannot sit here…” He paused, feeling the tears he’d managed to banish returning and the lump in his throat beginning to claim his voice.

“Sherlock,” She said softly, placing her hand on his shoulder as she stood beside him. “I know you have a lot to adjust to, but before you do that you should recover from your surgery. If there’s anyone you’d like me to contact for you, I can do that.”

Sherlock stared back up at the ceiling, the fight leaving him abruptly at her compassionate touch, and he felt his chin tremble. “My brother.” he whispered, blinking a tear down each of his cheeks.

“Okay, I’ll go and make a call for him.” Her voice softened further, and she smoothed her hand where it lay on his shoulder in a gentle and reassuring rubbing motion before stepping away.

He closed his eyes again, running everything over in his mind, and found himself thrust back to the previous night. Even as he lay in the bed, he could feel the rain that had fallen on his face, the searing pain that had rung through his body and made his legs feel like they were tingling, the nauseating flashing of the ambulance lights.

"Blood pressure’s way down…"

“BM is 4…”

“Pupils are reactive…”

“What about his brother?”

“There’s gotta be at least two pints of blood there…”

“You didn’t see anyone…? How can someone be shot and the gunman not be bloody seen?”

“Okay, on my count…”

“His breathing is stable - surprisingly. It’s about the only thing that is.”

“I can’t get a vein...sh*t.”

“His boyfriend’s going to lose his mind.”

“Forget John; Lestrade’s going to implode.”

“You’re coming with us, Sergeant?”
“His thigh muscle is completely worn through.”

“He’s trying to talk...I can’t figure it out. Just take it easy, mate.”

“Pick one of the three sites and block them, he’s losing too much blood.”

“Which hospital? I need to call Lestrade.”

“He’s bradying down, Max! We’ve got to get a move on.”

He could feel the cold air, smell the wet street, hear the sirens and feel the bumping of the ambulance as it drove through London to the hospital. And then he felt blank. He couldn’t remember if he knew he wasn’t feeling anything in his legs before that, he couldn’t remember how he’d felt after the surgery - everything was mixed up, blurred and blended thanks to the anaesthetic, his fuzzy head and whatever pain relief they’d filled him with. It made him angry, not knowing. Even his Mind Palace seemed to have been paralysed.

But wait. He remembered being with Sally Donovan. Had she come to the hospital with him, had she been there when he woke up after the surgery? How did Mycroft know…? Did his parents know? But John was...solid, and Lestrade… William. No, Will. He remembered hearing Greg’s voice.

*Jesus, Will, what the hell happened, Kid?*

He rubbed his forehead, his brain feeling fried as he tried to make himself remember. He felt hot, sick, dizzy… He licked his lips and reached out for the call bell again, feeling his breathing breaking hard in his chest. “Umm… hey…” he muttered, licking his dry lips. “I feel sick…”

A different healthcare assistant appeared, with a polite smile on her face. She was somewhat older, looked a little more acceptable as a medical professional of sorts, and she was quickly at Sherlock's side.

“What's the problem, Sherlock?” She asked, her tone neutral, able to address him without condescension. Her voice was tinged with a Welsh accent. Sherlock would have assumed as much with her name, emblazoned on her tunic, being Bronwyn. Or, he would have if he was able to control his thoughts enough, and to push away the feeling of horrific sickness in his stomach.

Sherlock huffed a nauseated breath through his nose. “I feel sick.”

“Okay, my lovely. Let's pop this back in place-,” she said, fixing the nasal cannula back into place. “And sit you up a little. Do you think you're going to vomit, or is it just nausea?”

“I'm going to be sick.” He exhaled in a deep whistle and retched sharply and suddenly. He didn't vomit - he hadn't eaten for hours, there was nothing to bring up. He heaved again, coughing saliva, and tried to catch his breath.

“The medication you are taking for pain relief is quite strong. Sometimes people feel nauseous with it.” She said softly, as Sherlock seemed to recover and his stomach muscles began to relax. “I'll see if I can get you some anti-sickness, that should help. Feeling a little better?” She asked as the colour returned to his cheeks.

Inhaling steadily, Sherlock nodded his head briefly. “Bit.”

“Good.” She smiled, “would you like some water?”
Sherlock shook his head, “Not yet.” He locked his lips. “The other girl - she was getting in touch with my brother…”

“Yes,” she nodded, “The three of them in fact, I think they’re in the cafe so she has gone along there to find them. It won’t be long, then they’ll be back.” She assured him. “How’re you feeling now? Are you comfortable?”

Sherlock shrugged one shoulder, “I don’t know.”

“I know it’s a tough thing to be facing; my son was injured in a motorbike accident when he was nineteen and was left paralysed from his mid chest. It was an incredibly stressful time for everybody - nobody knew how he really felt, and nobody knew how to act or to talk to him. But I’ve seen him blossom and he is flying these days, three years on he’s a homeowner, owns his own business too.” She smiled at him tenderly. “It feels like it now, I’m sure, but this isn’t the end of your life. Really, it isn’t.”

“You don’t know that.” Sherlock said bluntly. “Please, I just want to talk to my brother.”
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Please forgive my poor French to follow. I believe it's accurate, but my 3 years of the subject failed to teach me much.

When the young healthcare assistant found John, Greg and Mycroft, they were huddled in the corner of the busy family canteen with their hands wrapped around half-mugs of coffee and none of them were speaking. She approached them with a kind smile and explained herself.

“Sorry to interrupt.” She said awkwardly. “I’m Cheryl, I’m one of the HCA’s looking after um, Sherlock. He’s been asking for you,” She looked first at Mycroft, holding out her hand to gesture at him specifically, then turned to John. “He’s been a little agitated.” John got to his feet immediately, making the table shake as he ambled up. “He’s okay,” She insisted quickly, “But he is a little bit unsettled and would like you to come back.”

“Thanks, love.” Greg gave her a doughy smile, and got to his feet slowly. “John, mate, relax.” He placed his hand on the small of John’s back. “He’s surrounded by nurses up there, he’s alright. Calm down, yeah? You having a heart attack is the last thing he needs.”

After watching the healthcare assistant walked slowly from the bustling canteen, John turned to Greg and nodded despite his eyes being pricked with worry. “I know, but…” He shrugged his shoulders. “He’s angry, and upset. And I said I didn’t want to leave him alone with this news.” He dug his elbow out at Greg beside him, nudging the grey-haired man’s bicep. “Yet here I am, drinking God-awful coffee with you pair.”

“He isn’t alone, John. I just said, didn’t I? There’s nurses up there with him. And we’re not five minutes away from him that we can’t just go back there, either. He’s in safe hands, and he’s okay. And so he’s agitated, so what? He’s going to be. He would still be angry as all hell even if we were standing in there beside him and trying to pin him down. It’s Sherlock! And besides that, he’s just been given devastating news. I’d be pretty bloody angry, too.” Greg spoke total sense and John knew it, but guilt still built up in the doctor’s stomach, cramping his muscles tightly.

“Perhaps you should go back to Baker Street for the night, John?” Mycroft said, rising to his feet. “You’ll take him?” He looked to Greg, who nodded.

“No, I can’t.” John protested immediately. His face was pale, displaying actual fear at the idea of walking away. “I’m not waltzing back across London after he’s been dumped with this news. I feel bad enough being here - what part of this aren’t you two understanding?”

Mycroft looked sharply at him and nodded his head, “You can do it, and you must. Shower, have a meal, sleep for a solid night, and then return in the morning. I will stay here, right in his room.”

“I can’t ask you to do that.” John shook his head, “And I can’t go. I don’t...I don’t want to go.”

Mycroft tilted his head slightly, “You didn’t ask. And Sherlock is my brother, after all. It is of no hardship for me to be here with him. And she did say he asked for me.”
“He’s right, John.” Greg said gently, and smiled at Mycroft thankfully for the suggestion. “C’mon, I’ll take you back. Mrs Hudson’ll be glad to see you, she’ll want an update, too.”

“Greg, I can’t just go - I can’t leave him. I don’t want people…” John breathed deeply, annoyed with himself. He was tired, could use a shower and the idea of a night in his bed after a proper meal sounded inviting, but the fearful nausea that was mixed with it was far from welcomed. “I’m his partner; I should be caring for him. Going home to sleep because I’m tired isn’t being there for him. It’s selfish!”

“Mate, you are the least selfish person I know. You’re going to wear yourself down into the ground, and then who’ll be there for him? One night - it’s just, what, twelve hours? A whole twelve hours away for a rest, a shower and a decent meal isn’t leaving him, it isn’t abandoning your boyfriend duties - it’s a way to make sure you’re going to be able to keep being there for him. So c’m’mon, we’ll go back up to him, you can snog his face off or something and say goodnight, and I’ll take you home.” Greg smiled and clapped his hand on John’s back a second time.

“Fine.” John agreed, finally. “But you have to promise me that you’ll stay with him, the whole night. No excuses.” He turned on Mycroft as the three steadily moved away from their table, abandoning their cold coffees and untouched, overpriced sandwich wraps.

“Yes.” Mycroft nodded as they walked. “I will be here the entire night.”

“See?” Greg urged him. He kept his tone light and hoped that it worked in any small way to raise John’s mood. “He’s in the hands of the British-bloody-government, he’s safe as houses.”

John smirked, “Somehow, I’m not shrouded in comfort by that idea.”

When they returned to Sherlock’s room, he was lying quietly with his eyes fixed on the wall ahead, flicking from side to side as he counted the number of thumb-tacks sticking into the magnolia paint. Hearing them walk in together, Sherlock turned his head and glanced at them before letting it lull back into his previous position. He looked pale, John saw, and he could tell that there was one hundred and one things racing through his mind that he didn’t even know how to begin to articulate and work through.

“I’m sorry we were gone so long.” John said as he approached the bed and reached down to touch Sherlock’s hand. “You okay, Love?” He asked quietly. Sherlock turned his head to him, breathing steadily, and nodded his head. The left corner of his mouth twitched, as though he were about to say something, but nothing came out. He shifted his fingers so that his hand was atop John’s and held on firmly. John’s mouth stretched into a sad, thin line. “I’ve got to nip out a while, is that okay?”

“Why?” Sherlock asked, and he was surprised at how whispered and vulnerable he sounded. He was almost embarrassed to hear himself when he remembered that his brother and Lestrade were in the room.

John moved impossibly closer to the bed, “I won’t be gone long, just a few hours. I need to speak with the police, tie up some loose ends; Mrs Hudson wants to know that you’re okay, too, so I should probably go and talk with her. She’s pacing Baker Street’s carpets down to threads.” He smiled softly. “Mycroft is going to be right here, you’re not being left alone in this at all.”

“Then you’ll come back?” Sherlock ensured, and was relieved when John nodded with bright eyes. “Okay.” He nodded his agreement.

“I promise.” John insisted, “I’ll come back.” He leaned in over the bed and pressed his lips to Sherlock’s forehead. As he pulled back, Sherlock reached up with his left hand and cupped his
cheek, holding them face-to-face for a moment. Their lips touched lightly as John puckered his mouth and he smiled against Sherlock’s lips. “I love you.” He whispered, feather-light.

“I know.” Sherlock murmured. “Me too.”

John stepped away and cleared his throat. As he rummaged through the collection of his belongings on the piled chair, he focused on Mycroft and Greg in the doorway, and fixed Mycroft with a firm stare. “Look after him, and call me if anything happens or changes, or anything at all. Okay?”

As if he were touched by his brother and the good doctor’s show of affection, Mycroft simply nodded his head with fierce conviction before speaking. “I will, John.”

Feeling uncomfortable, Greg nodded across the room at Sherlock, “See you soon, Will, yeah?”

Sherlock frowned at him before rolling his eyes lethargically. “Yeah.”

“Let’s get you home.” Greg nudged his head, indicating into the hallway. “You,” he looked at Mycroft, “Enjoy your night with your little brother.” He smiled dorkily, and lead down the corridor with John a few steps behind him, hurrying to catch up.

Alone with Sherlock, Mycroft stepped further into the room in near silence. He removed his coat and folded it over the back of the piled-up chair, before repeating the action with his suit jacket. Suitably disrobed, Mycroft approached Sherlock and reached for the controls of the bed. He located the right button, and proceeded to lower the bed, until he found it an acceptable height for him to sit down in the empty chair in the further, left-hand corner of the room. He hooked the controls back onto the bed and walked around the bed frame. He pulled the chair in close to Sherlock’s bed and quietly sat down, all without even opening his mouth to say a single word to Sherlock. Once seated, he crossed his left leg over his right and rested his elbows on each of the grubby arms of the chair, clasping his hands together at his waist. Comfortable, he rested his eyes on Sherlock, who was frowning at him and following him with his gaze.

“What?” Sherlock broke first, his eyebrows crooking up as he stared back at his brother.

Mycroft parted his hands and held out his empty palms, drawing down his mouth in questioning, before clasping his fingers together again. “Well, I assumed you would feel like you could talk to me. Shout, debate the truth of your diagnosis, perhaps lose your temper.”

Sherlock blinked slowly in response as he inhaled deeply through his nose. “I don’t know what to say.” He licked his lips and swallowed against his dry throat.

Mycroft mirrored the tongue swipe before speaking. “Perhaps you have questions, or want to discuss how you’re feeling? Talk to me, little brother. We have all the time in the world.”


“Arrêtez, Sherlock!” Mycroft glowered at his response, “Sherlock, stop it...the nurse said you were asking for me to return. I’m here now, so talk to me.” Sherlock looked momentarily embarrassed. “There is no cause for pride. Not now.”

“You think I don’t know that?” Sherlock snapped, breathing harshly. “You don’t think it’s scaring me or making me feel sick to have teenaged nursing staff waiting on me?”

Mycroft unlaced his fingers and pressed his palms together, forming a point with his fingers, and pressed them to his chin. “So, open up your mouth and talk to me. Be honest. If it helps, tell me that you blame me.”
“Blame you?” Sherlock seemed genuinely taken aback by the idea and Mycroft momentarily regretted suggesting it - why stir a cooked pot?

Mycroft gave a slight nod. “For you being in that location.” Sherlock rolled his eyes. “You were working for me, I would only expect for you to lay blame at my door, Sherlock. I would, if the proverbial boot were on the other foot.”

Sherlock licked his lips again. “I’ve got no logical reason to blame you. I can’t blame Lestrade for not knowing if the place was empty or not, I can’t blame his team…” His throat caught in a hitch and he closed his eyes, feeling emotional.

“Perhaps.” Mycroft agreed, “But feeling as though you can’t for logical reasons does not mean that you don’t feel it or think it.”

“It’s as though you want me to blame you?” Sherlock said, questioningly. He opened his eyes slowly, unabashed as they watered and it was abundantly clear for his brother to see.

Mycroft shook his head, “No.”

“Then stop it.” Sherlock’s teeth were tightly gritted as he spoke. “Stop giving me permission to be angry, or sad. I don’t need your permission or validation. I don’t want your approval for my feelings, or your - your...justification. None of this is rational and if I want to be irrational, I will be.” He swiped at his cheeks with his left hand and angrily eyed the IV that got in the way. With the hooked fingers of his right hand, he dragged the nasal cannula from his face and pushed it aside, draping it across his hips. “Have you told the family?”

Mycroft was a little surprised at the question. “Not yet.” He responded, and suddenly realised that it wasn’t perhaps a wise idea to be honest. He had no real reason for not calling their parents other than he couldn’t face the news coming from him. “I wanted to know the details of what I was supposed to tell them first. No use in upsetting Mummy without the facts.”

Sherlock nodded his head, and licked his lips again. “I don’t want them to come. I don’t want them here.” Mycroft gave a single downward chin-jut of a nod in acceptance of Sherlock’s request. It was an order, and he would obey it. Oneupmanship might be a game they played, but ultimately they were there for one another when the time counted - this was one of those times. “I can’t cope with mother’s...clucking.” He exhaled deeply through his nose and looked at Mycroft, twitching his lips as if unsure whether to say another word. He did, anyway. “I’m scared.”

Mycroft had expected Sherlock to break and speak, but he hadn’t expected the vulnerability that accompanied his words. Hearing the quiet, sad tone that his voice emerged in brought Mycroft back to their childhood - to walking home from school with Sherlock who had yet another bloodied nose from beatings he’d received, rubbing Sherlock’s back when he vomited after his first alcohol binge, resting his hand on Sherlock’s thigh as he twitched and cried out, withdrawing from heroin. Sherlock’s ability to conceive his feelings, or those of other peoples, had always been a dubious subject with Mycroft. Convinced his brother fell somewhere on the autistic spectrum of significance, he wondered if Sherlock truly understood emotions at all. To hear him - at any point in their life - encapsulate his feelings clearly, always reminded Mycroft that Sherlock needed to know it was okay to consider his feelings and take the time to feel valid in them to be able to give them a name.

“I know.” Mycroft said, simply. His felt his heart quicken its pace in his chest as he watched Sherlock crying openly.

“I don’t want this.” Sherlock sobbed, screwing his eyes closed. “I don’t want this.” He repeated, his chin quivering. He balled his fists, holding both arms up over his face for a moment as he tried not to
sob aloud. “I don’t know how to be this.” He let out an angry growl, and pummelled his hands down into his thighs, teeth gritted in pure rage. He rhythmically beat his fisted hands against his legs, his body shaking as his cried with fierce sobs that rattled his torso.

“Sherlock.” Mycroft rose to his feet slowly. Bending at the waist, he reached over the bed and caught Sherlock’s slim wrists in both of his narrow hands. “Stop that.” He spoke quietly, his voice was almost soporific, he spoke so calmly. “Please, Sherlock. Stop. It will be okay.”

For any person, such as John, who might ever doubt Mycroft’s standing with his little brother, this moment might have served to offer up some kind of rationale, or insight, into their true relationship. By their very nature, they rebel and rock against one another, like opposite cogs of a well-oiled machine, ultimately working in unison whilst simultaneously working apart. This moment, this moment right here, as Mycroft gripped his brother tightly and, silently though it may be, whispered I love you and promised to care, would undoubtedly wash away any idea that any man might have that Mycroft cared very little for Sherlock.

If nothing else, their minds were their bond. Mycroft had seen Sherlock struggle to stay alive and had had to become the hard man he was in order to take Sherlock’s bite, feed it back to him, and ultimately keep him safe. Just because he controlled his brother, doesn’t mean he had total control and that was never more visible. Sherlock was broken and vulnerable and afraid, and - ever the big brother - Mycroft absorbed it, processed it, and met Sherlock with the rational intellect and strength that had always helped to keep him steady and true when his resolve would falter.
Chapter 11

John had never been happier to see the awning of Speedy’s as he was when Greg pulled the car to a steady halt outside of the cafe on Baker Street. They sat a moment, happy in the early afternoon quiet of the street, and John rested his elbow on the car door, capturing his head in his open palm. “Are you alright?” Greg asked, turning the key to kill the engine. “You’ve gone all quiet.” He turned in the seat to face John, watching him eye the townhouse on the street beside him.

John sighed with pursed lips and straightened up in the seat, then turned slightly to face Greg more easily. “No, not really.”

“Fancy a pint - or four?” Greg offered, only half-serious.

John smiled sadly. “I daren’t. I don’t think any conceivable number would be enough.” Greg felt sad to hear John’s admission. “I don’t want to go in there, either. Twenty-four hours ago, it was my anniversary and I was thinking about dinner with the man I’d spend a full year realising I love with every inch of myself. Now I’m thinking about how I’m supposed to look at him in the next year, two years, ten years, and not have pity in my eyes.”

“You pity him?” Greg asked carefully.

John nodded. “How can I not? But I hate myself for it.” He stared ahead at the road, watching a taxi shudder by with a passenger concealed inside. “I don’t know how to love him this way.”

Greg shook his head. “No, John, you do. You do know, because you’re doing it.”

“Am I though?” John asked, surprising the older man. John was never one to be unsure of his feelings - open about his sexuality, open about his love for Sherlock. No barriers, no lies. Why now would he even doubt himself. “Because I feel like I’m paddling against a concrete river right now.”

“Of course you’re struggling, but you’ve got more love for Sherlock in your little finger than most people would ever be able to imagine. You had to be dragged away from him back there.” Greg thumbed behind him for dramatic effect. “John, you’re like the poster boy for real love. If there was ever anyone on this earth who could love Sherlock Holmes more than he loves himself, it was always - always - going to be you. So he’s going to look up to you from now on; he’s still Sherlock. You can see that, you know that, more than any of us.”

John sighed heavily and shook his head, frowning in confusion. “Oh, I know. I didn’t mean it. I love him so much it hurts, physically hurts. I’m just - I’m just scared. How do I live with a paraplegic? How do I love him like this, how do I help or know when to take a step back? Greg, he’s going to be broken for the rest of his life. I mean, I’m the shortest person I know and he’s knee-high to a grasshopper to me.”

“This isn’t you talking.” Greg shook his head. “Everything you’re saying, it’s surface appeal. You love Sherlock’s smile, his voice, his mind. That body, all our bodies, they’re just packaging. You know Sherlock. You love him. Walking, or in a wheelchair; differently-abled or otherwise, you love him like nobody has ever loved another person. And right now, I sound more gay than you do!”

John had to chuckle. How could he not? “But I’m scared of hurting him. I’m scared of waking up one morning and not loving him anymore. I’m scared he’s going to change. Mentally, emotionally… I’m scared he’ll get bitter and twisted, or take on some new disabled higher power mentality and not be him anymore.” John said honestly. “I’m scared…that he’ll want to leave me.”
Greg let out a loud laugh. For a moment, John was appalled and offended. But, after a second, he began to laugh too. “Oh, John…” Greg laughed breathily, recovering from his giggle-fit. “One thing I know for certain is Sherlock would never leave you. He doesn’t seem to know how to be loved, but I’d be pretty hard pushed to find anyone he accepts love off more than you. Why would he ever turn away from that, wheelchair-dependent or not?” He sobered fully. “I’m telling you, mate. You two are meant for one another, no matter what’s in store. Nothing can break this-,” he waved his hand at John, “Whatever it is that you and he have. It’s stronger than steel, mate.”

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True to his word, Mycroft remained in Sherlock’s immediate vicinity the entire night. With exception to slipping from the room once or twice to use the bathroom, he didn’t leave his side. They talked on and off, at Sherlock’s preference. Mycroft lay his offers before his brother as he previously had done before John, and was surprised by his responses. He was somewhat more accepting than John had been. Mycroft flicked through a book he found in John’s bag when Sherlock dozed in and out of sleep, and encouraged Sherlock to drink when he woke. Mycroft took everything in - he listened as the nurses spoke, recalled their numbers and calculations, memorised their comments on Sherlock’s observations on each round check that they completed. He wanted to make sure he could relay everything to John, of course, but he also wanted to know so that he could be sure to be on top of Sherlock’s care. All he wanted to do now was the best he could - he had to, to alleviate the guilt he felt.

Surprising himself as he found himself roused by a moan, Mycroft had drifted into a light sleep in the armchair sometime before three am only to wake suddenly at four thirty to Sherlock’s hums of distress. He opened his eyes and brought his mind into focus, taking thirty seconds or so to sharpen his responses.

“Sherlock?” He got to his feet, clearing his throat with a cough as his brief sleep robbed him of his usual voice. Sherlock was still sleeping, but clearly hooked in a dream he wasn’t comfortable with. Reaching across the bed, Mycroft’s hand hovered above Sherlock’s leg. He was afraid to lay it down - what if he touched him and Sherlock felt it, what if he touched him and Sherlock didn’t feel it and, instead, Mycroft then had to realise that life really was different. Not making contact meant there would always be that question. Of course, it didn’t, but he could tell himself as such. Oh dear, Mycroft. He scolded himself. Your sentiment is showing.

He drew back his hand and waited a moment before gently shaking Sherlock’s shoulder. “Sherlock.” He called into his ear as Sherlock groaned again. “Wake up. You’re dreaming.”

After a moment, Sherlock’s brow creased and his eyes fluttered open slowly. His head jolted backwards as his eyes adjusted and fell upon Mycroft in close proximity. “What’re...you doing?”

“You were crying out.” Mycroft said in a whisper.

Sherlock scrubbed the back of his right hand into his right eye and yawned lethargically. “Sorry.” He apologised. Both boys seemed to be without barriers, open with one another and meeting, albeit haphazardly, in the middle.

“No,” Mycroft shrugged it off. “It’s okay. I thought, perhaps, you needed help. Here,” from the bedside table, Mycroft handed Sherlock a beaker with tepid water in. The beaker, initially to Mycroft’s dismay, had a spouted lid on it but it had proved to be useful in Sherlock’s not-quite-
upright position.

“Sorry.” Sherlock blinked, waking up slowly, feeling that immediate need to return to sleep that accompanied waking up begin to slip away. “No. I’m fine.” He said quietly, battling the cup away with a single swipe of his hand.

Mycroft set the cup back on the table with a bothered sigh at the refusal. “That’s two apologies in less than five minutes.” he said, accusingly, resting back in the chair that had, unfortunately, settled when he had stood up and no longer felt comfortable to sit in without his bodily grooves in it. “Anyone would think you actually had something to be sorry for.”

Sherlock eyed him carefully, frowning to work out his accusation. “Comme ça?”

“I was deflecting.” Mycroft said flatly, checking his watch. “What’s with the French, Sherlock?”

Sherlock shrugged one shoulder and reformed his frown. “J’évite la question.”

Mycroft glanced at him, not giving him the rise he was obviously bored enough to be seeking out. “Detective Inspector Lestrade - he calls you William. And his grandmother, she’s French yes? Do you and he converse in French?”

Sherlock actually looked a little surprised by the question, and Mycroft wasn’t surprised to hear Sherlock drop the accent and the language immediately. “It’s relaxing.” He said bluntly.

“Well, stop it - you wanted to talk so be serious, please?” Mycroft looked genuinely annoyed.

Sherlock’s frown furrowed deeper into his brow. “Are you jealous, annoyed...what, I can’t read you?”

“Neither.” Mycroft insisted. “I just hoped you’d want to talk, properly. That perhaps you’d listen to my apology.”

Sherlock writhed a little on the mattress, grunting at the effort before giving in. “What do you have to apologise for?” He asked quietly.

Mycroft’s expression flicked, from seriousness to sudden sadness, and he blinked once or twice before he considered a reply actually leaving his lips. “All of this.” he said.

Sherlock swallowed heavily and shook his head, letting his eyes close in a long, drawn-out blink. When his eyes opened again, Mycroft was looking at him with sharp features. “No.” He said then pursed his lips as he shook his head again. “It isn’t your fault.”

Mycroft got to his feet, cutting all eye contact dead. He paced around the foot of Sherlock’s bed for a moment before stopping and resting his hands on the foot board. “The case was years old.” Mycroft whispered, “Unsolved, but without current foundations that would even lead us to thinking it was still operating out of London at all…” He admitted, his eyes flicking to meet Sherlock’s. “I just wanted to keep you occupied; I knew you’d been without a case out of Baker Street, I wanted to keep you…clean. I could have given you any other file, in any other place across the city. But I gave you that one because I knew that the leads would be cold, keep you busier for longer.” Mycroft swallowed hard. “I am sorry, because I should be sorry.”

Sherlock frowned and licked his lips, then swallowed into his dry throat. “No.” He shook his head, reasoning with himself. “I won’t pretend I’d worked that out, but it doesn’t mean you’re to blame. You’re right - I could have been anywhere else on any other case. But I wasn’t. And even if I had been, maybe it would still have happened.”
Mycroft frowned. “Are they giving you morphine?” He asked, sarcastically. “I’m trying to apologise, brother mine, why is this not hitting you somewhat more sharply than it appears to be?”

Sherlock resented the accusation, but he didn’t rise to it. “Because whether or not you apologise, or we sit here debating the what if’s and the maybes, it isn’t going to change anything. Not one single thing. I’ll still be numb.”

“John would want you to hit me.” Mycroft said, passively. “John would want to hit me.” He added, and, to his surprise, Sherlock gave a deep laugh in his throat. “What?” He accused, “That small soldier doctor of yours is a Jack Russell by nature, little brother.” Sherlock’s laugh increased and it brought something akin to a smile to the corner of Mycroft’s lips.

“Maybe it’s the pain medication, or maybe it’s because I think you’re lying, I don’t know - I can’t work my brain yet…” Sherlock calmed and yawned, his jaw stretching tight. “...but you can’t be sorry for something you didn’t do. You weren’t holding the gun, Mycroft.”

“How can you be sure who was firing at you? The bullets went into your back, Sherlock.” Mycroft said flatly, only realising once the words had escaped that they sounded like a tease, like a threat. They hadn’t meant to - Mycroft had not shot his brother.

Sherlock looked at Mycroft with a slight, almost sinister smile. “I know you.”

“Oh, you do?” Mycroft questioned, straightening his back and resting his hands on his hips quite flamboyantly.

Sherlock nodded. “Yes. I do.” As he smiled again, he sighed his words. “Vous me faire du mal face à face, frère.” He twisted his upper body, visibly uncomfortable.

Mycroft’s turn to laugh came with a sarcastic, forced pronunciation of the gesture. “Ha-ha.” He said, tutting, and returned to his chair. But Sherlock’s statement had stung; to learn that his brother sincerely thought that he would enjoy watching him suffer made Mycroft feel sick. “No,” he said. “The case is current. I had just rather hoped you’d simply feel a...sense of closure, if I could provide something for you to rebel against.”

“By lying to me?” Sherlock’s brow furrowed again and he curled his lip in moderate amusement. “Sentimentality got the better of you. Surely, the trait of the loser is not evident in you?”

“Shut up.” Mycroft rested back. “Those drugs evidently need to be reevaluated.”

Sherlock smiled sleepily. “Mycroft, you don’t have to do that.”

“Do what?” Mycroft’s cheek quirked.

“Try to make it better.” Sherlock said, bluntly. “Because you can’t fixer-up this one, Mycroft.” He swallowed, his momentary lapse of anger and confusion returning fully. “Nobody can.” Mycroft watched his brother over the tip of his nose, with his head back in the chair, and remained silent. Sherlock gave a hum through his nose. “I’m in pain.” He muttered after a moment.

Mycroft straightened in the chair. “Severe?”

Sherlock shook his head, “No, not...not terrible, but persistent.” He explained. “In my back, and...stomach.”

Mycroft pushed himself to his feet again. “I’ll get a nurse.”
“No,” Sherlock called out quickly. “I don’t want anything else; no more medication, no more pain killers. I don’t want to sleep like a child any more, I don’t want to feel so foggy.”

Mycroft looked down on his brother with concern masked by condescension. “Don’t be a martyr.”

Sherlock smirked, shifting his shoulders in the hopes to alleviate the pain in his mid-back, ebbing lower. “I spent many days and nights numbing body and mind with heroin and cocaine, Mycroft. One thing I’m certainly not seeking, is martyrdom.” he said clearly. “It’ll ease.” He added. “Sit down, you’re making me antsy.” Obeying, once again Mycroft returned to his seat.

“I saw John had the Holy book in his bag.” Mycroft said, for some reason he couldn’t even work out himself. Perhaps he just wanted to talk to his brother. “The Bible - odd. I found a rosary, too.”

“Of course - he’s Catholic,” Sherlock said, and yawned deeply with a sigh. He pushed his shoulders into the bed, hoping to arch his back and ease the discomfort but nothing helped. “What were you doing in his bag?”

“Devoutly?” Mycroft asked, ignoring his question, and Sherlock could hear that slight hint of disbelief and confusion in his voice that often appeared when he didn’t understand something that humans did that didn’t match his beliefs.

Sherlock sighed, feeling tired. “I suppose so. He prays at night, was confirmed, takes Holy Communion… I’m led to believe he values his faith - based on these clues.” He rotated his shoulders uncomfortably.

Mycroft raised his eyebrows as he nodded. “What was his confirmation name?”

“Paul, I think.” Sherlock yawned. “Why are you so interested in this?”

“Because he’s a doctor, a medical man. He’s a trained man of war, and of science. A belief in an unseen deity seems odd.” Mycroft challenged.

Sherlock rocked his head side to side in annoyance and groaned, “Not that it matters, but he was raised Catholic and he still holds his faith close. I can’t give you any other answers, but a belief in a God of any kind is a personal thing. He isn’t obligated to share his thoughts on his faith with me and I don’t make him; it’s of no interest to me.”

Mycroft nodded. “There were pages marked, too.” He recalled aloud. “Isaiah, forty-one ten; and a few psalms.”

“No fear, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God.” Sherlock said, his tone echoing boredom. “I will strengthen you and help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” He considered the words for a moment. “Hardly a surprise, is it? He’s searching for religious healing to feel more in control of what he can’t control - more in control of all of this.” Mycroft shifted in his seat and watched Sherlock’s face for emotion, for tears and crumbling. It didn’t come. “Now can you shut up? I’m tired.” Sherlock mumbled, his wakefulness lulling.

Mycroft sat silently in the dimly lit room and watched his brother drift quietly back into a numb sleep, this time seeming settled as, after half an hour, he lay still without so much as REM-sleep twitching. Satisfied that Sherlock was now settled, Mycroft let himself drift back off, falling into a light and fitful sleep.
Chapter 12

John woke from a dreamless, seven-hour sleep with a headache and a dead right arm. He wondered if his position had even changed at all. He roused slowly, lulling in and out of wakefulness for ten minutes before he found the strength to keep his eyes open. He didn’t even remember falling into bed, but evidently he had. The last thing he had a clear memory of was putting away the pile of dishes from the sink and draining board - he’d just showered and had dinner with Greg - and that had been around midnight. He glanced around the bedroom and found the world and all of it’s troubles began to slowly return to his mind. He reached to the nightstand for his mobile and checked the time - seven forty-six - and put it back down before letting his arm go limp over the side of the bed.

He considered, for a brief moment, closing his eyes fully and grabbing however much more sleep his conscience would allow him before feeding spousal guilt into his slumber, but let the idea go when he heard rattling around outside of the bedroom door. For a moment, he considered that his dreamless sleep had not been dreamless at all. Could it be it had all been a nightmare? Feeling a flutter of nervousness in his stomach, he pushed himself up to sit, and swung his legs out of the bed. Quietly, he got to his feet, grabbed his phone just in case, and tiptoed out of the room to the small corridor that led into the kitchen.

“Jesus, Greg!” he cried out, his eyes landing on the Inspector as he crept around the kitchen to make coffee. “You scared the shit out of me.”

“And you me, you big dope!” Greg groaned, clinging to the kitchen counters with heaving breaths. “Scared me half to death - like some, bloody....Doctor Ninja!”

John smirked, then laughed lightly. “Thanks for letting me sleep.”


John laughed at the analogy. “Yeah, it is quiet up there.” He agreed. “Tried to get Sherlock to move into that room, actually. Wouldn’t shift from there, though.” He nodded down the corridor. “Liked being able to hear the front door.” He took a grateful sip of his coffee.

“Idiot.” Greg shook his head. They lulled into a shared silence, waking up slowly thanks to the caffeine and the benefits of a decent sleep. “So…” Greg began carefully into the quiet. “Have you thought about Mycroft’s offer? The house, the clinic?”

John shook his head as he took another sip of his coffee and pulled the cup away from his mouth to answer. “Honestly, no. Part of me doesn’t even want to think about it all. But mostly I just don’t know where to start. I’ve never had to consider a tailored home before. What is he going to need adjusting? What does he need adding in? I don’t know what to think about first.”

“Tell me to shut up,” Greg said with his left hand out as a physical gesture of honesty in his statement to come, “But I think that taking up the offer of the clinic might be good. A private hospital who have everything at their fingertips for a named price might be able to offer some kinds of therapies or equipment that the National Health Service can’t.”

John nodded, “Yeah, maybe.” He sighed. “First, I think I need to know about his injury and what the impact is going to be. If I know what he can’t do, what kind of support he’s going to require, maybe then I can think about Mycroft’s offers, and ways of moving all of this forward. Right now I feel like we’re stuck - a kind of limbo of not understanding anything.”
“I get that.” Greg nodded with appreciation for his honesty. “What’s it called. T-twenty...tea-for-two...?”

John chuckled. “T-twelve-L-one complete spinal cord injury. It’s the area along the spine affected that the letters and numbers relate to; so it’s right at the top of his lumbar region, hence the loss of feeling in his legs but not in his chest or abdomen, you see?” Greg nodded. “What I need to learn is what that means for his upper mobility, his...y’know, continence and stuff.”

Greg’s face shifted and John could see the realisation had hit him at those words. “God, yeah…” Greg exclaimed in a whisper. “I hadn’t even...I mean, things like that didn’t even cross my mind.”

“Depending on the feeling he has, he might remain continent. Some paraplegics can feel pressure when they need to pee, so there’s that to explore. But it isn’t something we’ll know while he’s all tubed-up at the hospital.” John scratched the back of his neck in thought.

“Perhaps another reason to consider Mycroft’s offer?” Greg suggested again. “He’ll have to be unhooked from all their equipment to be moved - a good a time as any to do tests like that.”

John shrugged. “I don’t know.” He’d never felt lost in his medical knowledge like he did right now. But the truth of the matter was that he wasn’t a specialist in anything like this. He was a General Practitioner - a family doctor. Family doctors weren’t supposed to have to make choices, decisions and life changes like this. “I suppose.”

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“Your blood pressure is good, and your sats are stable too so I’ll talk to the nurse about taking you off the oxygen. You seem a little warm though, are you feeling okay under those blankets?” Bronwyn asked with a smile. Sherlock gave a nod. “Your BM is a little low, so I think if you can stomach it you should start trying to eat, maybe drink a little more than those small sips of water.” Bronwyn gave Sherlock a small smile as she removed the blood pressure cuff from his bicep. “Cup of tea, slice of toast?” She offered, hooking her equipment back onto the rollable monitor at her side.

Sherlock shook his head. “I’m not hungry.”

Bronwyn ignored his response tactically. “Are you in any pain at all, my lovely?” She asked. Sherlock shook his head, his curls rustling against the pillow beneath him.

“He did experience some quite insistent pain last night.” Mycroft spoke up from the chair, eyes scanning a book but ears attuned to the room. “In his back and stomach.” He looked up and met Bronwyn’s eyes as she looked at him. “I’m not sure of the regions but it was rather relentless for some time.”

Bronwyn looked back at Sherlock, “Whereabouts was the pain, Sherlock?”

Sherlock shrugged, “I don’t know - I don’t have it now.” He said lethargically. “Middle somewhere.”

Bronwyn nodded at his response, something of a frown furrowing her brow briefly. “Okay, well if it returns let us know.” She crouched and checked the chamber on Sherlock’s catheter, something Mycroft saw and winced at, averting his eyes back to his book. “You had your renal scan yesterday, didn’t you?” She asked, straightening up. Sherlock nodded - he vaguely remembered that. “I’ll ask
the sister to speak with the renal team, see what the lay of the land is there.”

“Problem?” Mycroft asked, closing the book and holding it with both hands in his suited lap.

“Urine’s quite dark; and he doesn’t seem to be making very much.” She said, offhandedly. “Being on IV fluids should be keeping him hydrated, and with the little oral fluids he is taking, that should only help the situation.” She picked up the vital pack for records of Sherlock’s last round check. “Bladder wash-out done, flowing well… Hmm.” She mumbled to herself. “Well, perhaps it’s a urinary tract infection, or perhaps the damage to the kidney needs to be looked at further. Like I said, I’ll ask the ward sister to check in with renal, maybe it’ll warrant another scan to see what’s going on. In the meantime,” She said, crouching again and withdrawing a small white-capped bottle from her pocket, “We’ll dip this and see if there’s any signs of infection.”

Mycroft’s face echoed as much discomfort at the inner workings of his brother’s body being openly discussed as Sherlock himself did, hiding his face in his arm as he lay with his eyes averted to the ceiling. Sample in hand, and with her machine dragging behind her, Bronwyn left with the promise of returning with news as soon as she had any, and the threat that there would be breakfast arriving in the room whether Sherlock was willing and compliant or not and she expected him to eat it all.

Mycroft remained quiet in the wake of the healthcare assistant’s departure, and watched Sherlock for signs that talking might be acceptable again. When they didn’t come, after five minutes of silence, Mycroft decided to break it anyhow. “Has the pain really gone?” He asked, getting to his feet. He abandoned his book on the seat of his chair and walked toward the bed.

Drawing his arm down from his face slowly, Sherlock sighed. “It isn’t as bad.”

“But it is still there.” Mycroft clarified. “Perhaps this,” Mycroft inched his head toward the edge of the bed in lieu of saying ‘the issues with the tube currently inserted in your penis, draining away your piss’, “…is causing the pain?”

Sherlock licked his lips and shrugged, wanting to ignore it all. “I dunno.”

Mycroft hovered a moment, considering being a little more insistent with his questioning and pushing Sherlock into being more open, but he couldn’t bring himself to say anything more of worth. In the harsher lights of the daytime, the intimacy that had been allowed by the night seemed to have been snatched away.

“Play with me.” Sherlock said, oddly. “I spy with my little eye…” Sherlock proclaimed quite loudly, pausing to yawn before continuing. “...something beginning with...S.” Mycroft watched him squirm as he had during the night, attempting to relieve his discomfort but not able to shift his position.

“I am not playing with you. Grow up.” Mycroft grumbled loudly for effect. “And cover your mouth when you yawn.”

Sherlock sighed dramatically. “I'm bored. Play with me.” He pounded a fist lightly on the bedrail. “S - something beginning with S.”

Mycroft, not missing a beat, rolled his eyes. “I do hope you’re not so egotistical as to select yourself in this.”

“Shut up.” Sherlock cocked one eyebrow. “S,” he repeated. “Something beginning with S.”

Mycroft glanced around the room briefly, eyes sharp and reactive, before he smirked to himself and muttered. “Stethoscope.” His eyes had fallen somewhat quickly upon the object that the healthcare assistant had left behind, something some stressed nurse would soon be looking for, he assumed.
“Smart arse.” Sherlock yawned again.

Mycroft smirked again. “Sore loser, little brother.”

“You.” Sherlock nodded lethargically at him. “Your turn.”

“B.” Mycroft simply said, without all the childish pretense.

“Bed.” Sherlock answered, frowning as though he were genuinely thinking hard about his decision to answer.

“Of course it’s bed, what else is there?” Mycroft tutted. He glanced at Sherlock and found himself frowning. “Sherlock, your cheeks are on fire.” He said, finding it a stark difference to his alabaster skin to see Sherlock’s cheek a deep red. He stepped closer to the bed as Sherlock frowned at him. Raising his hand tentatively, he placed it first on Sherlock’s cheek and winced before moving it to his forehead, feeling heat radiating from his brother’s skin. He drew back. “You’re red hot. Sit tight - I’m coming right back.” Mycroft said, touching Sherlock’s arm before he walked from the room with a quick step, calling in the first available person at the station outside. “Excuse me, there’s something wrong.”

The male nurse who had been closest followed Mycroft back into the room and approached Sherlock’s bed with a kind and breezy bedside manner and a cool, Australian accent. “What’s going on then, mate?”

“He’s obviously got a temperature, just touch his forehead.” Mycroft spoke quickly, his hand jutting out to point at Sherlock.

Retrieving an in-ear thermometer from just outside on the obs. trolley, the nurse explained his actions as he carefully inserted the probe into Sherlock’s right ear. “Ouch, thirty-nine point four. Definitely burning up, mate. Let’s take a look at your surgery sites.” He took a quick look beneath the blankets at Sherlock’s thigh, but found the stitching beneath the adhesive dressing to be clean, without swelling or redness. He gained assistance from a healthcare assistant as they passed to turn Sherlock carefully in a log-roll onto his side and they examined the surgery site on his back, finding it too to be clear of any outward signs of infection.

Making Sherlock comfortable again, and drawing back his blankets in an effort to begin reducing his temperature, the nurse began explaining to Mycroft what was going to happen next.

“Okay, we’ll need to do blood test and figure out what’s causing the fever, but…” he said, reading quickly over the vital pack of information that had been left following Sherlock’s last check, “…I think that we’re already looking into a UTI, so we’ll see the results of that, and his blood test, and start him on the appropriate cause of antibiotics.”

“He has pain in his back and stomach.” Mycroft said, “He’s being vague but I can see his discomfort and I want to know what you’re going to do to help him.” Mycroft shook his head, “And how did his temperature go unnoticed not ten minutes ago?”

“Spikes can occur quickly.” The nurse defended. “But now it has been identified, we can treat what needs to be treated and get him comfortable again. As for the pain, there has been a request put forward for a repeat renal evaluation. In the meantime we’ll give intravenous analgesia and see where that leads.” The nurse lowered Sherlock’s bed to bring him almost fully flat and adjusted the pillow to cradle his head a little more than it had been, not worrying too much about supporting his upper back as making him comfortable. He effortlessly worked with the healthcare assistant’s help to gather the vials needed and draw blood from Sherlock’s willingly outstretched arm with the butterfly
method.

With a final reassurance to Mycroft that they would find the cause of Sherlock’s sudden turn and treat it as needed, the nurse and his shadow left, and Mycroft sunk back into his chair, book cast to the floor, with nervousness fluttering in his belly.
Chapter 13

John left Baker Street with Greg after a quick shower. Greg left John at the hospital with the promise of returning when he was finished in work, and John had thanked him for his presence. Keen to get back to Sherlock, John threw bag of extra belongings he’d picked up over his shoulder and waved to Greg a final time from the drop-off point before he turned and walked in through the hospital’s main doors. When he reached the surgical ICU, he was met by the room Sherlock had been in being stripped down. He stepped back out of the cubicle and walked across the short hallway to the nursing desk.

“Hi - sorry, um, Lisa, isn’t it? Where’s Sherlock?” He asked, frowning. He was sure his concern was etched on his face as the nurse smiled at him and spoke in a sweet, ‘bad news giving’ sort of tone to placate him before conversing with him like the professional she knew he was.

“He was transferred to renal - he had a scan early this morning following back and abdo pain; his bladder wasn’t voiding. A UTI was confirmed too, and he’s being supported on the renal ward whilst receiving IV antibiotics.” She explained carefully.

“He’s allergic to Penicillin.” John said. “You’re not giving him anything with Penicillin, are you?”

“No, love. He’s receiving Trimeth...oh, no he isn’t, he’s being given intravenous Nitrofurantoin. Don’t worry - all of his allergies are listed in his medical history, he won’t be given Penicillin.” She smiled sweetly. “Do you know where the ward is? I can give you directions.”

John shook his head. “No, it’s okay. I know it.” He smiled at her and tapped his hand softly on the desk. “Thanks.” Gripping the bag tightly, feeling his stomach muscles contracting in concern, he speed-walked through the hospital until the reached renal. All he could think of was the worst case scenarios. If Sherlock got sick, he’d struggle with that on top of his new life changes. Finding the ward without much struggle, he did seem to find it nigh on impossible to find a member of staff he could talk to. Waiting around at the empty nursing station, he looked around him, trying to find somebody professional.

After five minutes of growing agitated, and slowly beginning to lose his frayed patience, John felt a comforting hand on his back and turned to see who it belong to, only to meet the smiling eyes of a thirty-something female nurse with a kind expression.

“How can I help?” She asked, drawing back her hand and standing beside him.

“Oh - I’m John Watson, my - umm - my partner, Sherlock Holmes was transferred here from the SICU earlier this morning with non-reflex bladder and retention, and a UTI. He’s a spinal patient.” John tried to summon his professional voice but found himself jabbering, just too desperate to see Sherlock.

She smiled, and held out her slim hand to shake his. “Hi, John, I’m Shauna Vincent, I’m the acting ward sister. I’ve heard quite a bit about you in the last hour.” She smiled again. “Sherlock is currently being assisted with personal care and safe positioning and bridging are being carried out to make sure we’re maintaining skin integrity. After that, he’ll be hooked up to his IV medication to treat the urinary tract infection. The consultant has decided not to go ahead with any surgery on the kidney just yet, he wants to see if treating the infection will first help.” She licked her lips, and John felt comforted as she spoke to him like a human - an equal. “We’ve decided to take the catheter out and that’s been replaced and has since been flowing wonderfully. He’s being supported with inco-pads for a short time too, just in case of bypassing because of the previous retention.”
John smiled at her, sighing in pure relief. “Thank you.” He said, sincerely. “I can see him once they’re done?” He asked.

Shauna nodded, “Of course. They’re working in a quad-team, just for positioning, once they have him dressed and the IV is hooked up, he’ll be all yours.” She smiled. “His brother, I think, is just through there-.” She pointed behind her, to her left, “There’s a small room that’s being used as a waiting area - don’t let on to the execs, or we’ll be in trouble! Go on in, wait with him. We’ll come for you once Sherlock is settled.” She touched his arm as she walked away, and allowed him to move on and get comfortable himself.

John found the room easily - a tiny box of a space with four empty chairs and one occupied by Mycroft. He quirked his lips into something like a smile and set the bag down before sitting in a chair across from the older Holmes.

“Busy night, I take it.” John said. He shook his head and looked at Mycroft with a sharp glare. “Why didn’t you call me, you should have told me he wasn’t well. I’d have been here.”

“And that’s precisely why I didn’t call.” Mycroft said flatly. “During the night he just said he had pain; this morning he had a fever, worsening back and stomach pain, and the nurse found signs of infection in his urine. They did a scan of his back, his kidney is continuing to function abnormally and so they transferred him to the very place that is equipped for dealing with kidney disease and the urinary tract. He is in a hospital, John. At no point was he at risk of neglect.”

“I could have told you outright what was wrong. But you wouldn’t ever admit that he needs me above you.” John shook his head, “And thanks to you, I’ve neglected him by buggering off home for a kip!”

“He is fine.” Mycroft insisted, he had his lips spread into a thin line as he looked at John with an insistent stare.

“He’s far from fine.” John said, angrily spitting the final word. “What’s next? MRSA in his surgical sites?” He sighed and shook his head fiercely. “That nurse though,” He said, sighing to calm himself down. “Shauna.” He nodded. “She seems nice. Seems like he might actually get some better, focused care here.”

“I did advise that Sherlock could be transferred to the private hospital, but…” Mycroft stopped mid-sentence as John stared at him, eyes tense and mouth pursed angrily. “Yes.” He nodded his head. “She’s very nice.”

“Mister Holmes, Doctor Watson?” The men looked up, meeting a hopeful-looking Asian healthcare assistant with a bright, white set of teeth smiling at them. “Sherlock is asking for you. He’s been given personal care and he’s ready and waiting.” She said, stepping aside as the two men rose to their feet and walked toward her. She guided them to Sherlock’s side-room, and left them alone as they stepped inside.

John stood a moment, just shy of the doorway, his eyes flicking up and down over Sherlock’s form in the bed. He’d been positioned on his right side and was surrounded by a mound of different cushions and foam protectors. His head was resting on a crisp, white pillow; a pillow ran the length of his back, keeping him stable, whilst another was resting between his knees, keeping his legs from pressing against one another. Beneath his ankles was a foam cushion, rising the feet from the bed to prevent any potential friction-causing contact or pressure from his lack of movement from the bonier areas of his limbs. Beneath his left arm was draped over a pillow and he looked tiny, lost in a cocoon of safety.
Mycroft walked into the room, his shoes loud on the floor as he approached the bed, and took a seat in a chair that already had his coat and blazer draped over the back. John assumed he’d been there for sometime before being asked to give the nurses - and Sherlock - privacy.

“Sherlock.” Mycroft said quietly, attracting his attention. Sherlock’s hair rustled on the pillow as he raised his chin and his eyes caught his brother first, then John. Mycroft watched Sherlock struggle to control his breathing as his eyes filled with tears.

“John.”

John dropped his bag and approached the bed, bending at the waist to lean down and hug Sherlock, kissing him firmly on the temple. “Oh, Love…” he rested his forehead against the side of Sherlock’s. “I’m sorry I wasn’t here.”

Sherlock sniffled, blinking his tears from their pool in the bridge of his nose. “It’s okay.”

“No,” John straightened, and rested his hands on to of Sherlock’s. “No it isn’t okay, I should have been here. I’m sorry.”

Sherlock swallowed and shrugged lightly. “Mycroft was.”

“The pain must have been hideous.” John said, his hand smoothing down Sherlock’s temple and cheek, resting on his ear and pushing back his hair. “The antibiotics they have you on now, for the UTI, they’re good, strong. It’ll clear up, you’ll feel brighter, and things will move forward.”

“I know.” Sherlock nodded his head slowly.

John pulled back his hand. “How did you sleep?” He asked, “You look tired.”

Sherlock screwed up his face and shook his head, “John, stop it. I don’t want to talk. Just - sit here?” He softened his expression. “Please?”

John felt his heart break a little; when he’d left last night Sherlock seemed wider-eyed, tired but able to focus. Right now, he looked small and fragile, and the implications of the damage to his spine were becoming more evident. Everything was impacted by one thing within his body changing, and John was frightened to know what would come next. Would this be their life? In the hospital every couple of months because Sherlock has a fierce UTI they can’t treat at home; would there be such severe issues with urine retention that he’s at risk of rupture, or reflux, damaging what remained of his functioning renal system?

“Of course.” He whispered, and perched onto the side of the bed right beside Sherlock, mindful of his long limbs.

“You’re leaving then?” Sherlock looked over at his brother. John smirked at the bluntness and laughed as he looked around at Mycroft, sitting on the chair to their right.

“Charming as ever.” Mycroft rolled his eyes, but took the hint and got to his feet. “I’ll see you very soon.” They remained quiet as Mycroft gathered his coat and blazer, and watched him leave the side room without a spoken goodbye of real substance.

Once alone, John laughed more deeply. “That was a bit mean.” He smiled at Sherlock who, to John’s surprised delight, smiled back lightly.

“He’s been bugging me all night.” He waved his hand. “I’m glad you’re back.” He said, soberly.
John smiled at the right side of his mouth lovingly. “So am I.” He got to his feet, taking his hand out of Sherlock’s for a moment, and removed his jacket. He threw it onto the chair Mycroft had left and took his seat back on the bed beside Sherlock again. He rested his hand on Sherlock’s thigh, and trailed it up gently until he felt the slight twitch of Sherlock’s muscle beneath his hand, involuntarily showing John just where he could be affectionate with his touch and Sherlock would be able to feel it. A finger-space above his hip bone, to be precise; John made the mental note. He moved his fingers lightly, brushing them against the brushed-cotton pyjama bottoms Sherlock was wearing. “I’ve got to admit, I’m missing the hospital gown.” He teased.

“As am I.” Sherlock joined in, though it was clear he felt weak and tired. “Very freeing. Pyjama bottoms and a t-shirt don’t have quite the same-,” He paused to yawn, “...lack of constraint as an open-backed dress.”

John gave a light chuckle, patted his hand lightly on Sherlock’s side, and slipped down from the bed and onto his feet. “Sleep, Love. I’ll be right here,” He nodded to the chair, and sunk down into it without another word.
Chapter 14

For three, desperately long days, John watched Sherlock’s mood fluctuate in his small but singular room on the renal ward. He saw Sherlock battle his confusion caused by the infection, coupled with increasing boredom that arose as his fatigue decreased with the gradual treating of the UTI. John, alone, dealt with two total meltdowns and one failed attempt to rip out a cannula. Between he and Mycroft, there was the difficult handling of five instances of making the healthcare assistants cry - all were unsuccessfully avoided. Importantly, though, John saw a glimmer of Sherlock’s resolve return over a seventy-two hour period and, despite the bumps and the promise of worse to come, seeing anything close to a genuine shine of a playful smile in Sherlock’s eyes was enough for John to begin to rebuild his faith, in himself and Sherlock, and in a future that would be rocky but all their own.

John had barely left the hospital during the entire three-day span. Mycroft and Greg had managed to bully him out one of the evenings, but to the most part he remained at Sherlock’s side, citing that the last time he left ‘look what happened!’ Mycroft didn’t blame him, but the lack of alone time with Sherlock to allow him to work through everything was wearing him down and, though he would never allow John to know this, he was sure his annoyance was clear. Still, both Mycroft and John were glad of the improvements in Sherlock’s health as they came, little by little, each twelve-hour span seemingly bringing with it something that had got that little bit better.

By the arrival of the fourth morning on the renal ward, Sherlock seemed almost himself again and John felt more relaxed than he had in almost two weeks. To see something close to the Sherlock he had met was wonderful, to hear Sherlock actually beginning to spark conversations and use his mind to it’s fullest capacity was amazing.

“Glad it’s gone?” John asked as he returned to the bay, dumping his toiletry bag onto the bedside table that was pulled in at Sherlock’s waist over the bed, alongside a cup of long forgotten tea and a half-eaten and none-too-appetising croissant.

Sherlock was sitting almost completely upright, his lower back supported with an array of pillows and his knees forced into a mechanical bend by the raising of the foot-end of the bed. Sherlock frowned at him, lost in the question. “Glad what’s gone?”

“The drip.” John nodded in Sherlock’s direction. He pulled on a thin jumper atop his t-shirt and rested his hands on the footboard of Sherlock’s bed.

Sherlock nodded his head, “Yes.” He flexed his hand. “Needles without good feeling seem pointless.”

John ignored the obvious comment. “Thing is Love, now that you’re not being pumped full of fluids, you actually have to start drinking properly. No more sips of cold tea and then abandoning it. It’s important. The worse your fluid intake is, the more prone to urine infections you’re going to be and with a permanent or even intermittent catheter, you’re going to be at even more risk…” Sherlock let his head loll back and blew a sigh through his lips, making them jiggle and vibrate noisily. “I’m serious, Sherlock. The past three days have been pretty rough, not just mentally - I mean physically, you’ve been pumped full of pretty strong antibiotics, had regular bladder wash-outs while being flooded with fluids. Without that intervention, UTIs can lead to sepsis, and the fact that your bladder wasn’t expelling the urine isn’t a good thing - it could rupture or lead to your kidneys completely shutting down. Your urinary tract is in a tedious enough state right now. You’ve got to start looking after yourself.”
“Along with starting to live my life, and starting to build up my strength?” Sherlock snapped his neck up again and his tongue was sharp as he grumbled at John. “What was the other one? I forget. Start...finding new happiness, or something equally cliché and boring.” He rolled his eyes.

“I’m not saying this to patronise you.” John insisted gently. Sherlock stared at the table in front of him, eying the contents of John’s toiletry bag where it failed to close due to a busted zipper. “It’s because I care, and I love you, and I don’t want to be here to repeat this, or because you need a kidney transplant, when it could be avoided or at least reduced.”

“Yes, Dad.” Sherlock said petulantly and smudged his entire face into a ridiculously sarcastic smile. John took it, though. Score one for Doctor Watson.

“I was going to head out for an hour or so, if that’s okay? I want to see this place Mycroft’s lot are renovating and maybe take a look at the other one. I'll take photos, show you them, and you can decide.” John suggested, pushing his hands into his jeans pockets.

Sherlock pushed the table away a little and fiddled his fingers in his lap, flicking his fingernails together. “I want a shower.” Sherlock lifted his eyes, meeting John’s.

“Really? You feel up to it?” John smiled, not entirely hurt that his question had been ignored. Sherlock shrugged both shoulders. “I don’t know.” He twitched his mouth to the side in consideration. “No.” he decided. “No - but I want to get out of bed. I’m bored of sitting here.”

“Now that you’re feeling better,” John latched onto anything that Sherlock was prepared to do, trying not to let the refusals or mind-changing deter him from encouraging Sherlock back into a normal way of life. “I’m sure that the staff here can talk to somebody from the physio team about independent movement from the bed, a wheelchair, hoists…”

“What?” Sherlock’s brows drew up. “Hoist?” He shook his head. “Like a...human crane?” John chuckled though he feared Sherlock was genuinely concerned by the mention of the device. “Sort of.” He softened his voice and walked the length of Sherlock’s bed to stand at his side. He leaned his arms on the bedrail and bent his back as he rested. “It’s in two parts - a sling, and the hoist itself. You’re rolled on the bed, like how they did for helping you to wash and dress when you were feeling ill. They feed the sling under you once you’re on your side, adjust the placement to make sure there’s a strap to go around the inside of your thighs each side. So like this-,” He straightened and turned around, showing Sherlock how a typical sling might wrap around a person’s body. “...then they loop the handles of the sling onto the hooks on the hoist and use the remote to raise you up and bring you to the chair, or wherever.”

Sherlock frowned deeply. “No.” he shook his head firmly. “I don’t want that.”

John smiled and couldn’t help the chuckle that rattled in his chest again. “It isn’t as bad as it sounds. But, really, I’m sure you won’t need it. You’ve got upper body strength and I’ve seen you scoot yourself up in the bed, which is amazing.” He smiled with love. “A bit of work on showing you how to transfer, and a few days of you probably feeling tired whilst you get used to it, and you’ll be able to move with no issues which will only get more efficient as your arms and back get stronger.” John leaned on the sides of the bed again and reached in, squeezing Sherlock’s hand when he saw the cogs in his brain turning fast, simply by the expression on his face. “What is it, Love?”

Sherlock looked at him, his lips pursed and eyes beginning to fill with tears. “The institutional cocoon is cracking.” He said, cryptically. John frowned, unsure of his meaning. “It’s felt like a distant thing to be realised - the wheelchair, actually getting up of the bed and being paralysed. It’s
been protected, and kept locked away as something that’s ahead, and I’m not entirely certain that I am equipped to deal with having to face the reality of it.” His lips parted and he lapped at his bottom lip with his tongue. “A few days...seems too close.”

John’s eyes were wide and soft with sadness. “The cocoon is cracking,” He agreed, “But you are not going to have to do any of this by yourself. You’ve got me, and your brother, and Greg. Hell, I had a text from Molly Hooper this morning asking if she could visit. Everything that has felt like it is miles away is getting closer because you’re moving forward. You’ve dealt with each thing that seemed a possibility and then became a reality this far, why do you even think for a single second that you’ll not be able to do this?”

“I don’t want...to be…” Sherlock said, his words punctuated. “...disabled.”

The vulnerability of his words, his voice, the entire delivery, make John’s heart beat heavily and sink his stomach to his knees. He sighed, leaned over the bar, and pulled Sherlock too him in a gentle but loving hug. “You can do this; you will do this. And I’m not going to leave your side until you do.”

Sherlock wrapped his arms around John in return, inhaling his scent in the crook of his neck. “Don’t go out today. Just - tell Mycroft we’ll take the new house. I don’t want to be in a place where somebody else...I just...tell him the new one.” He released John and pulled back so that John would get the message. That was enough close-proximity stuff for now.

“You’re sure? Without looking, or…?” John asked, gripping the bar of the bed with both hands.

Sherlock rolled his shoulders, making himself as comfortable as he could. He nodded his head. “I don’t want to be making any more decisions if they can be alleviated. The new one.” He said with finality.

With a small smile, John nodded. “Okay.”
Chapter 15

Despite minor setbacks, the day came around quickly when Sherlock was transferred out of the renal ward and onto medical. John and Mycroft had stood back as Sherlock was settled in what would be his new quarters, hating the noise he made when the healthcare assistants and the nurse slid him across to the bed on the PAT slide. Rather dauntingly, after less than half an hour, two mid-twenties physiotherapists walked into the room with strong arms and even stronger resolves. They spoke clearly, with bright personalities and praise offered where it was due. They prompted, pushed and verbally instructed without once laying a hand on Sherlock, keen to see what he could do before they intervened. It took four days of pushing, exhaustion and growling under his breath to get there, but John was tearful with joy when, with verbal prompting from a male physiotherapist, Sherlock was able to use the bar at the side of the bed to pull himself upright, sitting up straight without support.

It took a further two days, but Sherlock was soon coached through turning his sitting position into ‘sitting on the edge of the bed’ and was able to move his legs whilst keeping himself upright and balanced. By the end of the week, Sherlock was issued with an NHS standard but practical wheelchair which provided him with adequate if not tailored support of his back and, more importantly, finally allowed him to be out of bed and free to move. Of course, Mycroft had already set about seeking out what was right for Sherlock, promising he and John that the new chair would be at the house when they were ready to go home. The home they were still yet to see.

John was brimming with pride and relief as he watched Sherlock, effortful at first, gain movement for the first time in two weeks. He knew this was the new normal, and it did sting a little, but to see Sherlock’s independence seep back in - if slowly - was able to breathe life into a happiness inside of him he hadn’t felt in what felt like an eternity.

The chair was made as comfortable for Sherlock as possible; a ProPad pressure cushion kept the seat comfortable and provided protection from pressure sores. “You’ll get stronger and stronger,” Emma - the physio team leader had promised. “Keep up the exercises with your arms, and focus on maintaining a strong core, and you’ll do fine. Duck to water.” She’d smiled.

John couldn’t fault their dedication - in a week they’d brought Sherlock from lethargic and bored to mobile and free, bringing him back to himself in a way they would never really understand. He’d be eternally grateful to them, that much he knew. He also knew he would never be able to thank the hospital staff for all they’d done to bring them to this point. It all could have been so different - Sherlock could have bled out, the damage internally could have been so much worse, he could have been left without the dedicated care he received but none of that happened because everyone had rallied around and found it within themselves to rebuild a broken man.

Watching Sherlock as he rolled his shoulders, stretching his back out as he sat upright in the wheelchair at the side of his bed, stuffing his toiletries into the overnight bag that had been ‘home’ for the last fortnight, John couldn’t keep his lips from tugging into a bright smile. Feeling John’s eyes on the back of his neck, Sherlock turned at the waist and met his gaze. “What?”

“Nothing.” John smiled, happiness-drunk. “I’m just...happy.”

Sherlock smiled and sighed contentedly. “Me too.”

“Greg’s coming in about a half an hour. He’s going to blow his head.” John chuckled, handing Sherlock the t-shirt he was supposed to have folded and handed back five minutes earlier but had instead just held onto, daydreaming. “He’s really excited to see you.”
Sherlock gripped the large rear wheels of his chair and, clumsily at first, twisted them so that he could turn to face John. “If he brings his phone in to take photographs, I won’t be held responsible for my actions.”

John chuckled, “He only wants to send them to Anderson.” The growl he received from Sherlock only caused his laughter to echo louder. “But seriously, Love, he really is glad you’re almost ready to go home.”

“So am I.” Sherlock nodded his head. “Mycroft still won’t tell me much about the place.”

John shook his head, rolling his eyes in sync. “I know - I’ve asked a few questions. He just keeps saying it’s suitable and specific.” He crossed the three-step distance between himself and Sherlock and rested his hands on his shoulders. “You’re doing okay?” he checked, sincerely. “Excitement aside, you’re alright?”

Sherlock glanced up at him and nodded his head. “I am.”

John bent at the waist and stole a kiss. “Good.” He said, eyes inches from Sherlock’s. Leaving a final kiss on Sherlock’s forehead, John straightened his back. “I’m just nipping to the loo - finish packing the washing into that carrier bag next to the case, I’ll bring it back to the flat later when Mycroft gets here.” He slipped from the room and disappeared down the hallway.

Sherlock twisted the chair awkwardly until he was turned back around to face the bed. He exhaled heavily and leaned forwards, taking the half-filled bag from beside the overnight bag and rested it on his lap. He leaned forwards again, wincing a little at the stretch that crept up his spine, and reached inside the overnight bag, dragging out the worn pairs of pyjama bottoms and shirts. He stuffed them into the carrier bag, along with John’s coffee-stained jumper. Taking a rest a moment, he leaned back in the chair and stretched his spine and muscles in the opposite direction, feeling momentary relief from the tugging ache.

He straightened and placed the bag back onto the bed. Reaching for the large wheels, he guided the chair as smoothly as he could around, clearing the bed without a crash, and rounded the end of it to lead out into the hallway. As he reached the doorway, he gripped the wheels for a sudden halt, centimeters away from colliding with a pair of suit-trousered legs. He snapped his head up and smiled weakly at his brother.

“Getting the hang of it I see.” Mycroft commented, brows crooked. Sherlock dragged the wheelchair into reverse, pulling back into the room as Mycroft took a step at a time to allow him his space. “No John?” Mycroft asked, glancing into the otherwise empty room.

“Bathroom.” Sherlock informed him.

“Feeling free?” Mycroft asked, inviting himself to sit down on the foot of Sherlock’s made bed, brought down to a lower level than it had been when he was in it twenty-four hours a day.

“Somewhat.” Sherlock nodded, resting his elbows on the awkward side armrests of the chair. “You’re early.”

“Yes.” Mycroft nodded, avoiding picking at Sherlock playfully for his stating of the obvious. “I came to let you know that the house will be finished by tomorrow, and free to be moved into the following day.”

Sherlock examined his face. He gave a slow nod. “Thank you.” he said, honestly.

“Don’t be so giving with your thanks, for I fear you may wish to retract it.” Mycroft said evenly.
Sherlock frowned at him. “Oh?”

“I am aware of what you said, and of your preferences, but I rather hope you'll forgive me when I admit that I went against you.” Mycroft began.

“Against me how?” Sherlock questioned, somewhat nervous of the coming conversation.

Mycroft swallowed and braced himself for his coming words, as well as Sherlock's reaction. “I telephoned...home.”

“Home home?” Sherlock fixed Mycroft with a glare.

Mycroft nodded. “Keeping this from them any longer seemed cruel.”

Sherlock huffed a deep breath in from his nose. “You're an arrogant prick.” He spat.

“An opinion I fully appreciate you having.” Mycroft said with the slightest pang of hurt. “But their presence could be just as stimulating and helpful as John’s.”

Sherlock laughed sarcastically. “How?”

“For therapy sessions, cooking, helping you at home.” Mycroft listed.

“I don't need to be helped. I am not an invalid.” Sherlock growled through gritted teeth. “I am thankful for the house, but your help is not warranted. Neither is theirs. I am more than…”

“Capable?” Mycroft supplied at his brother’s pause. “Yes, I can see that.”

“Get out.” Sherlock shook his head. He pulled the wheels of the chair, moving himself backward and thus making a pathway. “Go!”

John stepped back into the room as Mycroft got to his feet. He smiled lightly at the older Holmes but it wasn't returned, not even in the form of one of Mycroft's often-seen eyebrow crooks.

“What's going on?” John frowned, a half-smile still on his lips that served just to prove his confusion.

“Mycroft is leaving.” Sherlock said, hands in his lap.

“Can't have been here more than three minutes.” John laughed, “Whatever he has said to you, ignore him. He's probably in a mood over something stupid.” He looked to Mycroft.

“His annoyance is founded, somewhat.” Mycroft said plainly. “Good day, John. I'll see you soon.” Mycroft pushed past John and walked away, leaving the poor man confused and well and truly out of the loop.

“Sherlock?” John looked to him, arms out questioningly. “What was that all about?”

“My brother thought it would be a good move to call our parents.” Sherlock said, looking up and John as he grasped the wheels of his chair. “They're worried, he said.”

“I'd be worried about my kids if they were shot.” John said evenly as he watched Sherlock struggle a little to turn the chair. “I'm surprised he's only called them now.” John admitted.

“I didn't want them here. I still don't.” Sherlock said, adding a yelled curse as he caught the right foot plate of his chair off the frame of the bed.
John was at his side in a second. “Relax.” He said firmly. “Just take it easy. You need your head in the game, you have physio at one. So settle down and push your brother and your parents aside. Greg texted me when I was on my way back from the loo, he won't be long. So put on a happy bloody face and focus on moving forward.”

Sherlock sighed through his nose and rolled his eyes. “Fine.”

John and Greg were in a battle of deductions about the pretty healthcare assistant who'd just finished her round check when Greg arrived. He found John laughing in a girlish giggle while Sherlock explained that 'you never see a married woman with a smile like that'.

“Morning you two.” Greg greeted from the doorway, smiling at the bright atmosphere.

“Lestrade.” Sherlock glanced over.

Greg’s face was a broad smile as he scanned his eyes over Sherlock. “Looking great, mate. Really, bloody great.”

“John has expressed that sentiment in fifty different ways.” Sherlock rolled his eyes.

“And I'll do it twenty more.” Greg pulled a face and welcomed himself into the room. “Seriously, it's great to see you up, mate. You look brilliant.”

“He does, doesn't he?” John beamed from his seat in the corner.

“And everything else is good?” Greg asked, smiling.

“Kidney isn't functioning fully but it is functioning so it's a case of watching it; three monthly scans once he's home but it's a close monitoring regime while he's here. Surgery sites are great, no problems. Sitting well, muscles are strong and getting stronger…” John smiled brightly. “It's all...it's all good.”

Greg smiled again, and Sherlock shook his head as he looked between the two of them. “You do realise you look like new parents beaming over their newborn infant. If you could stop it, that would be good.”

“Give over.” Greg tutted. “He's happy - we're happy. It could have gone so different, but look at you. We're allowed to be glad.”

Sherlock accepted the scolding. “I know.”

“So what's the plan for today?” Greg asked, perching himself on Sherlock's bed.

“Physiotherapy at one.” John said, glancing at his watch. “And the renal guys are coming around; want to go through home care and...options.” John saw Sherlock's awkward shuffle in his chair and knew going any deeper into that explanation would earn him the silent treatment.

“How's physio going?” Greg asked, “obviously doing the trick.”

John nodded. “They aren't soft on him.” He smiled. “A lot of core-focused stuff, building up his muscles.”

“They'll get you a smaller chair I'm assuming?” Greg commented, “because I think that's the biggest thing I've ever seen.” He smirked at Sherlock.

Sherlock glanced down at the chair and agreed, “Mycro will.”
“It's NHS issue.” John explained. “He can have something more tailored to himself once he's able to move better.”

“I'm thinking black, with a yellow light on the back…” Greg said with a smile.

“Funny.” Sherlock rolled his eyes.
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

I've adopted the widely-used names for Sherlock and Mycroft's parents. Forgive my cop-out.

Mycroft sat at his desk in relative silence, examining the large room around him. Money had bought him a good life, a walnut lined office and expensive suits. Work was his life, such as he could wrap up his duties in a neat bow and call it ‘work’. He couldn't imagine what life for him would be like should ‘work’ stop. And yet, he knew, Sherlock had that realisation to reach. Sherlock’s work, Sherlock’s life, had come to an abrupt end and Mycroft couldn't work it out in his mind. Such finality seemed unrealistic. Accidents like this were things that happened to other people, paralysis was something you heard about - it wasn't immediate, it wasn't significant to you. And yet here he was, the brother of a man whose life going forward would - despite anyone's efforts - be defined by the fact that he would move through the world on four wheels, not on foot.

He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, comforted by the support of the high-backed leather cradle that supported him. He wondered if Sherlock would feel such comfort once confined to a wheelchair, and how would the wheelchair look? Mycroft had seen electric wheelchairs with full body support, chairs with large wheels, chairs with low backs, chairs with motors, with tilted wheels, with handles… Was it like buying a car? Would Sherlock be able to look at a chair, take it for a test drive and pick his exterior features? He shook his head and mentally laughed at himself. Why was he trivialising Sherlock’s future to a ridiculous comparison of sports cars!? He opened his eyes and stared up at the light fitting above his head. He lifted his feet up off the floor and placed them onto the wheeled legs of the chair and willed himself to sit still. He imagine himself numb and immobile. The very thought was torture. He tried to move his upper body without moving his legs and found himself instinctively shifting his position for ease of movement. ‘My God’ he thought, ‘Sherlock’s whole life is over’.

A knock at his door brought him back to reality and he sobered himself before looking up. “Yes?” He called out.

After a moment, the door handle turned and his mother’s head appeared around the frame. “Mike, sweetheart, when will we be popping over to the hospital to see Sherlock?” She invited herself fully inside the office, leaving the door open behind her.

“Now, if you wish.” Mycroft said quietly, and pushed himself up to his feet. He chose not to battle her about her inessential need to never use his given name. “If you’ll tell Dad we’re leaving?”

Violet nodded her head, “Of course sweetheart.” She watched him a moment, fixing his suit, before she turned from the room and pulled the door closed quietly behind him.

Mycroft sat back down in her absence and rested his elbows on his desk. He cupped his face in his hands and sighed into the quiet. It was beginning to hurt, now. Seeing Sherlock up and actually in the wheelchair was a stinging pain in his chest that bled into something deeper, like a knife wound that hurt from each angle. He was pleased, on the one hand, to see something near happiness return to his brother. But the realisation of it all - the reality - was stifling. After a moment of contemplation he got to his feet again. He quickly text John, informing him that they were leaving and would be at
the hospital shortly. He didn't receive an immediate reply, but he didn't need one. He pushed his phone into his inside suit pocket and left the study to join his parents in the reception room.

“Ready to leave?” He asked, watching his father pull his coat on.

“Yes.” Siger nodded. He gave a soft smile and Mycroft could see Sherlock's same smile in the eyes of his father. Sherlock, facially, was more like his mother but something in their father’s eyes had always reminded Mycroft of his little brother.

“Should we bring anything for Sherlock?” Violet wondered aloud.

“Like?” Mycroft frowned at her.

“Well, I don't know. Fruit, flowers, fresh clothes, or a book.” She supposed.

Mycroft rolled his eyes, “John provides fresh clothes every day or two, how would a single book occupy his mind…and do you really assume that flowers presented to Sherlock will be well received? No, you needn't bring anything.” He said finally.

Violet glanced at her husband and allowed Mycroft his condescension despite feeling she didn't need it. The three left together, climbing into Mycroft's waiting car. The drive was silent, but for the occasional chime of Mycroft's phone, and Violet held her husband's hand throughout. Mycroft observed them silently; he wondered if they felt the pain, sadness or guilt that he did.

They arrived at the hospital in good time, despite the traffic they met, and Mycroft had shown them to the ward Sherlock was on without stopping to allow them to take in pointers that might have helped them find their own way on a return visit. He reached Sherlock's room and stepped inside, a little surprised to find it empty of both John and Sherlock.

“Are we in the right place?” Siger asked, glancing around. “We did move rather quickly, perhaps we took a wrong turn?”

“It's the right room.” Mycroft said, his tone bored. “I expect that Sherlock is with a doctor.”

“Don't they visit rooms in London?” Violet tutted. “All that tax and they can't even do a room call…”

“Don't be stupid.” Mycroft groaned. “Scans, blood work, physical therapies. They require special rooms and equipment.”

“I'm no doctor.” Violet raised her brows. “And don't you talk to me that way, Mycroft!” If he hadn't been so bored of her, perhaps Mycroft would have been pleased to hear his full name.

“We can sit and wait, I suppose.” Siger pointed the chair in the corner with a jacket thrown over the back of it. “Sit, my love.” He ushered his wife over.

“Marvellous.” Violet smiled and perched herself on the edge of the chair.

Mycroft was on the borderline of ordering them out to have tea or something, but he stopped when he heard John's voice in the hallway behind him. He turned to the door, and offered a raised-brow-hello as John stepped inside, followed by a healthcare assistant pushing Sherlock's wheelchair, and a red-cheeked and grumpy looking Sherlock.

“John.” Mycroft said quietly. “Sherlock.”
John winced. “You picked the worst possible time.” He whispered with gritted teeth to Mycroft.

“Oh, sweetheart.” Violet was on her feet in a second and swaddling her son in a hug. The young healthcare assistant excused herself quietly as Violet kissed Sherlock's cheek and began to cry.

“Mother.” Sherlock said stiffly, allowing her to hold him but not returning the affection.

“...my boy.” Violet stepped back and cupped his cheeks. “Oh, Sherlock.”

John quietly shook Siger’s hand in the background and then watched Sherlock's awkwardness and fatigue mingle into plain annoyance.

“Okay, mother; you can let go now.” He insisted, reaching for the wheels on his chair to move backward out of her grip.

“How are you, sweetheart?” She asked, dabbing at her eyes as Sherlock ripped himself away from her.

“I'm tired.” He said bluntly. “I'd imagine you're distraught, and you're…pretending it all didn't happen.” He looked between his parents.


“He always has been...grumpy.” Violet smiled off her hurt. “Never one to reign in his bad mood if he didn't sleep too well.” She looked at John and pushed her smile up further.

“Don't I know it.” John smiled back. “Why don't you two and I grab a coffee, and Mycroft can deal with this grumpy sod?” John asked, nodding toward the doorway. “They have a Costa.” He added, as if it would somehow cement the idea.

Siger and Violet accepted John's invitation gratefully and preceded him into the hallway. “Settle him,” John jabbed his finger at Mycroft. “Then think of a way of sending your parents home until tomorrow. He can't deal with this right now.” He whispered and dipped out of the room.

In their parents wake, Mycroft removed his coat and laid it over the now empty chair. He regarded his brother silently as he slipped off his suit jacket and rolled back the sleeves of his white shirt, all without saying a single word. Sherlock stared at him, a little intrigued as to his intentions.

“Now, brother mine. To the bed?”

“I can do it.” Sherlock spat. “Hand me the controls.” He held out one slim hand to his brother and waited for the mechanism to be given to him. Mycroft stepped across the room and retrieved the controls for the bed. He untangled the coiled wire and placed it gently into Sherlock's hand.

Mycroft watched the bed lower with a noisy hum as Sherlock pushed the required button. His eyes were fixed on Sherlock as he placed the controller on the frame on the bed before awkwardly manoeuvring the chair forwards, the foot rests colliding noisily with the frame as he did so. Swearing to himself, Sherlock continued in his quest. He grabbed the wheels, turning them respectively so that the chair twisted around, this time leaving him facing the foot of the bed, his back to the top end. He felt a sense of pride at accomplishing it without further beating the chair off the bed, and Mycroft could see it in his expression.

With the bed low enough, Sherlock should have been able to push his weight into his hands, thus bring him enough power to swing his bottom up onto the bed. But he was new to all of this, aching
and tired from physio, and felt scrutinised by his brother. All that combined into a horrific concoction and seemed to freeze all of his abilities. He pushed into his hands with force but didn't rise. Trying again, he grunted as he lifted his bottom a little before dropping back down. His breathing quickened and his forehead began to bead with sweat as he gave it another go, pushing fiercely into his hands.

“Sherlock…” Mycroft began, watching his brother drop down again.

“I can do it myself.” Sherlock huffed through gritted teeth.

“Perhaps…” Mycroft started again, only to receive a glare from us brother.

“Stop it!” Sherlock snapped, hot tears filling his eyes. “Stop it! Stop treating me like I'm a child.”

Mycroft stepped closer, and simply reached to the side of the chair, fiddling at a lever until he managed to work the armrest free of the chair. “Try again.” He said quietly, staying close.

Breathing angrily, Sherlock placed one hand on the bed and the other on the remaining armrest. With a grunt, he pushed down and forced his bottom up. For the life of him, he couldn't twist. He dropped back down and sobbed, turning his head into the hip of his brother beside him.

“Alright.” Mycroft said, his hand on Sherlock's back. “Alright. No matter, we will do it together.”

Mycroft lifted Sherlock's legs and pushed the foot plates out of the way. It took him a moment to sober himself when he saw just how lifeless Sherlock's legs were, as they dropped haphazardly to the floor. He allowed Sherlock a moment to calm down before instructing him. He guided Sherlock to put his hands on his shoulders, promising to hold him tightly. With Sherlock's arms up, Mycroft placed his arms around Sherlock's waist with a quiet “One, two, three…” He effortlessly lifted his little brother, awkwardly turning him and dropping him down onto the now too-low bed.

Sherlock's legs failed to follow, of course, and Mycroft regarded his twisted figure, knees bent and feet twisted around one another at the ankle. He looked like his body was curled up thanks to cerebral palsy. Mycroft swallowed over a growing, painful lump in his throat and helped Sherlock fully into bed, lifting Sherlock's legs up. He watched his brother push his hands into the bed and reposition himself higher up, able to support his weight just enough to move up and drag his legs behind him.

As his hands had captured Sherlock's calves, he had felt the almost-capacity fullness of the catheter bag strapped to the limb. He had winced and wanted to move his hands but he couldn't and as he watched Sherlock moving he thought about it. Thought about offering a urine bottle to empty it himself; calling a nurse to do the job… The thought of dealing with his brother’s urine made his stomach sink, and not only at the idea of being so close to bodily functions. He hadn't dealt with Sherlock's toileting since he was a toddler - a baby - and having to face it now would mean going back to that headspace. A headspace he didn't want to occupy.

Shrugging his mind’s ideas away, Mycroft folded the chair and moved it aside, feeling the cumbersome weight of it. He felt sick, as though he'd been delivered horrific news, and he could feel a cold sweat build up along his back. He turned back to his brother and reached for the shoes on his feet, dragging them off wordlessly and let them drop to the floor under the bed. He pulled the chair over, right alongside Sherlock, and sat down.

“I'm sorry.” Mycroft said softly. “I shouldn't have brought them.”

“No.” Sherlock snapped back. “I told you that I didn't want them here.”

“I know.” Mycroft said sadly. “But they care about you.”
Sherlock faced him and frowned deeply, “So does Lestrade but he doesn't hug me.”

“He's not your parent.” Mycroft retorted.

“They're insufferable.” Sherlock said with gritted teeth, his hands in his lap and idle.

“The apple doesn't fall far from the tree, Sherlock.” Mycroft said with a pointed expression.

They looked at one another, their argument a stalemate. Silence descended and it was Mycroft who dared to break it after a long two minutes.

“You are doing well.” He said with insistence. “Not even two weeks and you're upright.”

“And pissing into a bag.” Sherlock said with a brow cocked in mock boredom.

Mycroft winced. “I would rather all of this than your death.” He admitted.

Sherlock looked at him, his mouth a thin line. “Yet, here I am considering the reverse.” His tone was dark and deep, his words clipped in anger.

“No, Sherlock.” Mycroft shook his head. “You don't mean that.”

“I do.”

Mycroft smirked. “Your expression belies your words, little brother. Les yeux sont la fenêtre de l'âme.” Sherlock glared at him. “Keep up the hard work.” Mycroft said as he rose to his feet. He folded down his shirt sleeves and pulled on his suit jacket. With his coat over his arm, he looked upon his brother. “See you very soon.”
“Thank you, John.” Siger accepted the bulky coffee cup as John handed it to him, and his eyes followed the short man as he sat down opposite he and his wife.

“Don't take too much notice of Sherlock. Today's been hard, physio was intense and he's exhausted. He doesn't mean to be a di...an idiot.” John said, taking a sip of his coffee.

Violet stirred the wooden stirrer around in her latte and regarded John with a smile. “Mycroft has filled us in on everything. He tried to keep us from coming, said Sherlock didn't want us here while he worked through everything.” She said sweetly, almost sadly, “But he's our child - how could we stay away?”

“I wouldn't expect you to,” John said, honestly.

“He has always been a strange boy,” Siger commented. “Always so antisocial and shy, displeased by other people's presence.”

“Expect for Mycroft. They've always been close.” Violet added.

Siger nodded. “I never was so close with my own brother, but they really do love one another. As children, they were always together.”

“Had to send them to playgroups and clubs just to integrate them with other children.” Violet laughed.

Siger smiled fondly. “I will always remember that Christmas is Devon.” He looked at his wife.

“...Mycroft taking Sherlock swimming on Christmas morning, in the damnable sea!” Violet laughed sweetly, her giggle melodic.

John smiled brightly. “God! They must have frozen?”

“You'd think.” Violet chuckled. “But they came back to the hotel room, soaking wet hair and skin pink from the chill, as happy as any child could be. Mycroft had taught Sherlock how to somersault under water and they were celebrating the achievement.”

“Christmas presents and dinner seemed like the last thing on their minds,” Siger added with a smile.

“Sounds like they were happy kids,” John said, both hands wrapped around his coffee mug.

“Oh yes.” Violet nodded. “Musical, intelligent, vibrant boys. University divided their interests, Sherlock went one route while Mycroft went another. As they got older their age gap defined them; and then they somehow came back together again.”

“Gladly.” Siger nodded his head and sipped his drink.

“So this broodiness of Sherlock's now?” John asked cheekily.

“Genuine,” Siger admitted. “He is specific about his moods, misunderstands them I think. What is it the doctor said, love?” He looked to his wife.

“Autistic,” Violet said, and John flattened his mouth into a thin line. “Mild by many comparisons, but it does present itself.”
“Mycroft always understood him better than most,” Siger added. Violet gave an agreeable nod of her head. “When Mycroft told us about what happened, we knew immediately he would be there to help Sherlock.”

“Yes.” Violet agreed. “We never doubted he would be cared for between you and his brother. It settled the worry a little.”

John smiled softly. “He is; he's loved and he is given all the care he needs, I promise.”

“We can see that.” Violet reached out and touched her hand to John’s arm. John felt the warmth of her hand travel through him like a jolt, an altogether good one, filling him with hope for the future.

“But perhaps we shouldn't crowd him.” Siger supposed. “He has you two.”

John was sorry when Violet took back her hand. He nodded at Siger. “He should be leaving here soon. Once he's home, you're welcome to come and stay, spend time with him.”

“He wouldn't want that.” Violet smiled, “but of course, we will visit and of course we will get on his nerves. What else are parents for?”

John laughed lightly. “Hell if I know!”

“Oh there's Mikey,” Violet said suddenly, craning her neck to look over John, and waved her arm.

John looked around and watched Mycroft walking toward them. He offered a smile as the tall, slim man stopped at the table beside them and declined to take a seat.

“We should be going,” Mycroft said bluntly. “I am staying with Sherlock here, tonight, so perhaps we should go and have dinner somewhere before I need to return to allow John to go home.”

John glanced at the Holmes, then their son. “It's no trouble.”

“Don't worry,” Violet smiled. “We'll go. And we can see Sherlock when he feels a little more...accepting of visitors.”

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John returned to Sherlock as the Holmes family left. He stepped inside, and offered a warm smile at Sherlock who was dipping in and out of sleep on the bed, laid out atop the blankets with exhausted, lidded eyes.

“You're officially family free, Love,” John smiled and walked further in. Her perched on the edge of the bed, his bottom at Sherlock’s knees, and reached out his hand and rested it on his hip. “Are you okay?”

Sherlock nodded sleepily, “Just tired.”

“They're nice,” John said softly. “They love you so much.”

Sherlock nodded. “I know they do.”

John nodded slowly, “want to have a nap for a while, then?” He asked. “I'll wake you up then the
“catheter guys come around?” Sherlock sighed as he nodded, relaxed by the permission to give in to his fatigue. “Okay, Love.” He leant down and kissed Sherlock's temple.

He got off the bed slowly and as quietly as he could, and settled down into the armchair. He looked Sherlock's body up and down and felt his heart beat a little out of rhythm. He looked normal, much as John hated that term. So how could it be that he wasn't? His eyes floated down Sherlock's tired and still form, mapping his joints and limbs. He stopped at Sherlock's knees and frowned, noticing the bowing fabric of his loose bottoms. He pushed up from the chair and placed his hand against the fabric of the pyjama trousers, able to feel the bulbous mass of Sherlock's leg bag. He fiddled with the cuff of the pants, folding them up and struggling to expose the catheter bag over its sheer volume preventing his trouser leg from rising.

John dipped down and retrieved the urine bottle from beneath Sherlock's bed. Fishing for the tap at the bottom of the bag, he positioned it into the neck of the bottle and released the lever. Once the ballooned bag flattened against Sherlock's skin, the bottle held over six hundred millilitres of urine. Bit excessive, John thought, for a five hundred mil’ bag. He wasn't sure whether he was annoyed at himself for not checking, at the healthcare assistants for not emptying it, or at Mycroft who clearly would have noticed… He knew the dangers of letting the bag overfill; regurgitation back into the bladder, UTIs, reflux from the bladder into the kidneys, bypassing…And for a whole minute, he hated himself. How could he not even think to check Sherlock was comfortable? How did it not cross his mind to check the catheter before leaving physio?

Leaving the room, bottle in hand, he slipped into the small bathroom designed for patients and emptied the contents into the toilet. He was supposed to be taking this man home and he couldn't even think of something as simple as him having a pee. How could he manage anything else? Hiding the bottle at his side, he walked back to the room. John slipped inside and closed the door behind him. He pushed the bottle under the bed and hovered at the small sink beside the window whilst he washed his hands. He felt terrible - they'd spent days in renal battling urinary tract issues, and now they were home and dry, John felt like he'd neglected Sherlock's health by not even thinking!

“Stupid.” He whispered to himself as he scrubbed his hands dry with a fistful of paper towels.


Sherlock smirked at him. “Me,” John said. “Did you have any back pain, belly pain?” He asked, binning the towels, and walked toward the bed.

“Back was a bit sore, okay now, though,” Sherlock said, and yawned. “Sorry.”

John smiled. “No stomach pain?”

Sherlock shook his head. “I'm okay.” John frowned, sighing. “What's the matter with you?”

“Nothing.” John shook his head. “As long as you're ok, then so am I.”
Chapter 18

Mycroft arrived shortly after eight pm and John launched at him as soon as he entered the room. “Are you really so self-centred and...British, that ensuring that your brother is healthy and comfortable falls completely below your abilities!” The scrappy man throwing himself toward him made Mycroft pause on the spot, just inside the doorway.

“I beg your pardon?” Mycroft eyed him.

“Your brother! I was back here right after you left, and he was seconds from lying in his own piss.” John barked. “You helped him onto the bed, yeah? You'd have noticed the catheter! Did you not spend the same days as me with him wired up and sick from infection? I mean, Jesus Mycroft.” Mycroft was stunned, momentarily, into silence. He blinked back at John a moment as the shorter man continued to stare at him with angry eyes.

“Stop it, John.” Sherlock called out behind them, seated comfortably in the armchair, surrounded by cushions.

“I won't.” John snapped around at him, then back at Mycroft. “You're a dick.”

Sherlock sniggered. “John.” He said, bored. “Stop.”

John tongued his inner left cheek and dropped the finger he had pointed at Mycroft. He turned to Sherlock and walked towards him. Bending at the waist, he kissed the top of Sherlock's head. “I'll see you in the morning.” He promised. Reaching behind the chair, he picked up the bag of washing they’d gathered up earlier that morning. “Your phone’s on the locker, just text or call if you need anything.”

John stalked away, brushing past Mycroft - who has stepped further in as John had stepped away from him - and down the corridor. Mycroft and Sherlock regarded one another and all Sherlock could do was smirk.

“Rendered silent.” Sherlock shook his head.

“Shut up.” Mycroft fixed a firm stare on him. When he broke it, reluctantly, he removed his coat and laid it over the foot of Sherlock's unmade bed.

Sherlock sobered slowly. “He's more pissed off than me.”

“More?” Mycroft clarified.

Sherlock turned down his mouth. “He's pissed off, I'm not.”

Mycroft looked at him pointedly and sat on the edge of the bed. “I'm sorry.”

“I don't want the rest of my life being defined by you all wondering if I'm carrying around a bag of urine or not.” Sherlock said, somberly. “Stop looking at me like a toddler whose toilet training isn't going well: I want to focus on getting out of here, I want to go home.”

Mycroft gave an even nod. “The house is ready, but for one or two loose ends. As I said, it'll be ready in around two days.”

Sherlock returned his brother’s nod. “Did the parental units get settled in maison de Mycroft?”
Mycroft rolled his eyes. “They did.” He said, sickeningly sweet with a smile on his face. “They are rather keen to see your new living arrangements.”

“I’m sure.” Sherlock wiggled his eyebrows.

“Tell me,” Mycroft said, glancing around the room. It was impersonal and stark, like a hotel room in some European city that lacked the creature comforts of England. “How long do you plan on keeping them at arm's length, Sherlock?” His eyes came back to his brother. “They do worry.”

Sherlock rested his head back in the chair and stared back at Mycroft. He could list a million reasons why being around his parents was insufferable, but mostly he just didn’t want any more people looking at him like he was incapable of living alone now. He could manage - he would manage - and there might be times ahead when an extra hand would be an advantage, but he would never allow anyone to make him feel like he wasn’t capable of continuing life as he once did. Above all of that, though, he had seen guilt and disappointment in the eyes of his family far too many times in the past; he was unsure whether he could stand to see pity there, too.

Mycroft, for his power, didn’t appear to have that grain of pity. John did, though. He’d seen it a few times. But with John, that pity was meant in love, in choices he’d made, not in familial necessity. He could take John’s pity because John had chosen to be here; Mycroft and his family were forced into knowing him, and pity in their faces was something he could not bear at all.

“Sherlock?” The younger Holmes snapped his head up and realised he’d drifted off to some dark corner of his mind. He blinked and met Mycroft’s eyes. “I asked you a question.”

“Yes?” Mycroft said, slowly. Mockingly. “I asked if you were hungry; I asked if you would like for me to bring you to the hospital canteen.”

Sherlock inhaled through his nose and considered the offer. He wasn’t hungry, but then he rarely was. A change of scenery, however, sounded marvellous. He nodded his head, curls springing on his brow. “Yes.” Mycroft rose to his feet, suddenly looking a little flustered. “You don’t have to pick me up again.” Sherlock said, watching his brother. “Put the chair right beside here,” he tapped the armchair. “Open it out, lift up the plates. Put the blue cushion in and put the brakes on. Don’t gawk at me, and I’m sure it’ll all be fine.”

As instructed, Mycroft retrieved the wheelchair from the side of the bed and opened it out as he guided it up, placing it at just over a ninety degree angle from the chair. He pushed down the brake bars, lifted the opened out footplates, and slipped the foamy, blue cushion down onto the seat - paying careful attention to the ‘this way up’ text on the top. Sherlock pulled the pillows from behind his back and turfed them onto the floor beside him. Inhaling steadily through his nose, he reached first to his right knee, then his left, making sure his feet were firmly planted on the floor with his knees perfectly bent. He reached out to the wheelchair and unlocked the armrest on the right-hand side, allowing him a clean swing onto the seat. He handed the armrest to Mycroft and took a few, deep breaths.

He braced his right hand on the arm of the armchair, and the left onto the furthest spot on the wheelchair seat that he could reach without stretching himself too far. Palms flat, he took another grounding breath before he pushed hard into the heels of his hands and pulled his bottom half in a left swing. He made the wheelchair, just. He found himself teetering on the edge of the chair, but with his bottom most definitely planted. He held out his hand to Mycroft, who hovered nervously at his side, and demanded the armrest back. Sweating a little from exertion, and worried his thigh might be in the way, Sherlock awkwardly worked the armrest back into place. With it successfully clicking
into its designated spot, Sherlock gripped the rests on each side of him and unceremoniously dragged his lower half up and back into the chair. He clattered down a little, and his forehead was glistening at the effort but, without an arm around his waist of a handling belt pulled too tightly across his ribcage, he had managed to move from chair to wheelchair.

Getting his breath back, he reached down and pulled his legs in at an awkwardly sharp bend. Flattening down the footrests, he lifted his legs in turn and planted them onto each bracket. With a sigh, he leaned back into the chair and, once he felt like his would not betray his bravado, he turned to glance at his brother.

Mycroft raised his eyebrows. “Brakes off then.” He said, turning.

Sherlock smiled to himself as he unlocked the brakes and grasped the large wheels of the chair, turning it around almost perfectly. He followed behind Mycroft, elbows and shoulders working hard to propel him alongside his long-legged sibling.

Mycroft held the ward doorway open, allowing Sherlock to maneuver through, as they reached the end of the low-lit walkway. The main corridors were alive, still, with people. Visitors, nurses, doctors and students - busy about their night shift. Mycroft pointed Sherlock in the direction of the canteen and continued to walk, allowing Sherlock to set the pace.

“I am proud of you, Sherlock.” Mycroft said, stoically.

Sherlock frowned deeply, so shocked by the words his arms seemed to seize up at his sides. “What the bloody Hell am I supposed to do with that?”

Mycroft stopped his long strides and turned back to face his little brother. “Use it to propel you forwards.” He offered and turned his back again.
The canteen was quiet but for a few teary-eyed parents, who nursed coffee cups they didn’t drink from. They were easy to discern from the just-off-duty nurses and support workers who bore tired faces and smiles, huddled around one another and shared stupid stories about their day just to wind down before going home. Mycroft could easily read each of the parents and their reasons for crying. Sitting in the furthest corner of the large space, a Polish-born couple held hands across the table whilst their chins wobbled and their eyes poured with tears; Mycroft felt sorry for those, the most. A lost child was not an easy experience - nobody births an infant to watch it die before them.

Sherlock moved slowly behind his brother, shoulders aching somewhat as he dragged his hands forward to propel the wheelchair ahead. He came to a stop beside Mycroft as the older Holmes noisily pushed a chair away from the free-standing table to give Sherlock space to move in. Sherlock pushed down the brakes once fed the footplates of the chair into the space beneath the table and pulled his arms in, wincing at the muscle contractions in his biceps as they sighed in relief of the break.

“Coffee, Sherlock?” Mycroft asked, brows arched as he hovered above his brother. It made Sherlock smile, the entire thing; Mycroft, in his suit and preened manner was about to order bog-standard coffee in a plebeian setting with his refined and posh voice and ‘look down upon you all’ attitude. Sherlock nodded and his curls shook.

The boys sat in near silence, staring at - but not touching - their coffee as the canteen occupants filtered out and were replaced around them. Mycroft’s eyes were unable to keep from wandering over his brother, over the metal of the wheelchair and forced bend of his knees. A portion of Mycroft wanted to crass and ask all of the questions he’d been wondering since the night of the shooting when the realisation of the future had sunk in, but it was overshadowed by the larger part of him who didn’t want to know what Sherlock felt, or didn’t feel. He didn’t want to know about the renal results, or his choices regarding personal care for the months ahead; he didn’t want to hear about physiotherapy and the simulations and exercises Sherlock faced. Not knowing, by its very definition, allowed Mycroft to be detached from the realities his brother was living.


“Three?” He repeated.

“Questions. You get three.” Sherlock elaborated.

Mycroft cast his eyes away, “No.” He feigned boredom.

“Just bloody ask.” Sherlock snapped. “I can’t stand your ignorance or the way you’re looking at me but can’t make a deduction. So ask your questions and get it over with.”

Mycroft rested his elbows on the table and clasped his hands before him. “You aren’t so interesting that I need to study you.” He pushed a marshmallow smile to his face. “I’ve known you your entire life, Sherlock. There is nothing you could tell me that I don’t already know.”

“Except there is.” Sherlock said, fingers poking through sugar that previous occupants of the table had clearly spilt across the table. One, long finger guided a single grain in a pattern of twists and turns and he watched it a moment before flicking it away and looking back up at his brother. “You can’t compute the chair.” Sherlock saw the micro-expression of annoyance flicker through Mycroft’s eyes. “Three questions.”
Mycroft exhaled slowly and unlaced his hands, folding them across one another atop the table. “Are you in pain?”

Sherlock nodded, “A little. My back feels…fatigued.”

Mycroft digested the information in a moment of quiet. He could read from Sherlock’s expression that the admission had made him feel vulnerable. He had assumed as much; Sherlock was always tired when he felt pain because it was so exhausting to pretend that he wasn’t. “I imagine you feel infantile?”

“Is that a question or a deduction?” Sherlock asked.

“A question.” Mycroft confirmed, “I want to be certain of your behavioural responses.”

“Behavioural responses?” Sherlock shook his head, “How should one behave when faced with being pushed around in a buggy made for adults?”

Mycroft nodded his head, “Exactly like this, I should imagine.” He shifted in his seat. “Sherlock, the anger you keep pushing down is something you are going to have to work through. No amount of burying it deep down will change that it exists, or stop you from feeling it. Nor will it bring about your mobility.” Sherlock fixed piercing eyes on his brother. If he had been about to retort, he thought twice about it and simply rolled his eyes. “As an addendum to the second question, and therefore still only two questions, this new-found feeling of being treated like an infant - do you intend to wallow in it or dispel the idea?”

“So you assume that I want to be pushed around, wear nappies and develop some form of sexual preference toward John which may involve him changing me and, if the mood strikes, see me call him Daddy?” Sherlock’s tongue moved quickly in his mouth as he spoke.

Mycroft cringed, “That sounds ghastly.” He turned up his expression to something more suiting his usual appearance. “Sherlock, I want to know what it is you're so opposed to telling me.” He examined his younger brother's face for signs of truths he wouldn't voice.

"Ask your third question so we can stop this ridiculous dance," Sherlock said. "I'm bored of this now."

“You didn’t answer the second.” Mycroft raised his eyebrows.

Sherlock inhaled through his nose and shrugged his right shoulder. “Yes,” He said bluntly. “I feel like a child. Now ask your third bloody question.”


Sherlock's brow creased in deep wrinkles as he frowned, examining Mycroft's words in his mind for a hint of a trap he may fall into. "Frightened of what?"

"You tell me," Mycroft said plainly.

"I'm not frightened, Mycroft. Why would I be frightened?" Sherlock defended.

"Perhaps you are afraid that John won't be able to handle the difference in your life together from now on and will leave. Perhaps you are just afraid to be dependent upon somebody else. Or perhaps your fear is more rooted in the ideas that you are faced with a life wherein you no longer are the
stronger, more dominant person you've always believed yourself to be." Mycroft's words rolled from his tongue in a smooth, unstuttering monologue.

"I'm not afraid of anything." Sherlock's eyes fixed on Mycroft's.

"Oh, but you are Sherlock. You're afraid that the world is going to take one look at you and not think that you're brilliant anymore. You're afraid that the title of freak is even more believable than ever, now." Mycroft sat back in his seat. “Think about it,” he said. “You’ve always been called names for being who you are - now you’ll be called them for what you are and that isn’t something you are going to be able to smoke-and-mirrors your way out of with deductions that freak people out.” He sighed. “You’re scared of being honest, Sherlock. And, frankly, I’m frightened for you.”

The brothers stared at one another for a moment in complete silence. Sherlock wanted to argue but he couldn’t - the truth was the truth, regardless of anything else, and it could not be changed. As ever, Mycroft saw through him despite everything he tried to do to veil it all and he felt sick, exposed and violated.

“Perhaps we should return to your room?” Mycroft said as he got to his feet, the legs of the chair screeching on the floor as he pushed it backwards.

Sherlock shook his head in a tiny movement. “No.”

“Then what, Sherlock? Parade around the hospital like idiots?” Mycroft said, bored, as he checked the time on his pocket watch. “You’ve been busy today, little brother. The rest will do you good.”

“What was it you were saying about infantilism?” Sherlock spat, looking up at him. “Getting off on this are you, brother dear?” Sherlock mocked him. “If I want to sleep, I’ll sleep. You’re supposed to be here on John’s orders as company for you, not as a babysitter. Stop treating me like I can’t use my brain and perhaps I’ll show you more freely that I still can.” He dragged the brakes off on the wheelchair with aggression. “Go home, Mycroft. I do not want or need you here and I’d really prefer it that you weren’t.”

“That’s better.” Mycroft gave a mocking slow-clap. “Finally getting out some of that aggression, well done Sherlock.”

Despite Sherlock’s protestations, Mycroft followed behind him as he made his way back to the ward. They didn’t speak, even as Sherlock struggled with transferring from the wheelchair to sitting on the bed, but Mycroft still declined Sherlock’s earlier invitation to leave. He sat in the armchair and kept his eyes on his brother, sitting across from him on the edge of the bed, limp legs bent over the bedside. Agonising silences were usually Mycroft’s crowning glory, but he found himself willing to fill this one to break the monotonous nothingness. He was growing soft, he considered.

“I was looking into therapies for your injury type,” he said and crossed his left leg over his right knee. “It would be possible, in fact, for you to gain upright mobility.” Sherlock’s eyes, previously locked on the pattern of the floor, travelled up to meet Mycroft’s gaze. “Sincerely,” Mycroft cemented his words in truth. “There are specific mechanical devices that an individual can be secured in that give support for you to stand. Given the full nature of the injury, movement independent of the device would be impossible, but it can provide upright support and movement via controls. A sort of standing wheelchair, if you like.”

Sherlock’s mind raced over the idea as he tried to picture it; a machine to make him stand, an upright wheelchair… It brought about nightmarish thoughts of Frankenstein’s creations. He frowned at himself and wrinkled his nose.
“What ever could cause that face?” Mycroft asked aloud, a slight edge of amusement to his tone.

“It sounds like a robot invasion.” Sherlock cringed. “Like that hoist-thing John was talking about before. I don’t want my movement to be based on machines. It’s sickening enough getting used to that.” He pointed at the abandoned wheelchair beside him.

“Just something to consider,” Mycroft said quietly. “I can get a nurse if you’d like help getting ready for bed.” Mycroft watched Sherlock attempt to stifle a yawn. “I expect there are only so many things you’ll allow my assistance for,” he added.

Sherlock nodded, “Please.”
The item mentioned in this chapter - the Mangar - is a moving and handling devise that is a godsend! It is a three-tiered inflatable pillow that aids with sitting and standing following a fall. https://goo.gl/images/e4HR2G

John was back at the hospital early the following morning, keen to ensure he made it back to Sherlock in time to join him for physiotherapy. He’d come to rather enjoy the sessions, despite being able to see how much they tired Sherlock out, and was driven to finding ways of learning from the therapists to further continue muscle stimulation on Sherlock’s legs once they were home and away from all of the immediate, twenty-four hour care staff. He found both Sherlock and Mycroft sleeping as he entered the room and couldn’t help but chuckle to himself at the sight. They slept similarly, he noticed - lips parted, head to the left side and tongue gently lapping between their teeth as though they were sucking a dummy or their thumb. He coughed heavily, just loudly enough to disturb them but not so loud as to attract outside attention, and laughed as both of them jumped suddenly awake at the intruding noise.

“Morning boys,” John chirped.

Sherlock’s eyes lulled closed once more. “You are entirely too noisy,” he remarked, voice husky from sleep and his tongue apparently too lazy to form words without a lisp.

John made his way to the head of the bed and bent down over Sherlock. He planted a kiss on his warm forehead and pushed his hair aside. “You need a shave, Love,” he said, scrubbing his hand against Sherlock’s chin. Sherlock stretched his arms up above his head and his face contorted in the joy of the action. He relaxed his muscles and looked up at John, giving him an agreeable nod.

Mycroft quickly looked suitable and presentable, as though he hadn’t been sleeping at all, and he got to his feet with little ceremony. “I’ll leave you two alone. Do let me know how the therapy session goes, John.”

“Oh course I will,” John nodded his head, his hand lingering on Sherlock’s head, twisting his curls around his fingers. When Mycroft left, allowing the boys time to themselves, John leant back over the bed and gave Sherlock a more personal good morning kiss. He smiled as he pulled back his head, greeted by a yawn from Sherlock that made him giggle more than feel annoyed. He swatted Sherlock’s chest. “Want me to help this morning, or shall I go and let the HCA in?”

“I can do it myself,” Sherlock frowned. “Mostly.”

With some input from John, Sherlock managed to successfully wash and dress his upper body. Allowing John to assist him, the two managed to work on a pair of boxer shorts and flannel pyjama bottoms, doing so with a series of one-man log-rolls on the bed. Still, it was an effort both men were proud of - a step in the right direction, John thought. John tried to stand back as much as possible, to allow Sherlock to do what he could and not interfere where he wasn’t needed. His approach seemed to work and Sherlock, despite losing his temper with himself once or twice, was bright and accepting when help was offered. It did twinge at John’s heart to watch Sherlock struggling; the effort on the dark haired man’s face as he transferred from the bed into his chair made John feel sick and helpless,
and that was one thing he never wanted to feel with Sherlock. He’d been working on squashing down the pity and it was working, he wasn’t sure he could work on three feelings at once.

Sherlock sat quietly in the wheelchair as John gathered up his washing, and poked his spoon around a bowl full of porridge. He had never really been a breakfast person, even less of a porridge person, and this morning’s offerings really served to prove to him why he had never partaken in the foodstuffs.

“Not hungry?” John asked, frowning at the rivers Sherlock was making in his breakfast.

Sherlock dropped the spoon and looked up at him. “No, it’s boring.”

“You need to eat, you have physio in half an hour and without something inside of you you’re going to feel tired quicker,” John scolded him softly. “Come on, Love, at least drink the coffee and eat the apple.”

“I’m not hungry,” Sherlock shook his head.

John pushed the table away, leaving it safely out of the way over the end of the bed, and sat down in the armchair beside Sherlock. “Not feeling positive about physio today?”

“What’s there to be positive over? It is bodybuilding, nothing more. It isn’t going to help me walk, it’s pointless. It’s boring.” Sherlock groaned petulantly.

“It isn’t pointless,” John corrected him firmly. “It’s necessary. Without building up your body strength, even doing what you did this morning is going to be hard - maybe even something you lose the ability to do altogether. That saying,” He said, “Use it or lose it? Well, that’s prevalent now. If you don’t maintain upper body strength, you’ll be bedfast with people feeding, washing and changing you, lying there in your own filth with absolutely no quality of life. Upper mobility is vital to you now, Sherlock. It’s going to keep you moving, keep you healthy and keep you alive.” His voice grew firmer and firmer as he tried to cement his point of view.

Sherlock looked embarrassed, almost, as his eyes flicked over John’s face.

John softened his eyes, “I know you feel like you’re taking baby steps, and I know all you want to do is go home and start trying to rebuild life. But, Love, to be able to do that you’ve got to be able to live.” He reached forwards and touched Sherlock’s writhing hands where they rested on his lap.

Sherlock closed his eyes, enjoying the comforting touch. “Can we go and get a real coffee?”

John smirked, “Yeah, of course.”

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“That’s great, John, exactly like that,” Monica’s Scottish accent reminded John of childhood holidays to his Mum’s hometown near the Mull. He felt happy with himself as he bent and flexed Sherlock’s left leg slowly under the physiotherapist’s watchful eye. “Keep it slow, the aim isn’t to build up muscle it’s just for movement.”

Lying on his back on the floor, right arm thrown over his eyes and the left across his stomach, Sherlock was silent and absentminded while John and Monica manipulated his body around him. He
was exhausted already - there had been ten minutes of sitting upright on a large yoga ball to strengthen his back that had ended in an agonising shout at the effort it took, and fifteen minutes of lifting tiny weights which only served to make him sit at an odd angle and bring back the back pain. He had had enough - though, in fairness, he had reached that point after only five minutes - but he couldn’t even summon the strength or mental guarding to argue against John and Monica’s insistence of the important of these sessions.

“The more active Sherlock can be, the less chance there is for calcium build up which is only a good thing.” Monica smile at John.

“Still doing okay?” John asked as he held Sherlock’s knee at a right angle. Sherlock hummed in lieu of a spoken response and John took that as a no. He slowly straightened out Sherlock’s leg and laid the limb down against the mat beneath them. Shuffling on his knees, John moved closer to Sherlock’s head and dragged his right arm away from his face. He smoothed Sherlock’s curls back from his eyes and smiled at him upside down. “Still in pain?”

Sherlock nodded his head, eyes closed lightly. “It’s all across my back.”

John looked up to Monica and turned down his mouth, “Can we call it a day?”

Monica nodded, a sympathetic smile on her lips. “Of course,” She agreed. “I’ll get the Mangar and your chair, Sherlock.”

John scrubbed his hand in Sherlock’s curls and crouched down further to kiss Sherlock at the awkward angle. “You’ve done great, really. You’ve done really bloody great.”

“Forty-five minutes of physiotherapy, twenty minutes of which has involved me lying here.” Sherlock said, eyes wide and peering up at John. “That’s super,” He grumbled, sarcastically.

John didn’t answer him - he was about to reel off a telling-off for him but stopped short of starting when Monica returned. He helped Monica to line up the Mangar, then assisted her with log-rolling Sherlock onto his right side. As John supported Sherlock, Monica lined the Mangar beneath Sherlock’s body and then helped John to gently lower Sherlock back.

“Ready?” Monica asked with a cheerful smile. Sherlock nodded his head, curls rustling on the mat beneath his head. “Okay then.” She flicked the button on the control device and, slowly, the Mangar began to fill with air. First in three, head-to-knee length pillows, and then toward the top end, slowly bringing Sherlock into a fully cushioned sitting position. Almost upright, Sherlock breathed a sigh of relief as the machine stopped buzzing and it held firm and steady at it’s current capacity. John lined the wheelchair up close to Sherlock’s knees as Monica strapped the handling belt around Sherlock’s waist. John did wonder why it was used - handling belts were supposed to be for support of those who could weight bear; clearly Sherlock wasn’t able to do that. But he didn’t say anything. He and Monica fed their arms in underneath Sherlock’s and, with Monica’s one-two-three count, they smoothly lifted Sherlock around and into the waiting chair.

“We’ll be able to get one of those at home, right?” John asked as Monica unhooked the belt from around Sherlock’s ribcage.

“They’re expensive,” Monica said honestly, folding the belt in her hands. She watched as Sherlock positioned his legs onto the rests with a small huff of effort. “And I’m not certain if Occy Health will supply them as a standard need. But it’s certainly something I could recommend, having worked with Sherlock here - I could state how much of a benefit it would be.” She smiled at John.

“Please do,” John nodded eagerly. He turned to Sherlock and rested his hand between his rolling
shoulder blades. “The pain’s no better now you’re up?” Sherlock shook his head. “Okay, I’ll have a word with the nurse when we’re back on the ward, see if they can give you something.”

“It might be that your muscles are spasming.” Monica suggested. “It’s common and it’s painful; it might be worth looking into diazepam.”

“Diazepam?” John and Sherlock said at the same time, their expressions similar in their dismay at the idea.

Monica smiled a little, “It is a muscle relaxant.” She frowned at John, “It’s given to people who trap nerves and pull muscles in their back; your muscles are at serious risk of atrophy from underuse and simultaneously pain from new overuse. If your back is painful, take what you can get to help it.” She insisted.

John and Sherlock looked at one another, considering her suggestion. “Makes sense,” John supposed. He placed his hands onto the handles at the back of Sherlock’s chair and peered round at him. “Ready to go?” Sherlock nodded and kept his hands in his lap as John took over. “Thanks Monica.” He smiled at her as she followed them to the door, holding it wide open for them to leave.

“See you guys later.” She chirped.

When they arrived back on the ward, John was banished from the room to allow the nurse to change Sherlock’s catheter and check his pressure areas for any signs of breakdown in his skin. She gave him a clean bill of health and a happy smile when she left, allowing John back in with Sherlock.

“I got a text off Greg,” John offered by way of a returning greeting. “Asking how you’re doing. And he wants me to come in and speak with some new officer they have on your case.”

Sherlock’s full lips dragged into a firm pout. “Why you, you weren’t there?”

John shrugged his shoulders, “No idea, Love. Perhaps it’ll be just to talk about you as a person, or what’s happened since. I don’t know.”

Sherlock thought it over in his mind. “I’ve been remembering more.”

John frowned, “You haven’t said.”

“I’m saying now,” Sherlock glared at him.

“Okay,” John held out his hands defensively. “What kind of things do you remember?” He sat on the edge of the bed beside Sherlock, left hand resting on Sherlock’s thigh.

“The paramedic. He said, how can someone be shot and nobody see who did it. But I think someone saw, or might have seen but can’t remember because it was insignificant,” Sherlock said, animated. “That new sergeant, who was with Donovan. He was standing opposite me and so he would have, in effect, been facing the shooter.”

John sighed, “Love, nobody’s going to be standing in clear view waving a bloody gun shouting look at me, are they?”

“But he was facing in the right direction; he could have seen, he could have glanced and not noticed it but registered it somewhere in his mind,” Sherlock said with a hint of old-time excitement in his voice.

“He’s not like you,” John shook his head. “Normal people don’t have bloody Mind Palaces. And Love, don’t think that I’m fishing for reasons for this not to be possible because if it was I’d be up
there in in that sergeant’s face begging him for details, but we need to be realistic.”

“But it’s possible he saw something.” Sherlock insisted. “On balance, he could have seen the gunman.”


“So Lestrade needs to talk to him - he and Donovan need to be questioned, properly questioned.” Sherlock raised his eyebrows at John. “Right?”

John nodded his head, “Right.” He swallowed, “But, Love, I know that they were. Dimmock, Greg himself...I know they spoke to Sally and the new chap.”

“Mycroft should do it.” Sherlock said suddenly, as the thought occurred to him he smiled as though it was the most obvious and perfect idea. “He’s good at doing that.”

“I’d noticed.” John shook his head. “Try it, speak to your brother and suggest it. But they’ll only talk if they want to, and they’ll only say so much. And, Sherlock, Love, they might not even know anything.”

“Yes, but they might.” Sherlock said forcefully.

John nodded slowly, his eyes locked with Sherlock’s. “Yeah, I know.” He whispered.
Chapter 21

Greg and John arranged to meet informally, rather than at the station. John explained that he was worried that meeting new people would disorder his mind before he even knew what it was he was expected to be talking about. When Mycroft arrived at the hospital shortly before seven pm, John returned to Baker Street to shower and change and then took a cab into town, meeting Greg a pub he knew in Soho. They ordered a drink and huddled into a quiet, old man-esque booth where it seemed semi-private and away from the hustle and bustle that was going on around them. John took a gratifying sip of his lager and licked his lips.

“It’s been a while since I had a drink.” He grinned at Greg who sitting opposite him.

The DI laughed. “I’m ashamed to say it’s my first since yesterday,” he tipped his glass before swallowing down a mouthful. “So, this new guy on Sherlock’s case,” He continued, putting his glass down onto the sticky table between them.

John nodded, feeling slightly nervous. “I’m surprised,” He admitted. “I thought you and your lot would continue to handle it.”

Greg nodded his head quickly. “We are,” he promised, “But this guy’s a recent transfer, bit of an Endeavour.” He shrugged his shoulders, dismissing the look of confusion John offered. “He wants to talk to you both, really, but I said to start with you. He wants to know more about what happened before - when we were in the flat, Sherlock’s mood, any indication that he might have been on edge or expecting something.”

“Expecting something?” John repeated, brows high on his forehead and head craned at an odd angle, offended by the impression he got from Greg’s words. “You mean to say, he thinks Sherlock knew he was going to be crippled by some lunatic?”

Greg held out both hands, swiping them wildly. “No, no, John - that’s not what I mean, or him, he just wants to know if Sherlock had had any threats or concerns before. We’re looking into everything - if it’s possible someone was threatening him, even if he wasn’t expecting an attack, then it could help with the investigation.”

John poked his tongue into his furthest bottom tooth, feeling a crack he should probably get filled, and then shook his head. “Greg, I spend practically twenty-four hours a day with that man. I read emails, texts and letters he receives. If there’d been a threat, I’d know.”

“And since?” Greg asked carefully.

John shrugged. “Not that I know of. I haven’t really checked the blog, or the post beyond bills. But I don’t think so.” He rubbed his hands over his face and then reached for his lager, taking two, large mouthfuls. “For a few hours, while I was waiting for him to wake up, my mind went to so many places trying to work out what had happened. I blamed nearly everyone - but I kept coming back to his brother. It feels stupid now, seeing Mycroft with him, hearing the way they talking, knowing everything that Mycroft is doing for him. But back then, watching Sherlock sleep after the surgery, the only person I couldn’t stop blaming was Mycroft.”

“It feels stupid now?” Greg repeated John’s words in a question. “That means you don’t blame him, or…” He shrugged.

“I blame him - I blame him for Sherlock being on the case, for Sherlock being in the area. But I don’t
blame him for the shooting, I don’t think he was involved. No way.” John was quick to clarify his words. “Don’t for one second think that I think Mycroft had something to do with this. He isn’t behind the shooting, I know he’s not. For all he acts like an ice-hearted dick, he and Sherlock have some kind of bond nobody will ever understand. Mycroft had nothing to do with it. Problem is, it still doesn’t help with knowing who did do it.”

Greg lifted his glass and took a long sip. Licking his lips, he asked, “Does Sherlock remember anything, has he said anything? He’s the most observant person I know, if there was anything visible, anything at all, he’d have noticed it.”

John nodded his head, “He said he could remember bits, but one thing he did point out was the positioning of him, Sally Donovan and that new sergeant…”

“Charlie.” Greg nodded his head.

“Yeah,” John pointed at Greg in agreement. “Sherlock said he was standing opposite him - so facing out to where Sherlock’s back faced. If there was anything to see, anything obvious or visible in that direction, Charlie would have seen it.”

Greg puffed out his cheeks. “I mean, we talked to him…” he began.

“I know, I know,” John nodded, “I said the same to Sherlock, but that’s the only thing he has to go on and, to be honest, it’s probably the only line of questioning you lot have got.” John surmised. He wasn’t wrong. Searches had pulled up nothing, Sally hadn’t been in eye-shot of the area and Sherlock had had his back to the shooter. Charlie, if indeed there was anything he had seen, was the best they had. “So this new guy on your team, he got a name?”


John’s brows quirked. “Thorough man then, I expect.”

Greg laughed, “Bit like yourself, really.” He joked.

“As long as he’s not into this because of the profile - solve a case like this, get a good name for yourself, you know what I mean? I don’t want some action-hungry, military dickhead using Sherlock to make a name for himself.” John said, his voice severe. Greg didn’t want to laugh, but he couldn’t help it. After a brief moment, though, John joined in. “That made me sound like more of a hypocritical cock than I’d intended it to.” He shook his head. “Not that my involvement with Sherlock has ever been for making a name for myself.”

“I know that.” Greg nodded his head earnestly. “Another?” He nodded at John’s almost empty glass.

John looked first at his glass, then his watch, then shrugged. “Yeah, why not? Cheers.”

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“I’m in pain.”

Mycroft was a little surprised to hear Sherlock’s voice. His brother had been asleep when he arrived at the hospital and, but for the nurses disturbing him when completing a pressure relief turn at around ten pm, he hadn’t even stirred. Mycroft looked at his watch - it was just after eleven pm - and then up
at his brother in the bed across from him. “Where exactly is the pain?”

“My back, and up in my shoulders.” Sherlock’s quiet voice came back. He was laid on his right side, surrounded by pillows and supports, and his back was to Mycroft. The position made his voice seem far away.

“Would you like me to get a nurse?” Mycroft asked, closing the paper file in his hands. He rested the document on his lap and slid his glasses from his nose.

“No,” Sherlock said, sleepily. “I don’t like lying like this.”

Mycroft placed the file on top of Sherlock’s travel bag and balanced his glasses on top of the entire pile. He pushed himself up to his feet and approached the bed. “Would you like me to move the supports so you can turn onto your back?”

“I’d like a cigarette.” Sherlock said, semi-sarcastic, craning his neck to look over his shoulder at Mycroft. “No,” He sighed, “That night nurse is a cantankerous letch, it’s best not to undo her carefully planned out work.”

Mycroft masked a smirk. “Very well.”

“Let’s play a game.” Sherlock suggested as Mycroft began to walk back toward the chair. Stopping, two steps from the arm chair, Mycroft turned and returned to the side of the bed.

“A game?” Mycroft rolled his eyes. “It’s after eleven at night, you’ve slept through what is perhaps socially decent hours, and now you’re in the land of the living and want to play a game? You do take silly notices, little brother. Besides,” He added, checking his watch, “The last time you and I played a game you ended up transferring wards.”

“Unless you’re planning on giving a bolus of some kind of infection, I’m certain that it’s safe. However, I can begin drafting plans for game condoms if you think that might help.” Sherlock slurred, half asleep, into his pillow.

Mycroft’s jaw stiffened. “Shut up, Sherlock. Go back to sleep or I’ll make you.”

Sherlock yawned and snapped his jaw closed again. “Hmm,” he hummed. “I’d like to see you try.”
John made his way through the hospital with a familiarity he was beginning to resent. Mycroft had promised the house would be ready by what would now work out at the following day and he knew Sherlock was keen to get moving but John felt apprehensive, even though he hated the hospital surroundings. He didn't know what he was expecting for the house but he was frightened that nothing would be right. What if it didn't work for Sherlock, what if it wasn't as accessible as Mycroft was saying? So many possible issues and it served to only increase his anxiety about actually being the sole carer of Sherlock himself.

“Morning, John.”

Snapping from his daydream, John turned toward the cheerful, feminine voice. He smiled at the HCA that greeted him. “Morning Hannah,” he replied and paused to talk to her. “How’re you?”

“Really good, thanks. Just out of handover and ready to start the day.” She grinned. “The night staff said that Sherlock's been in a bit of pain with his back since yesterday, they increased his repositions in bed to hourly because he couldn't settle comfortably. His brother stayed too. I quite like him, he's nice.”

John raised his eyebrows, “He has his moments.” He intoned. “Did they start Sherlock on diazepam?”

Hannah shook her head, “Not too sure.” She admitted, “I'm pretty sure it was a pain management drug they were trying first. Lyrica, I think.”

“Pregabalin!” John frowned deeply. “His pain isn't neurological, it's muscular. Sorry,” he quickly apologised after snapping sharply at the young woman. “I'm sorry, Hannah. I'll talk with the charge nurse later.” He said, affectionately touching her arm as he walked away.

John stepped into Sherlock's side room and, after Hannah had mentioned he was still experiencing pain, he was surprised to find him up, washed, and sitting in the armchair beside the bed.

“Good morning, John.” Mycroft greeted him, standing behind Sherlock.

“Hi,” John smiled. He walked to Sherlock and bent to kiss him atop his curls. “Sleep okay?”

“Not great,” Sherlock admitted.

“Physio today?” John asked and Sherlock wrinkled his nose. “It's important, Sherlock.”

“Very.” Mycroft concurred. “I'll leave you. Baker Street will be packed up today, unless you object?” He asked, looking at John and Sherlock as he pulled on his coat. Both men cringed at the idea but neither protested. “Wonderful; I will be here tomorrow morning at nine am, I trust you'll be able to work through the discharge papers?”

“I'm going to talk to the nurse today, I'll make sure everything is rolling for the morning. I know he needs to see the urologist again about...things, but it shouldn't hold up the discharge. Especially with this private physio clinic of yours.” John nodded his head.

“Well, keep me informed.” Mycroft threw over his shoulder. “And attend your physiotherapy session, brother mine, or there will be Hell to pay.”
John laughed at the look of distaste on Sherlock's face at the comment. He removed his coat and laid it over Sherlock's bed. “You really didn't sleep too well, hey?”

“I did to a point, then my back seized up and it hurt too much to stay asleep.” Sherlock said, yawning on cue to cement to story.

John offered a sympathetic look. “Well I've got some good news - Greg’s new guy, sounds like he's really focused. I'm going to be speaking to him this afternoon.”

“He's coming here?” Sherlock asked, fidgeting his back.

John shook his head, “No I'm going to him. And you get the pleasure of Greg's company while I'm out.”

Sherlock smiled and rolled his tired eyes, “An afternoon with Lestrade, what could be more exciting?”

John snorted. “You love the guy, and he loves you, and anyway you can do that French thing the two of you do and that'll fire off the cobwebs in your noodle.”


“Noggin?” John offered with a loud laugh. “Juice box, Zombie takeout…”

“Shut up, John.”

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“Sherlock?” Greg patted his hand on Sherlock’s arm, waking him from a light sleep he'd been enjoying since returning from physio half an hour before. He opened his eyes slowly and scanned the DI. Greg smiled, “Comment vas-tu, mon pote?”

“Awake, thanks to you.” Sherlock's voice grumbled deep in his throat.

“Oh. Not playing then?” Greg teased. “Fancy a smoke?”

“Thought you'd never ask!” Sherlock's eyes widened.

Greg pointed to Sherlock's wheelchair. “I'm assuming you know how to get into that monstrosity?” He scratched his head.

Smirking, Sherlock nodded. “Just bring it close to the bed, I can do the rest from there.”

Once Sherlock had managed to transfer himself into the chair - with flair and very little struggling, despite his back pain and fatigue - Greg wheeled him to the furthest reach he could of the hospital's grounds and handed him a cigarette. He'd bundled Sherlock up in a blanket, seeing as his trademark coat was long gone, and watched the look of pure delight in his face as he shivered into the cotton blanket and inhaled deeply on his cigarette.

“Hit the spot?” Greg asked with a laugh.
Sherlock exhaled a cloud of smoke, followed by a visible breath of air. “Feels normal.”

Greg smiled softly. “Yeah, well, don’t tell your brother or I think he’ll kill me. Last thing he wants me doing is getting you back on the fags.”

Sherlock inhaled deeply on the cigarette again and looked out around him. It was cold, the ground was wet and what little foliage existed in the NHS grounds was dying and disintegrating into the soil beneath it. Winter was close and it felt brilliant - air was life, and breathing in something other than disinfectant and the scents of his brother and John was a welcomed treat.

“You look good, Will. Brighter, stronger. I was shit-scared, you know? I thought you were going to die. I sat with John for hours while you were in surgery and I didn't know what to do with myself. I don't know how my days would fill themselves without you around, son, so don't you ever do anything like that to me again.”

Sherlock watched Greg speaking, the way he looked anywhere but at Sherlock himself, and felt horrifically guilty. “Je suis désolé.” He said quietly.

“Je ne vous blâme pas.” Greg shook his head, turning to Sherlock at last. “Je vais trouver le bâtard.”

Sherlock chewer the inside of his right cheek and exhaled through his nose slowly. “Je compte sur toi.”

More than anything, Greg was relieved to hear those words. He turned to Sherlock and nodded. “I know you do, Will.”
DI Jack Skinner reminded John of an old superior in the army. Broad shoulders, short hair, tattoos and a firm and brooding expression seemingly permanently adhered to his facial features. Sitting opposite him in his office, John felt a little bit intimidated, like a child sent to the Headmaster’s office for a telling off they knew would hurt. But when he opened his mouth to speak, John warmed to him immediately.

“I followed you and Sherlock through your blog. I was knocked for six by every post that you've made, I think his mind is blindin’. I wasn't shocked when Lestrade told me you and he were - together. Seemed right, and I'm not a prejudicial man. Hearing of the shooting shook me; I'm London born, I grew up in these streets, and when things like what happened to Sherlock look to be unsolvable, it makes me want to ensure that something is done.”

John smiled and his eyes shone with happiness. “Well thank you, Detective, that means a lot. Greg, Lestrade, he’s invested with Sherlock and he's become a really good friend of mine, and I know he's doing all he can. Anyone else who is willing to do the same is an asset and invaluable.”

Jack tilted is head and acknowledged John’s complimentary words modestly. “Well, I am keen to do everything I can to find the person responsible for this. It is owed to Sherlock to understand what happened and why, and it's owed to you to get closure on something like this.”

“You're right,” John nodded, “it is owed to him. He deserves to understand why.”

“Lestrade mentioned that Sherlock has an older brother, a man within government I'm led to believe?” Jack questioned gently and John nodded in the affirmative. “What the likelihood of him not being an interfering bellend?”

John choked on a laugh. “Well,” he tried to sober himself. “It's not highly likely that's for sure.” He laughed and shook his head. “Seriously, though, Mycroft - the brother - he's devoted to Sherlock, to say the least, and he is always involved in everything. It's alarming, annoying and makes you want to punch him.” John smirked, “but it's also the reason I kind of admire him, and he's shown his allegiance to Sherlock since the shooting. He's not going to step back and that's something you mightn't like.”

Jack rubbed his hand across his manicured beard and shrugged one shoulder. “Tell me about that night - in the flat, before, as you left. Tell me anything even if it seems insignificant now. It might be key to something.”

As John talked, Jack kept notes. He marked times and words and sounds, hoping something might be prominent enough to be meaningful. But he was ultimately left with nothing much more than what had come from Greg.

“We'll do everything we can; I know Lestrade isn't willing to let this go cold,” Jack assured as he put down his pen. “Do you have any questions?”

“You're going to want to speak to Sherlock, I know that, but with all being well tomorrow he will be discharged from hospital and be heading home. I just want to know that you're not going to descend upon him for a few days because you won't get anything remotely kind out of him until he feels more settled.” John looked almost apologetic as he spoke.
Jack gave a nod of his head though John could see he looked a little disappointed. “Of course.” He said, “Perhaps when you think he's ready in a day or two you can come here?” John nodded his approval. “How is he?”

John inhaled deeply and thought about a response. “Clearly quite depressed, and he's experiencing a lot of pain, but he's beginning to see the other side of the tracks. I can't begin to imagine being faced with immobility but he's coping remarkably, all told.”

“Well, all the luck to you both with him coming home. I know that people in Lestrade's team are rooting for him.” Jack said earnestly.

John snorted, “Most of them aren’t. Sherlock is an insufferable git.” He laughed.

Greg's face contorted in a wince as he watched from the foot of Sherlock's bed as the younger man struggled with transferring from the wheelchair onto the bed. He's shoved Greg back on two occasions and now the DI remained well back, feeling terrible as he watched his battle with a body that was broken and unresponsive.

“Sherlock…” Greg began softly. “Let me help?”

“I don't need your help!” Sherlock said in a breathless huff. “I can do it, I have to do it.”

“No shame in asking for help, though. We all do it. Me more than most.” Greg said gently. “You should know, it's you I bloody come to!”

“Could you shut up please?” Sherlock exhaled heavily, the strength in his arms dropping. He breathed deeply twice and tried again, forcing his body up and around successfully onto the bed. He exhaled heavily in relief, planted safely on the bed, and looked up at Greg with red cheeks.

“See, you did it,” Greg grinned.

Sherlock rolled his eyes but smiled despite himself. “Yeah, I did.”

They drifted into silence as Greg folded the wheelchair away and dropped into the vacant armchair opposite the bed. Sherlock remained sitting on the edge and Greg could see his mind whirring.

“Alright, son, gimme.” He said, folding his arms. “Something’s cooking your brain.”

Sherlock looked up at him through long lashes. “This new guy, the one John is talking to today.” Greg nodded. “He's good?”

“Seems it.” Greg hummed.

“Seems it - thanks, yeah, that's reassuring.” Sherlock rolled his eyes. “I mean, he's not just in this to be in it, he's sincerely going to try to find the person responsible?”

Greg shrugged, “We're all trying to do that, Sherlock, but yes I really believe he's going to work hard to find the person who shot you. He's come to us with great credentials and an ex-military career. He's focused if nothing else and that can only be a good quality.” Greg leant forward and rested his arms on his thighs. “Mate, you've got to stop torturing yourself and focus on getting stronger. We are
handling the case, it's not your responsibility.”

“I want to know, I deserve to know!” Sherlock said forcefully.

“Yeah. You do deserve to know, that's why he's with us. He's a good bloke and I really think he'll help us. Help you.” Greg sat back.

Sherlock sighed and tried to relax, feeling on edge. “And Donovan?”

“She's the same as always.” Greg raised his eyebrows. “She's asked about you, of course, nobody wants to see someone hurt. But I won't pretend she's...concerned.”

“She and Anderson still…” Sherlock raised his brows and faded off and Greg cast a withering look. “So yes, then.”

“He's married, Sherlock!” Greg grumbled.

Sherlock nodded, “Hence why I asked.” He grinned cheekily.

“You wind them up, it's no wonder they take the piss out of you.” Greg leant back in the chair and stretched.

Sherlock shrugged his shoulders. “Stupid people bore me.”

“Everything bloody bores you, Will!” Greg smirked and it made Sherlock smile.

Sherlock coming from Greg was always a statement, whereas Will was always affectionate. He had wondered initially where Greg had learned his given name, but it didn't take long to dawn on him that the DI had been through hospitals with him for years and that, at some point, it would have come up.

“Do you think you'll be able to find them?” Sherlock asked as they settled into comfortable quiet.

Greg scratched the side of his unshaven face with his right hand and sighed, “I hope so but I won't lie to you, it's going to be difficult and drawn out. We have no leads and all ballistics could tell us is the angle of entry. We know the direction the gun was fired from and nothing much else.” Greg held out his empty palms.

“And that Hawkes, he didn't see anything,” Sherlock asked with an edge of annoyance in his voice.

“Nothing,” Greg said resignedly. Sherlock looked physically deflated, his hoped of immediate closure seeming to keep slipping further and further away. It hurt Greg to know that there was nothing he could do to salve this particular burn.
“How does it make you feel,” Sherlock asked, laid on his back staring up at the tiled ceiling of the hospital room, “knowing that my brother is going through your pants?”

John had been giggling at Sherlock for the last half an hour. The pain relief they had given him - which had unfortunately had to be morphine - had not dulled his spirit and made him sleepy but instead turned him into a teenage drunk. But it had helped to almost eradicate the severe pain he'd been experiencing in his back and, despite his reservations, John was glad of that.

“I doubt Mycroft's doing the manual work, but still the idea doesn't fill me with much joy, Love.” He responded, peering at Sherlock with a smile over the open lid of his laptop.

Sherlock turned his head and set beady eyes on John. “Are you writing about me?”

John shook his head, “No, it's not a blog. I'm fixing up my CV. I'm applying for a job at the Health Centre around from where the new place is.”

Sherlock licked his lips excessively. “You're going to be a doctor again?”

“I never stopped being a doctor, Love, I just put it on hold.” John clarified softly. He looked away from the computer and at Sherlock, unable to keep from smiling as he flicked his hands in an odd manner. “You're a lucky man, having a live in doctor.”

Sherlock blew a raspberry and then laughed at himself. “I know.” He said finally.

“Go to sleep, Love, it's late, you're high and tomorrow is going to be a hard day.” John said lovingly.

They were apprehensive about the new house but excited too. Sherlock and he had talked for a long while about the surprises in store for them both with excitement in their voices. They were nervous, they would have to cope alone, but they were relieved to be finally starting their lives properly. Closure, although still a long way away, was ebbing ever closer.

“Hiya, John,” Rebekah, one of the night staff of healthcare assistance slipped quietly into the room, pulling gloves onto her hands. “Strange seeing you here on a night.”

“Hi, Becky.” John smiled gently in the half-light of the small room. “Quiet night?” He asked her, closing the lid of his laptop.
“So far,” she grinned, crouching at Sherlock's bedside to check the chamber on the night bag of his catheter. “You're on nights tonight too?” She smiled, glancing over her shoulder, “No big brother tonight?”

John smiled back at her, “No, he's making arrangements with the new house.” He told her. “So yeah, my shift tonight.” He joked.

“I'm just gonna grab on of the nurses,” Rebekah said, rising to her feet and removing her gloves.

John’s stomach sank. “Oh god, what's wrong?”

“Nothing, no… Just, his urine is a little dark. I'll get one of them to dip it.” Rebekah said calmly, her Yorkshire accent sweet and unassuming.

“Oh, please god not another urine infection.” John rubbed his forehead, a tension headache suddenly building.

“Let's let the nurse take a look before you get stressed, eh?” She smiled and left the room as quietly as she entered.

To John’s annoyance, the urine dip proved positive for everything except blood, and it was quickly agreed that Sherlock would be started up on a nitrofurantoin drip. What had started as a quiet night descended into chaos as Sherlock’s temperature rose as the hours ticked on and his kidney function began to worry the staff. By three am, Sherlock had been transferred back onto the renal ward and was hooked up to fluids and antibiotics. He’d had a rushed echo of his kidneys and had been seen by the on-call renal doctor for fear his entire urinary tract was malfunctioning. Tearing out his hair, and feeling useless as he watched Sherlock vomiting, John slipped from the ward and called Mycroft.

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Mycroft arrived at the hospital and defied visiting hours guidelines without regret. He followed the directions John had given him over the phone and met the shorter man in the corridor, by the entrance to the ward. He stopped short of the doorway as John caught his eye and looked down upon John with a firm expression.

“His left kidney has completely shut down, his bladder is swimming with bacteria. His right kidney isn't operating too great at the minute, either. He's just thrown up on half a cup of water so they're changing the bed.” John said, exhausted, gesturing behind him into the ward. “He just changed so quickly - I thought it was the painkillers sending him loopy, how could I not have noticed something was going on?”

“One wouldn't expect a repeat infection in a little over a week.” Mycroft reasoned, his way of saying ‘you’re not to blame’.

“It seemed to descend so quickly,” John scrubbed his hands over his face. “One minute he was giddy and then sleepy, and the next he has a raging temperature and he's throwing up everywhere.”

“They're treating the infection now?” Mycroft asked sternly.

John nodded, “Yeah same drugs as before, it'll take three days or so to see him really improve. But they're going to scan his kidneys again first thing and decide whether he needs to have surgery to
remove the left one. I mean, as if not being able to walk wasn't enough, he's now looking at recurrent UTIs and being a bloody kidney patient for the rest of his life. When does he get a bloody break? I mean...fucking hell!"

Mycroft regarded John wearily.

“We were supposed to be moving forward; Jesus Christ, he was supposed to be fit to go home! He went from dopey on pain relief to seriously ill. How does that even happen!?” John threw out his hands and inhaled a sharp breath before blowing it out, trying to settle himself.

“We start again, then.” Mycroft said plainly. “He is treated for the infection, he recovers, and he goes home after that. Another few days will not prevent there being a home to go to, John.” He moved closer to the entrance doors. “I expect he'll be looking for you, we should go to him now.”

John followed as Mycroft pushed the doors open and stepped onto the ward. “He had a bed on the main ward, there wasn't a side room.” John explained, getting into step with Mycroft, and pointed him in the right direction.

They reached the bay and were respectfully quiet as they approached Sherlock's bed. The raven haired man was lying propped on his left side, surrounded by supports, and hooked up to an IV. He smelled sickly, despite the wash the healthcare assistants had just given him, and his cheeks were red from the fever.

John brushed his hand through Sherlock's hair gently, “Hi, Love, I'm back. Mycroft is here, too.” He whispered. Sherlock’s brows moved sleepily but he failed to react in any other way.

Mycroft's eyes scanned his brother and were drawn to the orangey liquid that barely filled the fifty-mil line in the catheter bag hooked onto the bed. He closed his eyes and sighed quietly through his nose. They had a rough week ahead of them - he knew that from experience.

“Okay, Sherlock, just rest.” Mycroft said quietly as he watched Sherlock begin to move in the bed. “We can talk in the morning.”
Chapter 25

John spent a nerve-bending night dipping between light sleep and staring at Sherlock from the hard, plastic chair that one of the renal nurses has pulled into the bay for him. The closest they came to privacy was pulling the curtains around at the sides of the bed, which still left the end opened out and left them in full view of the three beds opposite - exclusively occupied by three elderly ladies. Mycroft had stayed, but slipped in and out of the ward making phone calls and plans for the week ahead. By the time the nursing staff changed over at eight am, John’s patience was frayed, his mind was tired and his heart was fluttering in his chest out of concern.

He jumped at the laying of a hand on his shoulder, and twisted awkwardly in the chair to see who it was. “Shauna, isn’t it? Hi.” John smiled but it didn’t hide his exhaustion.

“I’d say it’s nice to see you two, but I was hoping you wouldn’t be back.” The ward sister smiled sympathetically. “He’s pretty poorly, hey?” She said, retracting her hand and pushing them both into the pockets of her blue tunic.

John looked back at Sherlock and sighed, “Yeah - and it was so sudden. I missed the confusion, I thought it was pain killers making him a bit doped-up. And now look at him?” He gestured toward Sherlock with his left hand.

“We’ll get him right again; but I know that it’s a blow, you were planning on going home, right?” Shauna asked. John nodded his head briefly. “The specialist is going to rescans his kidney this morning and see how it’s functioning, but they are worried. The damage seems to be really affecting it’s ability to clear the toxins and while there’s infection in his urinary tract, it’s only going to make that harder but, with the catheterisation, it’s a bit of an itch-scratch cycle.”

John shook his head and got slowly to his feet with a tired groan. “I know,” He rubbed his hand across his unshaven chin. “I’m just worried that it’s going to end up being something more chronic; his system’s already compromised and if they have to take the kidney, he’s bound to end up with something more persistent and life-altering on top of the bloody wheelchair.”

“There’s always transplant, if it’s warranted.” Shauna said carefully, trying not to promise things that mightn’t be needed or be an option.

John shook his head, “Matches aren’t always available; and why would they do something like that for a paraplegic - why implant an organ that’s not going to last as long as it should?”

Shauna reached out her right hand again and touched John’s arm. “Let’s just think about the now, getting rid of that infection and bringing him back to himself.”


“It’s okay, don’t thank me. I’ll be back in a while with the medication round, okay? I’ll see you soon.” she gave John’s arm a gentle squeeze before walking away slowly.

John walked toward Sherlock, still sleeping on his side, and placed his hand on his exposed shoulder. “Sherlock,” He said quietly. The sleeping man didn’t stir. John placed his hand on Sherlock’s forehead, still able to feel heat radiating from him, and sighed as he smoothed his hand through Sherlock’s damp hair before pulling his arm back. “Oh, Love.” He sighed again, and scrubbed his hands across his face to push away the tiredness from his eyes.

“Still asleep?”
John jumped at the intruding voice and turned to see Mycroft. He nodded his head, “Hasn’t moved an inch.”

“I’m going to check in at the house, ensure it’s entirely ready. Then I’ll call our parents, let them know he won’t be coming home today. I can’t promise that they won’t decide to visit.” Mycroft said with an edge of an apologetic tone.

John shook his head, “They’re entitled to see their son, Mycroft.”

“Yes, but it isn’t exactly convenient, is it?” Mycroft raised his brows in distaste. “I won’t be long. If anything changes, be in touch won’t you?”

“Absolutely.” John nodded with conviction. “And please, tell your parents they’re welcome here.” John wasn’t sure why he’d said it - in his brief encounter with the Holmes’, he was certain they were nice people, but he didn’t know whether he wanted ‘other people’ around while Sherlock was so poorly.

“As a doctor,” Mycroft began, pausing on a thought before leaving. “These infections, are they serious? Is it usual for it to reoccur so quickly?”

John wet his lips and shrugged, “They can lead to sepsis, which is possibly why he’s so poorly right now, the temperature would certainly point to it. And yes, they can present often. For as long as he’s got a foreign body inserted inside of him, he’s introducing bacteria and leaving an open channel for it to breed. On top of all of that, his kidneys aren’t working at capacity so their ability to flush out toxins is decreased and, hey presto, urine infection.”

“Sepsis,” Mycroft repeated the word. “That’s serious?”

“Untreated, definitely. Urosepsis can make him ill and miserable, and only adds further pressure to his urinary tract. Thing is, his bladder isn’t contracting to expel urine independently so without the catheter he’s at risk of retention, reflux, rupture… His only option for urinary tract health is also the cause of his problem.” John gave a sarcastic laugh. “As if being in a wheelchair wasn’t enough.”

Mycroft nodded curtly. “Stay with him today, don’t move too far, I want to be sure he’s receiving the best care he can within the NHS. Once we’re aware of the prognosis with his kidneys, I will arrange transfer to a private hospital for the remainder of his treatment before going home.”

“Don’t move him, Mycroft. We were so close - don’t throw it up in the air now.” John begged. “Being close is not nearly good enough.” Mycroft said bluntly. “I’ll be back later on today, take care of him.” He nodded toward his brother before turning and walking away, leaving the conversation closed whether John liked it or not.

Alone again with Sherlock in as much a capacity as the open ward allowed John pulled the chair in close and sat beside the bed, watching Sherlock sleep. He dozed in and out of a light sleep himself, but he was always aware of what was going on around him. He kept his eyes closed as the HCAs checked Sherlock’s catheter and completed their rounds and comfort checks, listening to them speak more freely when, he presumed, they thought he was sleeping.

“God, it sinks,” one remarked in a broad Glasgow accent quietly and John knew she was emptying his catheter. “The nitro’ doesn’t help, I know, but that is one heavin’ infection.”

“I know, it’s awful,” the other responded, softly spoken but clearly a native Londoner. “He’s a cute guy, though, I remember him being up here a week or so back. Just been in the accident that put him in a wheelchair; he’s got this brother who looks as friendly as a fart in a jar.”
John had to feign a movement in his sleep to hide his smirk at the comment.

“I saw him before,” The Glaswegian responded with an animated tone, “Lanky streak of piss, and no mistake!”

The Londoner laughed lightly. “Too right. Will you roll him your side, I’ll do the pad check?” She said. They quietly counted to three and John winced as he heard the Londoner speak again. “God, I forgot he was...hung.” She laughed, then groaned, “Oh, Jeez - he’s got diarrhoea. It’s everywhere. Poor guy probably doesn’t even know he’s bloody done it. That nitro-stuff is evil.” John felt his stomach sink - not only at the indelicacies of the staff, but at the deep realisation that there was more to Sherlock’s immobility than he was letting himself consider. “He’s going to need a full change. You okay to hold him while I get sheets and a gown?”

“Can’t we put one of the bigger pads on him, these flimsy slips are ridiculous. I mean, I know he’s got the catheter and everything but with a cock like that, and shitting himself, a nappy would be way better.” The Glaswegian commented and her tone was so heavily dripping with disgust that it made John feel angry.

Stretching in the chair, John gave up his position and got to his feet. “Neither of you are trained medical professionals but by your ages you’ve been in this kind of work long enough to know that respecting the dignity of the people you’re caring for is paramount. Your comments on Sherlock, his family, and terms like hung and nappy are indiscreet, disrespectful and shocking. Keep your opinions of his body and abilities to yourselves and do what you’re paid by my taxes to do - make him comfortable and do it with as much respect and kind words as you can muster, or so help me God, I’ll see to it that you’re both frog marched out of here with your P-forty-bloody-fives!” He dropped the finger he’d been pointing in their faces and marched out of the bay, leaving both healthcare assistants stunned into silence.

Later that day, the consultant ruled out complete kidney failure, despite earlier concerns, but confirmed that Sherlock did indeed have urosepsis. The antibiotics, he said, would continue for at least five days. John was somewhat relieved - at least his kidneys hadn’t completely packed up. With the aid of fluids, pain relief and the antibiotics, Sherlock’s condition over the next twelve hours improved; his temperature decreased to almost normal and the constant flow of fluids with pushed oral intake saw his bladder function improve. He was far from out of the woods, but seeing his cheeks lose their pink tinge and his face gain a more usual tone, John felt like they were definitely able to see a light at the end of the tunnel again.

Mycroft, somehow, managed to keep his parents from joining them at the hospital and both he and John set about both being around Sherlock together. They discussed the house when Sherlock slept, and Mycroft made promises to ensure Sherlock had access to everything he needed. He looked animated, oddly, as he told John about the different equipment he had looked into that would maximise Sherlock’s independence both at home and, if he wished, in a work setting. John wasn’t sure what Mycroft meant by ‘work setting’, but he accepted his excitement as a positive thing.

By early evening, John’s annoyance at the two healthcare assistants that morning had become public knowledge. Shauna had even spoken to John in a professional setting, offering to bring the ladies up to HR if he thought disciplinaries would be warranted. Mycroft had been outraged, vowing to John that if he were to ‘point them out’, he would ensure their lives would be made a misery. John had dismissed him, but he couldn’t lie and say he wasn’t enthused by the idea.
Chapter 26

By day three on the ward, Sherlock showed such positive signs of health that John was beginning to tear out his hair. From sleepy, sick and feverish, Sherlock had become bored, irritable and an insomniac, spending less than three hours a night asleep before he was demanding John’s attention and begging to go home.

“This is revolting.” Sherlock shoved the cup of decaf coffee away from him. He’d already abandoned his breakfast and John was losing the will to live.

“No caffeine, Sherlock - it’s an irritant, your entire water system is buggered enough.” John said, pushing the table back toward Sherlock as he sat upright in the bed. “It’s that, or no coffee at all, and seeing as you’ve vetoed the tea, squash, water, Cola, Lemonade...it’s decaf coffee or nothing.”

“You’re a bully.” Sherlock looked at him petulantly.

“Yes, I am.” John agreed. “Now drink it.” John regarded Sherlock as he inspected the cup again, and have an annoyed sigh. “Sherlock, you came dangerously close to needing surgery a few nights ago, can you stop being so glib and start listening to me when I say you need to look after yourself.”

Sherlock frowned and looked at John with quiet contemplation as he nursed the cup in both hands.

“I'm not being glib, John.”

“It was me watching you vomit on fifty mil of water. I know you're fighting through this, don't think I don't understand that, but Sherlock you're not even trying to help yourself.” John groaned, weeks of pent up anger and fear bursting forward.

“How is going to every godforsaken physiotherapy session not trying? You think I want to sit in my own waste and never move again? I'm in pain, I'm bored and I'm angry. The sooner you realise that this is as hard for me as it is for you and Mycroft, the better!”

“You seriously think we don't see you struggling?” John asked incredulously. “I see you struggle, Sherlock. I see you in pain and I just watched you circle the drain, barely avoiding having renal surgery! Don't tell me I don't get it, don't tell me I don't understand. I understand!”

Sherlock threw down his cup, emptying what remained over the floor as he released it with more force than he’d intended to. “You’ll never understand, John. As long as you’re the one able to do everything for yourself, and your body obeys you, you will never get it.”

“I'm a doctor, Sherlock. First hand, okay, I might never really know the experience, but I know the methods, I know the details and I understand what it causes mentally, physically and emotionally to have your life ripped from you.” John said, his voice calming having been a little shaken by Sherlock’s physical outburst.
“And I’m a graduate chemist, doesn’t mean I avoid drugs because I know what they’ll do!” Sherlock retorted, his voice thick with sarcasm.

John’s face contorted, a frown fixing his brow in a deep crease. “What?”

Sherlock sighed, “I don’t know…” he shook his head, aware that their argument had his a stalemate.

John moved closer to Sherlock, grabbing dry-wipes from the locker beside Sherlock’s bed, and dabbed up the spilled coffee from the tabletop. “Love, I know this is difficult and you feel like you’re yo-yoing back and forwards, but you’re doing a lot better and okay, this is a setback and a frightening one because it’s a reality that you’re probably going to get sick like this a lot.” He pushed the sodden wipes into the coffee cup and moved the table away to allow him to get closer still to Sherlock. “You know that you can electively have the kidney removed. We can go private, explain the problem and I can be a medical reference that it isn’t in your best interests to not perform the surgery. But, Love, operating on one kidney and knowing that you’re going to be getting infections like this no matter how much you control infection means you’re at risk of being in complete renal failure down the line. Truth is, you’re at a fork in the road with the likelihood of both directions leading to absolute chaos.”

Sherlock twisted his mouth. “Reassuring, thank you.” He stared at John. “I don’t want surgery, but I don’t want to end up in hospital with infections all the time. Above all, John, I want to go home. I was ready. I’m ready again now, please, talk to the doctor and let me get out of here?”

“Finish the antibiotics first? Once they’re done in a day or so, I’ll insist on discharge. But on one condition,” John fixed a firm stare on Sherlock. “Drink - a lot. Water, squash, anything - just keep the toxins flushed out and this could be avoided for longer if not completely.”

Sherlock tongued the inside of his right cheek and gave a subtle nod. “You promise you’ll get me out fo here?”

“I do.” John nodded his head and smiled. “I’ll get a water jug filled up - you drink the lot over the next six hours and I’ll tell Shauna that you want to go home once the antibiotic course is finished.”

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“There’s definite tensing of the muscles, that’s for sure, so it’s no wonder the pain is continuous.” Shauna spoke softly, lingering in Sherlock’s bed-space at the end of her shift. “And I agree with what you told me the physio team said; if diazepam helps to relax his muscles you could avoid seeing him left with spasticity.”

“I hate that term.” John sighed. “I’m not sure addictive drugs like diazepam are a good idea though.” He shook his head. “Sherlock has...a past, old addictions. Replacing those with another addictive drug seems dangerous.”

“And letting his muscles give in to atrophy and seeing him with considerably less dexterity and independence than he has now seems cruel.” She said candidly. “John, I know you want to do the best for him, and I know that he’s a difficult one to please,” She smiled, “But I’ve seen spinal patients come through here with non-reflex bladder like Sherlock, and not with the renal damage that Sherlock has, and they’ve required prolonged intervention. We had a MD patient in his twenties whose atrophy had gotten so severe he was reliant on everyone. And I know muscular dystrophy is
different, but the complete loss of independence is universal. He’ll struggle, and so will you. I think the diazepam and intensive therapy, standing aids...I think it’s his best way forward.”

John looked behind him at Sherlock, half asleep on the bed with a frown on his forehead, then turned back to Shauna. “I like your honesty. I do. And I know that I’d be an idiot for not taking it all on board. But he’s a case, a pretty unique case, and I know him - almost implicitly, now. The slightest inch of allowance with drugs and he’ll...I dunno, I can’t see him shooting up but it’s facilitating the high, isn’t it?”

“You’re a general practitioner? You have a university student who’s not sleeping, severe anxiety and you prescribe diazepam, five M.G.. It’s isn’t a significant amount but it helps them, lets them relax, gets them through their assignments. You know it’s addictive and you can see they have mental health issues brewing, but you prescribe it because you know it’ll help better than an SSRI because it’s quicker to act. You know they’ll be immediately helped and that’s what they need and it’s what you want to see. So - apply it here. Sherlock is immediately given relief from the spasms in his back, he’s able to do physio and he’s able to keep the strength in his back to stand in a stander and, voila, he’s been immediately helped and the diazepam can be kept PRN and he’ll be feeling better because he’s already improved thanks to the therapies.” Shauna shrugged her shoulders with a smile. John couldn’t argue with Shauna’s reasoning, but he also could see the flaw in her thinking. She didn’t know Sherlock’s addictions, or his resolve for obtaining what he wanted.

“He falls moderately on the autistic spectrum; he’s obsessive and relentless. And while your idea is flawless, it doesn’t translate for Sherlock. He’s…” John shrugged.

“Yeah, I know,” Shauna smiled, “He’s a case.”

John rolled his eyes as he laughed lightly. “Thank you,” He sobered and looked at her seriously. “We’ve met a few people over the last few weeks, but you’ve sincerely been amazing. You’re lost as an acting ward sister, you know that?”

Shauna blushed, “What would you have me do?” She laughed.

“You should be out in the community; you as a district nursing sister would be award-winning.” John nodded earnestly. “I’d have you, and I know Sherlock would too.”

Shauna tutted and swatted John’s arm affectionately. “You’re sweet; he’s lucky to have you at his side.” She smiled. “I’m going to go.” She thumbed behind her. “I’m here in the morning anyway, so I’ll see you first thing.”

John nodded with a bright smile, “Yeah, you will. Goodnight, Shauna.”
“I’d rather we went together,” Greg said tentatively. Jack looked at him with a frown of discontent. “It isn’t that I don’t trust you, Jack. But I’ve got a relationship with the two of them - you’re new and I know from experience that Will’s going to refuse to say anything if he takes the fancy.”

“Will?” Jack shook his head. “Sherlock. Long story, his name is William. Not important.” Greg waved him off. “I mean, I know you got on okay with John. He’s the positive influence in this twosome.” He smirked in the hopes it would soften how anti this idea he was coming off.

“Lestrade, I get that you’ve got history with Sherlock Holmes, but this investigation isn’t into your relationship with him, or the work he’s done, or John-blinkin’-Watson. It’s about a man being shot and needing to find the person who did it. Nowhere in that does it facilitate nepotism.” Jack said bluntly.

“Fine. Go alone and speak with him. Just try not to punch him and when you’re inches from his face desperate to collide your fist with his cheek - because you will reach that point - call me then.” Greg flicked his wrist dismissively and walked away from the DI and the non-too-subtly lurking Donovan. “Take her with you,” He called back as he headed into his office, “They hate one another, I’m sure it’ll help.”

Jack turned and looked at Donovan, perched awkwardly behind him at her desk. “You two really don’t get on?”

Sally pulled a face, “On the whole, Sir, no.” She answered honestly. “But I was there when the shots were fired.”

“You’ll do, then. Get your coat, you’re coming with me.” Jack said bluntly with a hint of a smile at the prideful grin on Sally’s face.

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John’s expression of pure annoyance must have been evident as Sally hid her face as she was guided onto the ward by a healthcare assistant, with Jack Skinner a step or two behind her. He closed his eyes as he sighed and shook his head. “No,” He pointed his hand at Sally, “No, now is not a good time. He’s been seriously ill, you really want to go through this now?”

“The longer we continue to hold this off, the hazier things become. Mr Holmes, I’m Detective Inspector Jack Skinner.” Jack said evenly, stopping at the foot of Sherlock’s bed beside Sally. “Is there somewhere the four of us can go that is a little more private?”

“He isn’t fit for this!” John snapped.

“Doctor Watson, please,” Sally reasoned. “We need to know what Sherlock knows or this case is stale. If you sincerely want a resolution then we need to talk to him.” She looked over at Sherlock in the bed and John could see the uneasiness in her expression. She looked guilty, afraid, and a little nauseated.
John turned to Sherlock and raised his eyebrows. “It’s your decision.” He shrugged and shook his head. “If you say you’re up to it, then fine.”

Looking awkwardly between the three pairs of eyes fixed on him, then ultimately focusing on John, Sherlock nodded his head. “No, John, it’s fine. Sally’s right, it needs to happen sooner rather than later. If you could excuse us…?” He looked between Sally and Jack. Jack and Sally exchanged brief glances before Jack gave an agreeable nod and the two backed out of the bay and waited out in the ward.

“You don’t need to do this.” John insisted, watching Sherlock throw the bedclothes back. “Love, please, you’re still not well.”

Sherlock glared at him, “But for once, John, I agree with Donovan. And honestly, I’ve been waiting for them to appear since I was lucid.” John watched him awkwardly fight his legs around and huff lethargically into a sitting position on the edge of the bed.

“Fine,” John sighed. “Wait a minute, let me get your chair…”

The room that the charge nurse provided for them was clearly one designed for delivering bad news to family members. It was sombre and quiet, hidden away in a corner of the ward, with five conference chairs and a low table with a box of tissues and a vase of flowers in the centre of it. John watched Sally’s eyes flicking nervously over Sherlock as he parked the wheelchair between two of the chairs with John trailing behind him with his IV line. John slipped into the chair at Sherlock’s right while Sally and Jack took the seats opposite - the seats furthest away.

“Get it over with, then.” John said, petulantly. “He isn’t fit for this, not yet, you’re out of line for coming here but I can’t stop him being a stubborn git and insisting he sits here and talks to you.”


Jack glanced at Sally quickly and cleared his throat. “As I said, I’m DI Skinner. I joined Lestrade in the wake of this case and I’m keen to facilitate a good level of communication and trust. I want to know everything you remember and apply it to what we know, and move toward a resolution.”

“A resolution.” Sherlock repeated, nodding his head slowly. “That’s a broad term, Detective. A resolution can mean solving the case, it could mean simply applying a modicum of interest before closing it down. It could mean gathering information to be seen to be focus before letting it run cold.”

“That isn’t the intention.” Jack said seriously. “The goal is to find the person who shot you.”

“Goals are often missed, Detective, you know that. Being a military man, you should understand that operational goals are more frequently failures than successes.” Sherlock said pointedly. “I had my back to the direction of the bullets. I do not know anything, did not see anything. There is nothing that I can tell you that will be remotely helpful. Your goal should be to speak with Officer Hawkes. His sight line was more accurate.”

“There’s nothing Charlie could tell us.” Sally interjected. “We tried, both me and Charlie have gone over the night and there is nothing we’ve been able to give that is even remotely helpful.”

“Then that’s your shame, not mine.” Sherlock’s eyes flashed as he glared at her. “If there’s nothing you know, and there’s nothing you can learn from me, that leaves us up the proverbial faecal creek without a hygienic means of propelling the cannula.” John choked back a laugh that threatened to fly from his lips and received a glare from Sally for his effort.
“I’d appreciate it if you could just tell us anything, Sherlock.” Jack said slowly, his fixed on Sherlock’s face. “Anything at all.”

“I was shot three times, once in the thigh and twice in the back. I cannot feel anything below my pelvis and I am currently on a ward within the hospital that would indicate I have some significant issues with internal organs. There is nothing in that that you can take and apply to discovering who was holding the gun that caused all the aforementioned, is there?” Sherlock sighed heavily through his nose and reached for the breaks on either side of the wheelchair. “So, you have my sincerest thanks for the visit but I am done talking to you now.”

“Sherlock,” Sally got to her feet as he reversed the chair an inch. “We need your official statement.”

Sherlock flattened his lips and nodded, “Okay,” He sighed and cleared his throat. “This is it, the official word I am offering - I don’t have a clue what happened or why, and your incompetence is astounding to me.” He raised his eyebrows. “How’s that?”

“I appreciate that you’re frustrated,” Jack interjected. “But we’re doing our best with minimal evidence and support, and even less to go on.”

“How much more evidence do you require?” Sherlock held out both hands, the IV line clattering as his arm shook. “I’m paralysed!”

“Your mouth isn’t.” Sally snapped.

“Alright, enough.” John got to his feet and stood as a physical buffer between Donovan and Sherlock. “This isn’t getting us anywhere.” He turned to Jack and shook his head, “You promised me you’d wait, and I’m mad that you haven’t.” He admitted openly. “But there is sincerely nothing any of us can tell you. We don’t know anything and if Charlie Hawkes didn’t see anything then there is nothing to bind this case and it’s something that we’re going to have to accept. But this,” he waved his hand between them, “It isn’t helpful, and it certainly isn’t fair.”

“You’re a reasonable man, Doctor Watson, but reason won’t help anybody here. But I take your point on board,” Jack admitted as he stood. “The next time we talk will be when you are feeling better, when you’re out of hospital and with Lestrade in attendance. We won’t let this go; I won’t stand back and let this turn into a cold case.”

“Don’t promise things you can’t deliver on.” Sherlock said sharply, looking up at the bodies around him.

“We’ll see ourselves out,” Jack said calmly, guiding Sally out with a gesture of his hand. “And I’ll speak to you both very soon.”

The two officers left without another word and John dropped back down into his seat. He looked at Sherlock sadly and shrugged his shoulders; he didn’t know what to say. “I’m tired,” Sherlock said after a moment. “Let’s go.”
Chapter 28

Greg, give me a call when you can? - John.

John pushed his phone into his pocket and looked at Sherlock across the table. They’d, rather naughtily, bypassed going back to the bay for sneaking down to the coffee shop, drip and all in tow, and had hidden themselves away in the corner. John felt exposed, still, like the metal pole with a bag hanging off it gave them away, but at the same time he felt oddly relaxed at the private time he suddenly had been allowed with Sherlock. He missed him; he was around him all day and most nights, but God he missed him. He missed being able to smell the nape of his neck in bed, to reach out and hold him if he woke up in the middle of the night, to take hold of what had become his and decline to let it go. He missed Sherlock’s early morning smell; he missed the sounds he made when they kissed passionately, he missed the grumbling that bubbled in his throat when they had sex. Holding his hand or kissing him on the forehead was sentimental and loving, but it wasn’t close and it wasn’t private, and it was the privacy being ripped from him that was beginning to wear John down the most. Yeah, Sherlock was fed up and wanted to go home. But John wasn’t being open in just how much he wanted Sherlock to be home. Selfishly, all he wanted to do was hold him, close and tight, and fall asleep with his smell filling his sense.

“Are you okay?” Sherlock reached out with his left hand, poking his index finger onto the end of John’s nose.

John smiled, going cross-eyed to see the digit, and giggled when Sherlock pulled his hand back. “I’m alright,” He nodded. “Pissed off that Greg let them come, though.” He admitted.

“Why’re you mad at Lestrade?” Sherlock frowned and shook his head. “Isn’t that Skinner guy his new boss?”

John grimaced, “I hope not.” He looked at Sherlock and then made a face, one of open confusion. “I guess I’m mad because he didn’t come with them more than anything, he’s supposed to be our friend.”

“And he visits as a friend.” Sherlock clarified. “That wasn’t a visit, John, that was official. Maybe Lestrade is just too involved.” Sherlock considered, “It would make sense, then, that Skinner would be leading the investigation.”

John really didn’t like that idea. “I think they’re supposed to be neck-and-neck.” He scrubbed his hands across his unshaven face and left them cupping his chin, his elbows resting on the table for support. “Is it bad that I feel really selfish today?”

Sherlock tugged his mouth to one side. “What do you mean by that?”

“I miss you, physically miss you, and I feel like going against everything I know as a doctor to make it so that I can take away that feeling.” He said with a waver to his voice, feeling emotional. “I’m sick of the doctors and the nurses, I’m sick of the case, I’m sick of your brother…. I just want us to go home, now, and for me to be able to reach out and kiss you and not feel like I’m being watched, or judged, or questioned. I want to-,” He stopped, feeling his throat tightening.

“To what?” Sherlock asked, arching forwards. “To what, John?”

John blinked hot tears from his eyes quickly, willing them away as they fell down his cheeks. He drew his hands from his face and reached out to take Sherlock’s hands in his own. “I want to up and
go, right now. I want to get our life back. I want to have sex with you, in our bed, and….” He stopped, pursing his lips.

Despite being able to see John was upset, Sherlock couldn’t help but smile. John told him he loved him a lot; kissed him on the cheek or on the top of his head. The crown-kisses were his favourite. But it was rare that John was candid, base in his descriptions of how his love was, and to hear it made Sherlock feel like he almost understood what it was like to feel love as feverishly as normal people did.

“Why are you smiling?” John looked up, laughing at his own emotional outburst. “You’re supposed to be consoling me; look, I’m upset.”

Sherlock smiled again, the corners of his mouth dragging down as he tried not to grin widely. “I’m smiling because...I love you.”

John’s upper body physically reared back at the declaration. His mouth opened, and bobbed for a moment before snapping shut. His brows shot up his forehead and his sighed as he smiled widely, a grin spreading from ear to ear.

“Why are you smiling?” Sherlock returned, looking a little confused.

“You’ve never said it before, not like that.” John grinned. “Always, me too or love you too. You’ve never come to me and said that you loved me; I always thought that you never really understood what the term was for, but...Jesus, you got it right.” He reached across the table and cupped Sherlock’s bony cheeks. Despite the coffee shop being busy, John arched over the table to kiss Sherlock lightly on the mouth, their lips pressed firmly just a little while longer than Sherlock was usually comfortable with before he released him and sat back into the hard chair. “Now I really want to go against everything I know as a doctor and take you home.” Sherlock smiled, his eyes that little bit more alive than they had been for days. “And I love you, too.”

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“Sherlock Holmes?” John and Sherlock both looked toward the gap in the curtain, their eyes falling on a tall, slim man with firm shoulder muscles squeezed into a white tunic. “Hiya - I’m Justin.” He stepped in, and John got to his feet to shake his hand.

“John Watson, the...long suffering partner.” He smiled and Justin gave a polite laugh.

Justin held is hand out to Sherlock, sitting in the wheelchair opposite the chair John had been sitting with the table between them playing Twenty-One. Sherlock looked up and shook the young man’s hand. “Sherlock Holmes.”

“Good to meet you both,” Justin nodded at them politely. “I’m here to talk with you about your discharge and what that means for your personal care and continence needs. I believe that there was a long discussion with the renal staff here and a decision was reached not to swap from a urethral twelve-week catheter for the time being, due to the recurrent infection?”

John nodded his head as Justin looked to him when met with silence from Sherlock. “Yeah,” He said, “They decided that the self-catheterisation would leave too much wiggle room for the already aggressive bacteria, and with his kidney function being compromised it was deemed the safest option. We agreed - the last thing Sherlock needs is any further complications.”
Justin nodded his head, “I have to say that I agree. With your bladder remaining contracted things like a Conveen wouldn’t be helpful as you need the internal drain for your bladder to be voided. So it’s either leaving a catheter in situ, which you have currently, or in the intermittent self-cathing, which as you guys have already rightly come to the agreement on, isn’t the right option. So, when you leave us you’ll be signed up to the NHS District Nursing team - you’ll have weekly visits from the nurses for pressure area checks and a bladder washout, and then the washout will continue to be weekly but the pressure checks will reduce to three monthly, along with your catheter changes, unless there is any sign of breakdown in skin integrity.” Justin said brightly, “Does that make sense?”

“So that’ll be the same as what has been happening here?” Sherlock asked nervously, “Fill the bladder with saline and let it drain out?”

Justin nodded, “Exactly, only they’ll be doing it in your home. And then, every twelve weeks, they’ll remove the catheter and introduce fresh on. Unless there’s a problem - in which case there will be numbers provided to you to call to access the on-call nurses to come out. Catheters get blocked if there’s an infection, or sediment in the tubing for whatever reason, and they can come out and do an extra washout or change the catheter out for you.” Sherlock nodded his head slowly. “And in terms of your bowel health; suppositories will used just as they have been here.”

“No,” John shook his head. “Enemas. But, of course, suppositories is the idea for home.”

“Oh,” Justin turned down the corners of his mouth and nodded. “Ah - yes, with you being unwell, I can see why facilitating a commode hasn’t been idea.” He shrugged his shoulder. John watched Sherlock squirming, hating this line of conversation. Too delicate, too personal, too functional. “Besides that, is there any questions that I can help you with?”

Sherlock shook his head quickly, “Not unless you can tell us when I can go home?”

“I was told the plan was to allow you to leave when the antibiotics were finished, which I am led to believe is tomorrow?” Justin looked between them both.

“Tomorrow.” Sherlock looked up at John with wide eyes.

“If it finishes tomorrow then you’ll be cleared to leave either tomorrow evening or the following morning, which isn’t bad going all things considered.” Justin gave Sherlock a bright smile, able to see he was pleased with that idea.

“No, that’s brilliant.” John smiled, shaking Justin’s hand as he held it out to him, and then to Sherlock.

“Well if there’s anything else, it’s all down to the District Nursing team. You’ll be in good hands.” Justin promised. “I’ll leave you two to it.”

“Thank you,” John called out as Justin left, then spun around to face Sherlock. “See,” He winked, “You take the piss out of me and my God, but he’s answered my prayers there.” Sherlock rolled his eyes, but his smile belied his feigned annoyance.

John had nodded off in the chair sometime around nine pm, but Sherlock had been dead as sleep since before eight, barely moving an inch in the bed. But John’s sleep was short lived when his phone began to vibrate in his pocket, jolting him awake suddenly. He took a moment to come to his senses before he slid his hand into his trouser pocket and drew out his phone. Lestrade.

He answered the call, but didn’t speak until he’d rounded the bay corner and was walking down the ward to leave through the main doors into the hospital walkway. “Greg, hi.”
“John, I’m sorry it’s late and I know why you wanted me to call and I’m sorry.” Greg sighed down the phone. “I didn’t want him to come and see you, and I tried to swing it that I’d come with but...sadly, he’s outranking me.”

“I was afraid of that.” John heaved a sigh through his nose. “Well he left with nothing more than he came.” John told him, “Sherlock was his usual dick self, too.” He laughed.

“How is he?” Greg asked, concerned.

“So much better.” John smiled. “So, so much better. And once the antibiotics are finished, he’s clear to go home which should be tomorrow, or the following morning. So that’s given him the boost he needed and seems to have relaxed him. He’s been out for the count in a dead sleep for about two hours.”

“That’s good,” John could hear the relief in Greg’s voice.

“As soon as we’re in the house, Greg, you’re welcome through that door at any point, day or night, you know that?” John said.

He heard Greg smile by the way he talked. “I know, thank you.”

“What’s the matter?” John asked, sensing pauses in his words. “It isn’t just Skinner, is it? Something’s going on.”


“Bollocks.” John said bluntly, “Tell me what’s going on.”

“Ballistics came back; and I know it doesn’t really mean a lot, people carry weapons of all descriptions, but...” Greg paused.

“But what?” John asked, snapping.

“It was Army issue.” Greg admitted. “Like I said, people get weapons from all over, so the likelihood...”

“So you’re planning on asking me if I had any enemies?” John asked, frowning, looking up and down the hallway to see who was around him. “Any ex-boyfriends who’ve got it in for my current?”

Greg sighed, “John...”

“Ask me.” John said, his voice firm.

“John...”

“Ask me, Greg.” John raised his voice. “Ask me.”

“John, is there anyone you feel might have targeted Sherlock because of his involvement with you; any enemies, any ex-boyfriends...?” Greg said, his words effortful.

“No.” John said, his teeth gritted. “No, there is nobody. And you can tell Skinner that that is my official statement, and you can also tell him that I said he's an arrogant prick.”

“John, stop....” Greg said firmly.

“Anderson?” John frowned.
“Ballistics, John, it’s a separate team.” Greg said honestly. “It’s examination of the bullets, it’s...evidence, not speculation. And like I said, people are able to pick up all kinds of weapons illegally. None of us even considered…”

“None of us?” John laughed sarcastically. “Thanks for shitting all over our good day, Greg.” John rubbed his tired face with his free hand. “Am I a suspect?”

“How?” Greg’s tone rose, “you were with me.”

“As the brains behind it?” John shrugged.

“Don’t be bloody stupid.” Greg scolded him.

“This is Skinner, I know it is! Sherlock didn't give him what he wanted and now he's being a dick.” John growled.

“How can it be him? He's not in ballistics.” Greg said logically.

“I want to know why that dozy cock Hawkes isn't being pulled up. He was facing the direction of the gunfire, Greg! Send Skinner after him!” John groaned loudly.

“John, mate, please…”

John blew his restraint. “Oh some bloody mate, Greg! You hung Sherlock out to dry with them pair today, you arrogant tosser! And how long have you been sitting on this ballistics thing? It doesn't take the guts of a month for the report on an intact bullet to come back!”

“John it isn't like that at all.” Greg actually sounded hurt. “John I'm not allowed to be involved in the case.”

John tilted his head incredulously. “What? Why not?”

“Personal involvement.” Greg stated.

John laughed sarcastically, “By throwing Sherlock a bone now and then? That crap.”

“No.” Greg pushed. “They think I'm too close to Sherlock and I'm not seeing the bigger picture. They gave me the choice of stepping down as DI or handing the case to Jack. And I love him, honestly mate, but I can't…”

“You can't lose your job.” John said quietly. “I need to go; Sherlock's call bell is ringing…” He lied. “I'll speak to you...whenever.”
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

Forgive the length of this chapter, I know my posts tend do me somewhat more lengthy but I didn't want to switch scenes for this particular section.

John sat awake for the remainder of the night, alternating between watching Sherlock slumber on peacefully and sending text messages back and forth to Mycroft. It seemed that Mycroft already know about everything that had transpired with Greg; the DI had evidently been in touch with him himself and Mycroft told John he felt every bit as hurt by his actions as he was. John explained to him that he felt like Greg had abandoned him and Sherlock when his help would have been appreciated the most. John was sure Greg felt like he was doing the right thing but, to John, it just felt as though he’d chosen running his department over sticking by man he claimed to love like a son.

Giving up, John left Sherlock's bay at two am and called Mycroft out in the hallway. After a single ring, Mycroft picked up. “John.”

“I'm ripping my hair out.” John said honestly. “I can't not tell Sherlock when he wakes up but I don't want to be the one to tell him what's happened. I can barely get my head around it myself.” He said in a low voice.

“His hand was forced, I understand.” Mycroft defended. “I suppose neither of us would truly know what we would do in the same situation.”

“I'd take a bullet for him; I'd kill for him.” John said plainly. “If I had to give up my medical license for anything Sherlock needed me to do, I'd do it.”

“But you and Sherlock are different to Inspector Lestrade and Sherlock. My brother and he have an odd relationship.”

John frowned, “Odd how?” He asked. “Greg gives him work. How is that odd?”

“Sherlock and the good Inspector were differently acquainted in the beginning.”

“What are you talking about, Mycroft?” John pulled a ridiculous face despite the other man not being able to see it. “They have that whole father-son dynamic going on; are you trying to tell me that it was a sexual father-son vibe?” John laughed a little more loudly than he should have.

“Inspector Lestrade has brushed many of Sherlock's misdemeanours under the carpet in the past.” Mycroft said in outright dismissal of John's ideas. “He and Sherlock could be in trouble if those came to ahead. Other people obviously know about it and his hand has been forced.”

“Like drugs charges?” John asked. “Hardly breaking into Fort Knox, is it? At most, he’d take a disciplinary, surely?”

Mycroft sighed into the phone. “Sherlock could have faced a manslaughter charge for the death of a young man following a cocktail of drugs given to him - by Sherlock. Lestrade managed to edit a few notes and Sherlock walked away.”
John's eyes widened. “Bollocks!” He accused.

“Why else do you think they keep each other so close? My assumption is somebody else knows and Lestrade had no choice. So try not to be so hard on him.”

John shook his head, amazed at the revelation. “You think Skinner knows, then? He wanted Greg out of the way for his position...and he’s what? Planning on abandoning Sherlock's case as punishment?”

“Perhaps.” Mycroft replied.

“But punishment for what? This Skinner is some random bloke, he’s got nothing to do with it?” John said at a push, and then thought hard on the idea. “You don't think….” He thought aloud, “Skinner knew the...No. No, that’s…”

“Welcome, John.” Mycroft said abruptly.

“To what?” John frowned.

“You're currently standing at the same level in this curious case of Sherlock's as I am.”

“It’s all a bit bloody elaborate, don’t you think? This far down the line some militant who just happens to be a copper seizes the chance to overturn Sherlock and Greg…. It sounds like a Disney film!” John rolled his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose with his free hand. “If this ridiculous idea is right and Skinner is related to the person Sherlock overdosed, then...does that mean Skinner is the gunman?” He shook his head. “No. That stupid. It’s obvious, way too obvious.”

“But that doesn't mean it's impossible.” Mycroft said quietly.

“I'm still processing the fact that the three of you have kept this little tidbit a secret. Greg is a bent bobby, Sherlock’s drug history clearly has more avenues than a country walk, and you…”

“I was thankful that Lestrade was willing to help him. So, I helped Lestrade.” Mycroft said somberly.

“I suppose this is what Mrs Hudson felt like?” John rolled his eyes and rubbed his aching temple. The hospital around him was quiet and he was fairly certain he’d be busted for being on his phone soon. “Fine - I’ll stamp on my disbelief for a while. But that doesn’t fix any of this and, clearly, you know more than you’re willing to tell me. Why wouldn’t Greg just tell me? Why won’t you give me every inch of information I need to know because if the shit hits the fan any harder, Mycroft, I get dragged down in this too?”

John waited patiently for the explanation he knew he was owed, and prepared for its onslaught as Mycroft took a deep breath and began. “Lestrade and I believe that if Jack Skinner is who we think he is - and that is probable - then he is the older brother of the young man Sherlock was with at the time of the overdose. I don’t recall the kid’s name and asking Sherlock about it would be counterproductive. If Jack Skinner is the man we’ve all been expecting, then yes it is likely he was the gunman and it is also likely that attempting to have him tried and imprisoned for it will mean opening up numerous triggers he has everywhere that will reveal everything. Long story cut very, very short - if Jack Skinner goes down for the attack on Sherlock, Sherlock serves time for manslaughter and Greg Lestrade for the rap sheet of covering up and lies.”

“You too.” John said quietly, completely overwhelmed. “You’d go down for it too.” He sighed and shook his head, his eyes falling closed. “The bastard!”

“Sherlock is distracted but he isn’t stupid. It’ll burn slowly but he will piece it together once he
realises what has happened with Lestrade.” Mycroft said at length. “Stay with him, John.”

“Of course.” John nodded as he spoke, “I’m not going anywhere.”

“Push for his release today and I’ll ensure that there is a twenty-four-hour watch on the house once you’re inside. And John, don’t be so hard on Inspector Lestrade. This was not his choice.”
Chapter 30

John found himself staring at Sherlock as he slept and wondered how he could he could sleep at all. He knew that when he met Sherlock, both of them had a lifetime of stories behind them that the other could never know, understand or barely scratch the surface of if they ever began to discuss things. They’d met one another and been perfect in that moment - the history didn’t matter and John wondered why he felt like it did now. He’d killed people, it was the reality of a soldier. But to know Sherlock had been immediately responsible for the death of somebody was a strange thought.

How had he spent an year and a half of his life believing that this man was a hero? He’d been convinced that, despite his ineptitudes, Sherlock was a man of integrity to a degree and that Greg Lestrade helped to cement that. But just look! He’d been fed lies for eighteen months, and he was the only person who didn’t know it. He felt cheated by Sherlock - how could he make a life for them together when Sherlock couldn’t even be honest. He’d told Sherlock about his shortcomings, about the handling of a weapon, about all the people he couldn’t save that he wished he could have.

Why could Sherlock not tell him about any of this?

He thought they had an honest relationship - he knew Sherlock was a sneaky bugger from day one but he also knew Sherlock knew practically nothing about being able to lie to him convincingly enough that things would stay hidden permanently. At least, he thought he knew that about the man he loved. Everything felt wrong now, different and new and like something he wasn’t sure he even wanted to be a part of. How could he go forward in a life with Sherlock, in which Greg and Mycroft were hugely influential, knowing none of them had ever been honest?

What did Sherlock think he would do if he ever knew, that stopped him from telling him? Did the three of them meet up on occasion to make sure none of them had spilled the beans yet? Did Sherlock not trust him to keep it quiet, or not think he didn’t understand the implications of letting people know? Did Sherlock think he’d leave if he knew the truth? He sat forward in the chair and braced his elbows on his thighs to cradle his aching head in his hands. If any of those thoughts had passed Sherlock mind, then John wasn’t sure that he had made Sherlock feel secure enough in their relationship and suddenly he felt like the guilty party, like he hadn’t done enough to prove to Sherlock he was able to trust him.

He didn’t understand why Greg had let him talk to Jack Skinner if he suspected, or knew, any of this. Why did he deliver John to Jack’s office if he knew what Jack was planning, if he had these thoughts in his mind? Why did Greg not get the message to him somehow, in full or in brief, and warn John that something big was coming? Nothing made sense in his head and it ran round and round like an infinite loop, throwing more and more questions with each circuit.

He sat back and rubbed both hands across his exhausted face, blinking his eyes before forcing them open wide. When he focused back on Sherlock, he saw Sherlock’s blue eyes peering at him over a sleep-crumpled face. And, despite everything in his mind, he smiled because he was looking into the eyes of the man he’d loved since day one.

“Sleepy head.” He said softly, aware that people were sleeping around them and it was just approaching five am.

“You look exhausted.” Sherlock’s voice was croaky from his solid sleep and he sounded vulnerable and relaxed. John liked this side of Sherlock.

“Didn’t sleep well,” John replied as he got to his feet. He walked the short distance across to
Sherlock’s bed and bent at the waist to kiss Sherlock’s forehead. “You did, though.” He said as he straightened up again. “Out like a light quite early.”

Sherlock stretched his arms above his head, his throat bubbling out a groan at the joyful way it worked out the kinks in his shoulders, and dropped his hands back down on top of the blankets. “Don’t even remember falling asleep.” He said and yawned. “What’s wrong?” Sherlock asked as he flicked his eyes over John’s fatigued face.

“Nothing,” John said, fixing his expression.

“Liar.” Sherlock smirked.

“That’s rich.” John said before he could stop himself.

Sherlock’s head jerked back into the pillow and he frowned. “What?”

“I said, that bitch…” John licked his lips, and pointed to the repositioning chart on Sherlock’s table. “They said they turned you but they didn’t. You’ve been in the same spot all night.”

“You didn’t.” Sherlock shook his head. “You didn’t say that.”

“I did,” John smiled at him.

“You said ‘that’s rich’. You said it after I called you a liar…so, you think I’ve lied to you about something?” Sherlock pushed the subject, taking the bed controls in his hand to raise himself into a sitting position. As the bed moved, John stepped back a little. “What?”

“Nothing, Sherlock, really. You just heard me wrong.” John dismissed.

“I did not!” Sherlock snapped at him quietly, “I heard what I heard and I can see by your expression now you’ve been caught out. So if you’re mad at me about something, I’d rather you told me why.”

“Stop it, Sherlock, you’re starting a fight over nothing.” John kept his tone as even as he could. “Really, Love, you just misheard me.” He pushed his hands into the pockets of his jeans and forced another smile. “Calm down, it’s bloody early and people are sleeping.”

“You’re angry at me over something, you always do that stupid chin thing when you’re angry and you’re doing it now. Stop telling me I’m deaf and start telling me what it is you think I’ve done that’s so wrong.” Sherlock demanded, his teeth gritted in the hopes it would stop his voice getting higher with anger.

“You really want me to do this here?” John asked, giving up his falseness and finally displaying the hostility that was bubbling inside of him.

Sherlock nodded, “I’d rather we didn’t have to do it, but I can’t sit here with you behaving like this.”

“Fine,” John nodded his head, his lips pursed as he gathered his starting statement in his mind. “Well, first off, Greg’s stepped down off your case because if he didn’t, he was going to be sacked. And he was going to be sacked because of the lies he’s told for you. Well, specifically, one big one.” John licked his lips and raised his eyebrows as he watched the realisation quickly sweep over Sherlock’s face. “How could you keep a lie like that from me?” He asked, “You have spent however long since Greg put his job on the line for you being inches from being tried for manslaughter!”

Sherlock paled impossibly. He closed his eyes, everything hitting him at once. He didn’t know what to say; this conversation arising with John had never been something he’d prepared for.
“What was his name? The kid.” John asked.

“Mark.” Sherlock said quietly, staring at the foot of his bed.

“Mark Skinner?” John asked and Sherlock nodded in a daydream. “And when you met Skinner here the other day, did you know? Did you know who he was?”

“No,” Sherlock shook his head. “Not straight away.”

“When?” John shrugged, “When did you know?”

“I thought about it a lot when we were in the canteen.” Sherlock admitted.

John’s face fell in on itself. He shook his head, “Please do not tell me you said ‘I love you’ because you knew all of this was coming.”

Sherlock looked up at him, his eyes big and his pupils sharp. “It wasn’t the only reason I felt like I should let you know that you’re important to me.”

“But it was a factor!” John laughed sarcastically, anger like never before rising hotly in his stomach. “And even then you didn’t think it would be a wise idea to let me in on this big, bloody secret?”

Sherlock swallowed heavily, “I hoped…”

“What?” John growled, “You hoped what, Sherlock? That yet again Mycroft or Greg would sweep your mistakes under the rug for you?” He shook his head in utter disbelief. “We have pasts, Sherlock, and that this kid died while the two of you were smacked out of your head is a tragedy and I don’t know the facts but I dare say he’d have died with somebody else handing him the stuff if he hadn’t died with you; but, Sherlock, in what world did you ever think that you could pretend like it didn’t happen, or that your brother and Greg haven’t risked their…everything to get you to this point?”

“I hoped somebody would work it out.” Sherlock said. “Who Inspector Skinner was.”

“I suppose you’ve already come to the conclusion that Mycroft and I have?” John asked, about to tell him when Sherlock nodded.

“That he was the one who shot me? Yes.” Sherlock said quietly. “I’m sorry.”

“You’re not sorry, Sherlock; you don’t know how to feel badly for your actions or their repercussions on others.” John pointed his left index finger at him. “You don’t know how to be sorry for anyone or anything you have ever said or done.”

“You really believe that?” Sherlock asked, sadness clouding his eyes. “I’ve been sorry for what happened to Mark since the moment I knew what had happened. All evidence pointed towards me and I couldn’t prove otherwise, but I didn’t kill and I didn’t inject him, either. But I was there, beside him, and he had my DNA on him, my blood, my hair. My fingerprints were on the needle.”

“So not only were you smacked up, but you were risking HIV and Hep, too?” John spat. “You were there when a guy died of an overdose, all roads lead to you and you were providing the drugs. It’s not wonder you couldn’t prove otherwise, Sherlock. You are responsible!”

“I’m sorry.” Sherlock said, teeth gritted and face crumbling. “I’ve been sorry, I will always be sorry. But in being sorry, I can do nothing to bring him back. I didn’t ask Lestrade to do what he did and I didn’t ask for Mycroft’s help but they gave it freely. I didn’t touch anything from then on, I swear on
that, and if you don’t believe me you can ask Lestrade for the proof. He makes me have drugs tests monthly, and Mycroft watches me pee into a cup to make sure of it. If that doesn’t prove to you, or to them, that I am sorry and will remain sorry for as long as I live, then I don’t know what else I can do to prove it.”

John’s jaw jutted to the side and he sighed slowly, shaking his head as he tried to regain a modicum of control over his feelings. “What does it mean now?” He asked, pushing his argument with Sherlock over his lying down for the moment, and focused on what was ahead of them. “For you, Lestrade and Mycroft. And Jack Skinner. What’s next? Because I’m assuming either he goes down, or you three do.”

Sherlock shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. “I don’t know.”
Mycroft knew by the quiet that greeted him when he arrived to meet Sherlock and John with a car, finally seeing the day that Sherlock would leave the hospital, that the two were not completely comfortable with one another, and he knew perfectly well why. Sherlock sat, dressed and pale faced, in the wheelchair with his bag on his knee while John finished the final paperwork with the nursing staff, perched on the bed as he signed discharge papers and took their numerous leaflets and telephone numbers for outside support.

“You’re ready to leave?” Mycroft asked, towering over his brother. Sherlock peered up at him and nodded his head and Mycroft could immediately read his fear, his obvious nervousness. “And I assume…”

“Yes.” Sherlock said bluntly. He fixed Mycroft with a fierce stare. “I don’t know what I’m supposed to do now.”

“Go home, brother mine, and wait for the storm to pass.” Mycroft said, examining his gloved hands. Sherlock chewed his lower lip, “It’s not home - and besides, for how long will it be home? I’m going to prison.” He gritted his teeth.

“That’s a tad dramatic, don’t you think?” Mycroft said, moving to stand behind Sherlock and put his hands onto the handles of the wheelchair. Sherlock turned at the waist.

“Get off,” He snapped.

“Hospital policy, little brother - it’s me, John or the nurse and I’m fairly certain John’s temper would see you pushed into the direction of the first oncoming ambulance.” Mycroft said firmly in a whisper in Sherlock’s ear as he bent slightly at the waist to meet his height. “Inspector Lestrade is waiting at the house; a plan is to be made or all three of us rot. Get it straight in your head, Sherlock, or so help me God…” He snapped back up as he heard John thanking the nurse behind them. “Ready, John?”

“Yes,” He said, reading over a docket in his hand, “We need to go to the pharmacist on the ground floor before we go - they’ve given a prescription to begin prophylactic antibiotics, it should help keep the UTIs at bay. Once they’re up, his GP should be able to continue them monthly.” Sherlock looked over his shoulder at John. “I can do that, Mycroft.” He said, gesturing his hands at the wheelchair.

“No bother, John, really. Somewhat reminiscent of taking him to feed the ducks when we were children.” Mycroft pushed a doughy smile to his face, but it quickly fell.

“It’s not a goddamned pram!” Sherlock snapped.

“Mycroft, really. If you want to help, take that bag off his knee.” John insisted, nudging Mycroft aside gently to take his place. Despite the hostility that existed, and would for a while, John placed his hand affectionately on Sherlock’s shoulder before he began walking, guiding the chair smoothly from the ward. The cold air was a welcomed treat and, as it blew back his curls, Sherlock closed his eyes and inhaled deeply. It felt like a lifetime since the freedom of breathing in the ridiculous, London city air had been afford to him and he savoured it. John’s hand landed on his shoulder again softly and he opened his eyes, turning his head to the left to look around at him. “You’re doing okay?”

Sherlock smiled in a small movement; despite everything, love remained. “Yes.” He nodded his head and exhaled a relaxing sigh. “Just want to get home.” John gave his shoulder a squeeze before
withdrawing his hand.

“The car?” He turned to Mycroft.

“Your car.” Mycroft said, pointing toward the short-stay carpark. “A driver of mine will operate it today, of course, but it is designed to suit you both. There is rear access in which the wheelchair is secured. No need move transferring.”

Sherlock frowned. “So you roll me in the back and hope for the best?”

“Secure you, Sherlock,” Mycroft said, “Secure you in the back. But yes, that is the general idea. Hoping for the best.”

Sherlock scowled. “John, has my brother told you that Lestrade is waiting for us?”

Barely over the crossing that allowed on foot access to the carpark, John stopped walking and turned to his right to glare at Mycroft. “Is he?”

“We all need to be on the same page, John.” Mycroft said swiftly, trying his hardest not to swipe Sherlock across the back of his head. “You wanted to know as much as we could tell you, and you deserve to know it. Once we are back at the house, that conversation will take place.”

“His first day out of hospital and you want me to sit with you all and consider the steps to seeing him locked up, seeing you all locked up?” John raged, aware he was in public. “I haven’t even seen the home I’m moving into and it’s already a den of lies.” He gave the wheelchair a vigorous shove and continued to walk into the carpark. After a few steps, he stopped again and turned to Mycroft. “He’s your little brother - how do you let something like this go on, or happen in the first place?”

“John, don’t - not here.” Sherlock said quietly, turning awkwardly to look at them both.

“There isn’t a good place to do this, Sherlock. And I’m not sure I can sit in a car with you both knowing what we’re going home to do.” John said, remarkably calm.

“You make it sound like we’re going to kill someone.” Mycroft said, brows crooked. Nobody said anything for a moment. “Shall we?” Mycroft pointed into the carpark, and John spotted what he assumed was the car.

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The house exceeded all of John’s preconceptions; a three-storey conversion, the house contained lift access to all floors, including the basement, with an open plan wetroom and lowered countertops in the kitchen for easier access to Sherlock. The floors were devoid of carpet, but finished in painted wood, and the doorframes were widened and allowed the home to flow effortlessly, with Sherlock being able to get complete, independent access, to every single room. The house, from the outside, was accessible by a mobility lift or the original flight of stone steps and everything within the house was brand new, with the exception of the items Mycroft had ensured were transferred over from Baker Street; the kitchen wall, for instance, was the new home of Sherlock’s headphone wearing skull.

But despite his new, rather awe-inspiring surroundings, John couldn’t find it in himself to be enthusiastic about anything. Once he was sure Sherlock was settled, helping him to sit on the sofa
with an avalanche of cushions supporting his back, his temper switched back to it’s earlier setting and he stood, staring between the three men on the various seats in the lounge, while he tried to find a way of starting his argument without yelling at them all or using the F word.

“John…” Greg began, a cup of coffee nursed between both hands, and John immediately shot his hand up to silence him.

“None of you have any right to tell me anything other than the real truth right now, so whatever plan you all have to tell me to relax, stay calm, or apologise, wipe it off the slate because I don’t want to hear it.”

Sherlock hated that tone in John’s voice, the tone that was disappointed more than angry, and sad more than anything else. “But you need to understand why we didn’t tell you, rather than the nature of what we didn’t say.”

“It’s clearly because you didn’t trust me.” John snapped, standing at the fireplace. “We sleep together, Sherlock. In the same bed. Have done for a blood year, and you still couldn’t tell me this?”

“There’s a reason for it.” Sherlock insisted.

“So tell me!” John groaned, thrusting his arms out at his sides.

Greg sighed, “Let us tell you then…” He said, “Calm down, sit down, and give us the chance.”

“I’m fine here.” John said, softening his tone. “But feel free to go from the top.” Mycroft looked first to Sherlock, monitoring the expressions he made that made it clear to him he was in pain but not willing to turn the subject around from something that clearly needed addressing.

“The lad that…died. It wasn’t Sherlock’s fault. He was off his face, so was the Skinner kid. And I believed Sherlock when he said he didn’t give him the skag because Sherlock was out of it when we found him. But Sherlock’s fingerprints were everywhere and the lad…he and Sherlock…” Greg sighed, “They’d had sex beforehand; the scene, and the kid himself, was teaming with Sherlock’s DNA and there was nothing to support Sherlock’s word other than the word itself. And me being able to tell when he’s lying wasn’t a good enough case.”

“No matter what Sherlock would have said or how much proof he had to the contrary, DNA evidence goes further than verbal testimony,” Mycroft added. “So to avoid a trial, Lestrade and I worked where we had to to ensure that the DNA evidence didn’t produce the result that it should have and therefore it would keep Sherlock out of custody.”

“I gave a statement…saying that I’d given him the drugs but hadn’t stayed in the building. There weren’t street cameras in the area, so my word was enough then because of the lack of physical evidence.” Sherlock went on.

“It didn’t change that there was a dead twenty year old, and Jack Skinner wasn’t going to accept his brother had just topped himself. But that was the official verdict. Except, somewhere along the line, Skinner worked it out. It started a few years ago with emails, letters… and then about a week after Skinner put in an application to be taken onto the team I got in touch with Mycroft again to tell him that it was time to rethink our stories.” Greg explained. “But before anything could change, Sherlock was shot. The case was supposed to occupy Sherlock enough to get him out of Baker Street because Skinner knew the address. But he’d followed us and nothing mattered from there on out because Skinner took the law into his own hands.”

“How are you all so comfortable with this?” John asked, staring at them in turn.
“We’re not.” Greg shook his head. “Not at all. But when you’ve had six years to keep the secret and try to keep him safe,” He nodded at Sherlock, “You learn to live with it.”

“Almost.” Mycroft muttered.

“So you lied because the truth wouldn’t save you from the sort-of-lies the evidence was presenting?” John clarified. Sherlock nodded his head. If John had deduced from Sherlock’s pale face that he was tired and in pain, he didn’t react to it. “Then why not just fake an eyewitness, or tell them Sherlock was working with you that night…?”

“Because Sherlock’s DNA would still have been on the scene, and on the Skinner kid.” Greg explained again. “If we hadn’t presented it but slightly altered, the DNA could have been run again and they’d have worked it out.”

“But to cover up something like this…” John couldn’t work it out in his head.

“It was that,” Sherlock said, arching his back, “Or go to jail. If I was lucky, I’d have had a good judge who’d not have made it a life term. But…but there was no guaranteeing that, nor was I about to be charged for something…that I didn’t do.”

John stepped forwards and sat on the arm of the sofa Mycroft was perched on. “Are you in pain?” He asked Sherlock with a quiet, measured voice. Sherlock nodded his head, his cheeks beginning to flush. “I’ll get your meds out of the bag; they prescribed Gabapentin - it’ll take a few hours and it might need building up over a few days, but it’s supposed to be good for SCI.” He got to his feet. “I’m still mad, at all of you. But I can’t change what you guys did before I even knew you existed. And at the minute, all I care about is making sure he doesn’t need to be readmitted.” He pointed at Sherlock before he walked quietly out of the lounge and across the hallway into the kitchen.

John turned when the floorboards creaked behind him and shot Greg a half-hearted eyebrow raise by way of a hello as he joined him in the kitchen. Popping Sherlock’s tablets out onto a saucer, he set it on the counter before grabbing a glass from the glass-fronted cabinet and filled it with cold water from the tap.

“I’m pissed, Greg, so don’t come in here with the fatherly eyes and think that you’re going to be able to wipe clean all of this by being nice.” John said as he switched off the tap.

“I know,” Greg nodded. “And you’ve got every right to be angry. I won’t take that from you, and neither will they.” he inclined his head out of the doorway. “But right now we’ve got to work on how we’re going to keep Sherlock safe. Jack won’t let this go now that he’s succeeded in hurting him and he’ll push for a late conviction and one for Mycroft and me, too if we don’t find a way of shutting him down and getting everything straightened out…or buried, sometime soon.”

“I don’t want to lie.” John snapped, slamming the glass down onto the counter beside the saucer. “...but losing him - losing you all - would break my heart.”

“Mine too,” Greg said quietly. “I’m sorry - for what it’s worth.”

“Not a lot right now.” John said, seriously.

Greg sighed and nodded. “I deserve that.”

“And more.” John said firmly. “You all do.” He leaned back on the counter behind him. “Why couldn’t you just tell me?”

“The less people it spread around the better. You never wondered why Sally Donovan hates him?
She was new on my team, very new, by the book and above board in the extreme. A rookie. Sherlock flounced into the room as he does after Mycroft and I let him know he’d be clear and there was no visual signs that he understood much; you know Sherlock, you get the lack of emotions, but Sally didn’t. She still doesn’t. The boy died and she blamed Sherlock; or at least she thought he should have been held accountable for his part.” Greg shrugged his shoulders. “Perhaps she’s right - but Sherlock’s been like the son I never got the chance to have, and I wasn’t about to see him and that brain of his be thrown on the shit-heap. With the...Asperger’s and the general way he is, he’d be slaughtered in a prison.”

John nodded his head and folded his arms across his chest. “I’m afraid for him. If you two can’t help him yet again, he’ll die.”

Greg nodded his head. “That’s why we’re going to make sure nothing happens. Mycroft’s working on it.” Greg stared at John for a moment before he spoke again. “Want me to give him those?” He pointed at the medication.

“No - I’ll do it.” John turned and picked up the glass and saucer. The yellow Gabapentin caplets rolled around, bashing into the small, rounded diazepam pill. He walked past Greg and back into the lounge, leaving the Detective standing in the kitchen in silence, trying to work out how he ever thought that lie he absolutely had to tell to save Sherlock would ever remain safe.
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning for homophobia.

John woke up first when the morning arrived. Or at least he thought he had. Beside him, Sherlock was making contented snuffling sounds as he slept, that sweet arch in his top lip exposing his front teeth as he slumbered on in a way that made him look utterly relaxed. John wondered, for a moment, if that was truly the case or if he’d been awake during the times John had managed to capture an hour or so of precious sleep. He felt warm and safe in the closeness of being beside Sherlock, intimately and privately, for the first time in weeks. He could lie here forever, he considered. And then the tinkling of china in the kitchen below him reminded him that Mycroft hadn’t dared leave the house that night, and the feel of total privacy and closeness disappeared.

“Sherlock.” He whispered, and turned so he could place his hand in Sherlock's arm comfortably. “Hey, Love, come on.” He rubbed his hand up and down when it met Sherlock's flesh. “Mycroft's in the kitchen, if that isn’t a reason to be awake I don't know what is.”

Sherlock's face crumpled in on itself and he closed his mouth as he began to wake up. He smacked his lips and opened his eyes with a slow drag. John smiled.

“Morning.” John said quietly, turning onto his side. Sherlock’s body stayed still but he turned his head to John.

“Hi.”

“Sleep okay?” John asked quietly. Sherlock nodded his head. “Ready to get up? Your brother’s still here. I was kind of hoping he’d have gone off early, you know, got a kick start on sorting everything out.”

“John,” Sherlock closed his eyes as he sighed out his name. When he opened them again, he focused on John’s face. “Let me wake up before you start hating me again.”

“I don’t hate you. God, Sherlock, I could never hate you, despite what you think or how angry I get. I love you too much. But I’m angry and I’m hurt, and I feel guilty, too.” John admitted.

“Why? Why do you feel guilty? You didn’t do anything wrong.” Sherlock frowned, his sleepy face gaining colour as his body came to life.

“I must have,” John said, brows knitting together. “If you feel like you can’t talk to me, I must be doing something wrong.”

Sherlock shook his head, “This is different, John. It’s like asking for help, or telling you I’m hungry, it’s really different - life-alteringly different.”

John nodded, “That’s exactly why you should have been able to talk to me. I want to spend the rest of my life with you and I can’t do that if we can’t communicate.”

“Kiss me.” Sherlock said suddenly. “Please.” John tilted his head a little, but Sherlock insisted. “It’s
the morning and you love me, so kiss me. Kiss my forehead, hug me, touch me - just do something so I know that you’re still here.”

“I am here.” John said firmly.

“So show me.”

John shuffled across the bed without further request and first kissed Sherlock’s forehead; his skin was warm against his lips and he tasted of sweat and himself. Leaning back on his elbow, John leaned his head down and kissed Sherlock’s lips at an odd angle. But Sherlock kissed him back and it felt comfortable; it felt right, like home, like returning to something so close to normal it was almost perfect.

As John pulled his head back, Sherlock looked at him with his blue eyes wide and searching. “Promise me that no matter what happens now, with everything to do with Skinner, you won’t forget that this is the me that you love?”

John had to take a moment to process his words and tried to keep himself from crying. Sherlock was right, of course. This was the man he loved; the eyes, the nose, the hair, the smell… Sherlock back then was a man he couldn’t even have begun to process, but this man right here was a man he knew well and he knew that that was what he had to hold onto.

John nodded his head. “I promise.”

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In the mid-morning, Mycroft had called for Greg to rejoin them at the house. The four sat together in nominal silence for a while before Greg handed Sherlock the folder he’d brought with him. “That’s what your brother and I have collated on Skinner in the last couple of months.”

Taking the folder, Sherlock placed it on his knee as he put effort into moving the wheelchair. He drew it to a halt at the dining room table and John, Mycroft and Greg followed him into the dining room and took a seat each around him. Sherlock opened the folder out on the table and looked at the photograph. Along with Jack Skinner’s picture, there was a passport-sized photograph of Mark clipped into the inside jacket of the file. He stared at it for a moment, then looked up at Greg who has positioned himself on the furthest seat from him. “Couple of months.” He said, craning his neck.

Greg pulled a face, one Sherlock couldn’t work out the meaning of, before he spoke. “Yeah - we knew he was sniffing around.”

“And telling me about that would have been...useful?” Sherlock snapped the folder shut. He looked at John, “You’re right - not being told things is not a nice position to find yourself in.”

“We were trying to work out his intentions.” Mycroft cut in.

“I could have helped,” Sherlock whipped his head around to bark at his brother on his left hand side.

“How?” Mycroft smirked, “But giving him a bolus of heroin, too?”

John’s lurched forward in his chair, “Oi! Don’t.”
“You’re never going to let it go, are you?” Sherlock shook his head. “Or accept what I say. I did not make him take it. I just provided it to him. You know all about providing people with things, Mycroft.”

“Would you two stop it!?” John smacked his hand down on the table top. “Arguing isn’t going to get us any answers here.” He folded his arms and sat back in the dining chair. “You lot are the masterminds, but it’s pretty clear to me that something needs to be done to cement Jack Skinner being locked up without there being any repercussions, so is there anything in that folder that’s incriminating enough to imprison him somewhere and...discredit anything he says?”

Sherlock looked at John, then back down at the file. He opened it again and then set his eyes on Greg. “Well, is there?”

“Possibly.” Greg nodded and leaned forwards against the table. “Skinner’s was brought up on charges whilst he was in the Navy. Aggravated assault of a fellow officer who made some slur toward him.”

“What kind of slur?” John asked.

Greg rubbed the back of his neck out of awkwardness and tried to work out how to word his next statement. “A sexual one…” he began. “Kind of insinuated…”

“The younger inferred that Skinner was homosexual when jibing at him, using the term ‘don’t be such a fag’, Skinner turned on him with his fists raised and began to beat him while yelling out that he was ‘not a dirty, AIDS infected, fucking bender’.” Sherlock read aloud and looked up, his eyes going between the three men before him.

“That’s polite.” John said without mirth.

“Seems homosexuality rubs Skinner up the wrong way; one more for the tickbox list of reasons why Sherlock and Mark being acquainted was such an angering thing.” Mycroft said.

John shifted awkwardly in his seat. “You don’t have to pretend that Sherlock has had partners in the past. So much has happened in the time before we knew one another, we’d be naive to think we were one and others ‘one and only’.”

“And yet you squirm at the mere mention.” Mycroft commented.

“Stop it.” Sherlock rolled his eyes and twisted his neck. “I’m getting a headache.”

“Look, my thought was that perhaps we could lay that down as reasoning for all of this. Skinner shot you out of hatred for your past relationship with his brother. The original case between you and Mark needn’t even be a factor, other than that you’re both named.” Greg said hopefully.

“Won’t stop him singing though.” John said quickly. “The first thing he’ll do is demand people look into his brother’s death.”

“I know, but he’ll be branded a homophobe being locked up from the very beginning, go down for a hate crime. Anything he says derogatory about Sherlock will be seen as a continuation of that.” Greg explained.

John shrugged, “There’ll be sympathisers. Neo-nazi cocks who’ll know a guy who knows a guy who’ll be able to get their hands on a class-A lawyer to go over the old stuff. They’ll rerun the DNA analysis and the walls will crumble.”
“They can’t rerun the DNA analysis.” Mycroft said. “There was a DNA database cull and things were wiped when they were considered to be of innocent people, or already solved cases. Mark Skinner’s case was open and shut. There is no further sample to test.”

Sherlock’s head shot up from where he’d been reading the file and he stared at his brother. “What?”

Greg nodded his head. “It’s true.” He allowed himself a half-smile of success. “But we’re not out of the woods - to bring Jack down for the shooting we need to start from the top. And it needs to be done properly. You two need to come to the station and you need to name him as the gunman, say he was threatening you, making hate-crime threats.”

“We can falsify emails and texts to cement that.” Mycroft said.

“More lies.” John shook his head. “I won’t lie.”

“Not even for me?” Sherlock turned his head to him. The room fell silent and John stared at Sherlock. “It’s our way out, John. For all of us…”

“But only on a lie,” John said firmly.

“A half lie,” Greg supplied, hoping it would help.

John pushed himself up to his feet, “But a lie nonetheless, Greg.” He paced the wooden floor of the dining room and stopped behind Sherlock, peering over his shoulder at the folder. “Is that him? The kid, Mark, is that him?” He pointed at the photograph. Without looking around, Sherlock nodded his head.

“John this is the best we can come up with.” Greg’s voice sounded urgent in its delivery.

John straightened his back and reached out his left hand, cupping it around the back of Sherlock’s neck. He waved his thumb through the kinks and curls at the nape of Sherlock’s neck, watching them move between his digit. Stilling his hand, he looked up at Greg. “Fine.”
Chapter 33

John felt a lift in the atmosphere as Mycroft left, leaving him, Sherlock and Greg alone, with much less animosity than there had been when Sherlock came home. He sat with them in the dining room, fresh cups of tea before them, and actually shared a laugh. John's shoulders felt relaxed and the idea that Greg and Mycroft had a plan that sounded like it might work filled him with hope. Or it would have, if he could get the niggles out of his mind.

Greg caught him frowning in a daydream across the table and drummed his fingers. “Alright, out with it.” He said. “Something’s bugging you.”

John looked up, and wrapped his hands around his mug. “No, nothing.”

“Come on, there's something going on in your head.” Greg said with his brows crooked.

John looked at Sherlock, then sighed. “I don't think it's going to work. This placing Skinner at the scene thing. It sounds great, like a walk in the park, but for one thing.”

“What one thing?” Sherlock asked, frowning.

“They've got statements,” John pointed to Greg, “From you, saying you don't know who shot you, you couldn't see anything, that nothing had been going on. You go back on that now and place Skinner in the middle of our lives, you're lying…” He shrugged.

Sherlock's brows knitted together tightly. “Oh…”

Greg hit the table lightly with his fist.

“...they'll ask why you were so sure of there being no clues before and now there's loads. I'm not shitting in your Sunday hats, I'm just...worried. If I can see it, so will everyone else.” John shrugged his shoulders again.

“No, it's...you're right.” Greg scrubbed his face with his hands. “Shit.”

“Sherlock-,” John thrust back his chair as Sherlock drew the wheelchair away from the table. “Don't just turn from me, we need to talk about this.”

“No we don't.” Sherlock said with gritted teeth as he struggled to pass through the wide doorway in his temper, colliding the footplate with the skirting board. “Jesus Christ!” He yelled.

“Stop it.” John demanded, walking around the table to meet Sherlock. He took the handles of the wheelchair.

“Get off!” Sherlock yelled at him, as he tried to propel the chair into the wall again in pure anger.

“No,” John tugged harder, finally outweighing Sherlock's attempts. “Calm down, for christ’s sake.”

“I can't even storm out of the room without fu-.. God!” He slammed his hands down onto his thighs.

“Stop it!” John warned him and cupped his hands around Sherlock's wrists. “Just stop.” His voice calmed, softening to soothe Sherlock's temper. “I know you're frustrated and I'm sorry if you think I'm putting up roadblocks but I want whatever we come up with to be airtight. I don't want...I don't want to lose you.”
Greg watched them, feeling awkward and sympathetic. He wanted to say something that might help, but he couldn’t imagine what would.

“I didn’t do anything wrong.” Sherlock said, breaking down. “I didn’t hurt him… and now Skinner’s going to get away… with everything.”

“We won’t let that happen,” Greg cut in. “Really, Will. We won’t. Je jure devant Dieu…”

“Ne fais pas ça,” Sherlock shook his head, pulling his arms free from John’s loose grip. He gripped the large wheels of the wheelchair and moved awkwardly out of the room and across into the lounge.

“What did you say?” John asked, peering back at Greg.

“I promised him we’d do everything we could.” Greg paraphrased.

He nodded, “What’d he say?”

“Told me not to promise.” Greg said, sighing. He got up from the table, abandoning his tea. “Mind if I talk to him, just the two of us?”

“Be my guest,” John gestured toward the lounge with a flat hand. “He’s not letting me in today, maybe you’ll have more success.” He thrust his hands into his pockets and wandered into the kitchen.

Greg continued across the large hallway and stepped into the lounge with a cough by way of announcement. “Vous ne devriez pas pousser John tellement. Il est la meilleure chose que vous avez sur votre côté droit maintenant.” He said softly, inviting himself to sit down on the sofa. “Will, il ne faut pas prétendre que vous n’êtes pas mal ici parce que nous savons tous que vous êtes. Et c’est correct d’avoir peur. Mais plus vous poussez, plus il a de chances d’abandonner.”

Sherlock sighed heavily. “I’m not just frightened, I’m terrified. Mostly because of that! I don’t want him to realise how deep we’re in here, or how much I can’t give him. Why’s he staying around? Loyalty?”

“He loves you, though God knows why.” Greg shook his head. “Your brother and I will do everything we can to make sure nothing happens to you.”

“It already happened,” Sherlock said aggressively, opening his hands out at his sides.

Greg’s face paled. “I know that, Will.” He exhaled slowly. “You won’t go to prison. I won’t allow it. We’ll do whatever we have to.”

“Including risking it all, like John said?” Sherlock shook his head. “You’re an idiot, Lestrade.” He arched in the chair, his back beginning to ache. It was getting worse; he’d been home twenty-four hours and he was already struggling. He was hiding it well, but the pain in his back was reaching levels similar to when he was in the hospital and he was loathe to admit it to anyone for fear they’d take him back in.

“Yeah, thanks Will, I’m well aware.” Greg tutted.

Sherlock craned his neck back in annoyance and then snapped his head back up to look at Greg with a glare. “Don’t mock me, I’m being serious. You can’t promise I won’t be taken down for all of this, so stop offering it up like some kind of saving grace because it isn’t helping. I have nothing to go on to defend myself against Skinner if he looks to get me convicted for Mark’s death. And do you really think he won’t try just because he managed to ruin my life?”
Greg could only stare at him; he didn’t know what to say. He knew Sherlock had every right to be fearful, but he wanted to try to protect him and in doing that, he wanted to tell Sherlock how much he intended to fight. “It isn’t ruined.”

“Isn’t it?” Sherlock tongued his left cheek. “I can’t walk, can’t run, can’t turn over in bed without having to sit up and drag my dead legs about first. I can’t take myself to the bathroom because I don’t know when I have to go, so I have a bag strapped to my leg and I sit in a nappy. I can’t show John that I love him…”

“Will…” Greg tried to cut across him.

“I’m half a person, in an adult-orientated pushchair, with internal organs that could give up and kill me at any point, and I am in pain every second, of every minute, of every single day. And something I was a bystander to threatens to be the reason I die in a prison. Tell me again, Greg how my life isn’t ruined.”

“You’ve got John.” Greg said without a thought.

Sherlock shook his head, “For how much longer?” He placed his hands on the wheels of his chair and reversed to give himself enough space to turn around, and left the lounge. He moved slowly into the kitchen, abandoning Greg, and looked sheepishly at John. “Help me?” he said quietly.

John turned to face him, leaving the dishes, and scrubbed his hands dry in the dishtowel. “With what, Love?” he asked with raised brows.

“My back…” Sherlock shifted to his right side, almost trying to lift his buttocks, then did the same to the left. “No matter how I move I can stretch it out.”

“You can’t get up, Sherlock.” John said, dropping the dishtowel onto the counter top. “I’d love nothing more than to help you stretch out your back on your feet, but the only thing I can do is get the yoga mat and help you with stretches on the floor.” He gave Sherlock a sympathetic smile. “What is it?” He asked, stepping closer to Sherlock. He leaned on the counter with his hip and fixed his eyes on Sherlock’s. “Love, tell me.”

Sherlock sat back, his breathing making his chest rise and fall too fast. He closed his eyes and let out a measured breath, trying to regain control. “I can’t go to prison, John. I don’t care if we have to lie - I can’t do it.”

“They’ll find something.” John said, crouching down on his toes. “Love, look at me. They’ll do it - it’s Greg, and bloody Mycroft. Together they’re the British Government with a legally obtained gun!” Sherlock smirked despite the anguish. “I believe in them, Love. You should, too. And I believe in you.”
Just as an FYI I got soppy with John and Sherlock. I had Westlife playing (I Wanna Grow Old With You, if you're interested!) and I couldn't escape a little slushy scene.

Greg checked the door of his office was tightly closed before he opened the folder; John’s words rang in his mind as he went over the documents that had been collected since the night Sherlock was shot. They all pointed in the same direction and he knew John was right. ‘No idea’, ‘Nothing strange’, ‘No threats’, ‘Didn’t see…’. So many different ways of saying the same thing: they couldn’t start pinning Skinner down for this now. He flicked the document closed and sat back in his chair, and rubbed both hands across his face with a groan. Maybe Sherlock was right, maybe there was no way out. Mycroft’s reach would only go so far, and Greg knew his arm of the law paled in comparison. He felt guilt rise in his stomach, feeling like he was failing Sherlock completely.

He took his phone from his desk and fanned through his contacts. He was about to hit call over Mycroft’s name when there was a knock on his door and it slowly opened without invitation.

“Sir?”

Greg looked up, brows raised in quiet questioning. “What’s up?”

Donovan shifted on her feet for a moment before she stepped inside and pushed the door closed behind her. “It’s Skinner,” She said, hovering by his desk. “He wants to question the freak tomorrow, now he’s home.”

Greg shrugged his shoulders, “I’m not on the case.” He said flatly. “It’s Jack’s now.”

“I know,” Sally nodded her head. “But - it’s a waste of time. He’s spoken to him, you’ve spoken to him; he doesn’t know anything and neither does Doctor Watson. It’s a waste of resources. I’ve told him but he’s insisting that Sherlock Holmes knows who shot him.”

“If he does, he’d have said by now.” Greg said, passing his phone from hand to hand. “He’s not entirely stupid, he knows when to stop saving his intellect and start saving his life.”

“He hasn’t said anything to you then?” She asked, pushing her hands into the pockets of her suit trousers.

Greg frowned at her, “That’s why you’re in here? Do Jack’s dirty work for him.” He scratched the side of his head with his phone. “No, Donovan, I know nothing. John and I weren’t there when he was shot. That title belongs to you. Has Jack questioned you yet?”

Sally frowned, “He’s got no reason to.”

“Oh he has,” Greg widened his brown eyes. “You were present at the scene of a crime; that makes you a witness. Your meagre statement isn’t going to cover you with Jack once he realises he could probably pull a little more from you.” Sally shifted her feet on the spot. “God help poor Charlie when Jack gets around to him.”
“Charlie doesn’t know anything. You know that. You talked with him, Dimmock did too. If he knew anything he’d have said, but it was raining and he was in awe of Sherlock Holmes to look anywhere but at his face!” Sally shook her head and drew her hands from her pockets, crossing them over her chest. “And I didn’t see a thing, I wasn’t that end of the car.”

“Sally until someone brings Jack a confession on a silver plate, he’s not going to let up digging at Sherlock for whatever he knows, or thinks he knew, or nearly bloody knew once. So suck it up.” Greg looked at her with a firm expression on his face. “It was threatening to snow tomorrow, if you’re off round to Sherlock’s for tea you might want to wear your coat.”

John reached for the TV controls on the arm of the sofa beside him and switched on the television, plunging the lounge into darkness. He’d been alone for a while, Sherlock had been hauled up in the dining room with his laptop. He walked slowly across the large hallway and through the jamb into the dining room, stopping behind Sherlock. He placed his hands on Sherlock’s shoulders and rubbed the muscles with his thumbs. “It’s gone one, Sherlock. Coming to bed?”

Sherlock shook his head. “I’m not tired.”

“You can’t sit there all night, Sherlock.” John groaned, “If nothing else, Love, you need to relieve pressure. Last thing you need on top of everything is to have ulcers on your arse.”

Sherlock turned his head, his face glowing in the light of the laptop screen, and offered John a frown of mild amusement. “Fine.” he said, reaching up his right hand to close the laptop lid.

John left Sherlock to take the elevator to the top floor while he ensured the lights were off and doors were locked before taking the stairs up to their bedroom. He dipped into the bathroom before meeting Sherlock in the bedroom, smiling at him as he dragged off his shirt and launched it across the bedroom, hoping to land it in the linen basket but missed, by about a foot, thanks to the light material. “That was a crap shot.” John giggled. “You narrowly missed the foot of the bed, it’s lying between my feet and the basket.”

Sherlock shrugged, “I was aiming for you.”

“Bastard.” John feigned annoyance. “You got something to change into? Want me to grab something?”

“I have it.” Sherlock picked up the pyjama bottoms and worn-in blue t-shirt from the side of the bed. John stood watching as he unhooked the armrest of the wheelchair and clipped back the footrests to give himself the space to transfer across to the bed. He kept his eyes fixed on Sherlock, pretending to be changing at the same time, and waited until Sherlock was perched on the edge of the bed before relaxing his shoulders.

He left Sherlock for a moment, giving him space, and changed into his PJs in silence whilst sitting on his edge of the bed. Once he was sorted, he offered Sherlock a hand as gently as he could without being too pushy. “Love, need a hand?”

Sherlock looked over his shoulder and nodded his head. “I can’t…” He sighed. He was having trouble keeping his strength to pull his body from side to side to work down his trousers.
“C’mon.” John smiled. In a matter of minutes, he’d helped Sherlock to lay flat, worked off his trousers and pulled on his pyjama bottoms. He left Sherlock alone again, letting him hook up the night bag of his catheter himself, knowing he was already skirting on thin nerves as it was.

It took a while, but once they were settled in bed John turned and lay facing Sherlock as Sherlock lay flat on his back, his hands up by his face while one twisted into his hair absentmindedly. John reached out and lay his hand across Sherlock’s waist beneath the covers. He heard Sherlock sigh and hoped it was out of contentment and not stress as he ran circles on Sherlock’s ribcage with his left index finger.

“We can’t do anything,” Sherlock said suddenly, his voice low and quiet.

John inhaled through his nose and let it out slowly, “I know.” He whispered back. “But when you’re ready, I’m sure we can find ways of bringing intimacy back.”

“This is intimate.” Sherlock said, dropping his left hand to lay lightly on John’s as it stilled on his chest. “I like this.”

John smiled into the darkness. “Good. We need something you like in our lives right now.”

“They’ll do something, won’t they?” Sherlock asked. “Mycroft and Lestrade, they’ll find something out?”

John stayed quiet a moment then nodded, his head rustling on the pillow. “I believe in them, I told you. They’ll do something.”
John woke to repeated loud bangs and the obsessive-compulsive ‘shave and a haircut’ ringing on the doorbell shortly after nine am. He stretched in the bed, and groaned at the absurdity of it. He was cold, exhausted, and not prepared for whatever dickhead was standing on the other side of the door. “If that's some bloody cold caller.”

“Ignore it.” Sherlock grumbled beside him.

John shoved his face into the pillow. “I can't listen to that for another second. I'll be humming it all day.” He pushed himself up and threw back the cover. “I'll be back, don't move.” He said with a finger pointed at Sherlock, and dragged on his dressing gown as he ambled out of the room and padded down the stairs. After pulling off the chain lock and unhooking the bolt, he pushed down the Yale deadlock and pulled open the door.

“John.” Greg smiled at him, rubbing his hands together. “Cold as a polar bear’s arse out here, going to let me in?”

“Wasn't planning on it.” John rolled his eyes. “We were sleeping.” He said, stepping aside and dragging the door open to let Greg step into the warmer indoors.

“Well you're up now!” He grinned at him, “Brew?”

“If you make it yourself.” John said, shutting the door as Greg walked straight to the kitchen. John followed him, pulling the tie tighter on his dressing gown. “What're you doing here?” He asked, bracing his hands on the closest counter top as Greg filled the kettle.

“Breakfast.” Greg threw over his shoulder from the sink.

“Funny, you are, aren't ya.” John tutted. “Seriously, mate. What're you doing here?”

Greg set the kettle into its cradle and turned it on the boil before giving John his full attention. “Skinner’s coming here today, with Donovan.”

John's face fell in on itself. “What for?”

“To talk to Sherlock, now he's ‘feeling better’.” Greg shrugged his shoulders. “I thought I'd give you fair warning, help get a story straight. Mycroft knows - he's on his way.”

“Great! That's exactly what I want - a bloody Kray twins firm meeting in my house when I'm in my bloody pyjamas.” John poked at a back right molar with his tongue.

Greg chuckled despite himself. “Bagsy not the mental one. Wait, weren't they both mental?.”

“This is serious, Greg!” John groaned. “He's grumpy as it is. You really think we can get down a proper story before Skinner and her Nibs come by for a hot lunch and sparkling water?”

“Could just make sandwiches…” Greg shrugged.

“Stop it!” John pointed at him. “I'm really worried, why aren't you? You could go down for falsifying evidence.”

Greg flattened his mouth into a thin line and nodded his head slowly, “I could. Or you could stop bloody having a canaria, get dressed while I fix us a brew, and wait til you hear what Mycroft has up
his sleeve.”

John eyed him suspiciously. “What?”

“Surprise,” Greg said childishly. ‘Go on, dressed, get Stroppy Knickers up and at ‘em while you’re there and we can get a move on with saving all our bacon.”

John and Sherlock was blessed with half an hour before Mycroft arrived at the house. John had showered and changed into clean clothes in ten minutes flat, and Sherlock had accepted his assistance appreciatively to shower, dress and land in the kitchen to fill up on coffee. When they arrived into the kitchen, Mycroft and Greg were standing in nominal silence, both holding steaming cups of tea in their hands and the kettle was boiling up to provide John and Sherlock with the same treatment.

“Don't leave us waiting then,” John said, picking up a mug for himself and Sherlock. “What's the big idea you've got up your proverbial sleeve?”

“Patience, John.” Mycroft said smoothly.

John turned to him, “Don't have the time, Mycroft. In case Inspector ‘Shave and a Haircut’ here didn't tell you, Jack Skinner is coming here. This morning!” Sherlock laughed at John's nickname for Greg and Mycroft was left frowning at the amusement between Greg and his brother. “So enough of the secrets of the Queen malarkey; what the hell are we supposed to do?”

Mycroft widened his eyes, a little in awe of the big temper from the smallest man in the room. However, he relented, seeing John’s point. “Sergeant Charles Andrew Hawkes.” Mycroft said pointedly. “The new recruit to Inspector Lestrade’s band of merry men, as it were. It would seem his memory has returned, like an amnesiac in a love story.” Mycroft mocked. “Seems young Charlie has been a little loathe to work recently, feeling a little out of sorts about his new boss. And it seems a few sessions of hypnotherapy have done the trick and finding the deep rooted cause for all this anxiety.”

“He saw Skinner.” John said, beginning to smile.

“Quite right, ten points, good man.” Mycroft rolled his eyes. “Sergeant Hawkes recalls seeing a largely built man with a… proper military walk, and knew that there was something he recognised about DI Skinner when he began investigating your case.”

“Apparently Charlie has been to see our big boss; he's reported his suspicions and said that he's been receiving hypnosis because he had a little niggle that he knew something.” Greg said shaking his head. “Given that they don't have much to go by yet and an investigation is going to be launched, boss-man says to let Jack do what he wants until we're ready to pin him for your shooting.”

“Let him do what he wants?” Sherlock asked, taking the coffee John offered to him.

“Question people, whatever - Lyle didn't want him working for us in the first place so if this comes off, he'll be as happy as a pig in shit.” Greg laughed.

“And in the meantime? If he tries to bring up Mark’s death, or the case?” John asked and sipped his tea.

Greg shrugged. “I guess Lyle will be forced to make his case then.”

“So we're not clear?” John clarified.
“No, we will be.” Greg insisted. “We just have to bide our time.”

“Yeah,” John nodded his head, “So, we’re still up shit creek until then.”

Mycroft tutted loudly, “You have a police officer as a witness, it doesn’t get more credible. Hold
your breath and count to ten, Doctor Watson. As the saying goes, it will all come out in the wash.”

“Forgive me for not being comforted by that.” John sighed into his mug as he went in for another sip.

“It’s worth a shot.” Sherlock said quietly. “I’ve said all this time, it would be Hawkes to go to for any
eyewitness stuff.”

“Doesn’t mean it’ll land him in jail.” John shook his head.

Sherlock wet his lips. “If it’s enough to keep me out by him making a plea, I’ll take it.” John regarded
him sadly; how could letting a man away with destroying your mobility and forever changing your
life be worth a plea deal and freedom?

“Love, you shouldn’t have to settle for that.” John said, quietly.

“Sergeant Hawkes is willing to make whatever statement is needed at the desired time. We have
suggested he completes more sessions, accesses his mind palace and remembers everything he can to
the clearest detail.” Mycroft said. “One doesn’t stand in the direct line of gunfire and not see
something.”

“Wait, why can he change his statement? He’ll look like a liar. We’re back to square one.” John said
suddenly. “Sherlock saying he remembered would get us into bigger trouble. If Charlie does it they’ll
claim it’s fabricated.”

Greg shook his head, “Credible witness if he’s been through therapy.”

“I’m off the morphine, doesn’t that make me a credible witness?” Sherlock asked.

“You were asked when you were lucid.” Greg said. “Will, I’d love to tell you you could go in there
and tell them anything, tell me anything and I’d take it down as your official statement, but once they
realise your links to Skinner when he inevitably opens his mouth, it’ll crash down around us - like
John said yesterday. At least with Charlie, he’s out of that loop and he’s a by-the-book newbie with a
lot to prove. They’ll take his statement outright.”

John stayed quiet a moment, his mind travelling through different channels of thought and eventually
coming to settle on Sherlock and Mark Skinner on the night that he died. He imagined Mark and
Sherlock high, naked and intimate and it flashed back and forth like an old projector. Before he knew
it, his mouth was operating quicker than his brain and he asked, “Did he call you William, too?”

Sherlock shook his head. “No.”

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it, his mouth was operating quicker than his brain and he asked, “Did he call you William, too?”

Sherlock shook his head. “No.”

“So why does he?” He pointed at Greg.

“Sentiment.” Mycroft and Sherlock said at the same time.
“It was a few nights, John. Never a relationship; sex and drugs, nothing more.” Sherlock admitted, feeling exposed. “Lestrade’s his own kettle of fish, he thinks by calling me by my mother’s chosen name for me it somehow makes him closer to me.”

“That’s not true!” Greg said with a laugh, “I just liked how one of the rehab nurses kept calling him Willy.” He pushed up his cheeks into a smile and John felt his tension lift. “John, mate, really. Charlie’s got this for us and Mycroft’s on hand with anything you need.”

“You honestly think this is going to work?” John asked, rubbing his left hand against the side of his face.

Greg nodded his head, “I really do.”

John was braced throughout the morning, waiting for the doorbell to chime again and to be greeted with Jack Skinner and Sally Donovan on the threshold. When one pm came and the two still had not materialised, he began to let himself relax a little more. With Mycroft still lingering, aggravating Sherlock in the dining room over some first edition book Sherlock had that belonged to their father, John busied himself in the kitchen, firing washing into the machine and cleaning up the mugs and plates from breakfast.

“...you’re sure that Hawkes is reliable?” Sherlock asked Mycroft quietly, watching his older brother paw over the battered but loved copy of *The Fair to Middling*, a book their father had read to them numerous times as children.

Mycroft looked up at him from his seat across the dining table. “I’m never certain anyone is reliable, but Inspector Lestrade vouches for his honesty.”

“It’s a bit of a coincidence, don’t you think?” Sherlock asked, tugging at his hair. “...suddenly remembering.”

Mycroft made a face, wrinkling up his chin. “Hypnotherapy, little brother. Apparently, it works.” Sherlock rolled his eyes. “When are you attending your physical therapy session?” Mycroft asked, closing the book carefully and fixing his attention on Sherlock.

“Tomorrow afternoon.” Sherlock said, shifting his weight.

“John is going with you?” Mycroft asked, more of a statement than a question. Sherlock nodded his head in response. “I can organise a driver.”

“John can drive.” Sherlock frowned.

“Still, I’d rather...”

“No - John’s taking me.” Sherlock insisted. “We need a normal life. You weren’t chauffeuring us around before, so stop offering it now. You’ve got to let go at some point, Mycroft. I’m going to have this life forever - you need to let me get used to it.”

Mycroft shifted his eyes over Sherlock’s face. “I’d just like to help, Sherlock.”

“You can do that by letting me settle into my life without protecting me from everything.” Sherlock said more softly than he’d intended to. “You’ve done it my entire life, you need to give up now.” Mycroft gave one, stoic nod. “However,” Sherlock said, shifting again. “If you do want to help, you can find me an appropriate wheelchair.” He tapped is hands on the armrests.

“Specifics?” Mycroft asked, brows arched.
“John and I were talking; he said the back has to be lower and stiffer, to support my spine. No arms.” Sherlock said. “Anything’s got to be better than this thing. John’s even named it.”

Mycroft pulled a face of distast. “Something cute I shouldn’t wonder.”

Sherlock smirked, “No.”

“Then I’m inclined to assume it’s distasteful.” Mycroft rolled his eyes dramatically.

“Baculum.” Sherlock said then coughed a small laugh.

Mycroft grimaced, “That’s hideous.”

“Keeps him amused.” Sherlock shrugged lightly.

“Seems to be his default,” Mycroft observed. “Humour in the extreme when the exterior of his life is less than humourous.”

“Coping mechanism.” Sherlock said.

Mycroft inclined his chin in agreement. “I suppose his religion isn’t working for him; no amount of praying stopped your injury being severe, so he might as well make a joke out of it.”

Sherlock frowned, “He’s not making a joke.”

“He’s name your mode of mobility after the bone found in the penis of animals. I’m not entirely sure it’s without humour at the entire affair.” Mycroft said sternly.

“He’s just lightening up the mood. You might want to try taking the baculum out of your anal region once in awhile and understand what it is not to spend your entire life immersed in doom.” Sherlock snapped at him.

Mycroft stared at his brother for a moment and said nothing, taking in the changing expressions on his face. His temper had never been easily controlled but Mycroft had noticed how quick to anger Sherlock was. He knew he was worried about the future - they all were - but, not for the first time, the idea that his brother was battling depression crossed his mind. How could he not face a mood alteration? He’d been through so much. However the thoughts of his brother reaching a point where years of depressed feelings, hurts and experiences came bubbling to the surface was frightening.

“Perhaps.” Mycroft said finally. “I’ll research for the wheelchair - see what I can find that will be suitable.”

Sherlock nodded his head, “thank you.”

“Did I just hear your shout anal region?” John appeared in the door frame, a mug in one hand and a damp dishtowel in the other. He smiled as both Holmes boys turned to look at him.

“Maybe.” Sherlock said, flattening his mouth to a thin line.

“What’re you reading?” he asked, nodding to the table.

“Just browsing.” Mycroft said, getting to his feet. “One of Sherlock’s favourite stories as a child. Written by Arthur Calder-Marshall. He would have our father read it night after night.”

John smiled, “I can picture that, strangely.”
“Don’t get too sentimental by the idea of books and bedtime,” Sherlock warned, pushing himself away from the table. “Keep your mind focused on being the big, mean soldier you used to be.” He looked up at John. “Last thing I want is you going soft when Skinner and Donovan get here.”
It was approaching three pm when John and Sherlock both froze, mid-conversation, at the sound of two sharp rings of the doorbell. Sherlock swallowed hard and looked at John, eyes flashing a little with fear. John gave a nod and got up from the sofa. He touched his hand against Sherlock’s shoulder as he passed him and walked into the hallway to open the door.

“John,” Jack met him with a smile on the doorstep. “Mind if Sergeant Donovan and I come in?”

John stepped back, “Not at all.” He pulled the door further open and welcomed them in even-toned. He pointed them into the lounge as he closed the door, and followed them quickly. “Tea, coffee…?” he offered.

“No, thank you.” Sally shook her head.

“No for me, thanks.” Jack held up his hand in refusal.

John rubbed his hands together, “Take a seat.” he pointed at the smaller sofa, and sat down himself beside Sherlock on the sofa opposite. “So what are you expecting us to be able to say this time, that’s different from everything that’s been said before?”

“Well,” Jack stretched out his right leg a little before him, balancing in a perch on the sofa. “I was hoping that being out of the clinical environment and settled into home life might have given you time to consider things a little more, think of anything you might have seen or heard, noticed at the scene…” he looked at Sherlock intently.

“No.” Sherlock said bluntly, pushing himself up against the sofa cushion.

“And you’re positive you were not receiving threats, any indication that an attack on you might occur?” Jack persisted.

“Positive.” Sherlock said.

“There was nothing.” John confirmed. “No blog comments, no emails, no mail. Absolutely nothing. And besides, apart from him being an arrogant dick, what is there for anyone to threaten him for? He’s a consulting detective - he helps the Met, he’s been responsible for the closing of loads of your lot’s cases,” John gestured toward Sally. “Why’d anyone want to shoot to injur?”

“Maybe the motive was to kill.” Sally said, slightly nervous. “Misfire.” She shrugged. “Anyone you really pissed off, Freak?”

“Oi.” John jerked his head back. Sally averted her eyes. “Look there hasn’t been any threats - if someone was planning this, they didn’t let us know it was coming by lighting the sky up with fireworks as an announcement.” Sherlock smirked as John raged.

“Allright,” Jack held out his hand, “this isn’t supposed to be a slanging match - I just want to be sure of what you know so we can do our best. If you say your mind still remains with the same thoughts and memories then, fine, I can’t make you remember what you don’t remember. But if there is anything at all, even the smallest thing that seems insignificant, it might be useful.”

John and Sherlock looked at one another. So great was the urge to follow the original plan, but they both held strong. “Nothing.” John shrugged his shoulders.
“Absolutely nothing.” Sherlock reiterated.

Jack nodded his head. “Okay.” he reached into his jacket pocket and drew out a notepad. “We’re not fully abreast; can you give us the precise nature of the injuries you suffered as a result of the bullets?”

“Damage to the thigh muscle on my left side, a completely severed spinal cord…” Sherlock said, without an ounce of emotion in his voice.

“It’s a T12-L1 complete spinal cord injury - the damage is at the junction of the first lumbar region of the spine; it’s caused complete, irreversible paralysis from the pelvis to the toes.” John explained. John watched as Sally swallowed and breathed deeply. “It’s thought that further damage was caused to the spine when he was moved on the street, possibly the movement dislodged a bullet that was stuck and it was what then went on to cause damage to the left kidney.”

“Extensive, life-changing stuff. I’m very sorry.” Jack said, earnestly. “But it’s because of this we need to know everything you know.”

“Like I said,” Sherlock tilted his head. “I don’t know anything.”

“Sure you two wouldn’t like that cup of tea?” John offered, eyeing Sally’s paling complexion.

“No,” Jack said, getting to his feet. As he stood, Sally followed. “I think it’s probably wise to let you two get back to your afternoon.”

“Yes…” John said, standing. “Stay there, Love, I’ll let ‘em out.” He gestured back at Sherlock, and marched into the hallway with Sally and Jack behind him. He held the door wide open and waited for them to step out before pushing it closed firmly without another word.

“Fireworks…” Sherlock let out a laugh.

“Shut up, you.” John warned, pointing his finger at him as he stepped back into the lounge. “I thought Donovan was going to vomit when we started giving her the full details.”

“I saw.” Sherlock nodded, smirking. It softened quickly, though, and he sighed. “I hope Lestrade’s right and this comes off.” He rested his back onto the sofa and looked at John to his left.

“It will. Greg has never let you down yet, has he?” John leaned down and kissed Sherlock’s forehead. “Keep the faith.” He said, tapping his right index and middle finger against Sherlock’s chest in the region of his heart. As he straightened up again, he let out a laugh. “You should have told them the ‘anal region’ story.”

Sherlock rolled his eyes and grimaced. “Then she really would have been sick.”

“One for the family album, though.” John giggled to himself. “Cuppa?” he called, heading to the kitchen.

“No,” Sherlock hollered back over a yawn. “Coffee though.”

Well?

John examined the text from Greg and couldn’t help but smile at the simple but open-ended question. He considered a long reply, considered ringing him rather than replying at all, but finally settled on a
Score one, Sherlock Holmes

He laughed to himself as he pushed his phone back into his jeans pocket. “Sherlock?” He called out, not entirely sure he knew where in the house the guy was hiding. “I’m ordering dinner, are you hungry? Chinese or Indian?” He stepped out of the kitchen, junk-mail leaflets in hand, and peered into the lounge to find it empty. “Oi, Sherlock…” he called out. “If you’re asleep somewhere odd, I swear to God I’ll kill you.” He threw the leaflets down onto the coffee table and jogged up the stairs. “Sherlock?” he called, a little quieter.

“Bedroom.” Sherlock called back.

John pushed open the door and stepped in, a little apprehensive to what he’d find. “What’re you doing?”

Sherlock had a cardboard box, upended and poured out over the unmade bed. “Looking for something. It’s not here - I had it at Baker Street, but I can’t see it.”

“What?” John asked, frowning and holding out his hands at his sides.

“A photograph.” Sherlock looked up.

John chewed his bottom lip. “Which one?”

“What? What do you mean, which one? There was only one photograph I had. One when Mycroft and I...were kids.” He said, throwing an envelope filled with old utility bills out of his way, seeing it frisbee across the room and spill the contents across the floor by John’s feet.

“Not sure destroying the place will help you find it, Love.” John said. “Why the sudden need?”

“Because I didn’t notice it wasn’t here before.” Sherlock looked up. “...and if this doesn’t work, I want to take it with me.”

“Sherlock…” John mumbled his name sadly. “Love, stop a minute, will you.” he crossed the room and perched on a clear spot on the side of the bed. “I’ll call Mycroft, ask him where it is. I’m sure he’ll know the one and will be able to say where he put it. It’ll be in a box somewhere.”

“It shouldn’t be in a bloody box!” Sherlock snapped.

“Stop it,” John raised his voice a little. “Stop bottling it up and letting it all blow out like this, just get it all out in one go. This isn’t about a grubby photograph, so get mad now and tell me everything that’s going on in that muddled head of yours.”

Sherlock blinked at him, sobering up. “I don’t want to.”

“I can’t help if I don’t know.” John shrugged his shoulders.

“You can’t help anyway, neither can Lestrade, neither can my brother…. Where the fuck is it?” he launched the box, sending it clattering into a bookshelf in the far corner of the room.

“Love, please,” John reached for Sherlock’s hands. “I know you’re scared - I’m scared - but there is no way on God’s Earth your brother is letting you go to prison for something you didn’t do; no matter what it takes, or how he has to do it, he will not let that happen. That’s one thing I know for sure about Mycroft Holmes. So put your faith in him if in nothing else. He’ll keep you right.”
Sherlock swallowed and looked into John’s eyes. “You keep me right.”

John shook his head and flattened his mouth into a thin line. He took a deep breath. “Okay then believe in me; trust that I believe in them and will do everything I can to make sure you’re safe, and that that prick will get what he deserves.” John said seriously. “I’m worried, don’t think I’m not. But I’m trying to keep it positive so that I don’t give in to the demons. I’m still working through finding everything out, being home and working life out as it’s going to be. I’m tearing out my hair, too. But we’ve got to find a level to try exist on so we can make the best of what we’ve got.”

Sherlock looked at his destruction on the bed. “I don’t want to have to change my life again.”

“We’re going to try and not let that happen. Love, there’s so much ahead of us - I won’t let you wallow, and I won’t let you let this blood chair stop you moving forwards. We’re going to do great things, you and me. Despite everything. You’re still the world’s only Consulting Detective, you know? Your brain hasn’t changed.” John touched Sherlock’s forehead in the region of his temple.
"You’re a prick.” Greg looked up as his office door burst open and Jack Skinner marched inside with his right index finger pointed at Greg and an expression of pure malice on his face.

Greg jerked his head back. “Excuse me?”

Jack shoved the door closed behind him and approached Greg’s desk, bracing his hands against it to lean in close to the DI’s face. “You heard me, Lestrade. You’re a prick. You think that because you’ve got history with Sherlock Holmes you can attempt to sabotage everything I’m doing? You’re off the case, there is no need for you to be anywhere near Holmes, or Doctor Watson.”

“I’m aware it’s your case,” Greg leaned back in his chair.

“You were seen leaving Holmes’ house.” Jack straightened up. “Want to explain that?”

“He and John are my friends. Sherlock’s just come home from the hospital, friends tend to visit other friends when that happens.” Greg folded his arms across his chest. He was waiting - hoping, praying - for Jack to slip up and be blunt, to say what Greg knew he really meant, but he knew it wouldn’t happen.

“Stay away from Sherlock Holmes.” Jack yelled at him, face firming.

“Are you slapping me with an injunction, or is that a personal threat because you know you’re not going to get a word out of him?” Greg shrugged his shoulders. “Sherlock won’t talk to you - not only is there nothing he knows, but he also doesn’t know you. There’s major trust issues with that kid and in bombarding him the way I’m assuming you have, seeing as you’re still without anything to go on, you’ll only serve to shut him down further. Continue with your case, Jack, but don’t presume to order me around. This may be your case, Jack, but this is my team…” Greg got to his feet, anger bubbling in him as his cocky resolve began to crumble.

“For how much longer?” Jack muttered and turned, storming from the office and letting the door slam behind him.

Greg sat back down and shook his head, not sure whether he was more happy that Jack was pissed off and beginning to show cracks, or angry that the man had the audacity to warn him off his friends, and parade around the offices like he hadn't been responsible for nearly killing Sherlock. He wasn't stupid - he understood what grief and anger could do to a person, but he could never imagine taking revenge on anyone. And eye for an eye didn't work, not like this.

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“Sherlock I just got a text from Molly - you up to her visiting this morning before physio?” John asked as he trod slowly down the stairs. Sherlock was in the kitchen, arguing with the kettle that didn't seem to want to balance in the cradle of the kettle tipper. John lingered at the door when he didn't get an answer and laughed as Sherlock shot the tipper his middle finger. “That'll do it, Love. Make hand gestures at it and it'll balance perfectly.”

Sherlock looked around at him. “I don't know why we have this thing, my arms work fine and I can
lift a kettle."

“It's just Mycroft thinking he was helping. I have to admit, I rather like that the kettle swings back
and forth.” John smirked, leaning on the jamb. “Did you hear me, anyway?” He changed the subject.
“Molly wants to come and see you before your physio session. She asked if you'd be up to her
popping in this morning.”

“Boring.” Sherlock intoned, managing to finally settle the kettle into the right position.

“She's missed you, and she cares.” John said with a slight scolding tone. He walked into the kitchen
and took down two mugs from the wall-mounted press. “It'd be nice to see her. You said yourself
you want to get life back on track.”

“And Molly visiting is a normal thing?” Sherlock glanced up at him. “I can't stop her coming, I don't
necessarily want her to.”

John scrubbed his hand in Sherlock's hair. “Good dog.”

“Piss off!” Sherlock jerked his head away but John was laughing.

“Speaking of visitors, I kind of expected your parents by now.” John said, thinking aloud, as
Sherlock fired tea bags into their mugs.

“Mycroft might have locked them in his basement for safe keeping.” Sherlock dead panned. “I'm
sure it won't be much longer before they land on us with idle chat and wanting to help.”

“You're too hard on them.” John said, leaning back against the counter, and watched Sherlock tip the
kettle and fill their mugs. “They're lovely, they idolise you and your brother. And they want to be
near you while you're settling back down. That's a good thing. I wish Harry was half as bothered
about me as your parents and Mycroft are about you.”

“Harry's only importance is alcohol.” Sherlock said flatly, adding milk to their drinks.

“I'm aware.” John huffed, and reached down to retrieve his tea. “Thanks,” he said, taking a slow sip.
“So - what do I tell Molly?”

“Let her come.” Sherlock waved his hand.

John smiled at his minor defeat. “Oh you know Mycroft said you can get a kind of tray-thing, let you
carry cups and stuff around, save you having to rely on people to bring things for you. It's not safe to
have a cuppa resting on your knees the way you can with a plate.”

Sherlock looked at him with a slight grimace. “So not only am I in a pram, he wants me to have a
feeding chair too?”

John rolled his eyes. “No he wants you to do everything for yourself and get your head back in the
game and, quite frankly, I want that too.”

“Yeah - my life back to normal would be wonderful. But sticking a tray on here isn’t going to do
that.” Sherlock snapped at him, then sighed. “I know you’re trying to help, but that isn’t.”

“The more physio you do, the stronger you’ll get and the more...secure you’ll feel. You’ll find ways
of adjusting to keep your own life how you want it. Being that little bit lower to the ground won’t
stop you having a proper life, a normal life. Some people are born disabled and spend their entire
lives in wheelchairs - that’s normal. You adjust, you adapt. You’re already doing that. Making a few
changes to make life easier for you isn’t making you into a baby, or taking away your normality, it’s
enhancing the life you have now and creating your new normal. Our new normal.” John’s speech
seemed to settle into Sherlock’s head and he looked at him with wide, faithful eyes.

“It’s just that this is all still hard.” Sherlock said quietly.

“I know that,” John nodded his head. “But like I said, that’s why physio is important. And the more
you talk to people and realise just what you can do, the less you’ll focus on the things you’re not able
to do the same way anymore.”

“I like how you didn't say ‘can't do’ there.” Sherlock side-eyed him. “I want to see Mrs Hudson.”

John was a little taken aback by the declaration. “After physio we could swing by?”

“You can hop on the back, I'll hightail us there.” Sherlock said flatly.

John smiled, “You're an idiot.” He swiped his arm. “Get in at the table. I'll bring you tea and fix us
breakfast, then I'm texting Molly back.”
Chapter 38

Mycroft assumed that Jack might try to contact him. He didn’t know why exactly, what reasoning he would use, but it remained in the back of his mind that he might expect a visit from the Detective Inspector at some point. He wasn’t surprised, then, when the DI arrived with Sally Donovan in tow at his official offices, with a notebook clasped in his heavy hands.

“Mr Holmes?” Jack greeted him, holding out his left hand to Mycroft. Obediently, Mycroft accepted the gesture and shook the proffered hand. “I’m Detective Inspector Skinner, this is Sergeant Donovan.”

“I’m aware.” Mycroft nodded his head. “Do take a seat,” he offered, indicating to the two leather chairs before his desk. He made his way behind it and sat down as Sally and Jack lowered into the vacant visitors chairs. “How can I be of assistance, Inspector?”

Jack cleared his throat. “I want to talk to you about your brother’s accident. I’m aware that you were not on the scene at the time of the shooting but I know that you and your brother are quite - close.” He said. “I wanted to know if you had any reason to suspect that this attack might have been planned.”

“Why would I suspect that?” Mycroft clasped his hands on the desk in front of him.

“It’s a very specific attack.” Jack said informatively.

Mycroft conceded with a nod. “I agree, it appears to be quite a targeted crime. But I have no reason to assume somebody didn’t just seize the opportunity to shut Sherlock up. My brother can be rather intransigent.”

“Does Sherlock have any enemies?” Jack asked.

“I wouldn’t be surprised. You’ve met him, Inspector; how many people do you think genuinely feel affection toward him?” Mycroft opened his hands out. “I assume what you mean is do I suspect anyone of harming him?”

Jack nodded his head. “Indelicately, yes.”

“Of course I have my suspicions. None of them are proven or rational. Sherlock is my brother; like anyone with a younger sibling who is suffering, one tends to assume guilt on anyone they meet.” He fixed Jack with a firm stare. “It would bring me nothing but mental torture if I entertained every suspicion that cropped into my mind.”

Jack shifted in the chair and the leather creaked beneath him.

“Was there anything else?” Mycroft asked and checked his watched for posterity. “My brother is attending physiotherapy today and I would rather like to be there.”

Sally looked to Jack, then to Mycroft with a confused frown. “They’re giving him physio?” She asked. “John said the injury couldn’t be reversed.”

“It cannot.” Mycroft said, eyeing her. “But to allow his muscles to waste away is to risk further complications. Sherlock’s health is precarious enough without added dangers. And the importance of a strong back cannot be overlooked.” He watched her look away. “So was there anything else?”
Jack rose to his feet, “I'm sure we can talk again at a more convenient time.”

Mycroft eyed him. “I'm sure.”

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“Alright Sherlock, that's great. Really great - you're doing really well. Okay, now Eva, just bring your hands down to his hips. I need you to keep your back as straight as possible, Sherlock; you're fully supported from falling or losing balance, but you need to put all your strength into supporting your own back.” Mike spoke with a friendly tone, instructing his assistant behind Sherlock, as Sherlock’s legs were held for balance and kept positioned by another girl in front of him as he balanced on a yoga ball with the intention of getting him to engage his back muscles fully.

“It hurts.” Sherlock said, frustrated. John stood on the sidelines, biting his thumbnail nervously, anticipating a breakdown.

“It's because you're using muscles you haven't used for a while, muscles that are now very important. It'll be uncomfortable for a while but you're gaining real strength.” Mike ensured him positively. “And key for your posture, and ability to use other equipment in the future.”

“I don't care. It hurts.” Sherlock gritted his teeth.

“Eva, can you bring your support higher again, Hun?” Mike asked calmly, nodding as Eva hovered her hands around Sherlock’s mid-back. She placed her hands supportively against the outsides of his ribcage and Sherlock immediately leaned into her support. “No, Sherlock. You need to continue to support your weight.”

“What aren't you understanding?” Sherlock snapped. “It's painful.”

“I understand.” Mike nodded, crouching before Sherlock. “But you've got to push through that to bring up the strength in your back.”

“For what?” Sherlock growled at him. “Never going to be upright again, so what's the point?”

“Sherlock, Love, come on…” John called across.

“It's okay, John.” Mike shook his head. “Sherlock for you to be able to use a standing frame, you need to be able to be upright. If you cannot sit without support, you're not going to be able to stand. If it's too much, then we can stop. But if you give up, you're giving up everything.”

“I'm not giving up.” Sherlock growled at him. “I'm in pain.”

“Okay.” Mike said, standing. “John, do you want to bring his chair over?” He looked to John. He helped Eva to fasten the handling belt around Sherlock’s waist and, when John brought the chair into line, they carefully lifted Sherlock off of the yoga ball and into his chair.

“Don't look at me like that.” Sherlock snapped, peering over his shoulder at John. “I'm in pain.”

“You're giving up.” John said. “I know it's going to be uncomfortable but you didn't quit before, at the hospital. Why are you letting it beat you now?” John's tone wasn't condescending or accusing, but Sherlock didn't like to hear the words insinuating he was a quitter coming from his mouth.
“I'm not beat.” Sherlock said forcefully. “I'm in pain!”

“So you said, but Love, that pain won't go until you build up your strength and you won't do that if you stop at the first hurdle.” John reasoned. “Love, please…” He sighed softly. “Another ten minutes - no back support?”

“No!” Sherlock yelled at him, flinching from John's hand as he attempted to touch him. “I said I can't. So stop forcing it.”

“John, it's okay.” Mike stepped up. “Sherlock, if you're not okay with doing anything else, then we can call it a day.” John held up his hands in defeat. “If you're in a lot of pain, it might be ideal to discuss the treatment options available.”

“He's been given gabapentin, and diazepam.” John said. “It's only been a couple of days. He had morphine at the hospital but it isn't viable.”

“Morphine can have too much of a soporific effect, especially when you need to be prepared for physio. And the pain you're experiencing is strange,” Mike directed at Sherlock. “Some is nerve pain, some is muscular, some is neurological. So things like gabapentin, Pregabalin… They're the go-to options.” Mike pulled a considerate face. “A more supportive wheelchair would help, something with targeted support on your lower back, forcing you to sit straight but helping to support your lumbar spine while you build up your strength too.”

“We're looking into it.” John said with a smile. He touched Sherlock's tense shoulder. “You're absolutely certain you can't carry on today?”

Sherlock nodded his head. His cheeks were flushed pink and he looked at the edge of tears. John squeezed his hand and allowed him his pass. He took the handles of the wheelchair and slowly guided Sherlock toward the door as Eva held it open, bidding them goodbye. As they slipped quietly into the hallway, John came to an abrupt stop.

“What?” Sherlock glanced around at him.

“Your brother.” John nodded ahead and Sherlock swung back around, looking down the clinic corridor ahead of them. Sure enough, his eyes fell on Mycroft as he walked stiffly toward them.

“What're you doing here?” Sherlock asked, fixing his expression.

“I was under the impression you had a little longer to go.” Mycroft said, stopping just in front of them.

“He's in a lot of pain.” John said gently. “It'll take a while for the pain management medication to help.”

“No pain, no gain. Isn't that the maxim?” Mycroft blinked down at Sherlock.

“Be fair,” John reasoned, “There's a lot were contending with at the minute. He's tired, stressed and sore. Give him a break, yeah?”

Mycroft regarded John with a weary eye. “Well if you two are done here, perhaps we three could have lunch? There are a few things we need to discuss.”

“Like?” Sherlock begged.

“Jack Skinner paid me a visit today, and if nothing else he is a very easy man to read.” Mycroft gave
a sinister smile. “You can drive John.” He said walking on, “I'll direct you to a lovely little place I know.”
Once again, I want to say an enormous thank you to the people who have read, commented, liked, shared and discussed this story. I am absolutely blown away by the involvement, dedication and overall love for the way I puppeteer the Sherlock cast! You have really been a supportive, dedicated and devoted bunch and I cannot even begin to put into words accurately enough how thankful and amazed I am.

This chapter has been posted slyly from the PC at work (I’m on an admin day at the health centre!) so I apologise for anything blatantly unedited!

Sally knocked twice on Greg’s door before opening it and stepping into his office as he called out to the visitor to enter. She pushed the door closed behind her and gave him a weary smile as she approached the desk. He looked at her, his expression open and expectant, and shrugged his shoulders. “What?”

“Did you know Sherlock was having physiotherapy?” She asked, inviting herself to sit down in one of the chairs before Greg’s desk.

Sipping from his coffee, Greg nodded as he placed his cup back down. “Yeah, of course I did. Why wouldn’t they? He needs to relearn posture, support, build up the muscles he still uses. Come on, we did first aid training and touched on things like this.” He frowned at her.

“That’s not really why I’m here.” She flattened her mouth into a thin line and Greg sat back.

“Oh, gimmie.” He tipped his chin. “What’s going on?”

“Skinner.” Sally shook her head. “There’s something off.”

Greg tilted his head, “Something like what?”

Sally shrugged her shoulders and crossed her right leg over her left thigh. “I don’t know... I can’t put my finger on it. He was talking to Mycroft Holmes, Sherlock’s brother, today at his offices in that posh place uptown. They had this, I don’t know, silent conversation going on. Mycroft kept glaring at him.”

Greg smirked, “I’ve met Mycroft a few times - as have you - who do you imagine he doesn’t glare at?”

“I’m not stupid.” Sally shook her head. “It took a few days, but I got there.”

Greg shrugged his head back and then raised his eyebrows. “Got where?”

Sally laughed mirthlessly at him. “Did you think those of us who’d been around this long wouldn’t work it out? I mean... Jesus, Greg! Skinner! Jack Skinner - as in, Mark Skinner’s brother. The kid who died because of Sherlock Holmes. I knew that I knew him from somewhere, but it wasn’t until today when I saw how Mycroft reacted, and how standoffish Sherlock was with him... The freak recognised him straight away, didn’t he? And you and Mycroft knew who he was from the outset.
Why the hell is he even allowed to work this case? If you’re not because you’re his friend, then surely they can’t allow Skinner to do it either - he’s going to end up throwing Sherlock under a bus just because he doesn’t like the guy! There’s too much history.”

Greg sighed - he wasn’t shocked she’d gotten to the root, he was just surprised she cared. “Want to play double agent?” He asked her and she frowned.

“What do you mean?” She asked, uncrossing her legs and tucking them back under the chair.

“Keep on working with him, and don’t let on. But you and I will talk, and I promise you, Donovan, you’ll understand why we’ve got him here.” Greg vowed.

Sally shook her head. “Tell me now.”

“I can’t, not until we’re sure.” Greg explained.

“Sure of what? Greg, you’re hiding too much - it’s obvious something’s going on and if I’m going to be stuck in the middle of it, I think I deserve to understand what it is.” Sally groaned. “Tell me.”

Greg shook his head, “I can’t - not yet. I’m sorry.”

Mycroft’s chosen destination for lunch was a small village restaurant with chintz and china, reminiscent of the stereotypical country cottage style one would expect to find at their Grandmother’s house. They nestled into a small corner, receiving looks from a few patrons as they clearly didn’t fit the usual clientele. They sat in nominal silence for a while until Sherlock couldn’t handle the tension and waiting much longer. He pushed his coffee cup away from him and braced his hands on the table. “Out with it.” He demanded. “What the hell was Jack Skinner doing visiting you?”

Mycroft quirked his eyebrows. “Perhaps he favours my question answering skills, or maybe he didn’t like slumming it so much, I can’t be certain. What do you think, Sherlock!? He’s fishing for answers, or rather any indication that we’re on to him.”

“We are “on to” him.” John exhaled a breathy laugh through his nose.

Mycroft shot him a fierce look. “Can’t go letting him know that though, can we?”

“So what did he want specifically? You weren’t there when I was shot so he shouldn’t have any line of questioning that relates to you.” Sherlock said with a deep frown.

“He doesn’t. What he wanted to know was if I suspected him though I’m sure you can imagine he didn’t exactly say that. He asked if I had any suspicions about why you were shot, and who it might have been. What he really wanted to know was if I knew him and was well on my way to seeking him out. Of course, if he learned that I do he didn’t let on but I learned a few things from him.” Mycroft said plainly.

“Things like?” John asked, winding his wrist in front of him to urge Mycroft on.

“He’s worried; he’s getting in deeper than he imagined he would and from reading Sergeant Donovan’s expressions she, too, has her doubts about the great Inspector Skinner. He knows that his
records would be accessible to me, and to Inspector Lestrade, and he is clearly just hoping that it isn’t something we delve into. He doesn’t seem to assume that we’ll recall who he is and therefore won’t have any reason to feel ill will towards him.” Mycroft explained. “Part of him is loving the chase, the constant wondering if we know, if we suspect him or remember him at all. Part of him, though, is looking for the quickest way to get this over with. There’s something he’s keen to get back to but I don’t know what.”

“Surely it would cross his mind that if he knows you, you’re going to know who he is?” John asked, picking up his cup of tea. He nursed it a moment before taking a sip. “You wouldn’t forget him, not after everything that happened.”

“Perhaps he just hopes that we have.” Sherlock said, clearly half-listening as he ran through one hundred and one thoughts in his mind.

“Are you worried?” John looked at Mycroft. “Do you think he’ll do something to secure Sherlock getting into trouble before we get a chance to speak with Sergeant Hawkes?”

Mycroft exhaled noisily through his nose and shrugged one shoulder, “I really don’t know, but it’s something I aim to ensure doesn’t happen. I spoke with Inspector Lestrade, it seems that Skinner had a little wobble in his office the other day and almost showed the hand he has to play. He thinks that Skinner is close to breaking point - the worrying thing is that that could go either way for us. If he breaks, it could lead to him becoming more enraged and doing all he can to get all of us into as much trouble as possible. But, it could also lead to us being able to secure a conviction on him.”

“Would it be for attempted murder?” John asked. Mycroft looked at him crookedly. “Sorry, thinking out loud. I just - I’ve been trying to work out what they’d even hold him for; GBH, attempted murder, assault…” He shook his head. “If it was him that shot Sherlock, it was a measured shot and the courts would see that. There is no way they’d be able to then convict him of attempted murder, surely? He’s military - he knows his way around a weapon.”

“But one doesn’t use a gun just to wound in civilian life, John. People shoot with the intention to kill.” Mycroft said firmly.

“But then surely he knew what he was doing. If Skinner wanted revenge on Sherlock, why not take the kill shot and blow his brains out?” John’s brows creased in concern as he put down his cup. “He could have chosen so many ways to make Sherlock pay for Mark’s death - why leave it this long, and then why just wound?”

“To make me suffer.” Sherlock said quietly. “He wants me to feel pain, like he has since Mark’s death.”

“What pain has he felt? He’s a homophobe - he doesn’t hate you because Mark’s dead, he hates you because you had sex with his brother. Going by his view of gay men, wasn’t his death like a...I don’t know...an ethnic cleansing.” John spat the phrase. “I’m surprised he didn’t combust sitting in our lounge. I should have felated you, I’m sure that would have gone down like a lead balloon.” Sherlock and Mycroft looked at John with bewildered expressions and suddenly the doctor laughed nervously. “I’m sorry-,” he sighed, “I’m just exhausted.” He rubbed both hands over his face.

“Christmas is around the corner; I’m led to believe sentimentality kicks in in the festive period. Perhaps at this time of year, he comes to recall when childhood held promise for he and his brother, and misses him all the more.” Mycroft said, almost wistful, and John could read his expression easily. He looked to Sherlock, expecting to see awkwardness etched on his face, too, but found him wincing a little, his face looking both pale and flushed at the same time, with beads of sweat beginning to form on his forehead.
“Are you okay, Love?” John asked, reaching across instinctively to touch Sherlock’s arm. “You’re really quiet.”

Sherlock shook his head, “My back…”

“Do you want to go home?” John asked softly.

Sherlock shook his head. “No.” He licked his lips. “You said he wants to return to something.” He turned to his brother, “You must know what if you picked up on his urgency.”

“He has children.” Mycroft said, thinking aloud. “Perhaps he’s keen to return to his family, step back out of the limelight and away from any potential dangers.”

“He wouldn’t risk a prison term if he was concerned about not getting back to play house.” John shook his head. “That’s just stupid.”

“He’s not AWOL, so it isn’t that he’s hiding from his military duties. He got the job at Scotland Yard honestly, so that isn’t a concern. But he’s keen to retreat - like I said, I just can’t put my finger on the proverbial pulse-point.” Mycroft sighed, annoyed at his own lack of knowledge.

“Scared of Greg?” John suggested, “He could bring him crashing down, couldn’t he?”

“Whatever Lestrade might say could be counteracted by Skinner by the falsifying of evidence charge that he would face. He isn’t afraid of Lestrade.” Mycroft shook his head. “No, it’s something closer to home. His wife, his children...something that would mean that if he was kept away too long it would fall apart, it would ruin him.”

“Is it Mark?” John wondered. “Did he use Mark as his whipping post or something, abuse his kid brother, and now he’s scared that, because he’ll trudge up old ground if Sherlock’s case goes forward, he’ll get found out?”

Mycroft quirked his eyebrows. “It’s a valid point.”

John looked across to Sherlock and immediately his face fell. “Sherlock, Love…”

Sherlock screwed his eyes closed and bit against his lower lip. “It’s getting worse. Hurts in my stomach too…” He hulled his head to the side and groaned.

John glanced across at Mycroft, then back to Sherlock. “Actually in your stomach, or low in your abdomen?” He got to his feet and crouched beside Sherlock.

“Low.” Sherlock managed before he gritted his teeth again.

Despite the surroundings, John reached for Sherlock’s legs and lifted the cuff of trousers to check his catheter bag. “Shit…” he cursed and looked up at Mycroft. “There’s blood in his bag.” He glared at the older Holmes. “Shit! We need to get to the hospital.”

John had Mycroft phone ahead to the hospital and explain the issue as he drove like a demon through London. By some miracle, Mycroft had managed to ensure there was somebody waiting to greet them and John daren’t ask how he’d managed it. Sherlock was lifted by three staff members from the wheelchair and onto a trolley, and whisked through the A and E entrance. Despite their protestations, both John and Mycroft were not allowed to follow as Sherlock was wheeled away, crying out in agony.

“You think his kidney has completely shut down?” Mycroft asked, pacing outside of the accident
and emergency entrance with a rare cigarette clutched in his fingers.

John stood nervously, leaning on the awning post over the entrance door. “I’d say so. I was pushing him - I kept telling him in physio that he was giving up. I didn’t even think to consider the pain might be because of this…” he kicked his foot behind him and it echoed in a dull thud against the post. “As if there wasn’t enough to be scared of.”

“And they’ll remove it?” Mycroft asked, flicking the half-smoked cigarette away.


“Go and tell Inspector Lestrade what’s happening.” Mycroft suggested.

“I’m not leaving!” John snapped.

“He’ll be in there for a while, and I’m assuming surgery would be immediate?” Mycroft reasoned. “I will stay. Please, go, and I will call you when the verdict is in.”

John shook his head. “I can’t go.”

“You can.” Mycroft nodded, his voice insistent. “I’d assume it will be family only, and much as you and I both consider you Sherlock’s family, sometimes the NHS does not. Go and inform Lestrade, perhaps the space will do you good. Collect some things for Sherlock from home and return. Please, John - I would like the time with my brother.”

Under Mycroft’s gaze, John reluctantly agreed. “Please tell him I love him.” He asked, shyly. “And that I’ll be back really soon.” Mycroft nodded wordlessly.
Chapter 40

“Mr Holmes?”

Mycroft raised his head. He’d spent the last hour and a half staring at the floor beneath his polished shoes, in the waiting area of the surgical ICU. He got to his feet as a young female doctor approached. “Yes?”

“Hello, I’m Monica Harries, I was part of the renal team operating on Sherlock.” She put her hand out and shook Mycroft’s hand respectfully. “The damaged kidney has been removed and as the other is functioning well it is unlikely at this time that he will need to seek transplant.”

“You’ll continue to monitor the remaining kidney?” Mycroft asked, frowning.

“Of course; he’ll be observed closely while he recovers, and he will be under renal care once he returns home.” The doctor nodded.

“And there’s no signs of any return infections?” Mycroft checked.

Monia shook her head. “Not at present. The urethral catheter has been withdrawn and a small incision was made in his navel so that what is called a suprapubic catheter has been inserted directly into his bladder. Although it is often common for this kind of catheterisation to cause bladder stones, it was decided that direct drainage of his bladder in his manner, given his spinal injury, would prove to be more comfortable and therefore more effective in preventing bladder blockage and further trauma to his remaining, functioning kidney.”

Mycroft nodded at her words. “Can I see him?”

Monica smiled, “Of course. Follow me.”

Mycroft found his brother awake but fatigued, and lying slightly propped on the hospital bed. He was hooked up to an IV, again, and his catheter hung over the side of the bed in immediate view of the medical personnel that Mycroft knew were monitoring him closely. He pulled up the convenient chair in the corner of the room to sit beside Sherlock and sat down without a word. Sherlock looked at him, his tired eyes following his brother’s movements, and he blinked slowly as Mycroft looked at him once he was seated.

“Why didn’t you say the pain was so bad?” Mycroft asked quietly. “We could have got help sooner.”

Sherlock closed his eyes and sighed through his nose lethargically. “It was progressive, then it just seemed to suddenly burst and I couldn’t pretend it would go away anymore.”

“A dead kidney is not really ignorable, Sherlock.” Mycroft said bluntly. “John sends his love, I asked him to collect you some things from home. He was reluctant to go, just so you know, but I figured you would talk to me a little more freely without him present.”

“What brought you to that conclusion?” Sherlock asked slowly.

Mycroft drew up the right corner of his mouth. “Past experiences.” Sherlock nodded his head once and his curls rustled against the linen of the pillow beneath his head. “I wish you’d spoken up sooner.”
“It wouldn’t have changed anything.” Sherlock said, wincing as he moved a little and felt a sharp pain. “The kidney was destroyed from the outset.”

“I want to kill him.” Mycroft said slowly. “How I haven’t yet is an enigma to me. He deserves to be locked up with psychopaths in Broadmoor.”

Sherlock’s lips quirked. “If you kill him, the psychopaths can’t have him.” He exhaled slowly, not wanting his body to move too much. “John has a point,” He said quietly, “Why didn’t he just go for the kill shot?”

“Like you said, brother dear, he wants you to suffer. I’m sure he’ll be happy to know that you are.” Mycroft shifted in the chair. “How is the pain now?”

“It’s there.” Sherlock mumbled.

“I called our parents, of course. Mummy wanted to come here straight away, but I convinced her to remain at home and promised to call them once I knew you were out of surgery.” Mycroft spoke quietly. “John was going to let Inspector Lestrade know you were here; I assume that Jack Skinner knows by now, too.”

“That’s clever. Give Skinner what he wants - me in the hospital.” Sherlock exhaled and shook his head.

“Why deny using a process that works?” Mycroft said with an air of fancy.

“You’re an idiot.” Sherlock turned his head to him. “Why send John to do that? That’s just baiting him.” He frowned, groaning a little as he moved.

“The more we give him to react to, the sooner he’ll slip up.” Mycroft explained. “Sherlock, please, accept the morphine.”

“No.” Sherlock shook his head stubbornly.

Mycroft sighed huffily, “It’s no judgement, it’s not a regression. You’ve had surgery.”

“I don’t want it.” Sherlock shook his head, tears brimming in his blue eyes.

“Oh, Sherlock.” Mycroft drew his mouth into a thin line, watching Sherlock’s face contort as he fought off crying. “Take it easy, Sherlock.” Mycroft said, getting to his feet. He reached across and rested his hand in the centre of Sherlock’s chest. “Take it easy.” He hated the way Sherlock screwed his eyes closed. “Alright, Sherlock. Just take it easy.”

“This is torture.” Sherlock said, with his teeth tightly gritted together. “I wish he’d just killed me. Why won’t he just hurry up and expose whatever it is he wants to because I can’t stand this anymore?”

“Everything will work out.” Mycroft whispered, keeping his hand gently on Sherlock’s mid-chest. “Nothing is going to happen to you; I won’t let it.”

“You can’t promise that though, you know you can’t. If Skinner wants to, he can bring you, Lestrade and me down - prison terms for all of us, you know that.” Sherlock said with staggered breaths.

Mycroft sighed. “And he’ll serve time alongside us, Sherlock, for what he’s done to you.” He withdrew his hand. “But that isn’t going to happen. I told you, I won’t let it happen. You will not go
to prison - you didn’t...do anything wrong.”

Sherlock looked at him through blurred eyes. “I always assumed you thought I’d done it.”

Mycroft shook his head. “Not for one moment, little brother.”

Sherlock pursed his lips. “Is John coming back?”

Mycroft gave a quick nod. “I imagine he’ll be back very soon.” He sat down again, “But don’t change the subject. You and I need to talk.”

“I don’t want to talk, Mycroft.” Sherlock ran his left hand across his forehead and pushed his hair from his eyes.

“Whilst you were in surgery, I had more time to think about Jack Skinner.” Mycroft began despite Sherlock’s negative response. “It hadn’t occurred to me before, I’m not sure why. But something John said made me think. I’m sure you and Mark talked, if only a little. Did he ever mention his brother to you?”

Sherlock shook his head, “No. We didn’t talk like that.”

“Was he ever vague about things, masking injuries…” Mycroft prompted.

“Mycroft, I don’t know. We had sex, we got high, beyond that there was practically nothing between Mark Skinner and I. It was a joining of convenience. We didn’t chat, we didn’t meet for lunch and we certainly didn’t discuss how much our brothers appalled us.” Sherlock snapped at him. “But to be honest, if Jack Skinner was my brother I’d probably not want to talk about it either. Somebody who categorically detests me because of my sexual preferences...I’d want to take drugs and avoid him, too.” He winced as he moved and Mycroft felt sorry for him immediately.

“You do know that that is not a view that Skinner and I share?” Mycroft said quietly. “I have never been ashamed of your sexual preferences.”

“It probably wouldn’t matter to me if you were, I don’t think I’ve ever valued your opinion on my lifestyle that much.” Sherlock sighed. He turned his head to look at Mycroft and shook his head. “No - no, I know you don’t think like that.”

“Mum and Dad, too, they’ve never thought differently of you for being...” Mycroft tilted his head. “Well, none of us, we’ve never thought less of you. It’s always been...fine.”

“I know it’s fine.” Sherlock frowned at him.

“Good.” Mycroft gave one firm, straight-faced nod. “You should try to rest.” He switched the subject quickly. “Sleep. I can wake you once John is here.”
Chapter 41

Chapter Notes

Hi loves. I can't promise an update later (though I'll try) as I'm on a four day stint of night carers shifts so take this little update in the hopes that it'll sate you until I can post again.

“He’s back in the hospital?” Jack shook his head, resting both hands on his hips.

“Turns out the kidney problems he was having worsened. Lestrade said they were operating. John had been in to tell him, evidently he was on his way to their place to collect some things for Sherlock while he’s in the hospital.” Sally explained, folding her arms across her slim chest.

Jack drew down the corners of his mouth. “So I’d imagine Lestrade will visit?”

Sally looked around the quiet office space and shrugged, “He likes him, so probably.” She took a deep breath. “Look, Sir, sooner or later we’re going to have to call time on this case. Nobody knows anything and continuing to dig isn’t bringing up anything new at all. Maybe this is the turning point, the beginning of the end?”

“We can’t just stop investigating.” Jack shook his head.

“Why not?” Sally unfolded her arms, holding her empty palms out at her sides. “We have nothing, nobody knows anything. It’s cold.”

“It is never, ever the case that nobody knows. Somebody, somewhere, always knows something.” Jack argued.

“We’ve spoken to everyone!” Sally shook her head. “Me, Charlie, Lestrade, John and Sherlock, even Sherlock’s brother. You haven’t learned anything new.”

“Then we continue to question everyone. We can start again, with you.” Jack nodded at her.

“I’ve told you everything.” Sally frowned. “One minute we’re standing in the rain and Charlie is praising Sherlock, the next Sherlock is lying on the ground with blood pouring from his back.”

“And you saw nothing? Presumably on the driver’s side of the car you were facing the opposite way to Sherlock, so were in eyeline.” Jack said, tilting his head.

“No, I was at the front of the car, walking around to the passenger’s side. Charlie was going to drive. I was almost around at Sherlock’s side of the car.” Sally clarified.

Jack nodded his head. “We’ll pay a visit to Charlie Hawkes again, then.”

“He’s on leave, Sir.” Sally pointed out.

“And this is an investigation - he should be able to cooperate for a brief chat.” Jack smirked at her. “Get your coat, we’ll head to him now.”
“It’s almost eight pm. For follow up questioning, it seems a little unfair to land on him now.” Sally said, examining her watch.

“He’s on leave; it isn’t as though he’ll be having an early night for work in the morning, is it?” Jack raised his eyebrows at her. “I’ll meet you down at my car.”

Sherlock opened his eyes slowly, wincing at the pain that crept in once he felt consciousness return to him. He licked his lip and yawned noisily, shaking his head against the pillow. He rubbed his left hand into his eye, clearing away the fogginess of sleep, and turned his head to the side in search of his brother. The chair Mycroft had occupied was empty, and he almost felt sorry for the loneliness it presented. He turned his head again, staring up above him at the strip lights, and counted the ceiling tiles from corner to corner before rolling his eyes, amazed at his own boredom. He turned his head again and watched Mycroft walk into the room, sans his coat and jacket, looking a little more ‘dressed for home’ with his waistcoat and shirt-sleeves on show.

“Oh, you’re awake.” Mycroft commented obviously. “John is here, has been for a while, he’s talking with the nursing staff.”

“What’s the verdict?” Sherlock asked.

“Plenty of urine production, so worry is at a minimum.” Mycroft nodded his head, hovering beside the bed.

Sherlock sighed, “Well that’s lovely.” He said, absently.

“John isn’t happy about the new catheter.” Mycroft said and Sherlock frowned at him. “It's inserted into your abdomen, just below your belly button. It goes directly into your bladder. He feels this isn’t a wise move given your already compromised renal system.”

Sherlock fumbled with the blankets and his gown, fisting them out of his way. He was met with a dressing with a small hole in the centre that allowed the catheter tube to pass through it, meaning the small wound was covered from his view. “Why did they do that?” He frowned at Mycroft again and pulled the blanket back up.

“They decided it was a way to reduce infection.” Mycroft supposed.

“By cutting a new hole in my body?” Sherlock tutted.

Mycroft held his hands out and shrugged. “Maybe it'll be more comfortable and convenient.”

“Not being here would be more comfortable and convenient.” Sherlock muttered.

“Well, you did get yourself shot, brother dear. You cannot expect an immediate recovery.” Mycroft crooked his eyebrows and Sherlock sighed at him, unamused.

“You can go whenever you like.” Sherlock said, flicking his right hand at Mycroft. “John's here now.”

“I would rather stay. You have a habit of relapsing when I'm not around.” Mycroft said bluntly,
sitting down in the chair beside the bed.

Sherlock snorted. “Are our parents waiting for you?”

“I've telephoned.” Mycroft answered quickly.

“There isn't some Girl Friday waiting to be talked down to?” Sherlock crooked his eyebrows.

“I can do that via text.” Mycroft sat forwards. “It's no use, little brother, I'm here for the duration.”

Sherlock exhaled through his nose. “Lucky me.”
Mycroft left Sherlock and John with a modicum of privacy and excused himself into the hallway, wandering through the hospital with his phone held tightly in his right hand. He found a quiet corner, off near a ward almost completely deserted somehow, and made a quick phone call.

“Waiting is pointless, I am not prepared to do it any longer. Bring Sergeant Hawkes forward immediately and get the ball rolling - I will not stand back for another moment. Inform Inspector Lestrade that his cooperation is expected and that I want Jack Skinner brought in for questioning immediately after gathering Hawkes’ official statement. ...I do not care one damn about a timeline, Mister Jennings! You have been set a task and I expect you to carry it out. See to it that Lestrade gathers Hawkes’ statement, then call me back. I want to be there for the downfall of Jack Skinner.”

Sally's smile was almost apologetic as she sat opposite Charlie but beside Skinner at Charlie's small, kitchen table in his dinky London apartment. She held her notepad in her hands and fiddled with it as Charlie nursed a mug of hot, black coffee in his hands that she hand yet seen him take a sip from. She felt awkward, not liking being here at all, and watched the anxiety on his face intensify as Jack began asking familiar, persistent questions that she knew he would have no new answers to.

“And you maintain that there was nothing visible to you directly ahead of you, in the direction you were facing head-on, into the street?” Jack asked.

Charlie's hands tightened around the mug. “Absolutely nothin’. Nothin’ at all. I wasn't lookin’ beyond Sherlock Holmes, Sir.” He said nervously.

“That enamoured by him, were you?” Jack raised his brows with a half-hearted smile that Sally supposed was meant to be a tease.

Charlie shifted on the noisy, wooden chair. “Well, it's Sherlock Holmes, ain't it? I heard Lestrade talk about him a lot. I was kinda excited to work with him.”

“I suppose then it's true what they say - love is blind.” Jack looked firmly at Charlie.

Charlie drew back his head. “I don't love Sherlock Holmes, Sir. And I wasn't blinded by anythin’, I just wasn't lookin’ out for a gunman I didn't expect to be there.” He shifted again and Sally frowned at him. “No one expected them to be there.”

“So despite facing the direction that the shots were fired from, you maintain you would not be able to identify who it was holding the gun, where they were, or anything at all?” Jack clarified.

Charlie shook his head and took a measured breath. “No, I didn't see anythin’.”
Greg held his phone between both hands and stared across his lounge, contemplating the message he’d received. He didn’t understand why Mycroft wanted to move so quickly - no, he understood, of course, he just didn’t know why he was. They had a plan! They were biding their time, they were building a case and setting up defenses. Why did he want to jeopardise all they had so far? They could secure a conviction, Greg was sure of it, if they just kept going.

He reached to the floor and picked up his beer bottle and took a gratifying sip. He supposed Mycroft was just worried - Sherlock being back in hospital, going through another surgery, he assumed that his brotherly instinct was overriding his usually focused mind. Greg wasn’t blind - much as Mycroft’s manner often annoyed him, he knew that there wasn’t much that the older Holmes wouldn’t do for Sherlock. He’d seen evidence of it. Hell, they were right here now because of it! But it still bothered him. Surely what Mycroft was doing now was just acting out in revenge? Where did he think that would get them? The minute Skinner knew they were on to him for real, he would turn it all and they would all be in trouble.

What was Mycroft truly thinking? Did he really imagine that storming this now because of Sherlock’s change in health was the right move? What did he expect to happen?

Greg couldn’t make sense of any of it and he wasn’t prepared to move forward with Mycroft's wishes until he could. He searched through his contacts and selected Mycroft’s name, and held the phone to his ear impatiently as it rang.

“Yes?”

“Are you out of your mind?” Greg said sharply. “Get a statement and bring Skinner in? It's far too early for that, we have nothing!”

“We have Sergeant Hawkes’ testimony, that is all we need. And my mind, Inspector, is well and truly in tact thank you. I watched my brother writhe in agony and endure surgery, I think I have the monopoly on making the decisions.”

“I get it, I do, it’s worrying that Will’s had to be operated on. And I'm sorry he has. But storming forwards now isn't right. It won't work for us.” Greg argued. “Please, you need to understand that this isn't the right move.”

“With the statement of a police officer placing Jack Skinner at the scene and identifying him as the gunman is all the evidence we need.”

Greg groaned, “And as soon as he's in for questioning, he'll play the cards he has and we will all be in trouble.”

“What was that?”


“Hang up the phone, Inspector. I will be in touch.”

“What is going on?” Greg demanded.

“This line is compromised. I will be in touch.”
Chapter 43

Mycroft walked into Sherlock's bay with his phone gripped in his hand. John looked up at him from Sherlock's bedside and frowned, examining Mycroft's expression.

“What's wrong?” John asked, letting go of Sherlock's hand.

“Don't use your mobile phones. In fact, hand them over.” Mycroft said, approaching the bed with his free hand held out.

John jerked his head back. “Why?”

“Jack Skinner is a clever and manipulative son of a bitch; I'm stupid for not considering this sooner. Hand me your handsets.”

Reluctantly, John dug his phone from his jeans pocket and handed it over. “They're tapped?”

Mycroft nodded. “I think so.” He turned his face to Sherlock. “Yours is in your coat?”

Sherlock nodded his head sleepily, “I think so.” He watched as Mycroft went to the end of the bed, where John had Sherlock's belongings folded together, and rifled through his pockets to retrieve his phone. “What do you plan on doing?”

“Not turning them back on.” Mycroft said, holding the three phones in his hands, ensuring each one was shut down. “If you're desperate, I can organise secure replacements.”

“How secure?” John questioned, unconvinced.

“Secret Service secure. Only Mycroft will be able to track us then.” Sherlock intoned and John smirked.

Mycroft glared at his brother. “Don't make this into a joke. Everything is hanging in the balance, Sherlock!”

“I'm paralysed and missing organs thanks to him, how funny do you think I find this?” Sherlock snapped back.

“Clearly so amusing that you see fit not to take it seriously enough to just do as I ask!” Mycroft growled.

“When has doing as you asked ever ended well for me?” Sherlock snarled at him.

“If you tried it for once you might find out!” Mycroft's sharp tone surprised John a little - the man had been pleasant for quite some time that to hear him spear his words toward his brother made John feel a little uncomfortable.

“Hey, okay, alright.” John held out his hands. “Sherlock's got a point, Mycroft; how will just replacing the phone with some techy gizmo mean he won't do it again?” John asked. “And how do you even know our phones are tapped for sure?”

“I heard the line dip three times whilst I was talking with Inspector Lestrade. If our phones are monitored, you two are likely to be being tracked too.” Mycroft explained. “I can provide you with phones made for government, phones that will not be able to be traced.”
John's brows shot up. “You were talking with Greg?” He asked.

Mycroft nodded. “Yes.”

“Why? If something’s going on, we need to know.” John insisted.

Mycroft shook his head. “It doesn't concern you. Not yet.”

“Yes it does.” John forced. “Everything that happens concerns us all. We've all got a lot to lose here, don’t you see that? It isn’t just your position, or Greg’s job… Sherlock could go to jail if Skinner’s lies are believed and all because you guys lied in the first place. Everything that happens concerns me. Absolutely everything.” He gritted his teeth to try to keep from shouting. “He's just starting to get to grips with life and he's got a long way to go - you honestly think he'll survive prison?”

“It will not come to that.” Mycroft said sternly.

John shook his head in annoyance, “You don't know that!”

Mycroft silenced his a moment with a wave of his hand. “I do. That's why I was talking to Lestrade.”

“Fine - so tell me what it was about.” John demanded.

Mycroft set the phones down on the table beside Sherlock's bed. He looked between his half-asleep brother and John, and sighed as he gave in to the doctor’s demands. “Wheels were set in motion. If Lestrade does as I asked, Jack Skinner’s neat little world is about to crumble.”

“Wheels? What wheels?” John shook his head.

“Charlie Hawkes’ statement should be being collected. Once it is official, we can proceed with questioning Skinner as a named suspect.” Mycroft clarified.

“That's stupid!” John’s eyes widened impossibly. “You give him the slightest idea he's been identified and he’ll squeal every detail on Sherlock he knows. Are you really that much of a moronic dick?”

“I have to concede, Lestrade put it less offensively.” Mycroft tutted and John glared at him.

“Why are you doing this?” John asked, incredulous. “It’s too soon to fire in like you've got only aces in your deck. Jack will destroy him.” He thrust his hand toward Sherlock. “Or is that your plan?”

“What?” Mycroft snapped his neck up.

“You and Sherlock have this odd relationship, tit for tat, bickering all the time. Until now I thought it was sibling stuff, odd ways of showing love, but maybe I was wrong - maybe you actually want to hurt him.” John shook his head, his face set firm in an expression of disgust.

“How dare you?” Mycroft said, low and deep. “The last thing I want to do is see Sherlock go through any more hurt. I want Jack Skinner’s head on a stick, I want to see his blood sully the Thames, but this is not a barbaric century, John, and so I have to settle for tactful justice. However I can see that man crash to the ground, I will aim for it. Right now, I can do that by dragging him to the nearest station for questioning. So that's what I want to do.”

John shook his head. “And yet I don't believe you.”

“That's a shame, John. I thought you and I were on the same side.” Mycroft looked at him with an odd expression, one John couldn't read.
“I’m on his side.” John pointed at Sherlock. “Where are you?”

“Would you two please shut up?” Sherlock raised his voice. “I’m sick of hearing his name, sick of hearing my name and sick of dragging the past up. If he wants me locked up, fine - let him try. But I cannot listen to another merry-go-round argument about the bastard.”

“Sherlock if we don’t get a plan in place that’s going to help everyone, then I’m going to watch you…” John stopped, swallowing hard. “I can't see you taken away from me; I won’t do it.”

“Then don't argue with him.” Sherlock jutted his head to Mycroft. “If he thinks he's doing it right, let him do it. It'll go one of two ways - it'll work, or it won't.”

“And if it doesn't?” John asked, breathing hard.

Sherlock shrugged his shoulders. “Then I just have to hope they find an accommodating prison.”

John looked at Mycroft, shaking his head. “You better be right.” He spat. “If you're not…” He pursed his lips. “God help you.”
Sometime before midnight, John found himself in the hospital chapel. He wasn't entirely sure why - it was deserted, and it wasn't as though he was praying for the soul of someone recently deceased. But he found solace in the quiet, and security in handling a well-worn copy of the KJ Bible tucked into a neat shelf behind one of the small pews.

“In thee, oh Lord, I put my trust; let me never be ashamed; deliver me in thy righteousness…” He mumbled in a whisper, his left index finger tracing the text before him. “…have mercy upon me, oh Lord, for I am in trouble…”

He considered that Sherlock would laugh if he knew what he was doing. Though he knew Sherlock and Mycroft were raised in a Protestant household, he also knew both boys were scientifically minded and did not hold faith in high regard at all. John, however, had found strength in prayer for many years. Not that he was always sure of a divine existence. He was just sure that speaking in the hopes of being heard helped him to make sense of the troubles in his mind.

He closed the bible and pushed it back into its small nook. He clasped his hands on his lap and took a deep breath.

“You have to help me. Do something to keep him safe, please. I can't lose him now. This last year has been the only time I've ever felt like life had a meaning at all - don't take that meaning away from me.”

“I thought I was the only person left in London who still did this.”

John jumped and turned around, his eyes falling on a young woman in the corner of the chapel. He watched her stand and walk toward him. She was short, slim and pretty, from what he could see in the dim lights, and she stopped at the end of the pew he occupied.

“Can I sit?”

John shuffled over a little. “Of course.”

She sat down, and offered her right hand to him. “Sonia.”

John shook her hand politely. “John.”

“It's peaceful in here.” She said, looking ahead of her.

“It is.” John agreed.

Sonia took a deep breath and looked at John again. “I don't even know if I still believe in God, but since my husband was diagnosed with cancer I find myself in here a lot whenever he inevitably ends up back at the hospital.”

“I'm sorry.” John frowned sadly at her.

“Terminal - a brain tumour,” she said quietly. “Three years so far; he's outlived expectations but he's beginning to suffer more now.”

“That's terrible, it must be hard to see him deteriorating.” John sympathised.

“It has been.” Sonia nodded her head and her short, curly hair bobbed on her forehead. “He was
sporty, intelligent, athletic - now he's lethargic, malnourished and dying.” She drew down the corners of her mouth. “You become accepting of the worst things when you slowly prepare for them. It's sad, isn't it? His illness doesn't shock me anymore.”

“I understand.” John said, “I was a doctor in the army; I became somewhat desensitised to the violence and gore. It didn't stop being horrific, but I accepted it.”

“That must have been hard.” Sonia said sadly. She looked back out ahead of her.

“Oddly, not as hard as what I'm going through now.” John said, not entirely sure why he felt like he could talk to a perfect stranger. “My partner was shot and it left him paralysed. He had just had to go through surgery to remove a kidney that was damaged by one of the bullets. We know who shot him but we can't get a conviction because...because there's...” He didn't know how to say it. How did you say that the person who shot your boyfriend couldn't be convicted because your boyfriend had been involved in the death of said shooters brother?

“Red tape? I hate the police. The law system in England is more flawed than the US,” Sonia spoke up and John found himself nodding. “I'm sorry for your partner.”

“I'm sorry,” John apologised, “I don't know why I'm telling you all of this.”

“Perhaps God brought us together?” She smiled at him.

John laughed lightly. “Perhaps he did.”

Sherlock opened his eyes and stared above him, breathing fast. The dream had been so real and it fixed in his mind clearly despite the sudden burst back into wakefulness. He could still smell the musty, stale smell of the room and the burnt odour of… He closed his eyes tightly and willed the images and scents away. But it wouldn’t clear, none of it. The harder he wished, the clearer his mind made the visions. Mark, the needles, the cobwebs in the corners of the window and the way the light splintered from the streetlamp against the raindrops on the glass.

He opened his eyes and tried to steady his breathing, feeling pain spiking in his mid back. He focused on it, hoping it would chase away the demons, and slowly it did.

“You were talking in your sleep.” Mycroft said quietly. He was sitting in the same chair he had earlier, with one leg crossed over the other and his hand cupping his face. “You sounded frightened.”

“Pain.” Sherlock said.

“You said it wasn't bad?” Mycroft countered. “I can get a nurse if it is?”

“I'm fine.” Sherlock said, too quickly. “Did John go home?”

Mycroft examined Sherlock's face for a moment but saw his brother schooling his expression. “No.” He said after a while. “He went to get coffee a little while ago, I assume he's just taking a break.”
“He should go home.” Sherlock wet his lips. “Both of you should.”

“And if Skinner turns up here?” Mycroft asked. “What will you do? Beat him with your drip?”

“Perhaps.” Sherlock turned his head, looking back at the ceiling. “You're serious about moving on with this? About getting Sergeant Hawkes’ statement and questioning Skinner now?”

Mycroft nodded his head. “I am. I'm serious about ensuring your safety, little brother, and if that's what it takes then that's what we do.”

“And if he talks, and Mark’s case is brought up?” Sherlock looked back at him.

“We deal with it.” Mycroft said firmly.

“How?”

Mycroft drew down his hand and sat straight. “I don't know.”

“Then that leaves us nowhere.” Sherlock said sharply. “I wish I knew what his plan was.”

“You're not a mind reader.” Mycroft pointed out. “We just have to wait and see what he does.”

“Then why are you jumping in now?” Sherlock asked bluntly. “You're a walking contradiction, Mycroft.”

Mycroft's first thought was to be cruel, and “at least I am walking” was on the tip of his tongue. But it didn't come out. He adjusted his position and looked at Sherlock squarely. “I don't know. This is not a position that I ever expected to find myself in.”
Chapter Notes

Please forgive the short chapter.
I had planned on writing today and didn't get the chance. Then, when the opportunity to sit down and write did arrive, I got a call from work telling me of the passing of a resident.

In the interests of confidentiality, I cannot go into too much detail but I want to explain why this has affected me so much. For the purposes of this little message, we'll call this resident Adam. Adam was fifty-three and had a disease I had never heard of until I met him, called Multiple System Atrophy. It presents similarly to Parkinson's Disease but it is progressive in the extreme with a very short life expectancy and it causes cerebellar ataxia, aphasia and a whole host of difficulties. On Sunday night, Adam and I had been talking about his family. Adam, being so young, was understandably very shy when receiving personal care - a man in his fifties should not require two twenty-somethings to strip him naked and wash him every day. So, to help keep him a little more settled, I asked him to tell me about his children whilst I assisted him to the toilet and gave him a wash ready to settle into bed. His voice was very quiet - whispered and mumbled - and he had such a bright, beautiful smile. He told me about his children, his wife, and when he was diagnosed with MSA. He laughed, very very lightly, as he told me a joke his son had made about how Adam had never been slow enough to enjoy life and now all he did was shuffle through his day. I smiled, but it made me feel sad. So this evening I got a call to say he had called for help this morning complaining of chest tightness. He passed away in the ambulance before lunchtime of an MI. I'm so upset. He was so young, with a young family... He's just double my age - how is it possible that his life is cut so short when he isn't even the same age as one of my parents? How can his life be cut so short when I have recently cared for somebody who was 103? It sounds like a cliche, but it has made me - and I know the rest of the night girls - feel as though you need to stop planning, stop looking forward, and start doing NOW.

Greg arrived at work exhausted and anxious, and it showed on his face. He'd spent the entire night awake, feeling sick with worry, and drinking more than was perhaps acceptable to be followed up by a day in work. He kept his head down as he marched through the open offices, heading for his own private section of the floor, and prayed silently that nobody would comment on how rough he knew he looked. Somehow, he made it through the door without a single interruption, and pushed his door closed quietly with a sigh. Once settled in his office, he reached for his phone and did his best to get in touch with Mycroft finding it - as it had all night - going straight to voicemail.

“Would you bloody ring me? I want to know what I’m supposed to do. So call me, yeah?”

As he hung up the phone, his door opened without a polite knock beforehand and he looked up to meet Sally’s face coming through it. She approached his desk and sat down in front of him. “What does Hawkes know?” She asked bluntly. “And don’t say nothing because I’ve been in this job long enough to tell a liar. And you’re lying. So enough with not being able to tell me what’s going on. I need to know everything.”
“I can’t tell you. Not yet. I’m sorry, Sally.” Greg shook his head.

Sally echoed his movement. “You’ve got to. Because if you don’t, Skinner is going ahead with ripping the rug from under Sherlock Holmes.”

Greg frowned. “How d’you mean?”

“He plans on officially closing the case with a lack of any evidence. You really think the Holmes brothers will stand for that? Or John Watson?” Sally said. “Charlie knows something, and you know a lot more. So tell me - now.”

Greg stared at her for a moment, drawing courage as well as the appropriate words. He sighed and scratched the top of his head with his left hand, a nervous tick more than an actual need to scratch an itch, and nodded slowly. “Okay, but not here. Lunchtime, come and find me. We’ll get coffee and we’ll talk them.”

“Full disclosure.” Sally said, standing up abruptly.

Greg nodded solemnly. “Yeah, of course.”

Sally regarded him a moment before nodding and leaving his office; her walk was swift and Greg wondered if she’d crept in incognito. He waited for his office door to close before he sank back in his chair and sighed. He’d hoped that all of this would have been so much easier than it was right now. A few days ago he was certain Charlie Hawkes would bring Skinner crashing down and Sherlock and John would be allowed to live a life so close to perfect he’d feel sickly sweet at the prospect. Now he wasn’t even sure he could get to the end of the day without pulling a gun on Skinner himself.
Chapter 46

Chapter Notes

Apparently a burst of emotion is good for writing.

“Nice and clean,” The nurse said quietly, reapplying the clean dressing to Sherlock’s surgical wound. “Brilliant.” She smiled at him. “Mind if I take a look at the catheter site?” She asked, gesturing with her gloved hand to his tummy. Sherlock nodded quietly and allowed her and her HCA assistant to lift up his gown and pull away the sticky dressing just below his belly button to check on the catheter insertion site. “A little red, slight bit of discharge too, but that’s to be expected. Otherwise, it looks good. And your urine output has been fantastic, so no concerns there.” The nurse said, another gleeful smile on her face, as she fixed the gown back down around Sherlock’s hips. “We’re just going to help you out with a position change, alright? Do you prefer your left or right side?”

“Right.” Sherlock said, his voice a little hoarse. He cleared his throat. “Right.” he said again.

“Okay then, love, that’s fine.” The nurse nodded, wrinkling her nose sweetly. In swift but gentle movements, the HCA supported Sherlock on his side as the nurse slipped a slide-sheet in underneath Sherlock’s body. They lay him back onto his back and gripped the sides of the sheet, carefully slipping Sherlock up the bed with ease. Once he was position, the HCA pulled the sheet slightly in her direction, bringing Sherlock over to the left, the nurse then supported Sherlock lying toward her as the HCA pushed supportive pillows in behind Sherlock’s shoulders and bottom, preventing him from turning fully onto his back. The nurse raised the head of the bed slightly, giving Sherlock a little incline, and pulled the blankets back up over him to his waist. “Comfy?” She asked.

Sherlock nodded his head, “I’m fine.”

“Okay, we’ll be round in an hour or so for your comfort checks and to check your inco-pad. Alright?” The HCA said, removing her gloves and balling them together. Sherlock nodded shyly, watching them draw back the curtains from around his bed, revealing John and Mycroft lingering just by the bay door.

“Wait,” Sherlock called as the nurse made to leave.

She stopped and turned back. “Yes, love?” She smiled.

“When will I be able to go home?” Sherlock asked quietly.

She flattened her mouth into a thin line, thinking a moment. “The surgeon wants you up tomorrow, so we’ll get you up in the chair and get a little more movement back into your back and get a clear look at your movement. Another few days, all being well, and you should be ready.”

John sighed, relieved. “How long will he be kept under the renal team?”

“He’ll have regular scans and there’ll be outreach for a while. As long as he continues to function well, his visits will be reduced at the renal team’s discretion.” The nurse said confidently. She looked back at Sherlock. “Anything you need, just tap your call bell and we’ll be in. Alright love?” Mycroft
nodded politely to the nurse as she smiled at him, taking her leave.

Sherlock shuffled his shoulders about, making himself comfortable at the unnatural but understandable angle he’d been placed at. He held out his hand, flexing his fingers at John until the doctor reached into the bed and took his hand. John leaned over the bed and kissed Sherlock’s lips lightly, pulling back with a playful grimace. “Need to brush your teeth, Love.” he said and laughed.

Sherlock wrinkled his nose. “I know, I can taste my own breath.” He groaned. “Get my stuff?”

John nodded and let go of Sherlock’s hand. He routed through the bag at the end of Sherlock’s bed that he’d picked up when he left the hospital the afternoon before. He took out the toiletry back he’d thrown together and sat it onto the mobile table. “I’ll try and get a basin or something,” John said, pushing the table in at Sherlock’s waist. “There’s water there for now, just don’t spit in it.” He pointed a finger at him as he walked from the bay.

Sherlock pulled the table a bit closer and rifled through the toiletry bag. He flicked his eyes up, running them over his clearly tired brother. “Did you come up with any more ideas?” He asked quietly.

“No in the past couple of hours, Sherlock, no.” Mycroft said, pushing his hands into his trouser pockets. “If it’s okay with you, I will leave you in John’s capable hands and pay Inspector Lestrade a visit. While I’m away, I will source you and John secure mobile phones. I will also go back to your house and ensure that it is not compromised.”

Sherlock paused, one hand wrapped around his toothbrush and the other shuffling through the bag for the toothpaste tube, and looked up at Mycroft. “What do you mean compromised?”

“I thought it had already been established that Jack Skinner is far from stupid? Or have you inherited all possible outlets of stupid?” Mycroft snapped. “Sherlock, this man is dangerous. And he has been in your home. I’ll check the landline, and I’ll ensure the house is secure.”

Sherlock rolled his eyes. “Yes, okay. Is there any need for barking at me? I just had surgery.”

“No on your brain, last I checked.” Mycroft quipped.

Sherlock bit his tongue on any response that was less than kind he was cooking up. He pulled the toothpaste tube from the bag and set the two items down onto the table. “Are you stopping by Lestrade first?”


“Tell him I don’t want him to speak with Sergeant Hawkes. I want Skinner to do what he wants to do - I want to see this out.” Sherlock said firmly.

“Are you insane?” Mycroft snapped at him, not even lowering his tone as John returned. “You cannot possibly be in your right mind if you think holding back your single witness is going to help you.”

“What?” John’s eyes widened.

Sherlock sighed. “Skinner will have spoken to him numerous times by now and if Hawkes has any sense he’ll have continued to say he saw nothing. So Skinner is going to be left with no choice but to close the case. So what’s the problem? He closes the case and gets away with doing this to me. Perhaps that’s not justice and maybe, in the future, you two won’t be able to live with that. I but I would rather see him walk free than see any one of us end up locked up in some prison without there
having actually been a true cause at the start.”

“You are insane.” Mycroft shook his head.

“No,” Sherlock wet his lips. “I’m just tired of this.”

“So you’ll let him get away with attempted-bloody-murder?” John said, placing the basin he’d sourced onto the foot of Sherlock’s bed. “Sherlock, Love, with all due respect, you’re out of your mind. I want him to pay. Forget the future - I can’t live with this now. I want him to pay for what he did to you.”

“That’s how he feels.” Sherlock said, his voice unwavering. “I can’t keep pushing this when I know it’s going to either end with me in prison or him just stepping away silently - or both. So why can’t I just let him do what he wants? He’ll close the case, my shooting will remain a mystery and I can live the rest of my life, with you, knowing that what happened with Mark was sad but is done with.”

“How do you know he won’t try something else?” John asked, holding out his hands at his sides.

Sherlock shrugged. “He got what he wanted, didn’t he? He’s hurt me and he’ll walk free. He’s doing what I did.”

“What he thinks you did.” John said fiercely.

“Whatever - he saw me as a murderer, as somebody who took his brother away. So he’s hurt me like he was hurt. And he’ll get away with it, like he thinks I got away with it. And that’s what he wants. Surely that’s enough of a reason to give him what he wants?” Sherlock shook his head.

“No.” Mycroft clapped his hand down onto the table, shaking the water jug. “Sherlock, do not make any attempts to go through with this ridiculous idea.”

“Why not? If I give him what he wants and stop pressing this, then he wins. Once he knows nothing is going to come from what he did he’ll sink back into the woodwork and life can continue.” Sherlock said, certainty evident in his voice. “Tell Lestrade not to take Hawkes’ statement. I just want this to end.”

“And if we’ve got Skinner wrong, and his intention is just to bring you down regardless of this case?” Mycroft said, eyebrows raised. “You give him his freedom and he takes yours anyway. Then what?”

Sherlock swallowed heavily. “Then I don’t know.” he said, his voice quiet. “But it won’t come to that. I know it won’t.”

“How?” John shook his head.

Sherlock jerked one shoulder in a slight shrug. “I don’t know how. I just do.”

“No - you don’t know anything. You’re an idiot, and you’re giving up. You’re letting him win, you’re giving him what he wants because you just can’t be arsed.” John said, trying not to shout. “Sherlock, don’t give up now. Look how far we’ve come, look how much we’ve risked and stand to lose. I cannot and will not lose you. Any of you. So get your head out of your bloody arse and keep fighting this. Do not give up now.”

Sherlock shook his head. “I can’t.”

“Why not?” John begged him. If Mycroft heard the hitching in their voices, he didn’t say as much.
“Because it’s killing us.”

Greg handed Sally her takeaway coffee and the two walked quietly out of the Starbucks cafe, their coats buttoned tightly and necks covered with winter scarves to brace from the London winter. It took mere moments for Sally to break the silent contemplation and sipping of their hot drinks to beg him for information.

“So are you going to let me in?” She asked, cupping both hands around the extra hot drink.

Greg side-eyed her and took a sip from his cup. “You know who Skinner is.” He said, and Sally nodded. “Well so does Sherlock, John and Mycroft. ...and so does Charlie Hawkes. Not in the same capacity, but in an equally damaging one.”

Sally frowned. “How damaging?”

“To Jack Skinner, very.” Greg licked his lips. “Charlie ID’d him as the gunman - Sherlock’s gunman.” Sally stopped walking, and it took two further steps for Greg to realise she was no longer right beside him. He paused, and turned around to her.

“Bollocks.” Sally said, frowning deeply. “It was hammering rain, nothing was visible and he was infatuated with Sherlock. There was nobody around, Greg - nobody. How could he identify Skinner as the one with the gun?”

“His build, mostly, and he said there was the way the light fell just above you guys in the window of an above-shop flat. He got the chills working with him when he first started and then it occurred to him why as he was having counselling. He had hypnotherapy and was able to describe what he saw in that window. He saw Jack Skinner.” Greg explained.

“No - no way, this is ridiculous. This is all so bloody far-fetched. Skinner’s just here to ruin Sherlock’s life; but he didn’t shoot him.” Sally argued.


Sally shook her head. “He can’t have!”

“He did!” Greg forced. “He saw him in the window; he described him to the therapist, he saw Skinner and knew him immediately. It was him.”

Sally shook her head again. “No - this is stupid. I don’t believe it, not one bit of it. Greg, Charlie did not see Skinner in that window.”

Greg eyed her suspiciously. “Why are you so sure he didn’t?”

“Because he didn’t know the colour of the car.” Sally said with a sigh. “You sincerely think it didn’t occur to me at any point that Skinner at handled that gun? It was a panda car - Skinner thought it was your car there. If he was at the scene at all, then it was before we were all outside when yours was parked in front of the police car. And I do think he was there - and I do think he was involved - but I know that it was not him that fired the gun.”
Greg frowned at her. “You sly…”

“Let him close the case.” Sally said, resting her left hand on his arm. “It’ll only bring your life, and theirs, crashing around your ears if you don’t. Don’t persist with Charlie - and try to get it into Sherlock’s head that the more he pushes, the worse it’s going to be.”

Greg jerked back his head. “Why my life?”

“You sincerely think I don’t know all of that, too?” Sally said with her eyebrows raised. “Sherlock Holmes is a man who skates around on thin ice but always seems to make it back before it cracks. He couldn’t do that without you, or his brother.” Greg sighed deeply, inhaling freezing cold air through his nose that made his chest ache. “Let Skinner close the case. Or all of you will suffer.”

“And justice means nothing to you?” Greg asked, angrily.

“Where’s Mark’s justice?” Sally asked, shrugging her shoulders.

“Well it doesn’t lie in aiming three bullets into Sherlock Holmes’ back.” Greg snapped. “No - I won’t let him close the case and no, I won’t tell Sherlock to give up. Skinner is responsible for Sherlock’s life being destroyed. He deserves to have justice and Skinner deserves to pay the price for what he’s done.”

Sally shook her head, blinking slowly. “Well, don’t say I didn’t warn you, Sir.”
The nurse and her HCA returned to Sherlock just after Mycroft left. They assisted him with returning to his backed, upright position and ensured he was clean and comfortable. The HCA emptied his catheter chamber and the nurse administered his painkillers and antibiotics. She took another look at Sherlock's catheter site and gave the area a gentle clean with conti wipes and lukewarm water. Careful to clean down the tubing, away from the insertion site, and to use extra care when cleaning away the slight discharge around the site, examining it carefully.

“I'm not entirely happy about that you know.” John spoke up, not having excused himself while they assisted Sherlock, like he had earlier on.

“With what, my love?” The nurse asked, dropping the used wipes into a pre-opened waste bag, along with her gloves.

“The suprapubic catheter.” John said with a tinge of annoyance to his tone. “Renal failure patient comes in and your first though is to stick him with a catheter that is notorious for complications and increased infections.” He said bluntly. “Not exactly the cleverest of moves.”

“It was decided by the renal surgeon that this was a better means of Sherlock being able to manage his own care; with a non-reflex bladder it can be difficult for even urethral catheters to successfully void the bladder…” The nurse began explaining.

“I know how a flaccid bladder works…” John snapped at her. “What I don't know is why it wasn't mentioned before it was done. Surely the decision should have been made with us, with him, before the choice was made without consent?”

The nurse’s mouth bobbed open once or twice before she finally had an answer. “I can speak with the consultant for you, I'll find out what the specific details were.” She backed out gracefully, if she was offended by John's sharp tone she barely showed it.

In her absence, John turned his clear annoyance on Sherlock. “Please think about this more seriously.” He said, breaking the quiet that had drifted between the two of them. Sherlock was forcing down a cup of far-from-acceptable coffee. He was willing to eat and drink whatever they put in front of him, too, if it meant he'd be able to go home sooner. “Love, I don’t want you to feel like you have to give up on getting what you deserve. Or seeing him get what he deserves.”

“I deserve to not be looking over my shoulder.” Sherlock sighed, “I’ve made up my mind.”

“Then give your head a wobble!” John tutted. “Love, you don’t have to bow down to that prick.”

“I’m not bowing down, John. I just - I know that it’s either going to be the both of us in prison or me. I can’t do it. You say you can’t lose me, you think I can really stand to keep going through this-,” he gestured at his legs, “-without you?”

John inhaled sharply through his nose. “And you think I can live with knowing the man who almost killed you is walking the streets?”

“I expect you to.” Sherlock said, blinking. He pushed the table at his waist away from him and licked his lips. “John. You have to.”

“Well I can’t.” John shook his head. “And I won’t. I won’t let you surrender all that you’ve put into this, all that we have all put into this - your brother and Greg did not risk their careers and lives to see
you go to prison this far down the line. It won’t just be you who goes down, Sherlock. They will too. And that prick will walk free. I won’t let you throw all of this away. That man deserves to be brought up on charges for what he did to you.”

“We don’t always get what we think we’re supposed to.” Sherlock said quietly. “I am not going to walk - and putting him behind bars won’t make me walk. So why do this? I’m tired, John. I’m tired of fighting so hard against this and being afraid of what is going to happen. I’m tired of sitting here wondering when the door is going to burst open and Skinner is going to be holding a warrant for my arrest. I don’t want to see him succeed, but I can’t keep fighting a battle that has very little in the way of glory if we win it.”

John pursed his lips. “But if you let him win then he’ll think he’s right.”

“I don’t care what he thinks.” Sherlock shook his head. “All I care about is you and me, and the life we can have. I want to go home, with you, and know that that is what is waiting for me for the rest of my life. Letting all of this go and moving forwards is the only way that is going to happen. So that’s what I’ve got to do. I’ve got to let it go.”

John blinked, feeling his eyes filling with hot tears. “I don’t want you to give this up.”

Sherlock watched the tears run slowly down John’s cheeks and felt guilt stab his stomach. “I need to, or it’s going to kill me.”

“Your brother won’t let you.” John sniffed, rubbing his left hand down his cheeks to brush the streaks of tears away. “He and Greg have risked so much, and they love you, Sherlock, you can’t expect them to be okay with this either.”

“They’ll have to be.” Sherlock insisted. “John, I love you - I want to be able to be in love with you in our home, sharing our lives, not via telephone calls and behind bars. I don’t want that to be the risk involved with seeing Jack Skinner locked away for doing this to me. I hate where I am, I’m still scared of how I’m supposed to move forward, but pursuing this case will not change how I feel. It will not change my mobility. I can’t keep fighting with what strength I have for a battle I’m not going to win.”

“I think I understand why you’re doing this.” John took a deep breath, trying not to cry anymore. “But it feels like giving up.”

“It probably is. But if I don’t then I’ll lose a lot more.” Sherlock said firmly. “I want to go home and pretend that this is all okay. I can’t if I have to keep thinking that the day is going to come when I’ll be hauled away or Skinner will close the case. So I want it over with now, so that we can move forwards.”

“Mycroft will kill you.” John said, half-laughing over a sob as he sobered up.

Sherlock nodded, smiling mirthlessly. “He probably will. But this is my decision and this is the one I’ve come to.”

“Okay,” John nodded his head. “If you’ve made up your mind, I’ll stop trying to change it. We drop the case.”

“We drop the case.” Sherlock repeated.
Chapter 48

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Mycroft arrived at Greg’s Scotland Yard office, nobody would have guessed he’d been awake all night. He had returned home, barely managed a shower and change of clothes before his parents were questioning him about his brother, and had escaped again in less than half an hour. He marched directly to Greg’s small office with purpose to his steps and let himself in without knocking. He was surprised to find the office empty, though, and glanced around him a moment before stepping out again. He found Sally Donovan at her computer desk and approached her, lingering over her shoulder broodingly without spoken word to unnerve her into looking around at him.

“If you're looking for Lestrade, he's out on a call in Soho. He radioed in a few minutes ago to say he would be back so I'd expect him shortly.” She spoke without him even opening his mouth.

“And Inspector Skinner?” Mycroft enquired.

“I don't know.” Sally said. “Can I take a message?”

Mycroft shook his head with his eyebrows crooked eye. “I don't think so, no.” He spoke with condescension rife in his tone. “Ask Inspector Lestrade to be free at four pm. I will be come back.”

“How do you imagine one would be after being shot?” Sally quizzed. “There are other senior officers you could talk with.”

Mycroft simply stared at her. “Four pm.” He repeated, turning to walk away.

Sally got to her feet. “How is he?” Mycroft stopped. He turned back to her and tilted his head slightly to the right. “Sherlock.” She said, a nervous hitch in her voice. “How is he?”

“How do you imagine one would be after being shot?” Mycroft said with his brows furrowed.

“It's just…” Sally wavered. “He went from having physiotherapy to having surgery. I just wondered if he was doing better.”

“He is.” Mycroft said with a brief nod. “Do pass on my message to Lestrade.” He said airily, turning away from her again and walking on.

Sally watched him leave the department and placed her hands on her hips as she sighed. She had never felt great affection for Sherlock Holmes and she knew she never would, but knowing what she was certain she knew about Jack Skinner and his intentions for Sherlock, she did fear for him somewhat - for him and those he knew.

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Greg shook his head and found himself unable to speak, simply stating at Mycroft across the desk. Mycroft took a measured breath. “John tried talking to him again, but he's adamant.”

“When something isn’t sitting right with me.” Greg rubbed his hands over his face. “Sally Donovan said pretty much the same thing to me.” He braced his hands on his desk. “She also said that Skinner
wasn't the one with the gun.”

“Oh she did, did she?” Mycroft raised his eyebrows. “And who did this wonderful sergeant see shooting Sherlock instead, then?”

“I don't know - but she said from the description of the scene that Skinner had given her, it was clear that if he was there it was before I left with John as he didn't accurately describe the police car. He described mine. Whoever Charlie Hawkes saw, apparently, wasn't Jack Skinner.” Greg said, drawing his mouth to the side in thought.

“So Sergeant Donovan thinks Skinner has accomplices?” Mycroft clarified.

Greg shrugged, “Seemingly so.”

“Well, even more reason to continue on our part. If Skinner has people working for him then he has other intentions. If Sherlock lets this go and does not continue to ‘seek out’ who shot him, Jack Skinner stands in a better position for causing further damage. That means you, Sherlock and I are in even more danger of losing everything.” Mycroft said firmly.

“You think that that thought didn't occur to me, too?” Greg snapped at him slightly. “Tell Will I'm not letting this go - that the case continues whether he likes it or not. Tell him sorry.”

“Sorrow for protecting Sherlock will get you nowhere.” Mycroft said sternly. He got to his feet and looked down at Greg at his desk. “Though I know he would be grateful if you stopped by the hospital. John is pushing for his release, I know, but for now he is still there. If you can keep your cool, I'm sure your presence would be welcomed.”

Greg nodded slowly. “Thank you.”

Mycroft smirked. “Pas de probléme.”

“Don't do that.” Greg frowned. “Don't mock him.”

“I wasn't.” Mycroft actually looked a little surprised.

“You were; you were mocking us both and I don't appreciate it. I've been there for him, at times when you haven't, don't make out our relationship is a joke. I love that kid, and you know it, and this is killing me - all of this. So don't come in here playing the concerned big brother one minute and then turn it into a joke the next. Sherlock is in danger - we all are, and the prick who had put us in this position is conspiring to make our lives even harder still. It isn't funny, so don't rip the rug from beneath me or him, not on the one bit of escapism he clings to.” Greg sat back, his eyes fixed firmly on Mycroft's face.

“Don't flatter yourself.” Mycroft said with a curl to his lip. “I sincerely believe that nobody will be ‘clung to’ so tightly as John Watson.”

Greg scoffed. “You don't deserve that kid for a brother, you know?”

Mycroft rolled his eyes. “Sherlock always has been the one with the heart.”

Greg sighed, “Yeah, I know. That's how we got here.” He said quietly. “Try as he might to be as stone-walled as you, he cares more than he dares to show.” Mycroft stared at Greg for a moment. “It took you so long to accept that Mark’s death was not his fault. Now that you do, and now that we have the opportunity for taking down Jack Skinner and proving Sherlock's innocence, please don't stand in the way of things. Change his mind, Mycroft. If Sally Donovan is right - and part of me
hopes she is - then Skinner has allies and he plans on using them. We need Sherlock to keep his heart and head in line and see this through to the point where Skinner is punished. He deserves to see that happen.”

Surprising Greg, Mycroft nodded. “Give me a day or two.” He nodded his head again by way of a goodbye and turned to leave. “Sincerely, Gregory - visit him.”

Chapter End Notes

I've been dying for a private, sort of revealing exchange between Mycroft and Greg for a while. I hope you guys like it.
Chapter 49

When Violet stepped up to the doorway of the small bay room her son was being cared for in, she found him and his ever-attentive partner giggling like children. It warmed her heart, bringing a tearful smile to her eyes and made them glisten. She paused, not wanting to break away from the obvious lightness she felt her youngest deserved, before composing herself and stepping into view with a singsong, “Hello!”

“Mrs Holmes,” John sobered, turning from his position standing beside Sherlock's bed to look at their visitor and offered her a bright smile.

“Oh, Violet, please.” She waved him off as she approached. “Hello, sweetheart, how are you?” She smiled with wide eyes at her son.

Sherlock's bright smile of laughter for John softened into something sentimental for his mother. “I'm fine.” He promised her as she cupped her hand over his cheek.

“It seems to be a recurrent thing, me seeing you in a hospital bed.” She said, fighting her tears off. “Mikey explained everything. You poor soul.”

“He really is doing well, M...Violet. He's strong, bright, healing well. He's alright.” John said quickly with a light tone.

Violet nodded, “Oh I can see that. He's in good hands with you, John, dear.”

“I am.” Sherlock said through a smile, raising his eyebrows at John. “And where's dad?”

Violet smiled, “I supposed one of us would be enough to descend upon you today.” Sherlock nodded his head. “So when do you get to go home and stay home?” Violet asked, “I really want to see this lovely house of yours.”

“A few days yet.” John answered for Sherlock as Violet began fussing around him, righting his blankets and pushing his curls from his forehead. “Once he's assessed with his movements again and they’re happy with his surgery sites he'll be released. Which will be great when at last it happens.”

“I dare say!” Violet remarked. “Where is your brother? He told me today he would be here with you and yet it's almost teatime and he is nowhere to be seen.”

“He still has to work, mother. And one babysitter is quite enough.” Sherlock said flatly, frowning at her as she began organising his bag of belongings. She was pecking, nesting like a pregnant woman, and both he and John could tell there was something she was worried about.

“Can I go and get you a cup of tea, Violet?” John offered, hovering beside Sherlock.

“Oh no thank you, dear, I'm quite alright. I'm all tea’d out.” She smiled absently.

Sherlock frowned at her again and looked to John, sharing a silent “what's going on?” between them. “Mum, what's the matter?” Sherlock quizzed. “You're...fussy.”

“I'm quite alright.” She assured him, smiling up at him quickly as she paired his socks together and launched them back into the bag.

“You do seem a little...bothered by something.” John pitched in. “Are you sure you're okay?”
“Quite sure.” She looked up at him and pushed up her cheeks in a smile, and John's heart beat a little at the way she looked exactly like Sherlock.

“Well that's rubbish.” Sherlock tutted. “So stop messing with my clothes and tell me what's going on.”

Violet put down the blue button down shirt she was absentmindedly folding and looked between her son and John. “A man visited your brother’s house last night. A police officer.”

“That'll be Greg. He's a friend…” John said with a smile.

Violet held out her hand to him. “I'm aware of who Greg Lestrade is, dear, and this wasn't him.” Violet shook her head and John got the feeling that, to Violet, Greg’s presence meant Sherlock was high or overdosed and therefore the man didn't exactly spark her with joy. “No. He said he was handling the investigation into your shooting. Detective Inspector Skinner.” Violet said, looking nervous. “He was looking for Mikey, but he said as we were your parents he should like to talk to us too. I don't know why, we were not here when you were injured, but he seemed like he was keen to gather everything he could to help with the investigation and your father and I wanted to help…”

“What did he want?” Sherlock asked her firmly. “Did he say something to you? Do something…” Sherlock's back tensed at the thought of Skinner touching his parents.

“No, no, don't be silly.” Violet shook her head. “But he did take something of your brother's.”

“He took something?” John's eyebrows rose.

Violet nodded. “A photo frame. He didn't think your father and I were looking; I was relighting the dining room fire and your father was gathering up the coffee mugs, but I saw him pluck the photograph from the drinks cabinet and put it into his jacket pocket,” she shook her head. “Why would an officer want a photograph of you and Mycroft together as boys?” She frowned, looking at Sherlock. “I got a little frightened in case he wasn't actually a policeman.”

John licked his lips. “No…” He shook his head, making sense of her words. “No, he is with Scotland Yard.”

“He could have just asked, I'm sure I wouldn't have minded giving him what he needed, but whoosh! Frame and all, he slipped it into his pocket.” Violet tutted. “Maybe I'm worrying about nothing.” She rolled her eyes at herself. “I'm sorry, sweetheart, I'm being silly.” She smiled genuinely at her son.

John held Sherlock's hand and immediately felt Sherlock's fingers curl tightly around his. He watched Violet return to her folding of Sherlock's clothes, visibly less uptight, and then looked to Sherlock. “I don't even…” He whispered, and leaned in to kiss Sherlock's temple. “We'll let Mycroft know, and Greg, and see what they can find out.” He said quietly.

Sherlock pushed his head into John’s cheek, as John stood resting himself against Sherlock, and sighed. “Why would he do that?” He spoke in a whisper. “It doesn’t make sense.”

“He's screwing with us.” John mumbled and turned his face to kiss Sherlock’s head again.

“This is why I want it to stop. I need him out of the way.” Sherlock leaned into John, letting himself attempt to relax into the affection of John’s peppered kisses.

“Look at you two!” Violet gushed, putting a stopper on any further discussion they might have carried. “I never imagined my boy would settle down; dad and I always thought you and Mycroft
were too career minded to have spouses and families. But look at you,” She smiled, “You’re even affectionate and open to contact.” She looked up at John. “He barely used to let me push his fair from his face when he was a boy.”

John managed a small smile. “What was he like?” He asked, thinking that perhaps a trip down memory lane with Mrs Holmes would salve his and Sherlock’s discomfort for a while. “As a kid, I mean.”

“Very sweet when he was small.” Violet nodded her head with certainty. “Inquisitive, a little emotional, but always very affectionate. And then when he began going to the higher school he was less affectionate and forthcoming with his conversation, but he grew into a handsome young man who was absorbed by knowledge and literature, almost in the same way Mycroft had been by mathematics at a similar age.”

“I can’t imagine them as a kids.” John smiled sweetly, not standing so close to Sherlock now Violet was examining them, but keeping their hands entwined on top of Sherlock’s blanket. “Mycroft especially. The type of person he is - I find it difficult to see him as a small boy.”

Sherlock snorted; “He was never a child so much as a short man.”

Violet rolled her eyes and tutted but she couldn’t help the mirth from showing on her face at Sherlock’s comment. “Oh, stop it. You were both very sweet children; when Sherlock was about three years old, Mycroft couldn’t have been more than ten or eleven, my sister and I had taken the boys and her daughter, Melissa, to this wonderful picnic park out near where she lived at the time in Church Lawford. You remember Aunt Susanna’s house on the Rugby border, don’t you, sweetheart?” Sherlock nodded his head quietly. “So Sherlock is just a toddler and Melissa was a year older than Mikey; Susanna and I were in the garden and we were talking over the anniversary of our mother’s death that was upcoming and what we intended to do in memoriam. She’d been dead about four years at the time - it was one of my greatest sadnesses when Sherlock was small; he never did get to meet her. She would have found him wonderous, I know.”

John watched her smile sadly and looked to Sherlock, enthralled by the way Sherlock’s eyes followed his mother’s expressions with sharpness and concern.

“I digress,” She scolded herself and John smiled. “Mikey and Melissa took Sherlock along the large field at the front of the property. Oh, it was wonderful - lined with poppies and tulips, and wonderfully unkempt wild grass. Sherlock’s little curly head was all that was visible of him as the three walked away. They were gone for about twenty or thirty minutes and I began to get a little nervous about where they might have wandered off to. I trusted Mikey implicitly with his baby brother, but Sherlock was such a small infant and rather sickly, I hated to think he got too tearful while Mike had to care for him alone. So Susanna and I began calling out into the field and she spotted Melissa and Mycroft walking toward us again, so I began to relax a little more. Heavens knows I could barely relax having two boys in the house, but I knew Mikey would look after you.” She smiled at Sherlock with glassy eyes.

“Ever the big brother, in every sense.” Sherlock said quietly, and John didn’t know if it were sincere or sarcastic.

“When the three of them reached the edge of the field and were walking back toward us across the main garden, I could hear Sherlock crying in great sniffs of sadness. As though he’d been told off, you know, like when a young child just cannot calm down and they’re overwrought with emotion and cannot catch their breath…” She shook her head. “Poor Sherlock was just sobbing and we could hear Mikey telling him it was okay, that he would look after him and that he shouldn’t be upset anymore.” She smiled, clearly able to picture the scene in her mind. “I noticed then that Melissa was
carrying Sherlock’s little dungarees and that Mycroft was wearing just his t-shirt vest, because he had wrapped his button down around Sherlock’s waist. The little man had wet his pants on the admittedly long walk and completely lost his mind, so Mycroft quite literally gave him the shirt off of his back. To this very day, that is perhaps the single best thing Mycroft has ever done for Sherlock and it was done so honestly, so...openly. Completely out of love.”

John raised his eyebrows, trying to find something to sum up her story. Nothing clever came to mind; no sarcastic jibe at Mycroft or a witty comment. “Not many brothers that far apart in age who would have a relationship like that.” He said, sincerely.

“No, there are not.” Violet nodded. John watched her attempt to be discreet as she dabbed at her watering eyes. “That’s why it makes me so happy to know Mycroft is here for Sherlock when he needs him most. I know you do your part John, and that part is huge and it is vital to Sherlock - I see that clearly. But one’s siblings are never easily replaced and I am glad to know Mycroft continues to honour that role.”

John’s mouth twitched; he wouldn’t lie and pretend he always agreed with Mycroft or liked how he had treated Sherlock, but he had seen himself since Sherlock was shot just how sincere his love for Sherlock was. They showed it in odd ways, the Holmes boys, but love - very evidently - lived deeply within their relationship. “He does.” John nodded, his voice catching a little at the emotion filling the room. He turned his head and smiled at Sherlock. “Am I allowed to tease you for peeing yourself?”

“Do it, and see what it gets you.” Sherlock raised his brows with a mock-serious glare.
A little "trigger warning", I suppose, for this chapter. Witnessed events from a job of mine and, something I saw last night at work, whilst working with an "experienced" but far from gentle care worker last night inspired this chapter. Unfortunately, the events described are seen far too often in many, MANY care facilities; care workers assuming that an individual who perhaps is just immobile, or maybe unable to verbally express themselves, is completely deaf, dumb, blind and stupid and abandoning all semblances of actual care in favour of working quickly and "just getting the job done". I've been in the social care sector now for over ten years - initially, I started caring for children, but I have found my true calling caring for adults. In every, single establishment I have worked or helped out in (or visited) I've seen things like this happening as STANDARD. The very nature of "caregiving" should be just that...giving care. I always keep in mind "what if this was my mum/granddad/sibling" whilst providing care and attempt to do what I'd want to be done for them. I'm not a saint, and some days I'm rushed off my feet and want to "just get the job done" - but I always have to stop and remind myself that my JOB is to CARE about these people.

Sherlock woke early in the morning of his third day in the hospital and found himself alone. John had left the hospital that night - under Sherlock’s persistent insistence - and Mycroft had not been back at all that day. Oddly, Sherlock had found it easy to fall asleep despite their absence, so easy, in fact, he’d drifted off somewhere around eight pm and now found himself unable to sleep further. Checking the time on the large clock that ticked quietly above the arched entrance, he made out that it was just shy of three am and he sighed a little as he shuffled his head around on the pillows.

He knew, going by the general routine of the hospital staff, that at around three-thirty there was a comfort check which meant he’d be repositioned and his inco-pad would be checked, along with the HCAs attempting to force-feed him two hundred mil of fluids and poke around with his catheter. Despite their attempts, there wasn’t any dignity to relying on others for your continence needs; more strange faces and unfamiliar hands had been around his genitals and backside in the past three weeks than had sexual partners throughout Sherlock whole life.

He braced his palms against the mattress beneath him, intending to push in hard and try to pull himself up the bed a little to ease the tension between his shoulders, and simultaneously change his position himself and hopefully avoid all the hoo-ha that seemed to come with the simple task.

As his hands met the sheet beneath his bottom, though, he drew them back quickly as they sank into dampness. He pulled the blanket back from around his waist and drew up his gown. The incontinence pad, that fit against him more like a full, adult nappy than a slip-in pad, was saturated, along with his gown and the sheet immediately around his hips. He could see that the tubing to his catheter remained in place as he pushed the top edge of the pad down, but then noticed that the flexible foley was bent down, kinking the tubing and, therefore, causing an obstruction to the flow of the urine. With nowhere to drain, the urine had leaked both through the insertion site and had passed, if only a little, urethrally.

Since his last repositioning, or perhaps even before if his pad had not been looked at, his catheter had
not been draining anything and had simply been filling his pad until it reached capacity and began to soak his surroundings.

He thrust the gown back down and pulled the blanket back up over himself, breathing heavily. He was sure his cheeks were flushed as he felt his face begin to burn in embarrassment. He reached for the call bell just above his head and stabbed at it twice with his left index finger. It took mere seconds for the bell to be answered, and two petite HCAs stepped into the room with surprised expressions that were masked with well-meaning smiles.

“Hi, Sherlock. Is everything okay?” Harriet asked, drawing on a pair of gloves over her slim fingers. “You’re not usually willing awake at this time.” She grinned.

“Everything’s wet.” Sherlock huffed with gritted teeth. “I think it was bent.”

Harriet frowned, “What do you mean?” She asked, reaching out her gloved hand for the blankets as her colleague, Elaine, went around to the other side of the bed. As Harriet drew back the blanket, the smell of urine hit her immediately before the visible pattern of wetness around Sherlock’s back. “Oh, shit...is it kinked?” She began scrambling at Sherlock’s wet gown and, without speaking to Sherlock further or pausing for more niceties, slipped her hands down his hips to unfasten the catches on his incontinence pad and drew it down, exposing his genitals and leaning in to peer at the insertion site of the catheter. “It’s leaking...and, yeah, shit, the tubing is kinked at the connector. Balls! His pad is absolutely soaked, the bed. Full bloody change…” She looked across the bed at Elaine.

“Thought he had flaccid bladder?” Elaine asked. “He wouldn’t be able to pee without the cath…”

“Yeah, but when it’s obstructed it’ll just pass however. It’s clearly come out of the insertion site area, and it’ll pass through his penis too, at least a bit...” Harriet said, placing one of her gloved hands right over onto Sherlock’s left shoulder whilst letting the other take his exposed hip. She quickly dragged him toward her, pulling him to lie on his right side. “Drag the pad out...roll the sheet under...shit, did we bring any clean stuff?”

“Yeah, it’s in the locker, I left it in there on the last check so it’d be in there for the bedbath later. Might as well do this now, yeah, and fill out his paperwork for one of the beds having been done?” Elaine said, chucking the sodden pad to the floor beside her feet before she made a roll with the sheet tight in to Sherlock’s right side. She quickly soaked up the urine remaining on the bed with a handful of dry wipes from the locker, and then unfolded and slipped in the new, dry sheet before she reached into the bed to unfasten the ties of the gown. She lined up the clean, dry pad with Sherlock’s buttocks and nodded. “Alright…” she called out and Elaine placed Sherlock back down on his back.

Harriet eased Sherlock over onto his back and set about dragging the wet gown off his arms and threw it down over the bed so it landed on the floor. For a moment or two, Sherlock lay completely naked between the two women as Harriet unhooked his catheter bag from the side of the bed to allow him to roll in the opposite direction. Elaine reached over and placed her hands on Sherlock’s hip and shoulder - almost identically placed in the mirror image to Harriet’s stance before - and dragged Sherlock toward her. As Elaine held Sherlock on his left side, Harriet slipped the wet sheet fully across the bed and chucked it down on the floor beside the discarded gown. Once the wet sheet was gone, she pulled across the bunched up dry sheet, folding it down over the rest of the bed, and repositioned the pre-placed pad to line up perfectly with Sherlock’s bottom. “Alright…” she called out and Elaine placed Sherlock back down onto his back.

Without another word, the girls divided Sherlock’s thighs and pulled the pad up between his legs. Harriet reached down and awkwardly aligned Sherlock’s penis and testicles before pulling down the top part of the pad over him, fixing it in place with it’s sticky tabs around his hips. Harriet carefully made sure that the catheter tubing was straight and feeding down into the pad. She ensured it came
out of the leg cuff on his right side, and then hooked the catheter bag back down onto the bar of the bed.

“Got a gown in there?” Harriet asked, nodding to the supply locker.

“No, but he’s got a bag of stuff, ain’t he? You got a t-shirt or jammies or something?” Elaine looked down to Sherlock, staring up at her with bewilderment in his eyes. Sherlock shrugged his shoulders, unable to speak.

Harriet rooted through the travel bag that was on the floor by the end of Sherlock’s bed. She pulled out a plain, white undershirt. “This’ll do.” She said, and launched it across the bed to Elaine, who stood with her hands held open to catch it. Elaine worked Sherlock’s arms into the shirt before dragging it up and over his head, not especially mindful as she caught his ear trying to drag it down. “Rolling?” Harriet asked, easing the shirt down as far as it would go on her side without having to move Sherlock at all.

“Nah, he can bend. Quick lift…” Elaine said. Both women hooked their arms underneath Sherlock’s armpits and on Elaine’s quiet “…two, three…”, pulled Sherlock into a sitting position and hauled the t-shirt down his back. Once they were happy that it was down far enough, grazing the top of his pad, they lay him back down against the mattress and fixed the shirt at the front, pulling it down over his tummy.

Harriet abandoned Sherlock’s bedside and began gathering up the stained, wet washing. She folded the sheet and gown together into as tight a ball as she could muster and found the driest patch to form a cover to hold it with. Elaine fixed Sherlock’s pillows under his head and then bent down for the sodden pad at her feet. She folded it into her gloved hands. “The weight of that…” She tutted, smirking over the bed at Harriet. “...he does drink loads, though. No wonder he pisses for England.”

“That reminds me…” Harriet widened her eyes. “Sherlock, babes, do you want a drink?” The two paused at the entrance. Sherlock shook his head. “Okay then, we’ll see you in a bit.”

As the girls left, Sherlock closed his eyes firmly and bit down hard on his bottom lip. He wasn’t sure he’d ever felt so ashamed and unclean in his life. He felt violated, a little, and completely worthless. He’d been assumed useless by two girls about ten years his junior who had tossed and turned him like a piece of meat on a slab. They hadn’t washed the urine from his body, hadn’t repositioned him, hadn’t kept his modesty or dignity at all, and he felt painfully close to tears as he glanced around the once again empty room, still able to smell the tang of urine on his skin. He closed his eyes as the tears began to fall, rolling from his eyes and down into the bends of his ears. His abdomen pulled inward as he tried to hold back sobs whilst his shoulders shook with pure grief. He had previously reached a point where he felt he was dealing with the changes he’d been faced with, and now he found himself feeling utterly useless, dirty and unvalued, and wishing there was some way of ending it all.
Chapter 51

Chapter Notes

I haven't loved a chapter this much yet. Not sure what you guys will make of it, though. I love how disarrayed it is.

Last post for this evening - I worked 2 night shifts, and have been awake all day writing today so I'll be off to bed in an hour or so. Anyway hope you enjoy, and I'll get more up very soon. I have another chapter half finished (and it's longer...) so I'll post that in a day or two.

Mycroft had barely managed to sleep at all throughout the night and, by the time six am came into view on the clock at his bedside, he was glad of the morning’s unceremonious arrival. He was quiet and careful as he showered and dressed for the day, mindful not to wake his parents sleeping in the guestroom. It wasn’t that he was being a good son, or being polite - he just did not want their company.

His mind had been too full even before he’d slipped into bed; he had been too preoccupied to return to his brother at the hospital. He knew Sherlock would read his facial expressions immediately and everything would come to the surface and Sherlock would batten down the hatches even tighter. So he’d kept away - he’d gone to his offices and tried to focus on other aspects of the entire case. He’d sourced new mobile phones for himself, John and Sherlock; he’d visited Sherlock and John’s home and wandered the halls and rooms to ensure it’s safety; he’d spent an hour in blissful, agonising silence at The Diogenes, focusing far too much on the negative impact his brain had on every idea that burst forth.

He’d spent a remarkable amount of time at the boys’ house, actually. He’d taken the time, not only to ensure it’s safety, but to really look at all the work he had put into making the home ‘just right’ for Sherlock’s new needs. Doorways were wider, counters in the kitchen were lower, the bathroom was a wet room and there were bars around the toilet and sink to give Sherlock as much privacy and dignity to do things himself as possible. The floors were all carpet-free and the chair legs were complete with ‘elephant’s feet’ raisers to ensure they met the height of Sherlock’s wheelchair to allow him to transition across independently and smoothly. Despite ordering all the changes to the house, Mycroft considered, as he walked, that he’d never really stood back to see the finished result and he was both amazed and saddened at what had been accomplished. The house was tailor-made for his brother - complete with an elevator - and it made his throat thicken with a heavy, painful lump to have to have made any of these changes at all.

He pushed the house out of his mind with a shake of his head and tried to focus again, keen to narrow his mind into one, clear lane of thinking. One thing he kept coming back to, after leaving Lestrade, after lying in bed, after washing his hair in the shower, was that the thing he was most scared of was that Jack Skinner was not finished with Sherlock. Not in terms of Mark, not in terms of seeing him imprisoned or in letting the case purposefully run cold. No - he was petrified, absolutely bones-deep-terrified, that Jack Skinner had a plan for Sherlock that would result in his death. Mycroft knew it had been on all of their minds at some point, but it was a thought he was not able to push away from his at all. He could hide it, bury it under the concern for Sherlock’s renal system or the fears that their conversations were being recorded, but he could not hide from it. The thought found
him in rare moments of mental quiet, in the hushes of almost-sleep, and the serenity of the silent halls of The Diogenes. He could not run from the gut-twisting fear that Jack intended on killing his brother.

Every possible outcome for Sherlock, himself and Greg was running through his mind and he was trying to focus it, to **narrow it down**, to the most likely of scenarios. Two distinctions were sticking fiercely in his mind.

Sherlock could continue on his latest idea of not insisting the investigation continue. So...what would Skinner do? If he did indeed have people working alongside him, what would they do? How would Sherlock truly feel if the investigation ended and the world right-side-upped itself and he was left with just life; life with John, life with his wheelchair, life as it was now on a forward trajectory without fear of Skinner’s involvement any further? Would closing the case and ‘moving on’ truly mean that Skinner would let it all go at all?

What if he and Greg managed to get through to him, and convince him to keep fighting this to the end, to see it through to the courts and a sentence? How would Sherlock feel knowing the case would go public? How would Sherlock feel seeing Jack Skinner arrested, question and - all being well - tried for his injuries? If Sherlock did continue to fight this case through, would it even mean that Skinner would be named at all? Would Jack have a hand ready to play, knowing that they would call him to order if the investigation continued?

But what if there was something else? The endless list of possibilities was dizzying. Sally Donovan could have a card up her sleeve; Jack Skinner could have a lot of fingers in a lot of pies; Sherlock’s health could deteriorate further; what if Sherlock and John separate; what if Lestrade withdraws his involvement completely; what if Jack Skinner has a plan for one of them, or all of them, or something completely different?

**What-bloody-if?** Narrow it down, Mycroft! Narrow. It. Down.

It had occurred to him that the spinal damage was a misfire. Perhaps Sherlock had turned at the ‘wrong’ time; perhaps the bullet had travelled in the wind; perhaps the rain had obscured the correct line of sight. **Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps.** But it was all possible. **All plausible.** What if Sherlock’s paralysis was a life-saving accident, not a deliberate shot? What if Jack - or a cohort - had simply misfired? Sherlock’s brains could have been spread across the street; his heart could have been exploded inside of his lithe chest…

What if all the ‘what ifs’ they’d been considering were all wrong and Sherlock’s injury now was the ‘what if’, the ‘if only’, the ‘any closer and…’? What if the bullets that took away any sense of ...anything...below his waist was actually the only reason he is alive?

Mycroft couldn’t bear the insistence of the thought. It nagged, banged, ticked and popped, erupting through any other thoughts he tried to engage his mind in. And then the nausea would begin and he would be forced to harden, to let the icicles return to his heart and protect him from any further pains. A ‘broken Sherlock’ was hard enough to live with; a broken Sherlock as a means of chance was frightening. But the idea of his brother gone was nothing short of self-harm inducing.

He sat alone at the breakfast table with a cup of hot, dark tea, and attempted to hone his mind. He tried to get into Skinner’s head, to see what he had seen when the gun was fired. From Sherlock’s recounted story, Sally and Charlie’s statements, he got the rainy night clear in his mind and saw his brother there, Charlie and he face to face with the car between them. Sally...somewhere near the front of the car. He tried to be Jack Skinner, brought himself back a few tens of feet and higher up; above-shop flat window - he was high, above the chaos but dry from the outside weather. He visualised Sherlock, his coat, the buttons that tailored the back in, the upturned collar…
“Bang…” he whispered. “Bang! Bang!”

He frowned, opened his eyes that had closed as he’d focused, and stared into the mid-distance. Nobody had said what the bullet pattern was. Three drill shots? One, then two? Two, then one? The first - then the second - then the third, measured and accurate? Or random, as though the shooter were firing with their...eyes closed, aiming without aiming? Or two different shooters - one intending on making a kill-shot, but missing...and one firing to injure, to hurt, to maim?

“Why has nobody…” He tilted his head, setting down his teacup. “What if who Charlie saw in the window was Skinner, but there was also another…” He mumbled back and forth to himself.

Two shooters; Skinner, intending on a killshot but missing and another, an accomplice, paid...recruited...ordered to shoot Sherlock with an aim to cause physical damage. Identical guns. Identical pattern - different agenda?

Or one shooter - Skinner - interrupted? Two in the back, one in the thigh - the thigh shot was a miss, he was...disturbed, walked in on. His pattern changed. If so, what pattern did the bullets fall in?

**Two, then one?** Two in succession - one as a reaction, a misfire. Three in a very deliberate spot on his spine - massive blood loss, wavering very slightly to ensure multiple entry points in a single area. But the final shot was interrupted and he turned, firing as he did so, missing the point of entry and hitting another area. Still blood loss but not in the same capacity - spread out...

Mycroft screwed his eyes closed and massaged his aching temples. Nothing made sense. He was only ever able to rely on his brain, his ability to see what others refused to and know the destination of a thought before it arrived. But he was stumped; there was no rule, no pattern to follow, no clue. Skinner did it, or he didn’t. He had help, or he didn’t. He missed, or he was right on target. **He wanted to kill, or he didn’t.** But it was the complete lack of data - the complete lack of absolution - that was threatening to set fire to Mycroft’s internal hard drive.

But that last idea stuck with him and he ran with it, combining it with what Lestrade had told him Sally Donovan had said. What if it was a misfire that his thigh was blown through? The three bullets were meant for his spinal column but the final shot was interrupted. **Who was interrupting?** Who prevented that final bullet from making it’s destination accurately? Who was firing the gun if it wasn’t Skinner?

Mycroft sat forwards and rested his elbows on the table before him, and took his head in his hands. More questions than answers; more confusion than clarity. The more he tried to deduce, the less he found understandable. He wanted to know why - he wanted to know who - he wanted to know what next. Those three questions were impossible to find answers to and he knew it was impossible to expect them to appear. And so his mind remained tortured, playing over all the what ifs, whys and hows as though he were an amature, as though his heart was ruling his head.

Because it was.

What mattered to him was keeping Sherlock safe from further harm and that wasn’t from a practical standpoint. It was as a brother, as *Sherlock’s big brother*. He told himself he hadn’t sat through withdrawals, highs, lows and self-destructions to now see *somebody else* destroy his brother. He cared, despite what he told those who accused him of it. Despite what he told himself. Sherlock was the only thing he had ever cared about. Perhaps it was his peculiarities, perhaps it was his differently-abled mind, perhaps it was just fraternal love. But he cared for Sherlock, and being able to do precisely nothing to help him now was breaking his hard-guarded heart with every beat it gave. Sherlock was the place where Mycroft knew his life began and ended - without him, he wasn’t sure he would know what a real life was. Or was being Sherlock’s brother exactly what a real life was? If that was the case, why did he feel like he wasn’t doing it right?
His inability to narrow it down and work it out made him feel like he was failing Sherlock. Perhaps those on the outside would see it differently, but Mycroft did not. His job was to be there for Sherlock, again and again. But he hadn’t been. He wasn’t there when the shots were fired. He wasn’t there when Mark and he were high. He wasn’t there when Sherlock had a sensory meltdown in school. He wasn’t there - he wasn’t there - he wasn’t there.

_He wasn’t there._

**Three bullets. One off-target. Skinner wasn’t there?**
John arrived at the hospital early. He had managed a couple of hours restful sleep, but he had been awake since the early hours and his mind had been flitting back and forth between agreeing with Sherlock’s decision and being haunted by what Violet had said about Jack Skinner being at Mycroft’s house. Still, he looked as rested as he felt - which was fairly - as he stepped into Sherlock’s bay at eight twenty, surprised to find Sherlock lying on his side looking like a frightened child, eyes wide and blankets tugged up to his chin. Fearing another frightful infection, John hurried to the bedside and sank down into the chair so his face came in line with Sherlock’s.

“Hey, what’s the matter?”

“I stink.” Sherlock said, his eyes wandering over John’s face as if memorising it.

John frowned. “Well, you’re not exactly smelling of Fahrenheit, Love. But you don’t stink.” He smiled a little, bewildered by Sherlock’s mood.

“I want to go home. I can’t stay here, I’m fine. I want to go home. I’ll go AMA if they won’t willingly release me. I don’t want to still be here tonight, John.” Sherlock babbled out in a flurry of words. “Get Mycroft to threaten them or something.”

John chuckled lightly and pulled the chair even closer to the bed, allowing him to rest his head in beside Sherlock’s, sharing the pillow with him. Sherlock shuffled his head back a little, giving John more space. “If you want to go home, I’ll do my best.” John said, staring directly into Sherlock’s eyes awkwardly, close to him to the point that the Detective seemed blurry. “But I think Mycroft feels safer with you being in here.”

Sherlock shook his hair, dislodging his curls which saw them flop onto John’s head. “Don’t care.”

John gave him a sad but warm smile. “I’ll get you home, Love.” He snuggled in closer to Sherlock, humming into the closeness he missed. “Have you thought about your decision any more?” he asked, deciding to risk the question.

Sherlock nodded wordlessly, then took a deep breath. “I still want it all over with, I still want to break away and hope he just disappears. But I don’t know if it’s the right thing to do. He’s been to Mycroft’s home, he took a photograph of us as kids…”

“I know. It’s...strange.” John frowned, trying to think of any conceivable reason why he’d even require something like that.

“Will you help me with something?” Sherlock asked.

John groaned and sat himself up, finding the odd position, while lovely, too uncomfortable. He looked into Sherlock’s eyes and nodded. “Anything, you know that.”

“I need a shower.” Sherlock said quietly, almost squeamish at the request.

John frowned, “The care girls didn’t help you have a wash this morning before your medication?” Sherlock shook his head and looked impossibly small and vulnerable again. John sighed heavily. “Love, what the hell happened to you last night? You look scared out of your whits.”

Sherlock took a deep breath and blew it out through his nose. “The catheter was leaking - two of the nursing assistants came in and everything was...wet.” He wrinkled his nose. John’s face fell into a
sympathetic pout. “...they just took everything off and put new stuff on. I can still...smell it. Feel it on my back...” he gritted his teeth, feeling his eyes begin to water. “John I wet the bed and I couldn’t even have a shower. They didn’t even help...”

“Oh, Love...” John sighed softly. “I’ll help, okay? Up, in the wheelchair, and we’ll find somewhere and I’ll help you have a shower. And then I’ll see about taking you home.” John's body prickled with anger, unable to understand why anyone would be in this line of work and complete abandon what it is to actually care. He leaned down and pressed his lips into Sherlock's hair, closing his eyes. “Don't mention this to your brother. I'm fairly certain, mood he was in yesterday when he left, he'll get someone fired.”

“I honestly do not care what your reservations are. Complete surveillance. Every residence, office building, phone or computer - monitor it now.” Mycroft’s tongue sliced the words sharply down the phone then cut the call.

He passed his phone between his hands, scaling down his anger with deep, nasal breaths. He intended on finding out the truth - everything he could learn, he would. Who fired the gun, how and why, what Jack Skinner’s intentions were, who was working with him if, indeed, anyone was. He pushed himself up from the chair at the dining table and walked on quiet feet into the large hallway. He’d stop by Greg’s offices before he went to the hospital. From there, his mind would be focused on Jack Skinner and he would bring the man’s world crashing down around him.

Meeting Greg proved to be more difficult than Mycroft had assumed it might be, though. He was stone-walled by Dimmock, Donovan and a junior officer he had never seen before as they fobbed him off with reasons why Lestrade was not available. Mycroft was sure the man was around, mind you, but allowed the team their victory as he retreated, more focused on visiting his brother than anything else in his present frame of mind. He could not get his thoughts in order; there was more to Jack Skinner than he and Greg had previously considered and the thought that Sherlock might still be in danger was a hard one to bury.

Finding his brother, then, alive and seemingly well was an immediate relief when he stepped into the small room to see Sherlock up, in his wheelchair, and dressed with his hair damp and his face clean shaven. “Sherlock.” He greeted by way of an announcement. John was crouched at Sherlock’s knee, fastening Sherlock’s shoes onto his feet, and he looked up at the sound of Mycroft’s voice.

Sherlock flicked his eyes over his brother and they narrowed, reading his expressions and demeanour easily. “What’s the matter?”

“Why do you ask?” Mycroft raised his brows, dismissively.

Sherlock smirked. “Don’t play me, Mycroft, I’m not John.”

“Thanks, Love.” John peered up at him and Sherlock met him with a sarcastic but amusing grin. “He’s right, Mycroft. You look awful.”

“As, I’m assuming, Sherlock did prior to his obvious paying of attention to his personal care.” Mycroft deflected. “There is nothing the matter. Am I not allowed to pay a visit to my brother following surgery?” He invited himself to sit down on the currently empty chair, opposite Sherlock’s
empty bed.

“It’s ten am - I’m sure Her Majesty requires your services at this hour. So, clearly, there is something more pressing to you to keep you out of work and, seeing as John is my nursemaid, it’s obviously something you felt you couldn’t keep to yourself so, skip the brooding entrance and just spit it out.” Sherlock said, flicking his eyes over Mycroft momentarily before watching as John carefully placed both legs onto the footplates of the wheelchair before standing up with a little groan as his knees protested.

John laughed and looked to Mycroft, taking in the firm distaste for his brother’s ability to read him effortlessly, and folded his arms across his chest. “Right though, isn’t he?” He asked. “You’re here for a reason and, judging by your expression, it’s something you’re mildly concerned about.”

Mycroft took a deep breath and tilted his head slightly to the left. “I came to give you both the mobile phones I’d sourced for you, and to tell you that I visited the house and, as far as I’m aware, it’s security or sanctity hasn’t been compromised.”

“Oh,” John smiled. “Excellent.”

“But?” Sherlock frowned at Mycroft.

“But having the evening to examine things has led me to think deeper about things I’ve been too preoccupied to considered accurately since you were shot.” Mycroft sat forward. “Areas of the investigation don’t make sense; there are loose ends that should not be loose. Questions without answers that should really have been answered by now.”

“Such as?” Sherlock kept his eyes fixed on his brother and John began to feel like he’d been zoned out of the Holmesian exchange.

“Why the bullet in your thigh? Why two precise shots and one random? Why aim for your spine? How many shooters, how many bullets were actually intended for you, what caused the obvious deviation in aim?” Mycroft reeled as though they were obvious and Sherlock was deliberately missing the jump.

“Sergeant Hawkes saw him - Jack Skinner - he’s the shooter.” John said, pointing between the two men.

“Perhaps he was; but did he work alone?” Mycroft sat back again and crossed his right ankle over his left knee. “If he was planning on giving Sherlock maximum suffering why did he deviate his shot? If he was planning on killing Sherlock, why did he not make a more precise aim for somewhere more fatal?”

“That’s a lot of if’s.” John bristled. “But I thought you and Greg were sure, and with Charlie’s statement I thought that meant it was open and shut, but for waiting for the right time to strike?”

“That is a lot of if’s, and that is the reason I’m here. Sherlock - you cannot step back here and let the investigation shut down. We need the answers to those questions, the details behind the speculations. Whether or not you decide to push forward for a conviction for the person, or persons, responsible, you need to stick with this until Greg Lestrade and I are certain of the details.” Mycroft said firmly.

Sherlock shook his head. “Did she tell you?” Mycroft narrowed his eyes. “Mother, our mother - did she tell you what happened when Jack Skinner went to your house?” Mycroft drew his head back sharply.

“That’s a no, then.” John sighed.
“He went to talk to you and you weren’t there. But he decided he could talk with Mum and Dad, that he could get something from them - I’m not sure what. She let him in, they talked, and when he thought they weren’t paying any attention, she watched him pick up and put into his pocket a photograph from the press you keep the brandy in.” Sherlock said in quick words. He swiped his tongue across his bottom lip. “Us - you and me - when we were children. He took that photograph.”

Mycroft’s eyes lost focus. He knew the photograph - Sherlock and Mycroft; Sherlock just six and Mycroft thirteen, small, innocent, not entirely without happiness or innocence stolen by cynicism. And Redbeard… that funny, old dog. “Did she say anything, about what he’d asked?” Mycroft said with a cough to clear his throat. Why hadn’t he noticed this morning that it was missing? He glanced at it almost every day - how could he not have seen that it was no longer where it usually was?

Sherlock shook his head. “Nothing - she was too concerned that she’d let a perfect stranger in and with delighting John in tales of when you and I were small.”

Mycroft gave a swift nod. “Jack Skinner had help - either somebody who fired the gun on his command, or somebody who stopped him from killing you. Whatever the facts, Skinner is not working alone in this and I need to find out who it is he has on his side and why they are there. People do not agree to disable and potentially kill without motive. Jack I understand - a third party would have to be under his wing or have their own ill-feelings.”

John shook his head, “We went through this, Mycroft. No threats, no taunts, no...warnings. He’s an arrogant dickhead when he wants to be, but that doesn’t warrant anyone needing to get their back up enough to want to kill him.”

“That’s the question, though, isn’t it? Was Jack Skinner shooting to kill and interrupted, or was somebody shooting on Skinner’s behalf and deliberately misfired to avoid a murder charge?” Mycroft said with animation. John and Sherlock regarded one another. “Do not drop this investigation, or potentially you stand to be in more danger.”

John took a deep breath and sighed, about to launch on Mycroft about every inch of security he could offer needing to be put in place, when he stopped short of starting. He frowned into the doorway and Mycroft and Sherlock looked around as a voice spoke up.

“Oh, now...I don’t think the danger ever really went away, though. Did it?”
Sherlock eyed the man before him without attempting to hide the look of horror and pure shock that flashed across his face. He scanned his every inch and finally focused his eyes on his face, narrowing them as their eyes met. His pulse quickened, so fast he could hear his heartbeat in his ears, and he felt his chest tightening.

“Your faces are a picture - I wish I could put those startled expressions into a frame... Come on, don’t look so disappointed, Mycroft - you were doing great until you revealed just how far you were willing to go for your little brother. Did you really think you were being so secretive?” Jack spoke with a deliberately slow and almost evil-sounding niceness that it made John want to launch forward and punch him square in the jaw. “Greg Lestrade’s inability to hide his hurt whenever anybody mentions his pet-project Sherlock is hard to ignore. John, here, is a little man filled with a lot of rage and he can sense distaste in his choices a mile off - and yet, initially, you thought I was truly going to be the undoing of this case and find out who shot Sherlock Holmes.”

“You prick...” John tongued the inside of his left cheek. “You’re risking a lot being here; we could have you locked up for what you’ve done.”

Jack narrowed his eyes and pinched his lips in in mock thought, tilting his head to the right slightly before he shook his head slowly. “No...” he said, at length. “You couldn’t. While you’re not far wrong, it’s all speculation - you have no evidence. You think the bullets weren’t deliberate; the gun used, the type of ammo. I rather hoped they’d spend a little more time assuming John Watson, here, had just gotten far too tired of Sherlock being a pretentious, self-centered...”

“Shut up!” John launched loudly. “Shut up!” He gritted his teeth. “You tried to kill him - you don’t get to stand there like you’re in control.”

Jack laughed, a cackle deep in his throat, and smiled at John. “I am in control, John - I have been since day one. This has been a long time coming; the gunshots, the investigation - both investigations - and the ever-so-amusing dancing you four have been doing right on the fringes of this since the start. Who Shot Sherlock Holmes... it’d make a merry little title for your blog, John. Except if you did write this up, you’d be forced to go back and actually tell the full story. The true story. The story of how your beloved boyfriend here is a seasoned drug user and a murderer.” Jack held out his hands at his sides, empty palms face upwards. “I’m not sure there’ll be too many reads on that one, though. The glorious detective is a heroin addict...probably riddled with HIV, too. Then again, most of you fags are.”

“Stop it.” Mycroft gritted his teeth, rising to his feet and standing at his full height.

“Stop it?” Jack laughed. “That’s your big threat, Mister British Government? Ha...No!” he shouted, the fun and games leaving him as his obvious anger broke through. “This bastard’s life needs to be ruined!” He thrust his hand out toward Sherlock. “You killed my brother - you killed him before you
even facilitated his death, and I won’t forget that. I won’t let you forget that, either. Nice, is it? Bliss with your little live-in boyfriend, here? You think you deserve that happiness, or should be afforded it at all? You’re disgusting, you made Mark disgusting and now you’re living a disgusting life. Well, I won’t let you. Ensuring your death is easy from here on out.” Jack said with a sudden sobering of his entire form. “So perhaps you should heed your brother’s words.” He glared at Sherlock. “You’re definitely in danger, Sherlock Holmes.”

John and Mycroft stood in abject anger, watching the man turn and walk away. Neither of them moved or made any attempts to follow Jack. Neither of them were able to do anything. It took a long two minutes from Jack absence before either of felt like they could even change their position. John crouched, and pushed his face close to Sherlock’s trying to read an expression in the pale, wide-eyed terror that was his face.

“Love, are you okay?” John’s hands cupped both of Sherlock’s cheeks and he forced Sherlock’s absent stare to meet his. “Look at me, Sherlock. Sherlock - bloody blink! Look at me.”

“Get him out of here. Take him home, I’ll ensure you’re escorted and secured inside.” Mycroft began mumbling. “I’ll deal with Skinner.”

“Of course you will, yeah.” John got to his feet. “This is fucked, Mycroft. He’s just admitted his involvement and laughed in our faces at the futility of any attempts we could make to have him charged.”


“So, we really are just letting him walk away?” John asked, turning back to Sherlock.

“What other choice do we have?” Mycroft shook his head at John. “He is not a stupid man, John. He knows how the police work; he knows how Sherlock works. I believe him when he says he has covered his bases.”

“You sound like you admire him!” John snapped. “He tried to kill your brother!”

Mycroft watched John as he pushed his hand through Sherlock’s hair, letting his fingers linger for a moment to spin the curls around his fingers before he drew back his hand. Sherlock still hadn’t spoken, had barely moved an inch, and Mycroft’s concern for him was mounting. “Sherlock.”

John crouched before Sherlock again and took Sherlock’s hands in his. “Love, come on...talk to us.”

“William...this is important.” Mycroft’s voice rose and John was surprised when Sherlock turned his head slowly to look at his brother. “I won’t let anything happen to you. John is going to take you home; I’ll follow once I’ve dealt with a few pressing matters. The house will be surrounded, you will be safe. I promise.”

“I didn't think I cared that he would get away with it.” Sherlock spoke robotically. John hated it. “But I do.”

Mycroft exhaled loudly. “He will not get away with this.”

Sherlock shook his head slowly, “He will.”

“Look at the state of him,” John glared up at Mycroft. “Why is that bastard torturing him like this?”

“Because he thinks he can - and he thinks he deserves it.” Mycroft said, as if bored with John. “He
believes Sherlock’s presence in Mark’s life at all was Mark’s downfall. He blames Sherlock for Mark being homosexual, he blames Sherlock for Mark’s illnesses and addictions…”

“Illnesses…” John raised his eyebrows. “He was HIV positive? That’s why he made that comment?”

“No - but like many bigoted people toward homosexuals, Jack believes any man who sleeps with another must have HIV or AIDS. Mark had hepatitis at the time of his death, but Sherlock does not - before that begins to cloud your mind with judgement or fear.” Mycroft said swiftly. “Jack Skinner was ashamed of his brother and is now riddled with guilt and anger - and blame. Blame that, he feels, belongs at Sherlock’s feet.”

“And we’re just supposed to sit back and wait for the next thing he tries to do to kill him?” John pushed himself up to stand straight again. “Mycroft, this is ridiculous. That man needs locking up. Speak to Greg - he falsified before, he can do it now.”

“And end up in this mess again further down the line?” Mycroft waved his hand. “This is not a game, John.”

“I can see that!” John snapped. “You think I haven’t been here all this time, struggling with him, listening to him screaming in agony, watching him losing his temper in pure frustration to everything that prick has taken from him? You think this hasn’t been scaring me, hasn’t been making me feel like going out there and blowing his brains out? I am well aware of the lack of frivolity in this, Mycroft. Don’t tell me what I already know!”

“Then stop asking stupid questions, stop making ridiculous suggestions and think! Think about taking him home, think about protecting him by any means you can until I can get somebody more suited for the job.” Mycroft spoke low and deep.

“You bastard.” John smiled with not even an ounce of humour. “It is me that has been here for him the entire time. Holding his hand, cleaning up sick and urine, and praying he would make it through surgery when Sally Donovan called and told us what had happened. Me - Mycroft. I’ve done that. I’ve come in here today, even, and continued to do that when he’s supposed to be being cared for by medical staff. You think I can’t look after him, you think I can’t keep him safe? You do a better job, then. Go out there and do something big brothers are supposed to do. Chase after that prick and shoot him dead…” He pursed his lips. “If you think I need you to tell me, now, what I’m supposed to do to make him feel safe, to keep him safe, then you haven’t been paying much attention in any of this. I love him, more than you’ll ever be able to get through that thick skull of yours, so don’t you ever accuse me of not being able to protect him.”

Mycroft raised his eyebrows high on his forehead and pointed to Sherlock with his flattened, left hand. “And yet look at him.”

“Yeah.” John nodded his head, anger burning his cheeks. “Yeah - look at him. He’s actually got the urine off his skin he was still covered in when I came in this morning - you want somebody to kick into touch when you can’t go for Skinner, go out there and punish the girls who treated him like shit. Don’t pin this on me…”

“Shut up!” Sherlock shouted loudly, his voice cracking as he strained to quieten them both. “Stop screaming at one another. This is what he is expecting - for us to be divided and therefore weak. So, unless you actually intend on measuring the length of your penises against one another, help me do something that is going to stop him destroying us all any further.”

“Sherlock…” John sighed and rubbed his hands across his face. “I’m sorry. But I can’t just waltz home with you now and sit there, waiting for him to make his move. He’s a brazen cock, and he’s
going to keep taunting us like this because he thinks he’s home and dry. And as far as I’m aware, if
he thinks he is then he’s clearly got fingers in pies that we don’t even know about.”

“And that’s exactly why you need to take him home.” Mycroft said sternly. “The less involved the
two of you make yourselves in what’s to come, the safer you’ll remain.”

“And you?” Sherlock looked up at his brother, those previously sharp eyes becoming wide and
imploring, painfully young and vulnerable.

Mycrof inhaled, and let it out noisly through his nose. “I need to speak to Greg Lestrade.”
Despite a burning desire to be ‘on the frontline’, mostly out of a deep need to hold a gun to Jack Skinner’s temple and pull the trigger without an ounce of remorse, John remained with Sherlock back at their Marylebone home. John paced nervously throughout the roomy kitchen, pottering in an attempt to keep himself from losing his mind, and eventually leaned down against the central island countertop to read the ‘suprapubic catheter care’ documentation the nurse had reluctantly handed over when Mycroft and John signed Sherlock out of the hospital. He’d spent the first twenty minutes home texting Molly back and forth, mostly to ensure her safety, after he’d let her know that the strange number belonged to him. But even trying to make small talk had been too difficult to focus on for long - the dishes could only be washed so much (such as they were at two mugs), the washing from the hospital only needed one spin and now he found himself staring at the medical information sheet but taking exactly none of it in. With his elbows resting on the counter, he cupped his hands around the sides of his head and closed his eyes as he buried his face between his arms and the countertop, blocking out all of the glow from the spotlights above his head. When he eventually straightened his back and lifted his head up again, his growing, thick hair now disarrayed and spiky, his eyes fell on Sherlock as he came into the kitchen.

“Are you okay?” John asked him, expecting a shrug or a sarcastic answer by way of an obviously understandable response.

Instead, Sherlock nodded his head. “I think so.” He rested his hands in his lap. “I just wish I knew what was going on. Mycroft having us under house arrest is torture.”

John sighed as he nodded. “I know it is.” He rolled his eyes. “What good is it us sitting here, just...imagining all the worst outcomes?”

“In fairness, he thinks that he’s helping…” Sherlock began.

“Well, he’s not.” John snapped.

Sherlock let his head lull in annoyance. “John,” He whined his name like a curse.

“I’m sorry, Sherlock, but I’m angry - and I’m scared. Jack Skinner all but promised to kill you. And Mycroft is off galavanting? I have often thought that your brother is a dick; he’s proving it solidly right now.” John shook his head and rolled his eyes again, giving a breathy, sarcastic laugh. Sherlock tutted and reached for the wheels of his chair, sharply tugging them backward to allow himself space to turn. John mentally kicked himself and moved around the island counter, reaching out his left hand to clap onto Sherlock’s shoulder. “I’m sorry - he’s your brother, I know, and this isn’t easy for you - for any of us. I know that too. I’m just...I’m tearing my hair out, here.”

“And I’m not? It’s me he’s signing the death warrant on.” Sherlock looked up over his shoulder at John. “There are men with guns inside this house. There are people hidden around the entire street, watching this house. And there could be a lot more of them, that Mycroft doesn’t know about, if Skinner has been smart enough to position his own.”

“I know.” John said, his tone softer and his eyes flaring with anger a lot less than before. “I just wish he’d let me do something to help.”

“You are helping.” Sherlock said, his voice quietening to a whisper.

John smiled softly. “If this house wasn’t filled with men with guns, I’d think that was a come-on.”
Sherlock smiled, despite himself, and raised his eyebrows. “If this house wasn’t filled with men with guns, it might have been.” John gave Sherlock’s shoulder a squeeze before withdrawing his hand. He bent at the waist and buried a kiss into Sherlock’s curls. Sherlock exhaled and hummed. John straightened his back and gave the side of Sherlock’s head an affectionate shove with his hand. “I just wish I knew what his plan was - I just want it all over with, whatever the outcome.”

John nodded. “I know - so let’s hope, wherever Mycroft is, he’s got his game brain on and he’s working some serious MI6 skills to kill the bastard.”

“Do you think Lestrade is helping him?” Sherlock asked, turning his chair back around to follow John as he walked across the kitchen, flicking the kettle on to boil.

John frowned and sighed, “I don’t know - something Skinner said made me wonder if he’d got to Greg.” He scratched the side of his face with his left and made a face that said ‘even I don’t know what I mean by that’.

“Hmm,” Sherlock hummed, agreeing. “About Lestrade...um...not being able to hide his hurt.” John nodded enthusiastically. “I don’t have any idea what that is supposed to mean. Did he get information from him, did he hu….” Sherlock wavered. “...hurt him?”

John sighed heavily. “God, I hope not.” He scrubbed his hands across his face, feeling the anger he’d managed to placate a little rising back to full steam again. “Shit, Sherlock...I can’t stay here doing nothing!”

Sherlock’s eyes half-rolled and he shrugged his shoulders at John. “We have no choice. We don’t know where they are, what they’re doing, and the minute we open that door, Mycroft will be contacted by the however many people he’s got watching us. We’re under house-arrest. Hard for you as it might be, we’ve got to suspend a bit of hope on Mycroft’s shoulders and believe he knows what he’s doing.”

“Greg’s our friend.” John frowned deeply at him.

Sherlock nodded, “And Mycroft is my brother. And…”

“And what?” John asked, absently, watching steam rise from the boiled kettle as the switched clicked up. “And what, Sherlock?” He pressed, looking across at him as he took two mugs down from the glass-fronted press. “Sherlock?”

“My parents.” Sherlock’s face paled impossibly. “Skinner knows they’re at Mycroft’s…” He heaved out a deep breath. “What if he goes there?”

John set the cups carefully on the countertop. “Love, I’m sure...Mycroft would have thought of that. He’ll have as many people watching them as he does us. He wouldn’t leave them vulnerable, not after we told him that Skinner had been there.”

Sherlock nodded, calmed by John’s rational thought and tried to settle his rapid heartbeat. “Yeah.” He agreed. “Yeah, you’re right.”

“We need to calm down - we need to trust that Mycroft has something planned that’s going to send Jack Skinner back to hell. And, we need to trust that he’s protecting everyone with his contacts in the process.” John said, occupying his moving-far-too-fast mind with making himself and Sherlock a cup of tea to keep him from breaking down, or from launching the mugs across the kitchen and into the wall in pure temper and fear. “Go into the sitting room, I’ll bring this in and we’ll try and wait this out.” He looked up at Sherlock.
Sherlock nodded his head slowly. “I’m just going to the bathroom first.”

“Are you alright?” John questioned, frowning in concern.

Sherlock nodded his head quickly. “I’m okay.” He ensured him. “Just...give me the privacy, yeah?” John watched Sherlock leave, moving carefully through the wide doorway and out into the hallway to access the lift to the first floor bathroom. He held his breath for a few minutes, muttering a silent prayer to whomever might be listening that they weren’t about to be hit with yet another complication on top of it all.

John was in the lounge when Sherlock returned a few minutes later. The large, wall-adorned TV was on but barely audible and the main lounge light had been outed in favour of a table lamp on the shelf below the TV. Sherlock hovered in the doorway, watching John staring at the television and sipping at his mug of tea. It looked normal - domestic, comfortable, easy and genuine. It looked like the famed ‘comfortable couples life’ that people craved - comfort in the small things like tea, toast for breakfast, and nights on the sofa with mind numbing television and giggling over stupidity for company. But looks were deceiving, Sherlock knew well, and it made his throat tighten.

“Everything okay?” John asked, placing his cup down on the coffee table with a slight stretch over the gap between it and the couch to reach it.

Sherlock pushed his face into as much of a soft smile as he could manage, and nodded his head. “Fine.” He moved into the lounge and paused at the side of the couch beside him. John got to his feet and shoved the coffee table further away, widening the already roomy space for Sherlock to access a closer spot to the sofa seat and watched as Sherlock all but took the side of the wheelchair apart to independently transfer, with a huff of effort, across onto the couch.

John smiled as Sherlock sat back, his head resting into the high cushion backs and numerous cushions that plumped up the back of the sofa. He pulled the pressure cushion from Sherlock’s chair before pulling up the centre of the seat, folding the chair into a neat collapsed state to push it out of the way. He dropped down onto the sofa beside Sherlock and reached for their mugs of tea, handing Sherlock his carefully, before he sat back. He let his left hand rest on Sherlock’s thigh as he held his mug to his lips with his right and took a sip.

Sherlock held the mug between both hands and kept his head resting back, staring up at the quiet television, not sure what was happening as he failed to focus enough to get the gist. He closed his eyes and stared up at the ceiling when he opened them again. “What if he can’t do anything?”

John licked his lips. “Then he’ll know somebody who can. He’s Mycroft-bloody-Holmes, there is nothing he cannot do once he gets the bit between his teeth - he’s like a Staffy.”

Sherlock rolled his eyes. “John, I’m being serious. What if he doesn’t know what Jack is planning, or if he can’t stop him in whatever it is he’s going to do? What if he fails?”

“He won’t.” John said bluntly, and turned his head over his shoulder to look at Sherlock. “Love, he won’t fail. Your brother winds me up, and he fails you as a brother when he really shouldn’t, but this is one of those types of occasions that Mycroft has an aptitude for. And I know that sounds stupid, it is, but it isn’t wrong. Your brother is good at this, and as much as I’d like to wring his neck at the moment, I know that he won’t stop until he succeeds.”

“Oh dies trying.” Sherlock mumbled.
John placed his cup down, and took Sherlock’s from his hands to place on the floor, safely away from their feet, alongside it. “Sherlock - your brother is a shrewd son-of-a-bitch who thrives on things like this even more than you do. He will not fail, he will not get himself killed.”

“And my Mum and Dad - you really think he’s got them protected?” Sherlock asked, clearly concerned.

“Absolutely.” John nodded with conviction. “I bet the slick bastard has this whole city under locks.”

Sherlock managed a small smile but it faded quickly. “It feels too easy. We’re safe...it feels too straightforward.”

“We need to believe that Mycroft Holmes is just that good.” John said, though he was beginning to be less and less encouraged by his placating words the more he said them.

John turned in the sofa, hooking his legs up, and leaned in close to Sherlock to push his lips against Sherlock’s full pout. His right hand hooked up, pushing Sherlock’s curls back as it rooted in his hand to hold in there. Sherlock reached up, his hand cupping around John’s bicep as they kissed, open-mouthed and loving. John kept his left hand braced on the back of the sofa, keeping him stable, as Sherlock’s free hand went around John’s back and willingly pulled him a little closer, enjoying the closeness as much as John.

Loosening his fingers from Sherlock’s hair, John hummed and pulled back, focusing his eyes to look into Sherlock’s. “I love you.”

Sherlock smiled, looking sleepy with what small amount of relaxation had been afforded them in their brief moment of stolen intimacy, and blinked slowly. “I love you, too.”
If nothing else, Mycroft was at least glad of the fact that he could protect his brother now. He had as much faith as it was possible for Mycroft Holmes to have in anybody in the men he had surrounding the house Sherlock and John were cocooned inside of. That didn’t mean he trusted them with their lives; he didn’t trust even John with Sherlock’s life. But he was able to push Sherlock’s safety enough to the side of his mind to focus on finding out why Greg wasn’t answering his phone, and working out what his next moves would be in finding Jack Skinner, and bringing the bastard crashing down from the highest height possible.

Arriving at the Scotland Yard offices in search of Lestrade, Mycroft's face clearly reflected his unsettled feelings despite him trying to remain in his default stern setting. He set Sally Donovan in his venting sights and approached her computer desk with heavy steps.

“He's not here, hasn't been here all day and no, I don't know when he will be here. He isn't answering his phone.”

Mycroft was a little surprised at her immediate vocalisation, particularly given that he hadn't even had the opportunity to open his mouth.

“He hasn't been here at all?” Mycroft asked to clarify, a feeling of concern washing over him as he considered the possibilities for Greg's absence.

“Not at all.” Sally said with exasperation.

Mycroft nodded slowly. “Right. And Inspector Skinner?”

Sally shrugged her shoulders. “He was here early this morning, but he hasn't been for some time now.” She sighed. “Contrary to your and Lestrade's belief, I am not entirely enthralled with Jack and I do not believe him to be the next Messiah.”

“I'm aware.” Mycroft hummed. “Lestrade has been unreachable; his calls have been forwarded immediately to his voicemail. I was wondering if you had been met with the same response.”

Sally nodded, “Yes. Myself and Philip have been trying to get hold of him, as has our boss. No luck. Our assumption was that he was visiting Sherlock but, as you're here, I suppose that's not the case.”

“I fear that Inspector Lestrade may be in trouble.” Mycroft said without thinking.

Sally frowned and focused her eyes on him. “Why?”

Mycroft's head jerked ever so slightly to the side. “You are not a stupid woman, Sergeant Donovan. And Lestrade sees that more than most. Don’t think that he doesn’t. So engage the brain that he has so much faith in now and consider your question; why might Lestrade be in trouble?”

“Skinner.” Sally said quietly.

Mycroft raised his eyebrows. “We need to locate both of them.”

Sally got to her feet. Looking around her, she ushered Mycroft along with her and into Lestrade’s
abandoned office. She closed the door behind them and took a measured breath before speaking again. “You think that Jack Skinner has his eyes on Lestrade?”

“I think that Jack Skinner has more than his eyes on more than Lestrade.” Mycroft clarified with a firm nod to cement his claim. “I believe that a lot of people stand to be in danger if we cannot find Skinner and disable whatever it is he has planned. But I think that he is using Lestrade as bate.”

“You think he has Lestrade hauled up somewhere...doing what? Abusing him, tied to a bomb to use as a wager?” Sally shrugged, half serious in her comments. She sobered quickly when she saw her words had hit Mycroft a lot more harshly than she’d thought they might. “You do.” She frowned, “You really think he has him?”

“Greg Lestrade does not ignore his phone calls; not from you, and not from me. There must be a reason for him not answering and it must be a good one.” Mycroft said with a sharp tone, clear in his annoyance at her. “Now that I know he is not responding to you I am going to ensure there is a trace on his phone...don’t attempt it yourselves, it won’t work. But what you need to do retrace his last steps that you know off and find out, if you can, what he was last doing before he went off the grid.”

Sally shook her head, “This is madness.”

“You know what Skinner is, I know that you do. And you’ve worked things out, you are not stupid. I need to know where he is and if, for sure, he has others working for him. I need to know who shot my brother and why.” Mycroft glared at her. “None of this makes sense, so welcome to the long list of people who are also completely without a clue here.”

Sally pushed both of her hands across her face and through her hair. “Leave me Jack.” She said with a firm stare. “Find Lestrade and I’ll get to Jack.”

“That won’t be happening.” Mycroft flashed her a sarcastic smile. “I will not hand this over to you. By all means, dear, find him - but you will not be left to handle that alone.”

Sally bristled. “I’m not your dear.” She said with sharp eyes.

Chapter End Notes

This is a horrific filler chapter, and I'm sorry for that. However, it is relevant so it does work stand-alone. I am working right now on the next (LONGER!) update, and hopefully I'll have that up this evening/in the morning.

I have managed to reorder my brain a little but the last couple of days have been tough. I was suspended from my job after a resident burned his legs with a cup of tea. Despite my following of home policies and calling out the required agencies to care for his injuries, I've been accused of neglect and am facing "POVA action". This could mean I would no longer be able to work with vulnerable adults. I am hopeful - with the help I've got from some agencies - that this will not be the case, but it's all up in the air at the moment.
The darkness was the first thing he noticed, but it was quickly followed by a thick headache and dampness around his nose. He had no idea where he was, but he knew that it wasn’t his home. That’s where he’d be heading, he thought. He’d spoken to Mycroft, he’d gone to his car...no, no he didn’t know. It was all too unfocused, all too blurry. He felt sick in his stomach and could taste blood in his mouth - he couldn’t work out if that blood was from his nose, or if there was more damage he hadn’t become lucid enough to notice yet. He could smell something strong, something he recognised but couldn’t name. Gas...diesel...something. It made his throat burn and his eyes water, such as it was so strong. He didn’t know if he were soaked in it or if he was lying in it, or if it was just present in the...wherever he was, but it, next to the pain in his head, was all he could think about.

Then he slowly realised that he couldn’t hear a thing. Nothing at all. Not even his own breaths or heartbeat. There was total silence; thick, all-encompassing nothingness. He moved his right arm, aiming to lift his hand to his head and check he still had his ears, and only then did he find his hands bound together behind his back.

“Fuuuuuck!” He shouted and, while he could feel it in his throat and he knew he had said it, he didn’t hear the word leave his mouth. He began shouting louder, screaming and wailing, calling out everything and anything that came to his mind, hoping that wherever he was there was somebody close by who could hear him and would come to his aid. He was certain he needed help. He must do. “Hey! HEY! Help ME! Help!” He drew out the vowels, screaming as loudly and sharply as his throat would allow. Someone must be close, anyone. Somebody had to help!

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“My brother.” Mycroft spoke roughly as he dropped into the back seat of his waiting car, instructing the driver. He turned to Anthea, ever present, who had been waiting without a word in the back of the car whilst he’d been recruiting Sally Donovan. “Trace Lestrade’s phone - send the command straight to my office, make sure it’s McPhillips who picks it up. I don’t want anybody else to deal with this, do you understand? McPhillips has to be the one to do this. There’s nobody else as relentless.”

“Yes, Sir,” Anthea nodded her head and began tapping on her phone. It was rarely out of her slim hands.

“Then I want you to disable whatever blocks Jack Skinner has up. If it means throwing viruses at his devices then you do it. I want his exact location, to the bloody house number, am I clear?” Mycroft glared at her, snarling his words.

“Crystal clear, Sir,” Anthea spoke without looking up. “Anybody specific for that?”

“You.” Mycroft's lips curled around the syllable.

Anthea looked at him, smiling without mirth. “Absolutely, Sir.”

Mycroft inhaled deeply, feeling his lungs expand painfully in his anxiety-tightened chest, and let it out in a nasal sigh. “You’ve been checking in on my brother?”
“Yes, Sir.” Anthea nodded and turned to look at him briefly. “He and Doctor Watson are secure in the house, the guards are still placed. Your parents, too, Sir. Their location is still safe, though I was informed that they were not entirely happy with being taken from your residence.”

“Tough.” Mycroft gritted his teeth. “They’ll get happy with it, or they’ll perish at his hands. I don’t dare put it past him.” He sat back against the seat rest. “And my brother is okay?”

“Yes, Sir.” Anthea said, more softly. “My last report was that he and Doctor Watson were comfortable and conversational.”

“Sherlock, conversational?” Mycroft snorted and sighed again. “He’s afraid, at any rate, and I can’t have that - not at this time. When I enter their house, you are not to follow. I want you to do nothing more than keeping tabs on my brother and parents, and to focus on getting Jack Skinner’s phone and communicational devices disabled but to our needs. Am I clear?”

“Yes, Sir.” Anthea nodded her head. “...Sir, your brother is safe. You have the best men surrounding him and they are armed. Doctor Watson is a skilled marksman, too. He is within safe company.”

“Isn’t he always, though?” Mycroft looked towards her, his guard ever so slightly dropped. “My brother has an extraordinary talent for attracting trouble. A more unfortunate person one could not find if they looked. For Sherlock, what can go wrong in life most often does and I fear that he will never be protected enough.”

Anthea had no response; her eyes flicked over her boss for a moment before she looked back at her phone. “I’ve disabled his email usage and I have managed to scale back the security surrounding his phone. It will take me a little longer to process what else it is that he has shielding him.”

“Then don’t distract yourself,” Mycroft said bluntly. He was appeased as the car slowed before coming to an abrupt stop. “When McPhillips has his pinpointed location for Greg Lestrade, let me know. Otherwise, do not disturb me.”

“Of course, Sir.” Anthea gave on firm nod as Mycroft stepped from the car and let the door slam in his wake.

“Got the frighteners up him, ‘ey?” Ahead of Anthea, the divisional window drew down and she could see Clive, Mycroft’s regular driver, clearly through the seats.

“Of course,” Anthea’s tone was lighter for her colleague. “It’s Sherlock. When is he not on edge where Sherlock is concerned?”

“I’ve been drivin’ him for about eight years now. That brother of his is more trouble than he’s worth.” Clive commented, removing his glasses, and turned in the chair to look back at Anthea face-on. “One girl he had before you, and just before you mind, God, she hated Sherlock, somethin’ rotten!”

“He isn’t an easy to like character.” Anthea supposed, her fingers moving quickly on her phone. She peered up at Clive again. “What was she like? Amanda - the girl before me?”

“Opinionated. That’s why you got the job. As Girl Friday’s go, you’re my favourite.” Clive grinned.

Anthea rolled her dark eyes. “I hate that term. It implies sexual connotations.”

Clive laughed, his throat vibrated and it was clear to Anthea then if it had never been before that he was a heavy smoker. “You’re telling me there isn’t?”
“None at all!” Anthea snapped. “Absolutely none!”

“On your side or his?” Clive asked. “...cause there’s some serious daddy-daughter complex going on there.”

“Oh, that’s disgusting!” Anthea wrinkled her nose in repulsion. “If nothing else, Clive, I am the wrong gender.”

Clive eyed her for a moment and then the message sunk into his mind like a heavy paperweight. “Oh...” he widened his eyes. “Oh. I see.... Right.”

“Close the divide, Clive. I have work to do.” Anthea pursed her lips and watched until the blackened glass drew back up into the space between the seats. She sighed wet her lips with a quick slip of her tongue, wondering if Mycroft read her as easily as Clive did.

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“Help me! Help me! God...Fuck sake....”

Greg struggled against the binds around his arms and felt a searing pain in his left hip as he attempted to move. He began to realise his surroundings more, and to become more aware of himself. He was lying on the floor, a concrete floor by all accounts, and there were more and more roots of damage and pain coming into his mind. His ankles were paining him but he didn’t know if his lack of movement in his feet was down to bonds, or breaks. The pitch darkness was hindering his senses further and he found himself relying solely on smell and the sensations around his body. His shoulders were painful, and he placed that down to the twisted way in which his arms were drawn behind him. His pelvis hurt when he struggled against the floor, but that he could struggle assured him he was not paralysed nor had he broken anything like a hip or his pubic bone.

“Wankers! HELP ME! ....what...f...”

He struggled backwards, doing a side-lying squirm across the floor. As he moved, he felt the floor beneath him grow damp. He hadn’t moved far, but whatever he had backed into had begun to soak into his trousers and shirt, and suddenly that smell of...something...grew stronger in his nostrils. Gas...it was gas. He could smell lighter fluid!

“No...Jesus Christ. Help me! Get me out...help!”

He knew he was shouting, he could feel it vibrating through his chest, but the ability to hear the curses and pleading leaving his lips still evaded him. Why couldn’t he hear? Why couldn’t he get up? Where was he? Why was he here? He strained his eyes and tried to see in the darkness but nothing was focusing; no slight slither of light, no movements around him vibrating his senses, no reflections. Truly alone, he assumed, and deaf to the possible responses of anyone who could help he closed his eyes to his blindness and let his head rest on the cold, gritty and damp concrete beneath him. He was a father, he was a friend...and he was about to die alone, he was sure of it. He felt like he should at least be able to face who was doing this.

Not that it took much of a stretch of his brain to consider who it was.
“You’re doing your best to find him?” John said in as quiet a tone as he could manage through his anger, his teeth gritted as he glared at Mycroft over the island counter in the kitchen. “Mycroft, I’ve just handed you a cup of tea - how is that searching for him?”

“I have people who know exactly what they’re doing, John. We will find him.” Mycroft’s voice was as firm as the stare he set on John as he removed his coat. “But you do not mention this to Sherlock. Greg Lestrade is important to him - I do not want him developing any ideas in his mind about what he can or cannot do to go out there and search for him.”

“How far do you think he’d get?” John snapped. “But I won’t lie, Mycroft. If he asks a question, I’ll answer it. I can’t expect honesty from him and then not present him with the same.” He flicked his eyes over Mycroft’s face. “It’s lies that landed us here, remember?”

“I seem to recall it was a man with a vendetta that got us to this point.” Mycroft gave John a narrow-eyed stare.

“There is no way this is all down to Sherlock being with his brother.” John looked at Mycroft with wide, dark eyes unfaltering. “There is something else, there has to be. There is no reason why he would be so focused on you and Greg if there wasn’t something else. This isn’t just homophobia, or anger at Sherlock being partly responsible for Mark’s death. Something in Jack Skinner’s mind is set on causing maximum harm to you, Greg, Sherlock and everyone you guys love. So what is it?”

Mycroft’s expression softened. “I don’t know.”

“You must!” John shook his head. “Greg’s the nicest bloke going, Mycroft - there is no cause of anyone to hate him. So what’s the deal?”

“John - I don’t know. But I’m endeavouiring to find out. So until I have a focused idea, you cannot bring anything further down onto Sherlock’s shoulders. Am I understood?” He fixed his eyes sharply on John.

“I’m not your secretary.” John shook his head. “Don’t even assume that threats like that work on me. I’ve got your brother on my side, Mycroft - that makes me richer, wiser and more in control here than you’ll ever be. Just find Greg, then there’ll be no reason to tell Sherlock anything.” John picked up two of the three cups on the counter. “Living room,” He nodded out of the kitchen. “And you make him feel safe or, so help me God, Mycroft, I’ll find a way of making you sorry you didn’t.”
“Hello? Someone please…” Greg trailed off. His throat was hurting, his eyes were stinging and he still had no idea if anyone was even able to hear him. He occurred to him that there could very well be somebody standing silently over him, or even loudly laughing at his struggling and useless shouting. He couldn’t feel them, but if they were careful then perhaps it was possible. Of course he was blaming Jack Skinner; his mind was beginning to piece together how he’d got ‘here’.

He remembered Mycroft handing him his new phone, he remembered leaving Scotland Yard and he remembered reaching his car and lighting a cigarette. And then he remembered a noise - something metallic, like the kicking of a toolbox or a car exhaust dropping off onto concrete. He could see in his mind a sort of horror story set up - darkness and the clinking that gave away that the protagonist mightn’t be alone in an abandoned multi-storey carpark. But he couldn’t take it any further - no faces, no exact injuries, nothing. There wasn’t anything between then and waking up in darkness and in pain.

He wanted to turn onto his back but, having already tried, he knew the pain was unbearable and that lying in that way meant crushing his hands beneath him. He wanted to gain some kind of purchase to be able to move, to try to sit up if he couldn’t stand, and feel for something to support his back but he was so disoriented that the movements and coordination escaped him. He breathed deep, sickened by the fuel smells that burned his throat and nose. He looked around him into the blackness again, begging for there to be the smallest crack of light, and almost jumped out of his skin at the sudden, overhead burst of bright, white light that flooded the room and blinded him painfully.

He screamed out, screwing his eyes closed and pushing his face into the floor. Even as he tried to bring his eyes open slowly, they watered and stung at the burning brightness above him. Disorientated further, he couldn’t even respond as unseen hands gripped his shirt at his chest and dragged him across the floor, leaving his aching feet trailing as they pulled him across the concrete and slammed him down again. Greg was suddenly able to rest his back against a wall and he could feel hands gripping at his chin and forcing his head back, hitting it against the wall without real force but with a firm grip.

“Think he’s concussed, Jack?”

Jack walked into the concrete holding room and leered over Greg and his cohort, Neil. “Well he fucking will be if you keep bashing his head against the wall, Neil.” At his boss’ words, Neil let go of Greg’s face and rose to his feet beside Jack. The two looked down on Greg, watching as he finally managed to hold open his watering eyes without slamming them closed again. Jack pushed a devilish smile to his lips as Greg’s eyes scanned the room and finally landed on the two men before him. “Hi there, sweetheart.” Jack waved the fingers of his left hand in a round.

“You prick.” Greg spat at him, struggling to straighten himself in the half-hunch he had been thrown into against the wall.

“That’s not nice!” Neil bellowed, kicking out his heavy booted right foot to collide with Greg’s left ankle. He elicited a loud, pained scream from the DI. “Bad dog.”

Jack laughed. “See, Gregory, you and me have a job to do - and that job is to get Mycroft Holmes here. I think you’re the ideal bait for that!” He winked. He crouched down and glared into Greg’s face. “We all know Mycroft will go to the moon at back to Baker Street for Sherlock, but that’s familial loyalty. It’s a duty. For you, he does it out of heart. Such as you both deny it.” Jack reached out his hand and clapped it against Greg’s stubbled cheek. “Need to use the bathroom, fancy a pint?”
Greg frowned at him, able to see his lips moving but not able to comprehend a single word he uttered. “Stop...I can’t...I can’t hear you.” Greg’s voice was husky and unnecessarily loud.

“That’ll be these…” Jack reached forwards and pulled out the deeply shoved in foam buds from Greg’s ear canals. Immediately, Greg recoiled at the pressure changes in his ears that sent searing pains through and into his brain. “You and me, loverboy. We’re going to wait it out until Mycroft gets here. And when he does arrive, as we both know he will, we’ll let Sherlock Holmes know what it feels like to lose a brother.” Jack got to his feet, launching the small, foamy bullets across the room. He watched Greg surveying his surroundings and laughed. “You’ll never guess.” Jack grinned. “We’ve chosen this place for it’s specific non-specifics, you understand?”

“We?” Greg heaved breaths though his nose and cast red, watery eyes up at his captors.

“Neil and I.” He nudged his head to the side to indicate his stick-thin accomplice. “Good shot, is Neil. So don’t make any sudden movements.”

Greg coughed, feeling his throat burn and tear at the movement. “So he shot Sherlock?”

“Maybe,” Neil held out his empty hands and shrugged his shoulders, grinning wide and flashing his horrifically damaged teeth. “Maybe not.”

“You’re not getting away with any of this, you know that don’t you? Everyone is on to you.” Greg warned, arching his shoulders in the hopes that he could maneuver himself up the wall to sit straighter, his body waving itself like the movements of a caterpillar and getting nowhere.

“I’m counting on them coming, Gregory. Until Mycroft Holmes is here, this is all pointless. Like I said, that’s why you’re here. You’re the lure. When he bursts in here with his cronies, hoping the save the day and restore you to Sherlock, and to himself, his life will end. And then Sherlock Holmes will be forced to pay the ultimate price for his choices.” Jack explained with absolute confidence in his plan.

“That won’t happen.” Greg swallowed, grimacing at the men that continued to tower over him. “You’ll be dead the moment you’re made.”

Jack laughed and shook his head. “You know, Gregory, my only regret is that I didn’t let you in on this from the start. I mean, I know you and Mycroft were hot on my trail the moment I put in for this job. But I never assumed it would all come so easily to me and I only wish you’d been suffering alongside Sherlock for the whole ride along this particular, bumpy road. It would have been magical.”

Greg heaved another breath. “You’re a cockroach.”

“And you’re a diseased piece of scum who deserves to burn like your four pals, but I can’t take you all down or the whole world will begin to wonder if this isn’t Salem. So I’m taking your precious Government Man down in a blaze of unholy fire and you get to watch, and Sherlock gets to cry.” Jack hissed with gritted teeth. “What a lovely Christmas present for young Sherlock, don’t you think? The charred remains of his brother in a box, with a bow. A rainbow ribbon, perhaps.”

“Shut up.” Greg snapped, coughing as it ripped at his throat to yell.

With a nod from Jack, Neil reached down and pummel his fists in succession into Greg’s face, bashing each cheek from side to side until he saw fresh blood begin to pool from Greg’s nose. Only then did he stop. Drawing back and standing up, examining the spots of blood on his knuckles, Neil grinned as Greg heaved on a gob of blood that ran into his mouth and made him want to vomit.
“Sit tight, Greg my dear. I’m sure they won’t be long.”

With his words bid in a laugh, Jack tugged Neil with him from the room and cast it into blackness once again, slamming the heavy steel door with him as they left, leaving Greg with his hearing restored but his body aching and his mind racing worse than it had been before. They were all on the brink of death and he was certain he would suffer it before Mycroft even narrowed down the possibilities of where he was to a closed grid. He gritted his aching teeth and muttered a tearful goodbye, hoping that should God be out there and listening He’d bring his words to his kids.
Sherlock’s eyes followed Mycroft as he rose to his feet from the armchair, clutching his phone as it rang. He followed him with his sharp gaze out of the living room and into the hallway, unable to crane his neck to follow him further as he walked across the hall and into the dining room. Sherlock snapped his neck back around and looked at John, sitting beside him on the sofa.

“He’s worried.”

“Of course he’s worried, Sherlock; we’re all in the middle of some kind of war at the moment.” John softened his eyes. “Love, are you okay?” Sherlock nodded his head. “You want some more painkillers?”

“I’m okay, John.” Sherlock shook his head at him, dismissing John’s obvious diversion tactics. “He’s just sitting here, he’s supposed to be doing something and he’s just sitting here!”

“He’s got a lot of help Sherlock, you know that. If there were award ceremonies for people who had delegates, Mycroft would win it across the board.” John pushed a grin to his cheeks and Sherlock pulled a face at the pathetic attempt at humour. John pushed himself up to his feet and bent, kissing Sherlock’s forehead before he straightened again. “Why don’t I make dinner for us three?”

Sherlock flicked his wrist. “I’m not hungry.”

“When are you?” John tutted. “Look, we’re all stressed out to the max right now, Sherlock, but sitting here and getting deeper and deeper into it isn’t helpful or healthy.”

“I can’t sit here eating spaghetti while we’re waiting for that bastard to attempt to long range the lot of us!” Sherlock snapped and John was a little taken aback at the tone in Sherlock’s voice. “This isn’t just a normal night, John. It isn’t domestic bliss! And I’m…”

“You’re what?” John asked, crouching at the side of the sofa and forcing Sherlock to look at him. “What, Love?”

“I’m scared, John. I don’t know how my parents are, I don’t know how this is going to end. Mycroft’s safe while he’s here with us - but maybe he’s here because he’s scared that if he isn’t, we’re vulnerable?” Sherlock opened up. “And who knows if he’s got his sights on Lestrade, too?”

John exhaled heavily and pushed himself back up to his feet. He pushed his hands through Sherlock’s hair gently. “I know I argue it a lot, but I trust Mycroft almost completely.” Sherlock looked up at him, his blue eyes were stretched wide and he looked so young it made John’s heart ache. “If there’s any danger, he’ll protect us.”

Sherlock took a deep breath and rolled his eyes as he shook his head. “Yeah, of course.”

Mycroft answered the call when he assumed Sherlock and John were out of earshot. He wandered idly around the boys’ dining room as answered the call from Anthea. “Yes?”

“Sir? We have a location Gregory Lestrade. He’s south of the river.”
“South of the river?” Mycroft frowned, and peered over his shoulder into the lounge, able to see John and Sherlock around the door jamb, still sitting together on the sofa.

“Well - Croydon. Sewage Treatment works.”

“Beddington?” Mycroft’s brows rose quickly. “Odd location - if they had him anywhere I would have assumed it would be abandoned.”

“McPhillips said there’s a portion of the grounds with unused warehouses. It’s possible he’ll be in one of those.”

“It’s also possible that his phone has been discarded and they have him somewhere else.” Mycroft said with his voice as hushed as he could make it without whispering. “Set a team to check out sewage works; I’ll assemble a team for sweeping the south of the city. This is…”

“Sir, I’ve disabled Jack Skinner’s uplinks and protections but there’s something blocking me getting any further with tracing his phone. I can’t lock a location onto him, not one that’s current.”

Mycroft closed his eyes and steeled himself. “Then do not stop until you can. I’m counting on you; do not make me regret that decision.”

“Of course, Sir.”

Mycroft cut the call abruptly and pushed his phone into the pocket of his trousers. He stood a moment, his hands braced on the back of the closest dining chair, and exhaled in a deep sigh that emptied his lungs. He could Sherlock and John talking and hated the rise and edge to his brother’s voice. He sounded scared, young and lost, and it was a sign to Mycroft that Sherlock was close to melting down. But he wasn’t so secure himself and he wasn’t certain he go in there, remain stoic and stiff, and not want to bundle his brother into his arms.

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“Can’t we just open fire on the house?” Jack regarded Neil with wonderment at the fact that the man had survived into adulthood. “What?” He shrugged at Jack. “Let Greg live, take out the other three…”

The pair were not far from Greg, hauled up in an industrial-looking kitchen with smashed in windows and no electrical supply beyond the overhead lights that did little to fully illuminated the derelict room. Jack slammed his hand down onto the steel countertop that divided he and Neil. “I don’t want Sherlock Holmes dead, Neil. Do you not recall this conversation before now?”

“That was then,” Neil shrugged it off and folded his arms across his chest, recalling the sprain he’d received to his wrist when Jack had charged into him and bullied the gun from his grip. “You should have just let me do it. Ended it then. The thrill would have been more enjoyable.”

“What aren’t you understand, arsehole? I don’t want Sherlock dead; I want him to suffer. He suffers if his brother dies. He understands if his brother dies. And once it sinks into their tiny little minds that their precious Lestrade is here, they’ll be suffering over that too. There’s your thrill, Neil.” Jack drummed his fingers against the cold countertop.

“Your idea of thrill is warped.” Neil snorted.

Jack looked up at the man with cocked eyebrows. “Patience is a virtue, Neil. You don’t have sex for
the ultimate release in the first thirty seconds…”

“I’m a heroin user; it’s all about the immediate.” Neil smiled crookedly and Jack rolled his eyes.

“Check on him,” Jack nudged his head toward the opened doorway. “I need to make a phone call.” He straightened up, reaching for his phone in his jeans pocket. “Hurt him, Neil, and I will end your life where you stand.”
“John?” Mycroft stepped into the lounge and the two men looked up at him. “We may have him.”

“Jack?” Sherlock snapped his head around, looking over his shoulder at Mycroft as he stood in the wide archway into the living room. “You’ve found Jack?” He looked between his brother and John, a momentary look of surprise widening his eyes.

“No,” Mycroft shook his head. “Inspector Lestrade.”

Sherlock’s face fell quickly. “What do you mean may have him? He’s missing?” Sherlock dug his hands into the soft cushions of the couch and tried to sit straighter, attempting to turn his upper body to look around at his brother better. “You’re sitting here, drinking tea, and you’re telling me that he’s got Lestrade?”

“We don’t know he’s got him,” John said quickly, holding out his hand to Sherlock to calm him without any effect at all.

“You two knew that he was out there, missing and unlocatable, and neither of you said a word?” Sherlock’s chest heaved as he laughed without an ounce of amusement. “Where is he?” He glared at his brother, struggling into a straight-backed position, giving him a much better view between John and Mycroft.

“It is possible that he’s in Croydon.” Mycroft said, unable to look Sherlock in the eye. He pushed his hands into his trouser pockets.

“Possible?” John shook his head. “So you don’t actually know for sure where he is?”

“His mobile phone, exactly like the ones provided to you, has been located at the sewage treatment works in Croydon. Of course, this is the first place that I have sent people to, but Jack Skinner has his mind in order enough to not be so careless. By all accounts, the trace was easy to locate and I am sure Jack would have thought of that. It’s entirely possible that Lestrade is not with the device.” Mycroft said, stepping further into the room.

“Of course he’s not with it! Skinner is military trained, he’s a police officer - it’s highly ridiculous to think that that man wouldn’t assume you’d attempt to trace somebody by their mobile phone signal!” Sherlock snapped. “We have to find him. You have to find him.” He glared at his brother. “I’m shocked you’re even sitting here pretending you can cope with the fact that you can’t keep tabs on him.”

“There are more pressing matters, Sherlock.” Mycroft peered down at him, his blue eyes narrowed. Sherlock snarled and gritted his teeth. “Find him.”

“You don’t think that I’m trying to do that? I know you assume that feelings are an enigma to me, little brother, but do not for one moment believe you have the monopoly on holding somebody in high regard - someone other than yourself.” Mycroft exhaled a sigh through his nose.

“Can you two not do this now?” John raised his voice. “It’s bad enough we’re here in a plastic bubble, unable to help, without the two of you ripping into one another.” He focused his eyes on Mycroft. “Do the legwork, Mycroft - go and find him. Sherlock is safe here, you said so yourself. You have this place guarded more than Buckingham Palace, it’s a fortress. So don’t cocoon yourself in here with us for fear Sherlock isn’t safe, because he is. Please? Please, just go and find Greg now.
that you have something close to a specific line to follow.”

“I’m not leaving.” Mycroft said, slowly blinking his eyes. “Jack Skinner has some incredibly iron cast security surround himself; tracing his phone is proving difficult and my men are so far not even able to get past the more basic firewalls on his communication devices. If he is that well protected as a singular person, there are obviously more dangerous things he is preventing us from knowing. We cannot storm into wherever Lestrade may be without assuming that it won’t be just that easy. Something will go wrong.”

“He’ll die!” Sherlock shouted at him. “That’s what will go wrong, Mycroft. If you don’t go out there and find him, that’s what will go wrong.”

“We’ll all die - you really think that if he’s able to protect himself this well that he isn’t able to penetrate measures that we may put up?” Mycroft shook his head. “Despite appearances, Sherlock, I no longer think that you two are safe here.”

“On or off, Gregory?” Neil grinned, flicking the bright overhead lights on and off, relentlessly abusing Greg’s eyes. He laughed dirtily before leaving the room illuminated. He dashed across to where Greg was slumped against the wall and picked him up as he had before, taking fistfuls of his shirt in both hands. He raised him up as high as his lithe body could find the strength for before slamming Greg back down, catching the DI’s head off the wall as he launched him. The sickening crack of his skull made Neil laugh and Greg let out a pained groan. Neil’s eyes flashed in delight at the snail-trail of blood that the back of Greg’s head left on the wall as it slipped to the side. “Aw no,” He gave a ridiculous laugh. “Poor Greggy-weggy’s got an owie on his noggin.”

Greg breathed unevenly through his nose and barely managed to move his eyes in his skull without nausea making it impossible. He breathed raggedly. “Let me go…” he sighed, swallowing over the urge to throw up.

“That’s not going to happen.” Neil crouched down on his tiptoes, knees bent out, and peered into Greg’s pale, dirty face. His right eye socket was swollen and his nose was clearly broken and covered in dried blood. His chest heaved shallow breaths in and out and he swallowed frequently. His clothes reeked of gas and Neil wondered what would kill him first - Jack, or his injuries. “You can’t run anywhere, your ankles are broken. Your arms are tied so there’s no way you can get yourself up and you’re thicker than you look if you think I’m gonna lift you.” He laughed. “No… of course, I could light you a cigarette and then watch you burn as the flame catches in the fumes in this place. I could give your head a little wobble, and a big crack, and watch you die of brain death. Or I could return to my old favourite - a bullet.”

“You won’t.” Greg huffed. “Your boss out there...has you by the balls. I die...you die. And I won’t...die. He’s waiting for his real...target.”

“Oh that posh twat? Not going to happen. Right now, I’d say your precious Mycroft is with his little baby brother because he’s always cared about him more than he cares about you.” Neil laughed like a maniac. “See, Jack told me about you.” He said, flopping to sit down on his bum on the dusty floor. “‘Bout how you loooove him but he won’t ever really love you back because you’re not as important as Sherlock.”
“Fuck you.” Greg closed his eyes, breathing in deeply as his head pulsed with waves of dizziness and pain. He heaved a string of not-quite-deep-enough breaths and fought down the rising vomit.

“Nah…” Neil shook his head, screwing his face up. “That’s one thing you and I will never have in common; I don’t take it up the arse.”

Greg glared at him. “Fine. Fuck me then.”

Neil let out a heavy laugh and pushed himself up onto his knees. With as much force as he could find, he pummelled his right fist into Greg’s stomach, winding the older man and forcing him to cough and vomit. The hot, foul liquid erupted from his throat and soiled his clothes and the floor to his left, and he coughed and spluttered over the gags that followed. “You’re on thin ice, Greggles.” Neil hissed into Greg’s face. “Just see what happens when you try to take another step.”

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“Sherlock, what are you doing?” John groaned, watching Sherlock shuffle himself forwards, planting himself awkwardly on the edge of the sofa.

“Give me my chair.” Sherlock demanded, pointing to the side of the sofa.

“No.” John shook his head.


“Sherlock - calm down.” Mycroft said, drawing his hands from his pockets.

“No! I won’t! If you two are just going to sit here, hiding things from me and debating the best course of action, then I’ll go out there and I’ll find Lestrade myself.” Sherlock said, struggling to keep himself straight with the sudden loss of cushioned support behind him. “John…” he looked up at him, eyes pleading. “Please.”

John looked at him sadly, then up at Mycroft. “You really don’t think it’s safe here, either?”

Mycroft’s jaw stiffened. “I don’t know.”
Chapter 60

Mycroft’s phone began to ring in his pocket and he answered it immediately, breaking his eye contact with John and fixing his eyes on Sherlock as he spoke. “Yes?”

“Sir, I think I have a location on Jack Skinner.”

Sherlock watched Mycroft, his eyes narrowing as he tried to read his brother’s microexpressions. “Where?” Mycroft said firmly.

“Plumstead - abandoned depot, White Hart Road. If he’s is there, McPhillips and I are working on the assumption that Inspector Lestrade is, too.”

“Assumptions won’t help us here,” Mycroft said quietly. “Get a team there; I’ll follow.”

“You want to go?”

Mycroft pushed his phone back into his pocket. “Skinner may be in Plumstead, and Lestrade is likely with him.”

“That’s over an hour away, Mycroft.” John stared at him. “You think that if he’s got Greg there, he’s going to wait an hour for us to arrive before he hurts him?”

Mycroft nodded. “I think that’s exactly what he plans to do.” He kept his eyes on John. “But not we. Me.”

“That’s suicide.” John shook his head. “You can’t leave here if you don’t think it’s safe, and you can’t go to him because that’s definitely not safe. Send people, get Greg out of there, and bring him here. Surely, whatever it is that’s in Jack’s mind, it can’t be plausible for him to try to kill the four of us. There is no way he would ever get away with that.”

“If you’re going, I want to go.” Sherlock said abruptly. “We need to find out if he’s there, we need to find Lestrade and we need to end this now.”

“You are not going anywhere near Jack Skinner.” Mycroft pointed his right index finger at Sherlock. “And neither are you,” he turned to John. “You are both waiting here and neither of you are to move from this room. I’ll increase the security.”

“And what, we’re supposed to let you walk off into a potential death trap?” John threw out his arms.

“Yes.” Mycroft nodded his head, absurdly certain.

John almost lost control of his mind when he heard Sherlock speak. “Let him go.”

“What?” John’s eyes widened. “Let him go? Are you insane, Sherlock - he’s approaching a man who wants us all dead and he’s planning on doing it alone.”

“He needs to.” Sherlock sighed, a look of being beaten on his face that made John feel sick to observe. “You’d walk through fire for me, extend that amount of passion to somebody else for once. Contrary to your belief of Mycroft and I, we’re not unable to appreciate the relationships we forge with people. Let him go.”

“And we sit here and wait to hear that both of them have been murdered?” John shook his head in
pure disbelief. “I can’t believe the two of you, you’re surrendering all of this on an idea and you’re planning on risking everything… If Greg is with Jack Skinner, he’s either dead or close to it. The last time I checked, I’m the one with medical training out of us lot and to deny Greg the care he might need is unconscionable. He’s my friend…”

“Jack Skinner wants this - us, weak. But he wants something else more and we’ve got to give it to him. He has Lestrade for a reason and that sole reason is to bait us into finding him for the ultimate showdown he’s craving. He wants Mycroft there - but what Jack Skinner is failing to realise is that Mycroft isn’t stupid. He’ll go, yes, but he won’t go alone. He’s giving Jack what he wants, he’ll save Lestrade, and then Jack’s world crash before he has the chance to do whatever else he has planned.” Sherlock summed and John smirked.

“How can you be so sure that this isn’t a trap, that he doesn’t know this is the conclusion you two masterminds would come to and has something else that you’ve overlooked?” John questioned and looked between them both.


“I love you,” John stared back at Sherlock. “With every inch of me, I love you - but you’re stupid and I won’t let this happen.” He turned to Mycroft. “If you’re going, you’re not going alone.”

“What help would it be for you two to come? Sherlock is recovering, you are emotional…” Mycroft began.

“…and you’re facing losing the one person you give a damn about more than your brother.” John said forcefully. “It isn’t just the two of you who sees things, you know. But I care about Greg, too, and I won’t sit back wondering if he’s alright and worrying that you’ve been caught in the crossfire too. If you’re going to Plumstead, I’m going with you.”

“No.” Sherlock snapped. “John - he’ll…”

“See… you’re not certain of anything, Sherlock. If we are doing anything, we are doing it together. That way if there is any chance of one of us losing our lives, we go together and I’m not left wondering what I could have done differently to stop me from losing the people I love.”

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“Mycroft Holmes is planning on killing Jack Skinner.”

Dimmock looked up from his desk, his small features stretching wide in shock and confusion at Sally’s words. “What?”

“He thinks that Jack Skinner has Lestrade, and while I think he’s right, Mycroft Holmes is planning on going after him himself.” Sally said. “While I’m not opposed to the dressing down of either of the Holmes men, I cannot sit on my hands whilst they risk destroying London with a battle they’re bound to blaze through the city.”

“That’s a little dramatic, Sally…” Dimmock scoffed.

“You think I’m winding you up? None of us have been able to get hold of Greg all day. When is that man ever more than a text away from contact?” Sally asked, eyes wide.
Dimmock shrugged his shoulders. “Maybe he took annual leave and is with his kids?”

“In Weston? Don’t be an idiot! The battle is on, and Lestrade’s going to come off the worst if we don’t find out where he is and bring Jack Skinner down.” Sally insisted.

“I thought you and here were on the case,” Dimmock laughed lightly. “Look, Sally, he’s scored you and you’re feeling hurt. I get it…”

Sally’s nostrils flared. “No, you really don’t, you prick. I’m messing around, I’m not playing a game. Lives are at stake here. Grow up, cop on, and help me find Lestrade.”
“What is it today, then? Booze, or are you back on the sauce?” Mycroft placed his umbrella and gloves onto the cluttered dining table, eyeing his brother curled in a ball on the sofa just behind him in the open living space of the tiny flat. He wasn’t surprised to find Greg Lestrade lingering beside him, hands on his hips in such a manner that it pushed out his knee-length coat, exposing his suited frame beneath it.

“Mycroft,” Greg nodded politely. “He was hauled into the drunk tank earlier in the night. I, eh, pulled a few strings - no charges for being intoxicated.”

Mycroft sighed silently and nodded his head. “Thank you,” He said with unease. “This can’t go on, Sherlock. Oh, I’ll be here for you throughout, don’t you doubt that, but I’m not willing to give it all up for you again if you’re going to piss it into the next alleyway.” Greg looked between them both awkwardly. “Answer me, Sherlock.”

“No,” Sherlock hummed and turned over, facing the back of the couch and turning his body away from his brother and the DI.

“It isn’t just your own life you’re messing with here, Sherlock, it’s ours too. Inspector Lestrade and I have our own lives to uphold, our own values. Bending the rules for you constantly is not exactly what we have laid out on each day’s agenda!” Mycroft’s tone grew firmer and firmer the more he spoke. He couldn’t be certain, but he was almost sure he heard Sherlock mumble ‘fuck off’ into the couch cushions. “I’m giving you a half an hour. If you are not washed, dressed and presentable in that time, I’ll be forced to take matters into my own hands.”

“Mycroft…” Greg began, but the face Mycroft shot him silenced him before he could take his soft, fatherly tone any further along with his thought.

Sherlock turned on the sofa, rolling awkwardly until he was able to sit himself up and peered up at the two men above him. “I need your help.”

“Anything, that’s why we’re here, Will,” Greg said quietly, his soft eyes fixed on Sherlock.

Sherlock swallowed hard and inhaled deeply, feeling the ache in his chest. “I need you to come with me somewhere.” He said, pushing himself to his feet. He wavered, far from sober, and swallowed again. “It’s bad.”

“How bad?” Mycroft asked, drawing his hands from his pockets. As he looked at his brother, he wasn’t mid-twenties anymore; suddenly small, bouncy curls and imploring blue eyes greeted Mycroft like he was looking into the face of his chubby-cheeked ten-year-old brother, the kid who trailed him around whenever he was home, begging to be included in everything Mycroft was doing. He steeled himself, pushing young Sherlock aside, and force himself to recognise the man he now had for a brother. “How bad, Sherlock?”

“I think…” Sherlock swallowed again, looking for all the world like he might vomit. His breathing quickened. His eyes were red, his face pale, and his lips were trembling and bitten in, cracked beyond repairing them with a quick moistening with his tongue.

“Spit it out, for God’s sake!” Mycroft groaned, exasperated.

“Stop it, stop shouting at me…I’m trying to tell you…” Sherlock shook his head, an anguished frown furrowing his brow.
“So tell us,” Greg encouraged. “Just say it.”

Sherlock shook his head. He swept his hands across his face and back into his hair, pushing the curls away from his eyes. “I need to show you.”

“Fine,” Greg nodded his head, speaking calmly. “Where do we need to go.”

Sherlock shrugged, shaking his head. “Where was I picked up?”

“Some doss or another, I shouldn’t wonder,” Mycroft grinned at him without an ounce of mirth.

Greg shook his head, drawing down the corners of his mouth. “Battersea, I think.”

Mycroft widened his eyes, “That’s a push for you, isn’t it, Sherlock?”

“Take me there,” Sherlock said, his eyes flashing with panic. “We need to go there.”

Mycroft rolled his eyes and threw out his hands as Sherlock began to move around the flat. “Sherlock, what the Hell is going on? Stop with this ridiculous game of charades and just give us something to actually work on. Because if you don’t actually have anything to say, I’ll check you into a rehab facility myself right now.

“If we don’t get back there, I’m....” Sherlock’s mouth bobbed open and Mycroft’s eyes scanned his face, seeing true confusion and fear.

“You’re what?” Greg asked, pulling his hands from his hips, beginning to feel uneasy.

Sherlock looked at Greg, then back at his brother. “I don’t know, but it’ll be bad…” ..........

Jack stood over Greg's body, a little concerned that Neil's unsolicited beating may have gone too far, and wondered if the man were close to death or just too weak to remain conscious constantly. He turned to the skinny man at his side and thrust his fist into the man's face. "I said don't touch him, you prick."

Neil laughed as he nursed his hand against his chin, rubbing where Jack's knuckles had met face and shook his head. "I don't see no gun in your hand, Jack. Not like you'd actually shoot me, is it?" He fixed his boss with a stare that only served to anger the broad man further.

Jack shook his head and sighed noisily through his nose. "Get out of my sight, you twat. My phone is on the counter back in that kitchen - answer it if it rings. I better stay here and make sure he doesn't die. Nice work, arsehole."
Will, please tell me we’re not where I think we are?” Greg followed as Sherlock walked, quick and jittery, ahead of him, with Mycroft a step or two behind. “Mate, if this is where I think it is, we could be in serious bloody trouble. Are you crazy? I’ll be sacked for not closing this place down and reporting it.” He sped up and grabbed Sherlock’s arm, pausing them both on the spot as Mycroft caught up. “Is this a fucking drug house?”

Sherlock swiped his left hand under his nose and nodded. “Where else did you think I wanted to go? But…wait…” He shook his arm free of Greg’s grasp. “It’s important.”

Greg jerked his neck to the side and screwed his eyes closed. “How important? I’m not going in there with you to pick up your stash. I draw the line, William! Right here, right now. I won’t…” Greg held out his hands.

“A guy…” Sherlock said, his brows knitting together in the middle in such a way that Mycroft couldn’t read whether he was just coming down, genuinely worried or actually slightly afraid. “We were together there - if he wasn’t picked up with me, then he’s got to be still in there and the only…” Sherlock took a deep breath but continued to huff his breaths in and out through his nose, clearly anxious.

“For God’s sake, Sherlock, spit it out!” Mycroft raised his voice.

Sherlock jerked his head around, nostrils flaring. “If he didn’t get picked up with me then there’s got to be something wrong, he wouldn’t stay there.” He thrust his hand behind him at the rundown building that greeted them. What looked like it used to be a small factory was now without windows, half-crumbled, and a demolition site if Greg and Mycroft had ever seen one. There was a faint, familiar smell in the air that both men recognised and knew all too well and the place was deathly silent.

“You think he’s OD’d?” Greg asked, frowning, moving his face to make Sherlock look him in the eye. Sherlock swallowed with some force before he nodded his head in a jerky motion. Greg looked around at Mycroft, inhaling deeply. “Did you give it to him?” He questioned, looking back at Sherlock. “Will,” He reached out and grabbed Sherlock’s left bicep in his hand, “Did you give it to him?”

Sherlock nodded his head slowly, the movement still jerky, and looked Greg square in the face with wide, frightened eyes. “I cooked it…”

Mycroft’s eyes closed and willed himself not to launch for Sherlock when he opened them again. He took a deep breath and slowly opened his eyes. “How far inside were you?”

Sherlock shrugged his shoulders, “I don’t know. We were, um, we went, um…moved around.”

Greg’s face suddenly smoothed out in realisation, “Kid, we might be about to go in there and find this guy dead and you’re trying to be subtle in telling us you two fooled around in there.” Sherlock looked at his feet, his breathing not slowing. “Look at me,” Greg shook him where he held him still by the arm. Sherlock’s head snapped up. “Did you and this guy have sex in this place?” He gestured his free hand at the building. Sherlock glanced at his brother, his eyes wild and watering,
and nodded in the same jerky movement. Greg sighed, shoving Sherlock as he released his arm. “You idiot!” He balled.

“Oh, Sherlock....” Mycroft exhaled, his nostrils wide as he shook his head and looked at his brother as one would a bug about to be squashed. “What the hell have you done.”

Chapter End Notes

Yesterday I was given a choice in a meeting at my job - resign, or be sacked. I resigned. Today, I have an interview.
To celebrate - here's a (sorry, very short) flashback chapter just to let you know I love you.
Sherlock watched Mycroft pulling on his coat, preparing to leave the house. John buzzed around him, clearly trying to decide where it was his help was mostly needed. Of course, John would never want to abandon Sherlock, but the overwhelming need to ensure Greg’s safety was beginning to weigh him down. Sherlock was keen to be there to see Jack’s face when they arrived to save Greg, but knew he couldn’t go - what help would he be, recovering from surgery and still adjusting? He’d slow them down, hinder the task, and he knew that. But the thought of staying back here was one that was far from settling well in his mind.

“Go with him, John.” Both Mycroft and John looked to Sherlock as he spoke. “I know I said…but…Go with him. The house is surrounded, I’m safe here. I’ll be fine. Lestrade isn’t - so go.”

John’s face flicked between indecision and worry, and he couldn’t decide which of the Holmes’ to take his cue from. He shrugged his shoulders and looked at Mycroft squarely. “I want to make sure that Greg is safe. But I can’t go with you and spend the entire time hoping nothing happens here. He needs to come with us.” He pointed his hand toward Sherlock.

“He can’t.” Mycroft shook his head, his words definite. “I can’t prevent you coming, though I’d prefer to know that you and Sherlock remained together here.”

John shook his head, “I can’t sit back knowing Greg’s in trouble.”

“There’s no other choice. You come, or you both stay.” Mycroft said plainly. “Whatever you decide, do it quickly because I am leaving now.” He waited a moment, looking between his brother and John.

John frowned at Mycroft, “This isn’t that easy of a decision to make, you pompous prick!” He shook his head and looked to Sherlock for his input.

“Go,” Sherlock insisted. “Both of you - just go. I’m okay here.”

John nodded his head and moved quickly across the room, leaning to kiss Sherlock fiercely on the lips. “Keep your phone close, don’t move from here and I promise we’ll be in touch when we get to him.” He spoke close to Sherlock’s ear as he hugged him tight. “First sign of anything not being right here, call us and we’ll come, right?” He looked behind him at Mycroft and slowly straightened up.

“Of course.” Mycroft nodded his head.

Sherlock in every conceivable way.

“I think…” Sherlock said, pausing at the foot of a flight of carpetless stairs. They were painted in an olive green paint that was chipped and blistered, and each step looked to still hold carpet tacks were a potential tetanus hazard. Sherlock scrubbed his temples with both hands and shook his head. “...this way…” he pointed to his right, into a doorless room that was immersed in darkness. He turned into it, and, glancing back at Greg first, Mycroft followed. Sherlock stopped three feet from the door and inhaled sharply. Mycroft walked into his back, bracing his hands on Sherlock’s shoulders to prevent toppling them both to the floor, and followed his brother’s line of sight.

Before them lay a collection of mattresses, stained and with their springs exposed. They were littered with sheets, blankets, and items of old clothing that were as grubby as the rest of the building, and in the centre of one of the mattresses lay the lifeless, stick-thin body. Even from their distance, Mycroft could see the skeletal appearance he had, and lesions that showed years of drug use on the man’s grey face, and the purple lips confirmed what he knew anyway. Mycroft didn’t remove his hands. He turned his head as Greg stepped in behind him and nodded at him.

Greg’s sighed quietly. “I have to call it in.”

“And explain it how, exactly?” Mycroft spoke without movement.

Greg pulled a face behind Mycroft’s back as he reached into his coat pocket for his phone. “I don’t know, but I’ll come up with something.” He sighed through his nose. “I’m sorry, Will.” Mycroft turned his head to look at Greg again. “I can’t promise anything but I’ll do what I can.”

Mycroft nodded once in appreciation. “We need to leave, Sherlock,” He said quietly, inching his mouth close to his brother’s right ear. Sherlock shook his head and swallowed hard over rising nausea. “Come on,” Mycroft applied pressure where his hands rested on Sherlock’s shoulders, forcefully guiding him to turn around and begin to move. “We can wait for Inspector Lestrade outside.”

“It wasn’t….“ Sherlock babbled.

“I know,” Mycroft spoke calmly - too calm. “Come, brother mine, we should wait outside.”

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“He’s breathing, and he’s babbling to himself, so that makes you one lucky sonofabitch.” Jack pointed his finger at Neil as he returned to the industrial kitchen. “Beat the shit out of him, will you?” He stepped closer and piled his balled left fist into Neil’s angular face. The slim man tumbled backwards but did not fall. “Do not, for one minute, think you have any authority in here, you get that?” Jack jabbed his finger at Neil’s chest. “He dies, you die, is that understood?”

Neil stared at him.

“Answer the Goddamned question!” Jack shoved Neil hard in the sternum. “Is that understood?”

Neil nodded his head with a fierce glare in his eyes. “Yes.” He spat, rubbing his hand against his burning cheek.

“We might be winning this so far, but it is far from over. If you jeopardise any of that for some
power complex, I will end your fucking life.” Jack balled at him, physically backing away to put
distance between himself and Neil. As he went to speak again, he was interrupted by his phone
ringing on the countertop. He grabbed it, jabbed the answer button, and roared into the receiver.
“This better be good.”

“...Mycroft Holmes and John Watson have left the Marylebone house. Sherlock is alone.”

Jack grinned. “Not exactly what I’d planned for, but it’s bordering on an excellent outcome. How
about we play cat and mouse with Sherlock Holmes? Order Lincoln to go in - keep an eye on where
Mycroft and John are; if they know where we are, it’s all about to get very fun!”

“Lincoln is being prepped now. What’s his guise?”

“No guise.” Jack shook his head with a smirk. “Sherlock Holmes is about to feel like he’s lost the bet
but Lincoln is not to hurt him. He’s there to scare him only. All the hurting is going to come once he
learns that we blew up his precious big brother.” Jack laughed loudly. “Might even take the lovely
Doctor Watson and his precious Lestrade out with him, just to see everything in Sherlock’s world
completely fall at his beautiful but useless feet.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for your comments - I will get around to responding to every one of them.
It's so amazing to know that you're all still so invested in NMH. It means a lot to me. I
also passed on the response to Alioseven this morning - she is floored at where the story
is going (which made me feel pretty good) and is so happy that you're all still here/have
come here to read it. She's so thrilled that her idea has been taken on and moulded when
she no longer could.

Also, thank you to all of your well-wishes regarding work. It really meant so much to be
so supported. I attending an interview today, too, and was offered the job on the spot!
Hopefully, within 2 weeks, I will be able to begin my induction. Once my records check
(DBS) is back, I can begin my job properly. I'll be working with adults with learning
disabilities and I'm so happy!
Chapter 64

The place was swarming with undulating blue lights before Mycroft even realised Greg’s authority stretched as far as it did. Hidden well in the car with Sherlock, he had almost every faith that Greg would come true on his promise to do all he could to ensure Sherlock’s safety. Almost. Sitting beside his brother in the car in perfect silence, Mycroft considered all the things he could say and do in the moment; losing complete control over his temper was high on his list, but the look of fear mixed with his comedown that dominated Sherlock’s face prevented it from rising to his go-to response. He fiddled his hands in his lap and took a deep breath. After a moment of consideration, he asked his questions in turn.

“Did you love him?”

Sherlock jerked his head to the side, his eyes wide but narrowing as he looked at Mycroft. “No - I don’t think so.”

“Did you at least know his name?”

Sherlock nodded, his eyes welling with tears he refused to cry before his brother. “Mark.”

“And to him, you were?” Mycroft asked, his head tilting to the side. “What?” He asked, struggling. “A sexual acquaintance, his dealer, his boyfriend…?”

Sherlock moved his tongue around inside of his mouth, “All of it, I don’t know. I didn’t ask him.”

“You felt something for the man, I saw that in your face. I’m sure Lestrade could even read that. And I don’t believe the fact that you vomited as we left the building is solely down to your intoxication.” Mycroft spoke airily, part of him still unable to let his anger go completely.

“I felt fear, Mycroft.” Sherlock snapped. “He’s dead and everyone of Lestrade’s team is going to find my DNA in there, on him, on the needle still hanging out of his arm…” Sherlock stopped, feeling the nausea beginning to rise again.

“Save for the death, you had a taste of your own medicine tonight.” Mycroft said, unable to look at his brother. “Lestrade and I are more than used to finding you this way.”

Sherlock shifted on the leather seat. “I know.”

Mycroft stared at the dark window and flicked the thumbnail on his left hand against the nail on his index finger. “I’m rather glad it is him lying there and not you.”

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John wasn’t sure what he was expecting to find when they reached the place that Mycroft had been told Jack, and hopefully Greg, was at, but he knew that what he was greeted with wasn’t it. Even in the dimness, it was clear to see it was an old, abandoned factory of some kind. It was half rubble, half dilapidated building and John wasn’t sure he wanted to be stepping into a site that looked like it might collapse around him. He climbed out of the car as Mycroft did and, for some reason, was half surprised to see men approach Mycroft. Of course Mycroft had his men here - of course he did. He
lingered at Mycroft’s side and listened.

“We are absolutely certain that Jack Skinner is inside, Sir. We have no official word on whether or not the Detective Inspector is in there. We have not attempted entrance yet, we have been awaiting your approval.” One of the men said in a deep voice with military type authority and respect.

Another of the men nodded in his agreement with the first before speaking. “We’re sure he’s got the place rigged in some way; if we go in, there’ll be an explosion, an alert to him, ...something. We just don’t know what.”

“Sir, have you considered the possibility that you being here is all part of his game?” the first man asked and John looked immediately to Mycroft. “Perhaps what he wants is you, and not the Detective Inspector. Or Doctor Watson. It is entirely possible that he knew you would respond in such a manner.”

Mycroft nodded his head in a brief jolt. “Yes, the idea had crossed our minds and we are aware that Jack Skinner is a mindful man. If he is expecting us, there will be consequences, but there is support both here, in the form of you, and back with my brother. Whatever decision Jack Skinner makes from this moment on has been accounted for.”

“Has it?” John asked, his arms stiff at his sides and his fingers flexing in and out nervously. “Has it been accounted for?” He repeated when Mycroft peered down at him. “Sherlock’s alone.”

“The house is surrounded, inside and out.” Mycroft pointed out.

“And we’re sure that that is enough? What’s stopping somebody on Skinner’s side also being employed by you.” John questioned. “They could infiltrate, and Sherlock cannot run away or fight back.” He took a deep breath. “I knew he should have come with us.”

“To do what, John? Sit in the car and wait.” Mycroft shook his head. “He is safe, and until we hear of any reason to assume that he isn’t, our priority is ensuring Lestrade’s safety.”

“Our priority is all of us getting out of this alive - that’s Greg, you, me and Sherlock. If going in there for Greg is going to jeopardise any of that, then something else needs to happen.”

Mycroft flexed his fingers inside of his gloves and swept his eyes across his band of merry men before looking back to John. “And what might this something else be?”

John closed his eyes briefly, sighing. He had no idea. “I don’t know.”

Mycroft nodded his head, sarcasm and anticipation rife. “No,” He said flatly. He turned to his men. “Ensure you keep the place surrounded. You, and you...” he pointed at two of them, “You’ll accompany Doctor Watson and I inside. And you,” he pointed to another, “I want your sole task to be finding Lestrade, is that understood.” He received nods and a chorus of ‘Understood,’ from the men. “John,” He spoke quietly. “It’s now or never.”

John nodded and poked his tongue in against the inside of his right cheek. He sighed and screwed his eyes closed, psyching himself up. “Let’s go.”
“Mr Holmes, your brother left me with the strictest of instructions that I’m to cater to your every need while he and Doctor Watson are...otherwise engaged.” Anthea hovered in the doorway of the lounge, her ever-present phone clutched in her right hand.

Sherlock eyed the dark haired woman he’d seen numerous times in recent months without shifting his position at all on the sofa. He nodded his head. “Not necessary, I’m not a complete invalid, but if it keeps Mycroft quiet then feel free to make yourself tea and dunk a biscuit or something.”

Anthea smiled a little. “Nobody else is to be granted entrance to the house who isn’t already in here and you’re to be supervised without exception.” She elaborated. “So if I go to make tea, you have to come with me.”

“It’s two feet away. It would take you less time to boil a full kettle, brew a coffee and walk back here then it would for me to get off the sofa into my wheelchair.” Sherlock said at speed.

Anthea nodded her head in agreement, “Perhaps that’s true. Perhaps Mycroft feels you require the goading into moving. Or perhaps you’re putting up walls, I don’t know and frankly, Mr Holmes, I don’t care all that much. I’m here to do my job and I won’t have you making it so I can’t. So I’ll pass on the tea, thank you, and if you don’t mind I’ll sit right here,-” She gestured at the sofa opposite where Sherlock was sitting, divided by a wide space and the coffee table. She sat and crossed her right leg over her left. “How’s that?”

“Impressive.” Sherlock nodded once, the corners of his mouth turned down. “I can see why Mycroft keeps you around, that’s for certain.”

Anthea smiled discreetly. “Is there anything you need?” She offered, softening her tone.

“No,” Sherlock answered frankly, looking at her blankly. “Mycroft tells you most things, I know. How long did he know Lestrade was missing before he actually told us, baring in mind I found out within the past hour?”

Anthea opened out her hands from where they were clasped on her lap, her phone resting just beneath them. “I’m not at liberty to say.”

“You are,” Sherlock frowned at her, “You just don’t want to. He doesn’t appreciate it, you know - the loyalty you have. Not in the way you want him to appreciate it.”

Anthea’s brows twitched a tiny bit in the centre, knitting together loosely, “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means he won’t thank you for the ways in which you go above and beyond, not how you want him to repay you. You’re transparent, incredibly easy to read, even John Watson could do it.” Sherlock’s rolled his eyes in a round that showed his disinterest. “Mycroft will never know if you want to go home, get yourself kitted out and go out and meet someone for dinner. I’m certainly not going to stop you - having a babysitter is becoming stale very quickly.”

“Perhaps you shouldn’t be so rude and childish.” Anthea countered.

“I’m concerned,” Sherlock said and she fixed her eyes on him. “My brother has just walked into a potentially life threatening situation with the man I’m supposed to be spending the rest of my natural life with, to save one of the very few people on this planet who would lie down in front of a speeding train if it meant doing so would prevent me from harm. I stand to lose the three people who would go to the end of the Earth and back to ensure I saw another day of life, even if it meant losing theirs. Rude and childish is my way of pretending like this isn’t killing me.”
“This is pointless, Donovan, it’s getting us nowhere. His phone is completely off the grid.”
Dimmock shrugged his shoulders and sat back in his seat, exiting the open tab on the computer. “So
now what do we do, being that you’re the one who knows how this is supposed to be going and
what’s actually happening.”

“I don’t know anything, I just know the people who’re wrapped up in all of this and what they’re
capable of. Jack Skinner is out to get Sherlock Holmes, and because of their relationship with him
and the things they have done in the past to ensure Sherlock’s safety, he also has his sights on the
older Holmes, and on Lestrade. Jack is a vindictive, manipulative and smart man who is well
connected and well versed. If he wants to be hidden and untraceable, he can make it happen and
that’s why this is so goddamned frightening. Unless we know where Lestrade, the Holmes’ and John
Watson are, we won’t find Jack Skinner and if we can’t find those four, we have to assume that
Skinner is planning their deaths as much as they’re planning his.” Sally ranted, leaving Dimmock
startled.

“Has anyone thought of the place where Skinner’s brother’s body was found?” Anderson suggested,
surprising Dimmock as he hadn’t assumed anyone else was paying attention. He lingered in the glass
doorway and stepped in as Sally turned to look at him. “Might stand to reason he would take them
back to the place that they found him.”

“There’s no location on any of their mobile phones, no last location on Sherlock and John’s beyond
Marylebone and Mycroft Holmes is a master of complete disguise so there’s absolutely nothing on
him.” Sally shook her head, “The only way we find out is by driving out there.”

“No.” Dimmock shook his head, “I don’t even know where you want to go but from what you just
said about these five...psychopaths, it sounds like the most ridiculous idea going. Nobody goes
anywhere.”

“You’re not serious?” Sally glared at him.

“You’re risking your life, and the lives of anyone you take with you. No! I won’t allow it, and as the
senior officer, my word is final.” Dimmock slammed his right palm onto his desk.

Sally and Anderson glanced at one another. “You’re going to regret this.” Sally shook her head,
“When one or all of them is dead, you’ll be brought up on gross negligence charges, just you see if I
don’t file the complaint myself.”

“Where’s all this heart for Sherlock Holmes come from all of a sudden?” Dimmock asked as Sally
turned to walk away. “You hate the guy, resent Lestrade involving him at all. So why the jumping
on the bandwagon now?”

“I don’t have a heart for Sherlock Holmes; I have a heart for my work, for Lestrade, and for the
innocent people who get caught up in Sherlock Holmes’ mistakes. But right now, there is nothing
that Sherlock Holmes has done wrong - for once, he’s the victim and, because of that, he becomes
the reason I work. He becomes my work. I don’t hate Sherlock Holmes, I don’t like him very much,
either, but I don’t hate him. And right now, none of that even matters, and if you’d get your head out
of your arse you’d see that. Lestrade is in danger, and an ex-military and police-trained psychopath
has Lestrade and Sherlock, and everyone they care about in his sights. That’s why this bandwagon
pulled up,” She snapped. “So how about you get on it, too?”
Sherlock watched as Anthea got to her feet and clicked accept on her ringing phone, holding it to her ear beneath her loose hair. “Hello? No...no access to anyone except Mycroft Holmes and John Watson. Well, I received no word from Mycroft. ...no! No access.” She cut the call and clutched her phone in both hands.

“Ah,” Sherlock drew his mouth to the side. “Have we been made by Skinner?”

Anthea glared at him, “How very astute; somewhat of a blasé delivery, mind you. I take it you were not expecting a home visit from an occupational therapist at…” She looked to her watch, “…six pm?”

“Should have let them in - terribly boring just you and I sitting here, saying nothing, trying to work out who Mycroft loves the most.” Sherlock flicked his eyes away from her and onto the quiet television. “Report it to Mycroft, I’m sure he’ll do something about it. In the meantime, please sit down, you’re making the place look untidy.”

“Oh, would you just stop it? You sincerely believe this is what I want to be doing? Sitting here, with you, being spoken to like I’m something that was brought in off a farmworker’s shoe? I’m a Cambridge graduate; and I am far from just Mycroft Holmes’ lackie. Show me a bit of goddamned respect!”

Sherlock’s eyes followed her as she paced a little before him. He didn't know what to say to her for a moment and considered a response silently as she stared back at him. “Then do something useful.” Sherlock snapped.

“Oh, okay, suggest something. I'm sure you can make as good a job of it.” Anthea snapped at him. Sherlock’s jaw stiffened. Anthea looked almost immediately apologetic. “That didn't come out how I intended it to. I'm sorry.”

“Pass me my chair.” Sherlock gestured his hand to the side of the sofa where his wheelchair had been folded away earlier by John.

“I said I was sorry.” Anthea stilled and looked at him with softer eyes.

Sherlock arched his back forwards, pushing his hands into the sofa for leverage. “My chair.” He repeated.

“What do you need, I can do it.” Anthea asked him. “Coffee? Or something to eat? Or...medication?”

“My chair,” Sherlock shouted at her. “I need my chair. So do what you’ve been asked to do, and give it to me.”

Anthea was taken aback but his sudden sharpness, all sarcasm and rudeness replaced by actually, obvious annoyance. She loitered, not sure whether to adhere to his request or not, and found herself unable to do anything but stare back at him.

“Are you stupid, or have you suddenly lost your hearing? Pass my chair over.” Sherlock's eyes bore into her sharply.
“Your brother wants me…”

Sherlock sighed heavily through his nose. “I don’t care. I think all rules have been suspended tonight, don’t you? The three people closest to me are at risk and you think obeying some ridiculous request is helping? It isn’t. There is so much more at stake than you proving your ability to follow orders. I really would prefer it if you just left.”

Anthea shook her head. “Until Mycroft walks back in that door, I’m not going anywhere. So, I suppose we both have a nervous night ahead.”

“—”

“This place is clearly not inhabited Mycroft, it’s in total darkness.” John’s whisper escaped breathily into Mycroft's ear. The two were close together, with their accompanying paid assassins mere steps ahead. “You think that perhaps your search and destroy team got it wrong?”

“No,” Mycroft whispered back raspily. “Lestrade is in here somewhere, and I will not leave until I know he is safe.”

John exhaled and tried to figure Mycroft’s expression in the near sightless darkness that encompassed them. “I want to know he’s safe too.” John whispered, reaching out until his hand collided with another body, proving he was still following in the right direction. “But getting home to see Sherlock is also high on my list of priorities.” John gave a groan in his chest when he walked into the back of Mycroft, who’d stopped walking without warning.

“Sherlock is protected.” Mycroft hissed in an exasperated whisper. “If Lestrade is in here, then he is not. You’re a doctor, John - this is triage.”

“Sir, there’s a heat sense down to our left…” A voice called from the darkness ahead, hushed but audible. “From the TIC, there seems to be a doorway ahead, behind which there's shape that's reading - we need to get closer to determine the origin.”

“Keep moving,” Mycroft confirmed. He reached for John in the thick darkness. “Don’t lose focus now, John. Sherlock's safety is important, but without the three of us remaining safe, he stands no chance. Lestrade is key to Sherlock’s own survival.” He said, quick and quiet.

John stared to where he could barely make out a mass in the dark, and hoped it was Mycroft's face. “Then let's hope Greg's behind there, and alive.”
Greg sluggishly opened his eyes and felt that horrific headache beat deeply at his brow. Blood lingered in his mouth, mixing with the acidic aftertaste of vomit, and he spat in an attempt to rid himself of it. Every inch of his body ached, and the twisting pull on his shoulders and wrists was close to unbearable. He'd made peace with himself in a way, accepted that death could be imminent, and somehow it made the pressure of grief in his chest easier. Never seeing his children again was a daunting idea, but dying for the greater good was something he had been prepared for his entire career. Prepared, but not ready.

He wasn't ready to leave his kids behind, he wasn't ready to leave his career, his few friends, the man he'd come to love, the solid foundation he'd found in John and Sherlock. How could he just let it all be gone? His mind had rationalised it by sorting it into facts. If he didn't die here, Jack would make it so they continued to suffer. He assumed Jack wanted him and Mycroft as a way of hurting Sherlock - he knew almost, vaguely away of Jack having told him something to that effect - and he knew that his and Mycroft's deaths would destroy Sherlock. Facts circled his mind and he began to wonder what was real and what was concussion induced.

Was Sherlock safe? Was Mycroft here? Was Jack alone? Could he smell gas?

"Is this the report you'll be giving over?" Greg asked, looking at the petite woman before him. She nodded, tossing her light brown hair over her shoulder as she did so, and smiled at him. "Will you do something for me?"

She frowned, "Something like what?"

"No, Molly, I need your assurance before I say anything." Greg shook his head. "Will you do something for me?" He said, holding the report out to her.

Nodding nervously, her eyes flicking between Greg's and the report, Molly spoke with a hitch of concern in her voice as she took the document. "Anything."

"Don't file it." Greg said. "Or, file it but not like this - alter the results."

"Greg!" Molly snapped, "I could lose my job."

Greg nodded, holding out one hand to placate her. "I know - but if you file this, that DNA extraction to be matched will be matched with Sherlock. Our Sherlock, Molly."

Molly's eyes widened. "...No?"

"Whatever I have to beg from you, I will Mol'. Just please, help me out here because I can't watch him go down." Greg pleaded. "He can have been at the scene, I just don't want his DNA trail leading directly to the stiff."

"Mark." Molly said firmly, "His name was Mark."
“Well, Mark needs to help us make sure Sherlock does not go down for this. The evidence is there, I know, but he didn't do it Molly.”

“He wouldn't, he's not…” Molly twitched her shoulders. “I only see him in the lab, but...I know. He wouldn't.”

“That's why he can't be framed for this.” Greg appealed to her softer side. “So you'll help me, won't you Molly?”

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“Shit…” Sally put down the phone and slipped slowly down onto her seat. Her sudden reaction caught the attention of one or two of her colleagues, but it was Dimmock who responded.

“What?” He waved his hand before her. “Donovan, what?”

Sally looked up slowly, breathing deeply through her nose. “Charlie’s dead.”

“What?” Sergeant Collins’ head snapped up, sitting at the desk to Sally's right. “He's dead?” He repeated.

Sally swallowed hard and nodded. “The beat guys have called it in; GSW to the right temple. Looks like…”

“Looks like suicide?” Dimmock asked, frowning. Sally's head nodded slowly as she stared idly into the mid distance, completely struck.

“He wouldn't.” She said in a whisper. “He wouldn't just… Even after Skinner…”

“Even after Skinner what?” Dimmock asked. He clicked his fingers in her face to demand her attention. “What did Skinner do to him?”

“Scared the shit out of him.” Sally said. “I was there...I didn't stop it. And now…”

“So you think that Jack ordered a hit on him?” Dimmock asked, “And that the Holmes’ and bros show are next?”

Sally pushed herself to her feet, feeling frantic. “I know they're next. It's a message, a warning - Jack doesn't care what happens now, he just wants maximum impact, maximum pain for Sherlock Holmes and he's going to take down whoever he has to to achieve that. Lestrade is in serious danger - do you see that now?”

Dimmock nodded his head, “I do see it.” He stepped closer to her and leaned in, whispering into her ear. “And so are you.” Sally turned her head slightly but, out of the sight of others, Dimmock turned his hand around her wrist tightly. “Say nothing, just walk - out of the room and into the lobby. One move beyond there, you'll see what it is Charlie-boy saw. Got it?” Sally, staring ahead, nodded her head jerkily. “Good - now move.”

He released her arm but stayed close, following behind her out of the room and all the way to the lobby, then outside into the cold air. He stepped up beside her as they exited the doors and capture her wrist in his hand.
“The thing about being me is nobody even bothered to ask who I was or where I came from. Six months before Lestrade approves Jack, he approves me. That's some long-laid planning…” He marched Sally through the car park and toward the entrance gates. “And I just laid low all this time. Really low,” he hummed in her ear. “What's my name, Sally?” He hissed.

Sally's eyes grew wide. She didn't know.

“My name is Lincoln Dimmock; and Sherlock Holmes killed my cousin by overdosing him with a cocktail of drugs after raping him. And now, as the ultimate payback, Sherlock Holmes gets to lose his brother and his best friends, and it's me and Jack he has to thank for that.” Dimmock gave her a shove, moving her on quickly. “So now, we're off to pay Sherlock a little visit - and what's more, they're going to let us straight in because they think they've already barred potential infiltration, and they know our faces!” He gave a throaty laugh. “Get in the fucking car.”
Chapter 67

Sherlock shifted on the sofa; he had been feeling pressure in his abdomen that had only increased, and an ache in his back from the poor posture the sofa encouraged was beginning to make concentrating on anything else too hard. He recognised the feeling in his abdomen, equating the feeling to the urinary tract infections he'd experienced while at the hospital, and knew that that meant that his leg bag wasn't draining for one of two reasons - it needed to be emptied, or it was blocked. He braced his hands on the sofa and made his upper back as straight as he could.

“I need my chair,” Sherlock spoke up into the quiet of the room. “No you can't do anything for me, no I don't want to sit back and relax, before you even try. Just bring my chair round and open it out ...please?” He looked across the room at Anthea with firm but easily readable eyes.

“You're sure I can't do something to help?” Anthea quizzed as she got to her feet. She lingered to hear his response.

“Nothing - beyond giving me the chair, there is nothing you can do to help. So just please, bring it over.” Sherlock balanced his upper body weight on his right hand and thrust his left hand out, gesturing to the wheelchair beside him but just out of his reach.

Anthea responded to his sharper tone. She crossed the room and reached for the chair, unfolding it as she dragged it backwards, and lined it up beside the sofa. She watched Sherlock as he pushed the breaks down and dragged the sidebar away effortlessly, and wondered how he could have so quickly become adapted to the change. She watched him as he braced himself and carefully, with deep breaths of effort, swung his body around onto the chair, landing the drop almost perfectly in line. He fixed the sidebar back in place and used both of them as supports to push himself backward into the chair more comfortably. Anthea watched as he lifted his deadweight legs in turn and planted them into the footpads before he unhooked the breaks.

Without speaking, Sherlock glided from the room and into the hallway, slipping easily into the lift to take him up to the upper floor to access the bathroom. Anthea lingered down in the hallway, pacing between there, the lounge and the kitchen as she waited for Sherlock to reappear. She knew nothing about his inner workings, nothing beyond his immobility, because Mycroft didn't tell her. In her mind, Sherlock was using easy access standing rails and bars, and was peeing like any other man. Perhaps if she had known that he was unhooking the straps on his leg and emptying his beyond capacity catheter bag into the toilet, she may have been a little less eager for him to return and a little more understanding of the changes he was still adapting to.

The pressure in Sherlock's abdomen eased as the bag was emptied and almost immediately the bag began to fill again; a clear indicator his one kidney was working well, but an annoyance to realise that his leg bag would need emptying more often than he had bargained for if he was going to avoid this, and maintain his health, as time went on. As the bag filled almost to capacity again, Sherlock emptied it a second time, and he emptied the urine bottle into the toilet. He made sure the tap was closed on the bag before he pulled the cuff of his trousers back down to his ankle, hiding all evidence that he didn't operate quite the same as anyone else in the house.

Once he left the bathroom he considered giving Anthea the slip and remaining on this floor but he knew she would come in search of him. Despite his want to distance himself and remain out of her way, and be absorbed in his thoughts, he returned to the main floor of the house and made his way into the kitchen. He moved slowly around the island counter to reach the skin, accessing the low cupboard where his medication was housed. He took the boxes out and popped the gabapentin and nitrofurantoin onto the counter. He took one of the two glasses from the drainer board beside the sink.
and filled it with cold water from the tap. He necked it, knocking his tablets back, and hoped for quick relief from the tense pains in his back.

No sooner had he swallowed the tablets did Anthea step into the kitchen, her arms folded across her slim chest, and halted her slow steps as she reached the island. She rested the flats of her hands on the counter and watched Sherlock as he turned his chair and paused a moment when he caught her looking at him.

“Mycroft never did go into much detail regarding your injury.” She said quietly, “And I didn’t give it a lot of thought. I assumed that your legs just didn’t work - but I can see it’s a lot more than that.”

Sherlock nodded his head. “A lot more.” He repeated her observation. He steeled his protective layer, ready to “not talk” about anything she threw at him, and he was sure she saw his fortress tighten but the look of persistence that flashed in her eyes.

“He and I have been working to find you a more suitable wheelchair.” She said hopeful of a conversation. “Watching you in the lounge just then,” she thumbed over her shoulder, “I have a better understanding of Mycroft's descriptions of what you require.” Sherlock watched her; she was almost nervous.

“You saw one thing and you now think you can plan my future and, what, fix my back?” Sherlock challenged her.

Anthea looked back at him with firm eyes. “I'm trying to be understanding, and I'm trying to talk to you about anything other than how frightened I am that Mycroft won't come back.”

“What right do you have?” Sherlock asked her sharply. “To talk about me like you know, to ask questions or make assumptions? What right do you have to take on the affection you do for my brother?”

Anthea couldn't work out whether she was being scolded or genuinely asked a question. She frowned at him and shrugged her shoulders. “Mycroft Holmes is a thinly spread man; you, Inspector Lestrade, your parents, his work… Someone has to take the time to consider that sometimes he, too, needs to be considered.”

“I am considering him,” Sherlock said in a low voice. “I told you already, the three people who mean the most to me could be in a situation that they do not escape alive; I'm terrified at this precise moment in time. So do me a favour and keep your small talk and small minded questions about what it's like to be this low to the ground because I don't have any space left in my bullshit section to be bothered to talk to you about it. They're in this situation because of me - I can't think about anything other than them, and how guilty I feel. So just stop talking.”

“You don't need to be guilty.” Anthea told him quietly. “Mycroft doesn't hold this against you.”

Sherlock snorted in his throat. “How do you know what my brother does or doesn't feel? I don't think he even does half of the time. Stop presuming to tell me who my brother is; I know who he is, better than he knows himself, and I'm not going to be lectured by some Girl Friday who wants to get a jump on him but can't!” Anthea’s chin jutted slightly. “I grew up with him, and at the end of it all he could never be what you want him to be because he doesn't think of feel that way. Try all you like, he won't even notice.”

“You're a hateful bastard at times.” Anthea whispered.

“No,” Sherlock shook his head, “I'm realistic; waiting for a fairytale or answered prayers leaves you
broken hearted and bitter. Nothing good happens, nothing that we don't do for ourselves, so stop wishing it. If they die tonight, then they die. And it will be tragic and horrible and painful...and the worst thing that I have ever felt or could ever imagine, but it won't be stoppable but my hand, or yours - so why dream it might be?"

Anthea regarded him with sadness for his cynicism. “Because hope is sometimes all that keeps us going. Because when we love people, we don't want to think of the worst in them, or about them.”

“What if the worst is the truth?” Sherlock asked her quietly.

“If you love a person, it never is.” Anthea whispered. “We all make mistakes but it's because of the hope and faith and...trust of our loved ones that we are forgiven. It doesn't matter what you do, or have done, or might do in the future; if somebody loves you, to them you are perfect and you will always be a hero. Even if you never notice that you're loved by somebody, don't ever doubt that you are. To someone,” Anthea said with a sigh and a shake of her head. “Each one of us is loved, is perfect, is capable of anything.”

Sherlock swallowed hard and wet his lips with a swipe of his tongue. “You really think that?”

Anthea shrugged her shoulders. “I hope I do.” She nodded her head. “And in a not-beating-around-the-bush way of saying that, your brother loves and cares about you, and no matter what you think of yourself, or think that he thinks of you, you're way off his actual sentiments. So the cold, calculating persona you two adopt is useless - the world knows there's a bond, a unique and profound one, and this situation you're in now - all of you - proves that. Mycroft would lay down his life to save yours, because he wants to not because he feels he should. So the guilt isn't necessary, because nobody else is laying that blame at your door.”

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"I pulled a string or two; there are signs of Sherlock at the building and that can't be changed - if he gets brought up on anything at all it'll be drug charges that I can easily waver if needed. But there is no direct DNA links to Sherlock on the lad,” Greg said, a little breathless at attempting to get his words out quickly enough. “With a little help from an underrated girl at Bart's, I think I've managed to save his arse.”

Mycroft breathed a mirthless laugh though his nose and looked across his desk at Greg. “Again.”

Greg nodded slowly, “Yeah, again.”

Mycroft sat back in his leather, high backed chair and clasped his hands in front of him, his elbows resting on the arms of the chair. “He has a brother, the young man.” He informed Greg. “Military.”

Greg inhaled sharply.

“I'll keep an eye, don't worry.” Mycroft assured him. “Just you focus on ensuring Sherlock does not serve time for this.”

Greg gave a firm nod. “Absolutely.” He pushed his hands into his coat pockets. “How is he?”

“Withdrawing, but he will survive. And he will never be allowed near anything you might consider
recreational again. It'll be a condition, don't worry.” Mycroft said, sitting forward again.

“And had he mentioned the lad?” Greg asked, “any indication of their relationship outside of drugs and sex?”

“Knowing my brother, the drugs would have been acquired through the sex. One thing Sherlock has never been forthcoming with is relationships and close physical contact - even friendly hugs seem to render him speechless. A symptom of the ASD, I suppose. If there was a relationship of any kind, I sincerely doubt it was...deep.” Mycroft surmised.

Greg's eyebrows twitched into a slight frown, disagreeing with the man before him. “He's capable of more than you give him credit for.”

Mycroft nodded thoughtfully, getting to his feet. “I don't doubt that he is, Inspector, but I also don't doubt my ability to read the boy I've spent very little time away from for the entirety of his life. Independent though he may be, he is unable to manage when totally alone and that is where the drugs come in.” He fell silent, and Greg could see that memories were keeping him from speaking further.

“Yeah, well...” Greg mumbled. “Just tell him I'm here if he needs me, yeah?”

Blinking, Mycroft looked at Greg and nodded his head. “Yes, of course.”
"Well?" Mycroft whispered loudly.

"Definitely a human form. There is no way of knowing whether or not it is the Detective Inspector until we get in there - but it's definitely a person." A hushed voice responded.

"What do you want us to do, Sir?" A harsher whisper asked.

John tugged on Mycroft's arm, "This could be a rig." He reminded him.

"How? You can fake a thermal imaging feed of a person." Mycroft growled back at him.

"They could be recently dead, loaded with explosives. It could be Jack waiting for us. It could be Greg but...rigged with something. There is no way Jack is going to make this easy for us." John insisted. "We need to be careful."

"Don't enter the room yet." Mycroft answered his charges after a moment of silence over John's words. "Can your imager give any further details?"

"Only if we go in." The hushed whisperer responded.

Mycroft exhaled and tried to find another way around this in the moment. He drew a blank. "Okay," he spoke up. "Let's go in - assume mortal danger until there is proof to the contrary, am I clear?"

"Sir!" The men before him agreed.

"Okay - then go."

"Mycroft!" John snapped, grabbing blindly for the man's arm. "Think deeper - the door could be rigged, Jack could be watching us like rats in a maze right now. We need to be careful or it's game over right now."

"There's no other choices now, John. If it's Lestrade behind that door, he needs our help. If it's Jack, then we kill him." Mycroft said, firmly but without obvious fear at all.

"I want this to work, but if we're all dead then it isn't going to. Just think." John said, letting go of Mycroft's arm.

"I am." Mycroft said in a low whisper. "Are you?"

Despite his reservations, John kept in formation with the three men before him as they made their way down the final three feet of walkway before reaching the door behind which they were hoping was Greg.

"Sir? We're at the door. Open it immediately?" A whisper emanated from before John and Mycroft.

Mycroft inhaled sharply. "Do it."

As the heavy door was effortlessly pushed through - not locked as they had assumed it would be - the men were blinded momentarily by the sudden burst of light they were met with behind it. No explosion, no gunfire, nothin…. Blinking with straining eyes, John and Mycroft stepped into the room and looked around. It took less than two seconds to spot Greg, hauled up against the wall, his neck bent up at an odd angle of rest, his top bloodied and stained with vomit, and pale and clearly
The room smelled of lighter fluid, something that overwhelmed all four of the men as they made their way across to Greg.

John pushed his fore and index fingers in to check Greg's pulse at his neck, sighing as he felt the strong but slightly uneven beat. “He's just unconscious.” He said, kneeling at Greg's hip, and looked up at Mycroft above him. “But he's in a bad way, look at him…” His eyes ran up and down Greg's body. “Breaks, bruises, concussion probably. He's got to be in agony.” He looked up at one of the men dressed in all black. “Can we get the ties off his wrists, loosen up his shoulders?”

“Perhaps we should focus on getting him out of here first?” The shorter of the two spoke and John recognised his voice from the darkness - softly spoken, authoritative, but peaceful.

“You can carry him, without hazard, in the darkness?” John asked. “I'm not putting up roadblocks, it's a genuine question. Because, if you can, then I'm all for it.” He said, pushing himself up to stand. “His ankles look broken, they're bent out of shape, and that head injury isn't good…”

Mycroft inhaled sharply, his eyes moving up and down Greg's unmoving body. “Emergency Services?”

“Sir, it would never be explained comprehensively.” The softly spoken man addressed Mycroft. “Emergency responders are out of the question.”

“Too right they are.” John and Mycroft turned and met the eyes of a man they'd been dreading seeing again, whilst simultaneously hoping they could, just to blow his head from his shoulders. “Don't worry about him.” Jack said as he stepped further into the room. “He's sleeping off effects of a heavy night out. Seems mixing a punch in the face, with having your head rammed into a wall and sensory deprivation don't mix to well.”

John launched for him, his run at full pelt as he stormed across the room and immediately reached for his ever-close gun in the inside pocket of his coat. He held the gun out and pointed it directly at Jack’s temple, cocking it ready. Jack didn't move an inch.

“Shoot me.” Jack goaded. “No really, do it. End the mental torture, it'd be a relief. But know this - without me, Sherlock is in trouble. And, without me, big brother Holmes over there,” he waved mockingly, “Yeah - he dies. Actually, he dies even if I'm here, but it sounds more dramatic if there more than one thing to lose, doesn't it?”

John's top lip curled.

“You need to make a decision, Doctor Watson. You can kill me, and watch Mycroft die and then live through Greg's subsequent death and Sherlock's mental health decline. Or you don't kill me, and Mycroft is the only one who has to really lose his life but then I get to watch you and Greg do a dance, if the man survives that is. So what'll it be? Tick tick tock, Doctor Watson. Choose your gameplay.” Slowly, John lowered the gun. “Good boy.”

“Jack, you know that this cannot go on as you wish it to. The police are aware, of that much at least you must be certain.” Mycroft said as calmly as he could keep himself.

“The thing about the Metropolitan Police, Mister Holmes, is they’ll employ anybody.” Jack spoke lightly, his tone jovial and uncaring in many ways, and John watched him with a grimace as he walked past him at the door and toward where Mycroft was standing beside Greg. “I mean Greggy boy, here, he employed me.” He laughed disgustingly. “Not that this would have gone much differently had he not. There are people within Lestrade’s Scotland Yard office that have alliances outside of him, and I’m sure you need no further explanation.”
Mycroft thought quickly. “Do they have access to my brother?”

“Oh yes,” Jack nodded with a smile. “And they should be gaining that access incredibly soon, if they haven’t already. But don’t worry - they won’t be murdering him. They’ll be talking to him, making him feel safe and well, perhaps they’ll discuss his new outlook on life, given he’s a few feet closer to the ground than before, and then - when you’re dead - they’ll break the news.”

Behind Jack, John’s breathing quickened in pure anger. Mycroft nodded his head at Jack’s words, “And if I don’t die?”

“You will though,” Jack whispered loudly. “Absolutely, you will die.”

“How?” Mycroft asked him, “I deserve at least to be informed of my execution method.”

Jack’s expression sharpened. “You don’t deserve anything! Did your brother inform Mark of how he intended on killing him?”

“Sherlock did not kill him; it was an accident, an overdose on cocaine and heroin that destroyed his body. Sherlock did not make him take the drugs, he did not force it into him in any way, and he certainly did not do anything that would further facilitate his death. I know that you’re angry about Sherlock and Mark’s relationship, such as it was one, and I know that you have an overwhelming hatred for my brother for his kinship and his part in Mark’s life - but laying blame where it does not belong will not bring your brother back, or change how he passed, or change who he was. And killing me will not teach Sherlock a single thing you intend it to. But if you insist on killing me, I won’t prevent you. Just know that you’re not doing it for the reasons you keep telling yourself that you are.” Mycroft spoke with remarkable eloquence and John found himself somewhat soothed by his voice, despite the emergency of the situation.

“Sherlock Holmes raped and murdered my brother.” Jack spat loudly, his face reddening with the ferocity of his voice.

Mycroft shook his head slowly, “No,” he said quietly. “The sexual acts between Sherlock and Mark were consensual. Mark died of a drug overdose, the doses of which he administered himself. Being present prior to his death does not make Sherlock a murderer.”

“You’ll lie for him until your dying moments.” Jack pointed his finger at Mycroft. “But I know the truth; I know what he did. And I know what you and Lestrade did. I know!” He jabbed his finger into the side of his head as he roared at Mycroft. “For Doctor Watson and Lestrade to leave here, and for your precious brother to remain alive, you must die. And you will - and I’ll kill you; I’ll kill you knowing that you were a lying abomination.”

“Then do it.” Mycroft stiffened his jaw. “Knife, gunfire, poisoning - I do not care.”
Chapter 69

Sherlock regarded Anthea with a quiet respect for her honesty. She was so easily read and she didn’t seem to mind. He pushed his tongue into the inside of his right cheek and grasped the wheels of his chair. “Help yourself if you’re hungry, John keeps the kitchen stocked.” He said, moving smoothly around the island. As he moved toward the doorway, about to slip into the hallway and toward the dining room, the room Mycroft had had lined with bookshelves and filled it with all the books Sherlock had previously owned, plus whatever else he thought his younger brother should own, when the doorbell rang twice sharply. He looked over his shoulder to Anthea, “What happened to you getting an ominous phone call to announce a guest?” he asked her, half-serious.

“Perhaps one of the doormen wants to use the bathroom?” Anthea returned the nervous joke and stepped up beside Sherlock.

Sherlock eased his chair forwards a little and Anthea stepped around him, standing in the hallway between him and the door. “Aren’t Mycroft’s men cyborgs without bladders?” He asked, though he wasn’t entirely sure why, or if Anthea was even listening.

Anthea stepped up to the door and peered through the viewing lense. “Sergeant Donovan,” She said, looking over her shoulder, “With another person - a man, dark hair, short, long dark coat.”

Sherlock’s brow twitched in a slight frown before straightening out again. “Sally Donovan at my door, and not with Lestrade’s authority forcing her. It must be Christmas.” He moved forwards and stopped behind Anthea. He nodded at her, “Let them in.”

“I’m not sure I should.” Anthea shook her head at him, peering through the lense again.

“It’s Scotland Yard, they don’t get more on the side of the angels than that.” Sherlock tutted, and reached around her slim waist for the door handle. He unhooked the chain and released the Yale lock, then turned down the handle. As the door loosened, he moved backwards and allowed Anthea to tug the door open the rest of the way. The hallway rushed with a flurry of cold night air and Sherlock stared at Sally Donovan and DI Dimmock on his doorstep. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“Can we come in?” Sally asked. Sherlock noticed her narrowed pout and the slight heave to the inhale of her breaths, but he took it as nothing significant as he nodded at her request.

“By all means, Sally.” He said, his voice dripping with sarcasm. “Inspector Dimmock, I’m nearly certain you’ve grown a few inches.” Sherlock commented as Anthea pushed the door closed when the officers stepped inside. “Tea, coffee, something stronger? Anthea here will fix it for you, I’m sure. Name your choice.”

“We’re not here for the tea, Mister Holmes.” Dimmock spoke bluntly, blousing his coat out as he pushed his hands into his trouser pockets. “We’re here for a chat.”

Sherlock inclined his head and rested his hands in his lap. “Here in the hallway, or would you prefer to sit?”

“What’s easier for you?” Dimmock asked, brows raised high on his wrinkling forehead, and Sherlock shot him a look of disgust.

“Why don’t you two go through to the dining room and take a seat, Sherlock can join you, and I’ll put the kettle on.” Anthea spoke slowly, gesturing to her left into the large dining room, already
illuminated with a high ceiling light. She watched Sally walk in first, her boots noisy on the hardwood floor, and smiled as Dimmock offered her a nod by way of thanks and followed Sally into the room. They sat opposite one another at the far end of the table, beneath the front of house window, as Sherlock came into the room behind them.

“If you’re here to continue Jack Skinner’s questioning, you might as well know it’s pointless.” Sherlock said with an air of forced boredom as he tucked his chair in at the other end of the table, where the dining chair was deliberately left away, and pushed down the breaks. He rested his hands on the polished table top and clasped his fingers together as if about to pray. “The man’s investigation, as I’m sure you knew well, Sally, is going nowhere and…”

“Shut up,” Dimmock said with a sharp bark. “We’re not here to play cat and mouse, Sherlock, we’re here to talk about what is about to happen.”

Sherlock drew back his head, a little shocked to hear the meek man speak so brazenly. “And what is about to happen?” He asked, his voice a little more husky than he’d expected it to sound.

Dimmock leaned into the table, his posture and positioning a mirror of Sherlock’s, and shrugged up his shoulders. “Somewhere across town, right this moment I should imagine, your brother, live-in lover, and the great Detective Inspector Lestrade are standing on the edge of a very precarious cliff.” Sherlock flicked his eyes over Sally, now very easily able to read the fear in her face. He didn’t know the details, but he knew that this was about to get very serious, very quickly. “And if said cliff of precarious structure does as it’s supposed to, one or all of them will die. But, do you want to know the really good bit?”

Sherlock blinked slowly. He drew his arms up, elbows on pointe on the table whilst his palms flattened together and his pointed fingers bent in against one another, that same ‘praying’ stance now inverted. “Enlighten me.” He challenged.

“I can let you watch, if you like,” Dimmock’s eyes flashed and he smiled. “And, if you’re really good, I might even let you try - and ultimately fail - to save them.”

“Why?” Sherlock asked, lowering his hands again.

Dimmock drew down the corners of his mouth and shrugged, “Why not?”

Sherlock rolled his eyes, “Not why the choice - why are you doing this? What exactly are you getting out of working alongside Jack Skinner?”

“Oh,” Dimmock rounded his mouth dramatically, “You don’t know who I am? I’m Lincoln James Dimmock, and Jack and Mark’s mother is the older sister of my mother. Mark Skinner was my cousin - and you ruined and then stole his life. What am I getting out of working alongside Jack Skinner, you ask? Revenge.”

Sherlock tisked dryly, “Vengeance…” he nodded slowly, “Not really a healthy emotion to operate on.”

“There are worse emotions to act on,” Dimmock commented loosely, his eyes not leaving Sherlock’s face. “Love is a foolish one, I believe. The things people do for love is alarming. You see,” He pointed his left hand at Sherlock, “That’s why you’re in this mess - here, alone, nobody to back you up. Love conquers all, it’s said, and perhaps that’s true. But doesn’t that mean that the people who left you here alone don’t love you?” He make a fake shocked face. “Your big brother and your boyfriend went away, in favour of saving Greg Lestrade over remaining here and making sure you stayed safe. You can’t run away, can’t fight, and John took his gun. What does that say about the
love they hold for you? Not a lot, if you ask me. Maybe it’s all the raping and murdering you did…”

Sherlock stiffened his back, swallowing forcefully over Dimmock’s words.

“Oh, what was *that*? Did you just ‘peacock’ me, Sherlock Holmes? Challenging me? Or was that the shivers of truth running up and down your broken back?” Dimmock laughed dryly in his throat. “All of Mycroft’s henchmen think you’re safe in here, and that us two being with Scotland Yard means you’re now even safer. All you’ve got is Smokey Eyes in the kitchen, there, and I’m certain there isn’t much she’ll do without consulting your big brother - but seeing as he’s about to be dead, that really does leave you nowhere.”

Sherlock breathed in through his nose, his chest heaving to allow the air in over a rush of anxiety. “I didn’t do that to Mark,” he spoke quietly, his teeth clenched together.

“Oh…” Dimmock narrowed his eyes and shook his head, “You did, though. And now, Jack’s going to make sure that everybody you ever loved feels the pain you put Mark through, so that you can feel the pain you put *us* through.” Dimmock braced his hands on the table and stood up. He pushed the chair back noisily and walked down the room. He took the seat to the left of Sherlock and pulled his mobile phone from his pocket. After a moment of fiddling, he presented the phone to Sherlock with a screen image of camera footage. It wavered a moment before focusing.

Sherlock could clearly see, in a remarkably high definition filming, Jack standing a few feet from two men in black, his brother, and Greg who was laid out on the floor with clear streaks of blood on his face. Behind Jack, Sherlock could see John standing with his arms at his side, his gun clutched in his left hand, the fingers of his right were twitching awkwardly. After a moment, as Dimmock fiddled with the volume controls at the side of the phone, he could hear their voices.

”...I’ll kill you knowing that you were a lying abomination.”

“*Then do it. Knife, gunfire, poisoning - I do not care.*”

He watched Mycroft span his arms out to his sides and felt his heart beat quickly in his chest.

”*On the count of three, Doctor Watson, you’re going to aim that gun at Mycroft and you’re going to pull the trigger.*”

“No.”

“Oh, yes… Yes you are.”

“I won’t do it, there is nothing you can say or do on this Earth that would make me do it.”

“What if I told you I could have Sherlock killed, right now, if you didn’t.”

“I’d say bullshit.”

“*Is that your final answer?*”

Sherlock looked up at Sally, and then across to Dimmock. “Is it sinking in yet?” Dimmock asked him. “An eye for an eye - brother for brother.”

Sherlock’s top lip curled angrily, “You won’t get away with this, none of you. You’ll have witnesses if you kill me, witnesses if my brother dies or if anyone touches the three of them.” He spat and gritted his teeth tightly. “You can’t do this!”
“Did Mark say that? Did he beg you to stop hurting him when you raped him? Did he beg you not to inject him with that filth?” Dimmock slammed the phone down onto the table, screen-side down, and glared at Sherlock. “You don’t get to continue living a happy life after what you did to him, after how you ruined our family! You don’t get to be happy, you don’t get to be healthy - you don’t get to keep your family in tact. You don’t. I won’t let you.”

Sherlock flicked his eyes to Sally again and he could see her dark eyes overflowing with tears, leaving damp streaks down her cheeks. She said nothing, but Sherlock could read the apology in her face. He closed his eyes for a moment and tried to breathe steadily. “Let Sergeant Donovan leave,” He finally said, opening his eyes and facing Dimmock.

“What’s the fun in that? I want her to see you fall apart, or see you die - it all depends on what your boyfriend chooses now.” Dimmock laughed disgustingly and picked the phone up again, thrusting it under Sherlock’s nose. “You don’t look much like the hero detective to me,” He growled into Sherlock’s ear as he pushed the volume back up on the film.

“...John, you don’t have to do this. I came here knowing what may have been expected.”

“Then you’re an idiot, Mycroft. You think Sherlock would want this? I won’t shoot you, and I won’t let him do it. You’re not dying here, none of us are. You cannot keep blaming them for something you found to be disgusting in your brother.”

“My brother was made disgusting by the men he associated with, Doctor Watson.”

“Yeah - men like you. Men who beat people up for who they love, men who threaten to take the lives of those who have something you’ll never have; faith in humanity.”

“Humanity is a concept, Doctor Watson. Sherlock Holmes is a reptile who needs to suffer, and he’ll never know what it is to suffer what I have until he experiences what I have. You’re wasting time - shoot Mycroft Holmes, or...”

“Or what? You’ll have Sherlock killed, yes, I know, you said. But it’s bullshit.”

“Are you truly willing to test that theory?”

Sherlock breathed deeply and sharply, willing there to be a closing curtain, the dimming of lights, the swooping in of superman. Something had to happen, something had to change. This could not be the only options they were faced with; it just couldn’t.


Chapter 70

“There are two ways this will go, Doctor Watson, but they both end the same way - with Mycroft Holmes’ death.” Jack watched John’s expressions for any sign he might be weakening under his threats. “So either you shoot him, or I take all of you out in an explosion that will level this entire area.”

“You too, then, I expect?” Mycroft spoke up. “You wouldn’t get far enough away to light this place up without taking you with it.”

“I don’t have any reason to survive, so dying is a quick end to a long road.” Jack answered him quickly, glancing momentarily before focusing his eyes back on John. It did occur to him that while the man was holding the gun, he could still be killed.

“What if I agreed to my demise on one condition.” Mycroft asked, and John’s eyes fixed on him with confusion and fear.

“Mycrof…”

“Oh?” Jack turned to him, apparently forgetting about John, and quirked his eyebrows in interest. “Lay out your offer and we can discuss it.”

“Let John Watson and Inspector Lestrade go, and whatever hold you have over my brother you release - if you do this, you can do whatever you like to me.” He took a deep breath and kept his eyes locked onto Jack’s face.

Jack hummed, “Well, that is a very sweet offer Mister Holmes, I won’t lie. And it is incredibly tempting to agree. But letting Sherlock Holmes free is a no-go, you should know that. Just killing you would be delightful, don’t get me wrong, but where is the fun and torture for your brother in that?”

John’s lip curled. “You don’t feel you’ve tortured him enough?”

“Nothing would ever be enough.” Jack snapped and turned his attention back to John. “So on second thoughts, Mycroft, I reject your offer. Perhaps the death of you all is the only way to truly let Sherlock Holmes know what it is to be left without something you love.”

“You didn’t love your brother,” John gave an emotionless laugh. “His relationship with Sherlock, whatever it may have been, wouldn’t have bothered you if you did. You were ashamed of him, ashamed of the fact that he liked to have sex with men instead of women, and so you’re glad he’s dead - the only ill feeling you have now is that he died at his own hands, because that means you didn’t get a chance to do it.”

“John…” Mycroft warned in a low tone.

“…You were probably jealous that he was able to embrace who he was, have a relationship and feel love. Because you clearly don’t. You don’t - I mean, look at you, you’re every inch the soldier without a heart to take home at the end of the day. And that’s why we’re here - because we can go into battle and still know that we’re human enough to go home and feel love, be loved and give love in ways you never could.”

“This isn’t helping!” Mycroft snapped at him. “Stop it, John.”
“No, I won’t. He thinks he’s avenging his brother’s death,” John waved the gun toward Jack, “When the truth is that he’s acting out of jealousy and spite. He doesn’t feel aggression in the way he should - he feels aggression because he’s resentful of all we’ve had that he never could. Even Sherlock Holmes, the most arrogant man in England, knows what it is to be in love. You’re not homophobic, Jack - you’re plainly and simply jealous, and you’re throwing your toys out of your pram in the most extreme way you can think of. And still you’re not using your heart, such as you have one! It’s all gut-reactions, knee-jerk...none of it is genuine…”

“John!” Mycroft shouted as Jack launched at John, tackling the arm outstretched holding the gun first before they began to scuffle together, eventually landing in a heap of limbs on the floor as they began kicking and punching at one another. “What are you doing just standing here,” Mycroft turned to his Men in Black, “Stop them,” he thrust his hand at Jack at John, and crouched down to attend to Greg’s still lifeless form. No sooner had he reached out, intending to check Greg’s pulse, did his head snap around at three loud pops of gunfire. “John!” He was upright in a second and across the room before he knew it.

“Step back Sir, there’s blood…” the shorter of his men held out his arm, preventing Mycroft getting any closer to the two men on the floor.

Mycroft’s face paled when he saw Jack move, pushing himself backwards until he met the wall to sit. His shirt was covered in blood, his face beginning to bruise already, and his nose was bleeding. He was out of breath, and Mycroft hoped and prayed that it was down to a bullet wound he just couldn’t see. But when he saw the gun in Jack’s hand, he knew his hopes would not be realised. “…John…”

“Sir, stop…” The same assassin held his hand out as Mycroft went to move forwards.

“He could be dying!” Mycroft snapped arching forwards despite the attempt at restraint, and crouched before John. “John? Can you hear me, John? Doctor Watson!” He rubbed his hand in a fist against John’s sternum. He received no response. When he drew his hand away, blood coated his knuckles. Mycroft tore John’s dark jacket away, followed by his shirt, and was greeted with the smallest of wounds in John’s chest, just below his nipple on the left side. He grabbed at John’s arm and hip and rolled the man instantly. There was little to see but Mycroft knew that that was only because of his positioning. So why all the blood? And then he saw it, and he didn’t know why he hadn’t before. Grazed across John’s neck, was a thick pool of heavy-flowing blood that pumped to the floor. His colour was gone, his eyes wide, his lips beginning to purple. Mycroft grabbed for John’s wrist - weak and thready. A sign, at least. But where had the third bullet hit?

“Sir?” Mycroft looked up. His men were crouched before Jack. “He’s dead, Sir.” The smaller man said, dragging open Jack’s shirt. “Straight through his lung, Sir.”

Mycroft sighed in momentary relief. “We need assistance here immediately, you hear me? Two separate ambulances for Doctor Watson and Inspector Lestrade. Immediately, is that clear?”

Both men nodded, “Yes, Sir.”

“Alright, John.” Mycroft spoke quietly, “Help is on the way. Don’t you dare let go.”
“No...John!” Sherlock looked away from the phone and up at Sally, well aware that though she couldn’t see, she could hear the sounds that the feed provided. “Is...John…” His mouth bobbed open.

“Shit…” Dimmock slammed down the phone, his face contorting in disgust. “Your faggoting little housewife…” He reached for the collar on Sherlock’s shirt with his left hand, stabilising his target, and drew back his right fist. Sherlock braced as Dimmock’s fist came down sharply, colliding with his cheek and dizzying him.

“How do we know that?” Sherlock asked, turning his head a little to speak clearly. “He’s got people everywhere.”

Anthea inhaled deeply, watching as two officers tackled Dimmock into a choke hold. “So has Mycroft.”
Chapter 71

“Gunshot wounds to chest and neck…” Mycroft watched the paramedics as they eased John’s body onto a backboard, and onto the trolley they’d spirited in with them. “…his waves are off, there’s got to be blood collecting in the pericardium. Nick, his sats are dropping, let’s get him on the van…”

Mycroft stood back as the two whisked John away. He exhaled deeply, trying to steal his emotions back under control. He wasn’t sure that he could forgive himself if these were John’s final moments - he wasn’t sure Sherlock would forgive him, either. He turned, watching the paramedics with Greg, and hoped that the news they would give would sound more reassuring that the fates of John. “Heart rate is steady, he’s recoiling from painful stimuli…” he heard one of them say.

“Is that good?” Mycroft asked, looking down on them.

The female paramedic nodded, “It’s definitely a good sign.” She looked back to her colleague. “On my count?” Mycroft watched them ease Greg up by his limbs and place him onto the stretcher beside them. His oxygen mask fogged and cleared as he breathed, and that was all the reassurance Mycroft needed to know at least he was faring better. “We can have one accompaniment?” The female paramedic looked at Mycroft. “I’m assuming the other has left, your friend isn’t in a good way, but if you want to accompany us with Mr Lestrade here, you’re more than welcome to. We’re returning to the same hospital.” Mycroft nodded, his words leaving him in a feeling of relief and fear mixing in his stomach.

He followed them, moving through the dark hallway illuminated by torches as the paramedics guided their own way out of the derelict maze. The air outside was cold and fresh, and Mycroft inhaled a heavy lungful. It dizzied him, to breath the fresh air after inhaling fumes, but it was a relief. He let the paramedics load Greg into their van before he climbed aboard, fastening himself into the waiting chair on the female paramedic’s insistence.

“Queens?” The male paramedic asked, peering through the window from the front of the van.

“Yeah - everything else is too far.” The woman confirmed with a nod. Mycroft watched her work. She had Greg quickly cannulated and receiving fluids, and had replaced his oxygen mask with a nasal cannula as he began to show more responsive signs. She spoke to him as if he were fully compos mentis, and Mycroft found respect for her in that. “Greg, isn’t it?” She asked, turning to Mycroft. He nodded. “Okay, Greg - that sounds a little better than calling you Mister Lestrade. We’re just a few minutes outside of the hospital; once we’re there we’ll get you some pain relief and get the injuries dealt with. You’ll be fine.” She touched her hand to Greg’s shoulder and Mycroft saw him sweep his eyes open a moment before they closed again.

“Alright, Dimmock, calm yourself down.” The abrupt way in which the officer spoke only seemed to bubble Dimmock’s anger further. He fought against the two men restraining him and crowed about all he would do to ensure Sherlock knew this wasn’t over. “Shut up…” the officer growled into his ear. “Continue to fight me, and your rap sheet is just going to keep growing.” They battled the man from the room and into the street, struggling to haul him down the steps outside and into the waiting police van.
Sally stood at the front door with a female officer at her side, they were talking quietly and Sally was giving a brief statement of events. She followed Dimmock with her eyes, breathing unevenly until the doors were slammed and he was truly locked away inside the van. “Are you alright, Sergeant Donovan?” the officer asked her, and Sally brought her eyes back to her with a jerky nod.

“Yes,” she answered. “Are they?” She asked, thumbing in through the front door.

“They’re fine - let’s focus on you. Are you prepared to come to the station with us now?” The officer asked.

“Not yet, Hannah.” Sally shook her head. “Is there any word on Lestrade?”

Hannah nodded her head, “Their location was found quickly when a treble nine call was made, requesting two ambulances to attend. He’ll be on his way to the hospital now.” She assured, running her hand up and down Sally’s arm soothingly. “If you don’t want to go to the station yet, why don’t we go back inside. You could do with a cup of tea.” She smiled softly. Sally nodded her head, agreeing, and allowed Hannah to guide her back into the house.

Anthea lingered in archway of the lounge, watching as Sherlock spoke to two officers who were perched on the sofa. He gave them all the information he could, but he stammered and wavered over his words, trying to perfectly recall the words he’d heard and scenes he’d been forced to watch.

“...my brother tried to shut it down, asked John to be quiet, but Skinner moved forward. He and John fell, fighting on the floor...”

“And that’s when the bullets were discharged?” The older of the two officers asked, making notes on a small pad in his hands. Sherlock nodded his head. “How many bullets?”

“Three,” Sherlock responded quickly. “Both of them were hit, from what we heard and saw on the video uplink, Jack Skinner was killed.”

“Were there any other people on the film - you told us there were six that you could see, five of which you knew, and the other was Jack Skinner. There were no signs of there being anybody working with Jack?” The officer asked.

Sherlock shook his head, “Nobody we could see,” he said, “But Jack wasn’t working alone we know that - he admitted that. I mean, he had Dimmock working for him. There had to be somebody else at that location who was working with Jack. And if nobody saw them in that tape, or saw them leave, then they must still be there. And if they’re still there, you’ve got to assume that they’re not going to let this go. Whether or not Jack is alive, they’re going to want to continue what was planned - that’s how criminals work.”

The officer nodded, and held out the hand he held his pen in to placate Sherlock’s growing agitation. “We plan on having the place searched, don’t think that that isn’t in the works because it is. If anybody else was there, they will be found before they have a chance to do anything else.”

“I want to see John.” Sherlock said, his hands bracing the wheels of his chair. He turned, facing Anthea. “You can take me, can’t you? Please, take me to see him.”

Anthea looked at Sherlock, then at the officers who nodded at her. She looked back at Sherlock and smiled, softly and sympathetically. “I’ll get you there.”

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“He’s in surgery as we speak.” The young theatre assistant explained, pushing her thick-framed glasses up her nose. “They’re working to extract the bullet in his chest cavity, and control the bleeding around his heart. They’re hopeful, but this is surgery and it’s dangerous. Please, take a seat in the waiting area and we will find you when we have more information.” She reached out, placing her hand on Mycroft’s chest as if to push him away, but applied to real pressure.

Inhaling, Mycroft stepped back from her and nodded, his expression firming. “As soon as you know more,” He looked at her seriously. “Anything else, anything at all, you must find me.”

She nodded her head, “I will.” She vowed.

Mycroft watched her walk away and breathed deeply. He turned away and returned to the seat he’d been shown to when Greg had been taken through to MRI, told he could wait just here and he’d be found when they had news. It was as though the hospital staff were versed in that particular line - was it like telesales, he wondered, did they get taught a script? He just longed to have news on John - not knowing was not something he did well. Spending hours here, thinking the worst, lay ahead of him and he knew that - and he hated it. He clung to the fact that at least he knew Greg was doing well; one broken ankle, the other badly bruised but unbroken, severely sprained shoulders, broken fingers, numerous cuts and bruises and a concussion that would make him dizzy and disoriented for days. But he would live, and he would be fine.

“Mister Holmes?”

Mycroft raised his head, drawing his eyeline away from his clasped hands, and looked up to the healthcare assistant who stood before him. “Yes?”

“Greg Lestrade - we’ve attempted to call his next of kin, his ex-wife. There doesn’t seem to be any way of getting in touch, her number is coming up as a misdial.” She explained, “Do you have contact details for her?”

Mycroft shook his head, “I don’t.”

“In what capacity do you know Mister Lestrade?” She asked.


The healthcare assistant smiled with her lips in a flat line, “Perhaps you can help us with his information?” She asked, inviting herself to sit opposite him. She held a clipboard in her hands with a sheet clipped to the front. “Is there anyone else we could contact in his family?”

“He has a brother in Weston-Super-Mare, but they are not in regular contact. I don’t have his details to hand, but I am sure they would be listed in his medical information as an alternative means of contact should his ex-wife not be reachable.” Mycroft reeled off. “His name is Alex, he’s an obstetrician.”

“I’m sure we’ll be able to find his details somewhere,” The healthcare assistant nodded her head. “He’s currently having his ankle set, but after that I’m sure you’ll be allowed in to see him. Once he’s settled in on the ward, I’ll make sure that somebody comes back to find you.” She got to her feet. Mycroft nodded his head once as she walked away.
Anthea hadn’t thought about it when she’d agreed, but the idea of taking Sherlock to the hospital was much smoother than the practice. Try as he might, he struggled to find a way to safely move from his chair into the waiting car and, short of being lifted in by a clearly unsuitable Anthea, there didn’t seem to be a way of getting him in. She watched, cold on the street and with curtains around them twitching at the flashing blue lights, trying to keep composed as Sherlock let out a growl of annoyance and slammed his fist into the side of the car.

“Your car?” Anthea asked, looking at him with serious eyes.

Sherlock glared at her, “Seeing as you were hiding out here in this one, Mycroft and John took it. It’ll be wherever they were. And I cannot stay here - I won’t stay here, I need to see John. I need to make sure that he’s okay.”

“Let me contact Mycroft,” Anthea proposed. “I can find out how John is from him and at least provide you with that until we can get to the hospital. I’ll call us a cab, they have easy access…” She fluttered, reaching into her skirt pocket for her phone.

“Forget contacting my brother, just call a cab. I don’t want to waste any more time, I need to see John. Don’t go back to being useless now, not when you were just starting to be worthy of being here.” Sherlock grumbled, watching her closely. “Call a cab.” He said clearly.


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The surgeon on the right side of the table held up the large syringe. “That’s eighty cc’s aspirated.”

“Cloudy. Is there room for more reduction, Doctor Ascott?” Doctor Forrester asked, standing on the left side. He was clearly more senior than his assistant by some years, and as wise in his looks and the sound of his voice as he was in his medical knowledge.


Doctor Forrester nodded his head briefly. “Keep going,” he nodded, "be aware of his systolic function…”

“His rate is strengthening.” The anaesthetist informed them, peering around the side of the monitors up at John's shoulders.

Doctor Forrester nodded his head, pleased. “What’re his sats?” He asked.

“Ninety one, up from eighty six.” The anaesthetist replied. “Good colour, BP is stabilising.”

Doctor Forrester chanced a smile, “Excellent.” He said, focusing his eyes on Doctor Ascott’s steady hand as he continued the pericardiocentesis.

“Did you nick the left chamber?” The anaesthetist called out suddenly. “He’s bradying down - I need an ABG.”
“I didn’t.” Doctor Ascott insisted, “I didn’t nick him - there’s no increase in fluid, no blood in the chest cavity - he isn’t bleeding further. Stop-,” he held out his hand to the anaesthetist. “I’ve aspirated the excess build up in the pericardial sac, give his heart time to respond.”

“His pressure’s dropping and his rate isn’t picking up!”

“It’s will,” Doctor Forrester interveined. “Give him a moment, then we try internal paddles.”

“Shocking him?” Doctor Ascott looked across at him.

“It’s that, or he dies here. Wait a beat, if his pressure doesn’t increase and his heart won’t function alone, we shock… Have the paddles ready.” He ordered, watching the monitors. “Come on, son…” he whispered. “There -,” he nodded quickly to the screen, “A spike; his systolic function is increasing, he is definitely fighting.”

“Shock?” Doctor Ascott asked, wearily.

“No - his pressure’s coming up.” The anaesthetist said slowly, following the changes in John’s heart rate on the monitor. “His sat’s are creeping up, oxygen is increasing. Heart rate is stabilising.”

“Thank God for that.” Doctor Ascott exhaled heavily behind his mask.

“God had nothing to do with it, son,” Doctor Forrester insisted. “You were right to insist. Trust yourself. Okay,” he addressed everyone around him, “Now that the bullet is clear, let’s focus on closing his chest. Can we get a page across to the team in ICU, ensure there’s a bed.”
Chapter 72

Greg stretched on the bed and groaned at the ache the change in position caused in his shoulders, it felt like his arms were being ripped away from him at the very joint they attached and he screwed up his face to prevent screaming profanities. He calmed himself and pushed his head back into the pillow, steadying his breathing. He screwed his eyes closed, breathing through the pain, and when he opened them he was surprised to see Mycroft standing at the opening of the curtain. He flicked his eyes up and down the man and took a leveling breath.

“He didn’t kill you.” Greg said quietly, as if needing confirmation that he wasn’t so high on morphine that he was hallucinating.

Mycroft pulled the curtain as he stepped into the bay and shook his head, “He didn’t kill you, either, Inspector.” He said as he came to a stop beside Greg at the top of the bed. “He is dead, though.”

Greg’s brows crashed together in a deep frown. “Skinner?”

Mycroft nodded his head, “Fatal gunshot wound in the chest, straight through the lung I was led to believe.” He explained. “But that wasn’t before he managed to injure Doctor Watson. He is currently in surgery - cardiac damage, it would appear.”

Greg’s face paled impossibly. “Is he…”

“At the moment, yes, he’s alive.” Mycroft answered quickly. “But his injuries as serious, and it could be some time before surgery is finished.”

Greg’s body lost all power and he seemed to melt into the pillows and sheets, “Jesus Christ.” He sighed breathily. He looked around him, anywhere but at Mycroft, before he forced himself to make eye contact with the man again. “And William?”

“He was supported and protected at home, not for lack of trying on his part to be included in coming to get you. On the last update I received, he was as intransigent as ever.” Mycroft told him, and suddenly he was aware it had been some time since Anthea had been in contact. Greg smirked at the line but he was far from truly amused. “Don’t worry,” Mycroft said carefully. “Jack Skinner is dead.”

“He wasn’t alone.” Greg said, his voice strong. “Some guy...Neil...he did most of this,” he indicated at himself with his splinted fingers. Mycroft frowned deeply. “You came to get me?” he checked, and Mycroft nodded his head. “Then Neil was there and he knows, which means he’ll know Skinner is dead and he’ll do the next thing he can think of to cause maximum impact…”

Mycroft flicked his eyes side to side, running through his thoughts. “Sherlock…."

Greg nodded, “You need to make sure he stays safe, because that Neil guy is a psycho. He’s not going to hold back on hurting Will further, or killing him if he has to. We’re all surplus, you and me and John. We’re all pawns to make Will suffer. Without Skinner telling him what to do, Neil’s going to do what he wants and you just know that’s going to be going after your brother.”

“Skinner was all about using us to hurt Sherlock, are you sure this Neil won’t do the same?” Mycroft asked, watching Greg wince as he moved.

“Why would he? It was Skinner’s plan to hurt us - Neil’s all about the big impact, the deep wave. Will won’t feel it unless it hits him; I could see it in Neil a mile off. Now that he’s top man, or thinks
he is, he’ll do what he wants and what he wants is to make Will suffer.” Greg exhaled, wincing at
the muscular pain is caused through his chest and back. “I can keep my ear out here for John, act as
an advocate or something through Scotland Yard, I don’t know, I’ll think of something. But you’ve
got to make sure Will stays isolated from us and protected, even if that means the two of you
disappear until everything else is under control.”

“When he finds out about John, he won’t go anywhere.” Mycroft insisted.

“So don’t tell him.” Greg answered quickly. “Lie to him, Mycroft - you’re good at that.” He hadn’t
meant it as an insult, not really, but it he could tell by Mycroft’s expression that his words had stung.
He took a steady breath and licked his lips. “Thank you,” He said suddenly and Mycroft looked at
him sadly. “For coming for me.”

“Of course I came.” Mycroft said firmly.

“You didn’t have to, but you did.” Greg spoke quietly. “And I know it was probably for Will, but
I’m thankful.”

Mycroft moved a little closer and looked Greg in the eyes. “Of course I came,” he repeated. “For
you.”

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“He’s in V-fib.”

“You’re kidding...jesus…”

“Paddles.”

“You’ll tear the stitches.”

“Paddles!”

“On my count, to two-hundred…. Clear!”

“No rhythm.”

“Again…. Clear!”

“Still nothing - bagging.”

“Charge to three-sixty…. Clear!”

“Nothing….”

“Charge again…. Clear!”

“No rhythm… Bolusing.”

“His heart can’t take it. Call it.”

“No. Charge again. ...Clear!”
“Nothing….”

“Stop it, this is torture Doctor Ascott! Call it.”

“No. Charge again to three-sixty…. And Clear!”

“Still nothing…”

“Charging…. Clear!”

“Nothing… No, wait. Stop! Sinus rhythm, pressure’s coming up.”

“Heart can’t take it? He’s alive - that’s why we do this.”

“At what expense, you egotistical…”

“Stop it, both of you. He’s stable - let’s get him in the SICU.”

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Anthea drew her phone from her pocket and peered at the screen as it vibrated with a phone call. She looked up at Sherlock as the two waited impatiently on the street for a passing cab. “It’s your brother.” Sherlock looked up, eyes wide, and listened as she answered it. “Sir?”

"Is he alright?"

“Yes, Sir - he’s okay. We’re fine now. Are you?” She asked, looking down at Sherlock.

"Now?"

“Sir, we know what happened…” Anthea said slowly, frowning as it occurred to her that Mycroft had no idea what she was talking about. “There was a video link - Detective Inspector Dimmock…Sir, he was working for Skinner, and he’s been here. We saw what happened with Doctor Watson and Inspector Lestrade.”

"Where are you and Sherlock?"

“Waiting to take a cab, Sir. Sherlock wants to be with John, understandably.” Anthea explained. “I assume you’re at the hospital too? And I’m assuming it’s Queens, given your location?”

"Stay at the house. I will be there shortly.”

“But Sir, your brother wants to be with Doctor Watson…” Anthea said, her voice a little pleading, aware that Sherlock would accuse her of not sticking up for him if she wasn’t at least a little forceful.

"No…”

Anthea pulled the phone from her ear as Mycroft hung up. “He wants us to wait here, he’s coming. He wasn’t aware we knew what happened - and he wasn’t aware of Dimmock, I could tell by his voice, he was shocked. He’s coming.”

“We need to go to the hospital.” Sherlock shook his head.
Anthea sighed, “We can’t.”

“We have to!” Sherlock snapped. “It’s John.”

Her face softened sadly, “I know...but your brother sounds worried.”

“I’m worried.” Sherlock said with gritted teeth. “I need to know that John’s okay.” Anthea reached out and placed her hands on the handles of Sherlock’s chair. When she attempted to turn him, he pushed down the breaks. “I’m not going inside, I’m not sitting back while John could be dying.”

“Sherlock-,” Anthea spoke as calmly as she could, pushing herself to understand his feelings. “If you leave now, your brother will send a search party. He’s clearly worried something else could go wrong. Like you told the police, Skinner wasn’t alone. If he’s got people out there who’re programmed to come for you in the event of his death, your brother will never forgive me if I let you run off into the sunset and directly into a waiting bullet.” She breathed deeply. “Please, come back inside with me.” Sherlock stared back at her, breathing unevenly. After a moment, pursing his lips tightly, he pulled back the breaks and lifted his arms, giving Anthea full control.
Chapter 73

Chapter Notes

I'm very, very sorry.

The police kept guards at the house, as well as those supplied by Mycroft’s reach, and while Sally left, Sherlock did not feel as though he was alone in his own home with Anthea around. He felt surrounded by strangers, overwhelmed by the presence of others, and desperate to be anywhere that allowed him to be closer to John. He stayed in the kitchen, away from the rabble of people that congregated mostly in the lounge with Anthea, taking statements and generally talking too loudly for Sherlock’s liking. He was still, just inside of the doorway, looking around him at the house that was still so new and lacked very little in the way of his and John’s own touches. He jumped, turning his head sharply as a hand touched his shoulder and glanced up at the man that greeted him.

“Sorry mate,” The PC apologised quickly. “We’re supposed to be here making you feel safer, not scaring you half to death.” He grinned sheepishly as he stepped into the kitchen. “Don’t mind if I make a cuppa for a few of us, do you?”

Sherlock rolled his eyes lightly as he shook his head, “Help yourself,” he flicked his wrist toward the the kettle.

“It’s alright, ain’t it? This house.” The PC made small talk, something Sherlock hated, but he did it well. “I’ve seen revamped houses before, but this one’s a dazzler.”

“They’ve taken Dimmock in, I presume?” Sherlock asked him bluntly, and he could see the man bristle a little at the sudden sharpness of his voice.

The PC nodded, “Yeah, straight in. There’ll be a team in to interview him as soon as possible. And there are experts being drafted in to trace that video, too. They’ll find the location, and they’ll be able to trace everything back to it’s roots.”

Sherlock sighed through his nose, “Let’s hope so.” He reached down and gripped the wheels of his chair. “Excuse me,” he said, more out of habit than actual manners, and slid quietly from the kitchen and into the hallway. He had intended to head straight into the lift, escape before he was seen, but he spotted Anthea loitering in the dining room and found himself compelled to go to her. He glanced briefly at the gathered police officers in the lounge, and moved smoothly into the dining room. “Has Mycroft been in touch?”

Anthea quickly fixed her expression and nodded, “He was heading this way about two minutes ago, sent me a text to say he was almost here.”

“Did he mention John, or Lestrade?” Sherlock asked, bringing his arms up and fiddling his fingers in his lap anxiously.

Anthea shook her head, “Not directly.”

“Did you ask?” Sherlock countered.

“We can talk to him properly when he’s here, Sherlock.” Anthea spoke softly, calmly almost. She
inhaled and exhaled noisily through her nose and then stiffened as four loud squealing pops echoed outside in the street. Her face contorted and she looked at Sherlock, wondering if he’d heard it too, only to realise that the officers in the lounge were all reacting, moving quickly to the door and preparing to step outside.

“Gunshots?” Sherlock asked, in a whisper.

Anthea flicked her eyes over Sherlock and her brows knitted together in the centre, “I don’t know…” She shook her head.

“I want you two to stay here, is that understood?” An officer with a large build approached the archway into the dining room. “The door is still guarded, and there are still officers inside. Remain in here, you’ll be protected.” Anthea nodded her quickly in understanding.

“That was gunfire…” Sherlock said, twisting awkwardly in his chair to see the officer.

He nodded, “Look…please, stay here…” And he was gone, disappearing from the room and out of the open but manned door, into the cold street. Through the open door, Anthea and Sherlock were afforded the ability to hear every shout from the officers outside. Anthea assumed it was an oversight, and one that she knew they’d regret as their words suddenly became very dark and very clear. She watched Sherlock’s face, waiting for his reaction, wondering if he, too, had heard the words she had heard that buzzed in fuzzily over radios and echoed through the door.

"Lone shooter immediately apprehended. Fifties caucasian male; manic behaviour, spouting bullshit about making the Holmes’ pay…"

"Any casualties?"

"One."

"Repeat that, please?"

"One casualty… Caucasian male…looking for ID."

"Deceased?"

"Yes."

"Can you repeat for that clarity?"

"Yes - that is one deceased male, GSW to the head and chest, possible GSW to the abdomen."

"Do we have a speculative ID?"

"A wallet in the coat pocket…"

Anthea held her breath, her mouth open and her eyes flooding with tears. Sherlock stared at her, his eyes darkening and his body impossibly still.
"Name?"

"Holmes. Mycroft Holmes."

Anthea’s hand flew up and covered her mouth as a gasp escaped. She blinked, trying to control her tears but it was an impossible feat. “Oh, my God.” Her breathing staggered in and out of her chest and she tried but failed to bring it under control. She swallowed hard against rising nausea and turned her frightfully wide eyes to Sherlock.

Sherlock’s face was firm and though his breathing was unsteady he somehow managed to be stable when he opened his mouth. “That’s…my brother,” he turned, looking to the officer standing at the door. “Hey! That has to be wrong. The dead man out there, it has to be somebody else. Mycroft Holmes is my brother…”

The officer frowned at him, then raised his eyebrows sharply. He reached for the radio on his shoulder and spoke into it clearly. “Can I get a clarification on the ID of the casualty?” It took a moment, the his radio buzzed and a muffled but audible voice came through.

"For clarification, that’s one deceased male with ID indicating a Mister Mycroft Holmes.”

The officer looked at Sherlock and Anthea could see the sadness hit the man’s eyes. He nodded and spoke into the radio again. “That’s the brother - Sherlock Holmes’ brother; that’s him.” He hooked his radio back onto his shoulder and stood, staring at Sherlock, clearly unsure what he was supposed to do or say next.

“It’s got to be wrong,” Sherlock shook his head side to side quickly. “That can’t be Mycroft.”

"Private ambulance on the way…”

Anthea looked up as the officer’s radio buzzed again and closed her eyes. “Sherlock…”

Sherlock spun around to her, shouting as she moved toward him with her hand out to placate him. “No, they have to be wrong. He wasn’t here yet, that can’t be him…”

"Does the brother want to ID?"

The officer flinched at the words, and while he considered looking to Sherlock for his own response, he captured his radio in his hands quickly. “Not right now.”
Chapter 74

Sherlock shoved against Anthea’s hands as she reached for him, attempting a hug or a compassionate touch of some kind. “Leave me alone. He isn't dead! That isn't him, he wasn't here yet, he told you he wasn't!”

“Sherlock…”

“No!” Sherlock yelled. “Don't give me some rational line. I am being rational. He isn't dead!”

“You're not rational right now, and nobody expects you to be. But you have to be prepared.” Anthea reasoned. “These people are psychopaths - the rational thing is to assume this has happened.”

Sherlock shook his head, “No! He isn't dead.”

“He might be.” Anthea insisted, her voice quiet. “He was worried, and you said there were other people working with Jack. It is completely possible. I don’t want to believe that that is him any more than you do, but it could be. They have his identification, Sherlock.”

“That doesn't mean anything.” Sherlock shook his head at her. “That doesn't mean it's Mycroft! People get forgeries and false documents. Mycroft could have sent a decoy guy in a car because he knew Skinner had a man out there…” Sherlock offered her any other rationalisation. “He texted you, he said he was on his way: on his way doesn't mean here. This is Mycroft, he probably hadn't even started to travel. He lies, he deceives, it's his he works.”

Anthea rolled her eyes, but she nodded despite keeping her heart from accepting his ideas. “I know what you're doing, but it's going to make it harder to accept if it turns out to be true.” He sat down at the table and looked out through the archway at the police officers moving back and forward.

“Exactly,” Sherlock pointed at her. “If…” He went quiet for a moment and blinked rapidly through his thoughts. “Eliminate the impossible.” He said quietly, “Whatever else remains is undoubtedly the truth.” He widened his eyes. “It isn't impossible that he sent somebody else because he knew Jack had somebody watching. That hasn't been eliminated yet, don't you see?”

“See what?” Anthea asked, “I see that we’re sitting here playing Cluedo when your brother could be dead.”

Sherlock shook his head. “He isn't.” He said, his teeth gritted together. “Schrodinger's Cat.” He looked at her with firm eyes. “Right now he is both dead and alive,” Sherlock reached for the wheels of his chair and pulled himself away from the dining table. “Until I can look for myself, and see his body, I won't give in to that idea.”

As Sherlock moved out of the dining room, Anthea followed him with her eyes. “Don't you understand that you could be saying goodbye to more than Mycroft?” She asked, standing when Sherlock stilled in the archway. “Does Schrodinger apply to John, too? Are we just assuming he's alive and well, despite the bullets…” She approached and hovered behind him for a moment. “Jack Skinner was an evil bastard who recruited other evil bastards. You're right, he had people working for him and they were probably outside. If you want to spend the next however long convincing yourself that he and his men haven't done anything wrong until you can look at it, then fine. But how will that help John's mum or sister, or your parents, when calls have to be made to tell them what happened? Are they still both dead and alive then?”

Sherlock bristled as she walked past him and into the kitchen. He watched her move and disappear.
into the bodies that littered his house. He moved to the front door, and peered up through the open passageway at the star-littered sky above. He didn't know why the door was still open, but he assumed it was to allow passage for the numerous men and women making their way in and out. He'd lost count of the different faces and names, and he didn't care to recall them either.

“Perhaps you shouldn't be lingering at the open door.” A man at the door spoke in a deep voice, and at this point Sherlock wasn't sure if he was police, or one of Mycroft's men. He didn't even bother to look up.

“I'd wager I'm safe enough.” He replied quietly, looking out into the street. The road was blocked and panda cars continued to flash their lights. Neighbours gathered at their windows and Sherlock felt like he should wave, or shout, or something…

“Oh no…” The man spoke, and Sherlock snapped his head around. “We're far from safe.” Sherlock's breathing hitched in his throat as he watched the man pull down the high scarf and heard him alter his voice. “Go inside, brother mine.” Mycroft stood, somehow, at his side - alive. He altered his stance and reached down his left hand to Sherlock's shoulder. “Move inside, it isn't safe out here like this.”

“How…” Sherlock shook his head.

“Schrodinger…” Mycroft flattened his mouth into a thin line, but when Sherlock glared at him he knew he couldn't play lightly. “I'll answer your questions, Sherlock, but not outside. Go in - I'm right behind you.”

“Answer me now.” Sherlock insisted, shaking his head. “In what frame of mind were you to assume that that was news I could stand? John could be dying in the hospital and you…”

Mycroft nodded his head briefly, moving his eyes around him before he focused on Sherlock. “I will explain inside,” he said and turned to walk in, “Please, Sherlock.” He held out his hands, ushering Sherlock into the safety of the house, and followed him inside.
Chapter 75

“He appears stable - pulse is steady and he’s breathing on his own. He's not conscious yet, but he’s responding to stimuli.” Doctor Forrester peered over the log of John’s vitals and then approached his bed. “His heart hasn't stopped again?” He looked up to the SICU ward manager.

He shook his head, “No, he's remained stable. His blood pressure has been on the lower end, but it has maintained. His pulse has been steady. Like I said on the way in, he took a moment when he was extubated to find a steady rate, but his breathing has been stable. No signs of internal bleeding, good urine output, generally holding strong.”

Doctor Forrester nodded with a hopeful smile. “That's good, very good. Did you reach his family?”

“Next of kin is his partner, he's unreachable at the moment. The number provided doesn't seem to be connecting. He has an alternate, his mother, she has been contacted.” The ward manager explained.

Doctor Forrester looked back down at John, and shook his head. “He's a doctor himself, you know?” He asked and peered up at the ward manager. “Army veteran, too. Doesn't make sense that you survive war and come home to face death, does it?” He pushed his hands against the bar and moved away from the bed. “Keep him on fifteen minute observations.” He instructed as he walked away.

If Anthea had noticed the glares Sherlock was beating forcefully in her direction, she didn't let on. She was restrained in her relief as she watched Mycroft walk through the door and follow Sherlock into the dining room, though she did quickly follow them through to ensure she had indeed seen what she thought she had.

“Sir…” She poised in the doorway as he stood behind Sherlock at the table.

Mycroft nodded in her direction and then gently touched his left hand to Sherlock's left bicep. Sherlock looked up, “I want to know what you did, how and why, but I need to know about John first.”

“He was in surgery when I left the hospital. Things were serious but he is a man of strength. Inspector Lestrade promised to find out what he could.” Mycroft reassured him. “We will go, Sherlock; I will make it so you can be there with John, but for now it's important that I keep you safe - keeping you safe and away from Jack’s reach should keep everyone safe.”

“How?” Sherlock shook his head. “He's dead.”

Mycroft closed his eyes, as if a little annoyed with Sherlock, and moved around to sit in the chair right beside him. “There was a man working alongside him at the warehouse; he beat Inspector Lestrade badly. We didn't see him when we were there and I don't know what he looks like. But it didn't take long to figure that his next move would be to come for you, it made sense to send somebody else ahead of me.”

“How would some idiot on Jack’s side know you were coming? Did the person even look like you? ...it doesn't make sense!” Sherlock exhaled pure confusion and fixed his eyes on Mycroft. “How did
he know you were coming here, what car you'd be in?"

“I have my own men, my own reaches, Sherlock. Just be thankful we knew what we knew.” Mycroft waved him off.

“What if you'd walked into that? If Lestrade hadn't said anything and that was you, shot through the head on the pavement?” Sherlock breathed deeply.

Mycroft looked away. “It wasn't.”

“It could have been. John could die, and you could have too. You're not allowed to do that to me.” Sherlock's breathing quickened as he fought to maintain composure. “I don't want to be safe, Mycroft, I want… I want to be with John.”

Mycroft looked to Anthea before he leaned closer to Sherlock. “I know that,” he said quietly. “And you will be, but you cannot be until we know that it is safe. Just because they have that man, doesn't mean there aren't more. All our lives are at risk, Sherlock.”

“Haven't they been all this time?” Sherlock looked squarely at him and Mycroft could see the tears he was refusing to shed. “I need to see John…”

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“Greg? Hi, I'm Tom. I've got some pain relief for you,” the young nurse entered the small bay with a cheerful smile for the man. “I bet you've been counting down the minutes?”

Greg turned his head on the pillow, feeling lethargic, and managed a weak smile. “Umm,” he hummed. He was in pain, in his shoulders and almost completely - without ease - down to his toes. He watched with lidded eyes as the nurse fussed around him before reaching for his hand to bolus the morphine through his cannula.

“It shouldn't take too long to kick in at all, mate. Is there anything you need?” Tom asked, checking Greg's IV. He took the tiny movement of Greg's head, almost a shake but not quiet, and his quietness to mean no. “The call bell is here,” Tom said, pulling the bell around. “Anything you need, just press it and we'll be in.” He lingered a moment, watching Greg's eyes lull closed, and paused on the spot. “Greg?” He touched his hand to the side of Greg's neck, feeling for his pulse. “Greg!” He called louder, and rubbed the balled knuckles of his left hand on his sternum. “Shit!” He reached above the bed and slammed his hand into the code bell, dropping Greg's bed flat with his free hand as he did so.

An alarm rang out through the ward and, almost immediately, staff began to file in as Tom was beginning compressions.

“His heart just stopped..” Tom said, raggedly.

“PVCs?” Someone asked in the rabble.

“Embolism?” Asked another.

“Likely,” Tom agreed to the latter, “...DVT?”
“Reena, call it in, and let’s get him stabilised. Drop the head - we’ll get an airway.”
“Hello, John. I’m Doctor Ascott, I was one of the surgeons who operated on you when you were brought in. Do you feel well enough for me to do some simple observations?”

John regarded the tall man at his bedside and managed to nod his head. Thank God for painkillers was all he could think, as he dared not consider how severe the pain in his chest every time his breathed in would be without them. “Okay,” he said hoarsely. He lay perfectly still, not even trying to move, as the doctor began inspecting the incision site on his chest, and running through his observations.

“Any severe chest pains, pains in your left arm, or back?” Doctor Ascott asked, and John shook his head in a slow ‘no’.

“Nothing...unbearable.” He managed slowly, blinking as the brief sharp stab that the slight change of position in raising his right arm on the doctor’s command caused. “Tender.” He admitted.

“You went into cardiac arrest, John. The defibrillator was used.” Doctor Ascott told him, shining his torch into John’s left eye, then his right. He smiled at John, hovering above him. “You’re really doing amazingly well for a man who was shot so close to the heart.” John frowned at him. His pale face was slowly regaining a little colour, mostly around his eyes in the form of exhausted bags, but he looked far from a healthy man. “The bullet didn’t fragment, and that is a miracle.”

“There were others,” John said, wincing as he exhaled a little more deeply than his chest was allowing for. “In the warehouse.”

Doctor Ascott gave him a sympathetic smile, “Rest, John. Don’t expect too much of yourself right now. Sleep, recover, and I’m sure questions will be answered in time.” Doctor Ascott moved from the bed, intending to walk away, but John called him back.

“My partner…” he said, swallowing over his scratchy throat. “Sherlock Holmes, is he alright? Did your staff phone him?”

Doctor Ascott smiled lightly again, “I’m sure he would have been contacted. Please, John - rest.”

John watched him leave, letting his head settle into the pillow behind him. How could he rest? He’d be shot and he had no way of knowing what was going on with everyone else. Did Mycroft get out, did Greg? Was the house still safe, was Sherlock okay? Rest would not come easy, he assumed, how could it when he was so unsure of everything? He couldn’t just switch off loving somebody, anybody - he needed to know they were all okay. But at the same time, he felt completely useless, totally weightless, and unforgivably tired. His eyelids drooped heavily and he couldn’t hold them open. He fell, albeit with a hazy awareness of the noises around him, into a painfully tired sleep.

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“No breath sounds; still no pulse. It’s been ten minutes without any sign at all…” Tom’s eyes followed the motionless monitor. He looked over at the doctor in attendance and waited for her
The doctor drew her stethoscope from around her neck and held it loosely in her hands. She took Greg’s wrist in her hand and waited. As she lay his wrist back to the bed, she nodded her head. “Okay. That’s it. Time of death...twenty-one, ten.” She called, looking to her watch. “Thank you, everyone. Tom, if you’ll…”

Tom nodded his head, reaching for the monitor screen to switch it off. “Yeah, I’ll make the calls.” He watched everyone file away, all but one young HCA who stood looking between him and Greg’s body with a wide, scared stare. “Are you alright, Lucy?”

“Broken bones,” She shook her head. “He had broken bones. How do you die after broken bones?”

“He’d been through a bit before he came to us, Loo.” Tom glanced at her compassionately. “He had head injuries too. In all likelihood, he threw a clot. The longer the heart is down, the harder it is to restart.” He moved around the bed and placed his hand lightly on her narrow shoulder. “If you don’t want to help with last offices, that’s fine - I can ask Kerry.”

Lucy shook her head, “No - I want to.” She insisted. “I need to. He asked me to call up to another ward for him, find out about a friend, but I didn’t do it; I got busy with Mister Padowski in bed six and I forgot. The least I can do is make sure whoever’s coming to see him isn’t terrified by all of this.” She gestured around her.

Tom flattened his mouth into a thin line. “Guilt won’t help you, Loo.” He said gently. “Why don’t you get the wash kit, take a few minutes. I’ll start with the basics.” He suggested and the young girl took his lead. He watched her leave before he turned back to Greg’s body. “Rest in peace, mate.” He said carefully, making the sign of the cross. “I don’t know if you were catholic or anything, but I am, so forgive my mumblings.” He said, and he began to recite a small prayer quietly as he set about preparing to undertake last offices.
Chapter 77

There's an indescribable peace that comes with sleep that John knew he should have been feeling, but it evaded him completely. He woke frequently before drawing his eyes open a final time at, going by the loudly ticking clock the size of Big Ben, ten thirty pm. He breathed steadily, mindful not to take too deep of a breath for fear it would be too painful. He glanced around him, aware he wasn't the only person in the room, but found the person across from him attached to too many machines to even breathe alone.

He considered reaching for the call bell and insisting he be able to speak to Sherlock, and find out how Greg was. He considered it, but despite his mind being awake, his body felt heavy and lethargic and refused to follow many commands. He was simultaneously in pain all over and somehow still relaxed all over. Apart from his mind. It was sharpening, remembering, and filling with worry.

What he wanted was to be at home, in bed, and to turn over and know Sherlock was there. He wanted to reached out and let his hand fall in the small of Sherlock's back, or feel the angular jut of his hip, he wanted to find Sherlock's curly head nestled on his pillow and be able to inhale deeply and know he was home. He realised that, in his mind, Sherlock wasn't as he was now - he was moving, his body fluid, pointing his toes beneath the covers and turning over without assistance. He was mobile, uninjured; he was as he always was. John didn't know if it was the drugs or just an old memory he longed for, but it hurt him a little when he realised that the first version of Sherlock that came to his mind was not Sherlock as he had become. Was it just because that is how he saw him? Did he see him as unchanged, despite the changes?

He took a deep breath and a sharp pain pulled through his ribcage. He winced and held his breath, panicking a little as it took time for the pain to ease. He blew his breath out slowly through pursed lips and willed himself to calm down, feeling hot tears begin to prickle his eyes. He wouldn't do that, though - he wouldn't cry. He breathed in slowly, and released it even slower, carefully bringing himself down from the intensity of the pain and anxiety.

He turned his head, gazing through the small passage that led out into the corridor. He could see the edge of the nurse’s station and a nurse leaning over the edge of it, one leg bent behind her at the knee and balancing on the toe of her shoe while the other remained planted in the floor. She let out a laugh and it echoed lightly, and John wondered what it was that had tickled her so much. He watched her stand and she stepped forwards, just out of his sight, but he could hear her talking.

“Yeah, bed two,” she said. “Keep it short, though, yeah?”

He heard footsteps and assumed she’d walked away. A moment later, a lighter set of footsteps began and they grew louder, followed by the appearance of a body in the passage. Wearing a burgundy tunic, the girl that greeted John was petite and pretty, dainty in all her features, and looked rather sad as she approached his bed. He followed her with his eyes.

“John Watson?” She asked, her voice as pretty and light as she was.

John breathed in carefully. “Yeah,” he nodded his head.

She smiled just a tiny bit. “I'm Lucy, I'm one of the support workers here at the hospital. Um… Mostly, I'm just here to see if you're alright, to ask how you're doing. But, um, I'm a little bit later than I intended to be.”

John frowned at her, “All things considered, I think I should be thankful I'm alive.” He watched her
expression firm. “Did you want to do my blood pressure or something?” He asked, his voice still weak.

Lucy shook her head, “No.” She bit her lower lip. “I'm sorry, I shouldn't have come up here. I could be pulled in on a disciplinary…” She batted at her eyes as tears began to build.

John flicked his eyes in confusion and shifted his hips slightly, easing his position to the right a little, just about relieving the pressure on his coccyx. “Are you alright?”

Lucy stepped closer to John. “I was asked to get a message to you, and to see if you were okay after your surgery. I couldn't come when I was asked and now...now I'm too late.” She wet her lips. “...I told him I'd come and make sure you were okay, and that I'd let him know. And now I can't let him know…”

John frowned deeply and took a slow breath. “Why're you too late.”

Lucy took a deep breath and blew it out. “I could lose my job for breach of confidentiality but he seemed to really care about you…” She shook her head and fixed her eyes on John. “Greg Lestrade.” She said, and held her breath as John expression changed.

John knew what she would say; he didn't know if he just knew or it was all down to her manner and the way she spoke, but he knew. And still, he asked, “Is he okay?”

Lucy shook her head, “He passed away earlier tonight; embolism, most likely. Measures were taken but...they couldn't bring him back.”

John's eyes filled with hot tears and he stared above him, his nostrils flaring as he fought against the urge to heave in a deep breath. His chin shook and he bit his bottom lip.

“I'm so sorry.” Lucy said, staring at her hands as she fiddled her fingers together. “I know sorry doesn't help, but I sincerely am.”

In true nature to John, his mind moved quickly to Sherlock. Did he know? How was he? He knew this would break the man apart.

“I shouldn't have come.” Lucy said, pushing her hands into the pockets of her tunic. She turned and walked away, certain she had just destroyed the career she had only just begun to build.
“Can't you just let him go to the hospital? There's CCTV, there's security. You'll be monitored the entire time you're there.” Anthea unfolded her arms and moved into the dining room, away from the arch. She loitered, didn't want to sit down, and looked at Mycroft - still consumed by relief for his survival.

Mycroft shook his head and frowned at her as though she were entirely stupid, “It isn't safe. I need to take him away from here.”

“Will he go without John?” Anthea asked, resting her hands on her hips.

“No, I won't.” Sherlock spoke up, angered at them for talking over him. “I'm not going anywhere without John, or Lestrade. I won't leave them behind.”

“You may have to.” Mycroft said firmly. “I don’t know how many other people were working for Jack Skinner, Sherlock. There could be tens of them, and they could know more than we assume they do. This goes deeper than you and Jack, it goes deeper than Mark.” Jack had plans for you that we can’t even imagine, he was an evil and twisted individual who apparently had longer arms than the law. We need to assume nothing is certain, nothing is safe, and neither are you.”

Sherlock took a deep breath and shook his head, “I’m not going anywhere without John; you say nothing’s safe, well I can’t leave him behind if you want me to go. I saw it all happen Mycroft - I saw it all on video, he was shot, I saw what you did, how you turned him over, you were looking for an exit wound. He was hurt badly. You don’t honestly expect me to go anywhere without even knowing if he’s alright? If we leave, he comes too. Lestrade will say the same, he won’t let you walk away single handed - he’ll expect us to be together.”

“He told me to get you to safety.” Mycroft interjected. “Sherlock, if you’ll take nobody else’s word, take Greg Lestrade’s - for everyone else to be safe, you need to be safe. Is that getting in, is that settling into your bloody head?” He knocked his knuckle hard on Sherlock’s head and the consulting detective pulled himself away as far as his body would allow.

“Don't mock me! I'm serious, Mycroft!” Sherlock curled his top lip.

“As am I,” Mycroft insisted. “You had surgery a couple of days ago, John is probably still going through it now, and Lestrade is not in a fit state. Nothing in this entire situation is not serious. But Sherlock…”

“There isn't a but.” Sherlock shook his head and reached for his wheels. “We need to go to John.”

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John couldn't stem his tears when they started. How had it come down to this? Greg… Dead? It wasn't supposed to happen that way, Greg was so responsible and forward thinking; he was supposed to be the one who was careful, the one who outlived everyone else because he always went the right way. John closed his eyes, pushing the tears away, and felt them roll down into the bends of his ears.
And again, as had a habit of happening, it was Sherlock who came to his mind. Grief aside, fear filled him. What would Greg not being here mean now for Sherlock? Greg had lied for him, doctored paperwork, squirreled him away and kept him safe. With Greg gone, would Sherlock now face the fallout of the lies everyone had told for him and face the prison sentence he’d avoided this long? The thought terrified him. It was hard enough being so far from Sherlock now; having iron bars between them would surely end both their lives.

He breathed through a sharp ache in his chest, brought on by a deep sob he wasn't able to withhold. He felt sick, and he was certain it wasn't just the post-surgery sluggishness. He ran through everything they'd been through in the last year, how much of a firm friend Greg had become, and it made his stomach sink down to his knees to know that that man would no longer be there. From that first night he had met Greg, despite him being frazzled, he'd liked him. And as time had gone on he had only liked him more. Greg meant the world to Sherlock - more than even he meant to Sherlock, he was sure at times - and he knew that Sherlock's feelings were reflected fully in the DI. The knowledge that Greg was no longer there, that there would be no more “Will”, no more French conversation he was left out of, no more “kid”, no more “gimme, Will” to pull Sherlock out of his moods…it stung.

He knew if he felt the loss this deeply, this painfully, Sherlock would be feeling it ten times worse. And if he didn't know? Well, John didn't know which he feared most - being there when he found out, or not being there.

And Mycroft, of course. They were close - closer than they dared to admit, John had often thought. They were united in their love and focus of Sherlock, destroyed by it too, and John had long held the view that they needed one another as much as Sherlock did them. Was Mycroft here, had he been with Greg when he died? Or would he and Sherlock be learning of Greg’s passing together? Another thought John didn't like to consider - both Holmes boys broken, neither one stable or prepared, neither one emotionally equipped. He wasn't sure he'd like to see their faces when a stranger broke the news, if that's what had to happen.

He peered at the monitor beside his bed; his vitals were fair but his heart rate was high. He knew it was the grief, he knew his heart was working hard and adding any stress to that wasn't ideal. But he couldn't calm it, couldn't settle the pain.

Greg had sat with him through Sherlock's surgery, been there when he couldn't get through to the lad, been a rock, a stronghold, a whetstone for his anger. Greg stood strong when John had felt unable to support himself through that night and now he was gone. It seemed unreasonable, it seemed unconscionable. Where was the justification in taking the lives of those who gave the most, who fought the hardest, who loved the purest? Greg didn't ask for thanks, he didn't ask for anything, but he gave in abundance and continued to give even when you didn't think you needed anything more. He loved Sherlock despite himself, and - he and Mycroft notwithstanding - John didn't think anyone could be that much of a foundation for Sherlock Holmes again.

John closed his eyes in a slow blink before they shot open on a sudden realisation, “God…” He exhaled slowly. “His kids.”

And John’s mind began to run through the occasions he’d met the girls. Their birthdays, a few months apart, not long after he’d met Sherlock had been spent with their Dad and Greg had proudly introduced him to them before whisking them away respectively for a special day, just them and their Daddy. He didn’t wish the feelings they’d be faced with on anyone - he knew what it was to lose a parent so young, having watched his father pass away at a relatively young age, and he knew that the girls would be crippled with confusing grief.
“This isn’t fair,” He whispered into the air, closing his eyes to push away the tears again.
“This argument is pointless in the extreme. They’re not going to let any of us just walk out of here. Dimmock was here with a live video link to wherever Jack Skinner was - we are going to have statements to give and Chief Inspectors to talk to. And you witnessed a murder tonight, and with John Watson…” Anthea shook her head, thrusting her arms out to the sides in a more animated state than Mycroft had ever seen her. “Not to mention that they think you’re dead!” She spoke the final line with gritted teeth, her voice low, and both Holmes boys looked at her, finding clarity in her words.

Sherlock braced his right elbow on the armrest of his chair and cupped his forehead in his hand. He sighed heavily and dragged his hand down his face as he lifted his head, “She’s right.” He admitted reluctantly.

Anthea shook her head, “No - I mean, the only way you two get to leave here is with them, or with their help.” She focused her eyes on Sherlock. “Are you feel quite well; any pain, complications from your surgery?”

Sherlock frowned at her, perplexed, then slowly raised his eyebrows with an impressed shake of his head. “Now you mention it,” He rolled his shoulders and glanced to Mycroft. “There has been a little abdominal discomfort.”

“And how do you convince emergency medical personnel when they arrive, Sherlock?” Mycroft poked holes in the idea. “Pale though you are, brother dear, you’d be paler, red-cheeked, nauseous. How do you intend to act being in pain that severe it warrants a nine-nine-nine call?”

Sherlock shook his head slowly, “It wouldn’t be a total lie.”

Mycroft narrowed his eyes at him, “You’re in pain?”

“Some,” Sherlock nodded and fidgeted, eyeing Anthea with embarrassment at her presence for this conversation.

“Since when?” Mycroft pressed.

“A couple of hours, I don’t know,” Sherlock snapped.

Mycroft frowned, “A couple of hours,” He tutted. “Is it severe pain, or abdominal pressure? That could mean your bladder isn’t voiding…”

“Stop,” Sherlock held his hand out to him.

Mycroft exhaled and tried not to react as he knew Sherlock was expecting him to. “Sherlock, it could easily be another infection or a problem with your catheter. Answer me, what sort of pain is it - pressure, sharpness, an ache…?” Though, when Sherlock refused to answer him, he chose not to press. He would have time and the fraternal need to push his brother to honesty when there was less of an immediate threat.

“So, what are you going to do?” Anthea asked.
Mycroft flicked his eyes over the pair of them before nodding his head. “Okay. Go with me,” He said, getting to his feet. As he went to speak to attract any one of the officer’s attention, his phone began to vibrate in his pocket. He looked back at his brother before he drew it from his pocket and held it to his ear. “Yes?”

“It’s Melody, Sir. Inspector Lestrade is dead. No details as yet, the ward staff are waiting for his family to arrive.”

Mycroft swallowed, his Adam’s apple bobbing slowly, and his brows moved in a slight twitch near the bridge of his nose. “Thank you,” he said at length and brought his arm down. He pushed his phone back into his pocket and returned to the seat beside his brother.


“Sir?” Anthea circled the table to stand at the side of Mycroft. She looked to Sherlock, hoping there was something he knew that she couldn’t work out, but he looked back at her with an expression that proved he knew as little as she did.

“Greg Lestrade is dead.” Mycroft’s words were harsh and blunt. To many, it may have appeared matter-of-fact, heartless and without any touch of emotion. But, as with Sherlock, Mycroft’s defences against fear and pain often formulated in an indelicate manner of speech and a snide expression that, at the root of it, truly did not mean what they appeared to.

Sherlock drew his head around slowly, away from Anthea and to his brother, as a frown grew deep on his forehead. It lingered a moment before his brows twitched, unsure where to settle, as his eyes widened with his mind working overtime. He tried to sequence everything, tried to find a rational word to bring to his lips but he failed. How could he be dead? John had been shot, Greg had not. It made no sense. He was at the hospital, he was being cared for, how could he just be dead?

“How?” Sherlock finally spoke, much too quietly.

Mycroft shook his head in a very small movement, and half-rolled his eyes sadly, “I don’t know, not yet. The hospital staff are waiting for his family.” He placed his arms on the table and clasped his hands together. “I have minor-level eyes at the hospital, they will be able to keep me informed.”

Sherlock reached down and drew the brakes from his wheelchair, and gripped the large wheel rungs with both hands. He directed the chair back, edging away from the table. “Sherlock-,”

“Let him, Sir.” Anthea placed her hand down on Mycroft’s arm.

“I’m getting my coat,” Sherlock threw over his shoulder as he moved forward. “And then we’re going to the hospital.”

Mycroft shrugged Anthea’s hand away and got to his feet, following his brother, “No, Sherlock. We’ve just had this discussion, we can’t just leave and burst in there. It’s dangerous, and there are ends to tie off here. We need to be careful about how we go forward.”

Sherlock stopped and turned with precision, “And if we don’t go and make sure John is okay, there could be ends to tie off there, too. Do you want there to be a toe tag on him, as well as Lestrade? I won’t sit here and wait for that call.”

Mycroft could see the shining in Sherlock’s blue eyes and the way that they had darkened when they did with his changing emotions; light blue always meant he was thinking, that sea-green colour they took on was usually a sign of happiness, the dark blue-grey tone was always fear, and bordering on slate grey when he was upset - like now. “I don’t want that, you know that I don’t. This was not
your fault, Sherlock.” Sherlock visibly stiffened throughout his shoulders and mid-back at the words and Mycroft knew he’d hit the nail on the head. “You don’t have to wade in here and prove your worth, or to show an apology. Nobody is blaming you.”

Sherlock shook his head, jolting back when Mycroft reached out regardless of the eyes around them. “I am,” he said quietly with his teeth held tightly together, looking up at Mycroft through lowered lashes. “I’m blaming me.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm so unhappy with this chapter. It's changed TWICE in the last hour. But fuck it.
"...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus..."

John opened his eyes slowly and hated how they felt gritty and dry. He raised his left hand and rubbed his fingers in each eye respectively, satisfied by the feeling. He yawned, and wondered when he'd actually drifted off to sleep again. He couldn't have slept for long - he wasn't feeling a lot of intense pain, so he assumed he was still in the grip of his pain medication. He took a deep breath but he did so slowly, wincing before it even felt painful for his chest to expand. He blew the air out slowly and knew he had to work on that - he had to breathe through the pain, he had to get strong. Part of him knew he was rushing. He'd just been shot, just had surgery, he could take his time and he should take his time, but he knew that with everything that had happened, and could happen still, that that wasn't a luxury he could assume he'd be afforded.

He breathed as deeply as he could and exhaled slowly, trying to get his fuzzy mind to focus without any real achievement. But one thing his mind would focus on was home; Sherlock, Greg, Mycroft...everything and everyone he considered to be family, everything he lost could still lose while he was physically unable to be there to stop any force of evil that might try to break it down. The more he thought, the harder it became to breathe. He didn't know what lay behind the walls of this room - how Sherlock was, if Mycroft was okay and if Greg was still alone and waiting for his family to say their goodbyes all remained a mystery to him. He felt useless, like he'd let Sherlock down, by not being able to brush it off, get to his feet, and continue to be at his side.

It hit him again with a brute force that Greg had died and he screwed up his face as tears welled in his eyes. He was without friends, without family, and from what the HCA had told him had died with nursing staff pounding on his chest. That is no way to go, not for anyone. Nobody who is so loved ever deserves to die without those words told to them as they pass. He tried to breathe evenly and calm himself but his efforts were in vain. His chest heaved and he sobbed tiny breathless and painful moans as he tried to calm down, panicking too much.

He was scared to death; grief was a sensation so close to fear, and lack of information only increased it, and not knowing what was happening with Sherlock, that was hurting him so deeply he could barely even stand it. He reached for the controls of the bed and raised the head, feeling a relief in his chest as he rose, breathing new air. His head felt a little dizzy, but he breathed carefully through it and blinked the tears away from his lashes. He opened his eyes, fixing the sea-blue orbs on the ceiling tiles above him, and prayed.

“I know there are things in this world that I cannot even begin to understand, and things in this world You have to worry about more. But I’m begging you, please keep him safe as his soul passes through; guide him to You, hold him in Your hand and please, keep him in the light. I’ve never known a man such as Greg - a heart as big as his I’m yet to find in any other person I’ve met. He deserves peace.” He inhaled slowly through his nose and blew it through his pursed lips. “Keep Sherlock safe now, keep him well, keep his surrounded by anybody who can watch him and ground him, and save him if he needs it. And bring him to me...I can barely hold my heart up with Greg’s death, I’m not sure I could live if you took Sherlock from me, too.”

He recalled a bible passage he had earmarked when Sherlock was in the hospital, one he had read more than once to try to force his mind into abandoning his worries up for His father to carry for him. It had helped, sometimes, but other times it had been hard to cling onto his faith. What God would
allow one of His children to suffer as Sherlock did? And John couldn't help recalling that feeling now - what God would take the life of one of the better men He had created; what God would allow for him to be here, right now, alone and without any information on the people he loved, in as much pain as he was in? He thought it, but he couldn't keep it in his heart. God had given him through tragedies in the past, and he knew he could continue to talk to Him now and know, if there was nothing He could do, at least He heard.

It occurred to John that if God heard and did nothing, then He was not good. John had been raised Catholic, to be thankful for a righteous God that guided their lives and loved them. John had always assumed that that, by default, made Him good, but it didn't. But John couldn't find any righteous reason for Greg's death, for Sherlock being paralysed, for himself being shot. He saw no reason for God to allow that to happen. He saw no reason for God to abandon him now other than Him no longer caring. Could it be that the hero John had spent his life praying to was no longer worthy of that title to him? Could it be he'd been abandoned by God when he needed him the very most?
Chapter 81

Mycroft was immediately behind Sherlock as he abandoned them in the hallway and turned for the kitchen, not all that careful of the officers in his way as he pushed through them with the wheelchair using vigorous strokes of his wrists. Mycroft paused at the doorway, watching Sherlock navigate the large space. He peered behind him a moment, glancing where Anthea stood with her arms pulled tight across her chest, then looked back in at his brother. “Sherlock, I understand that you’re angry.”

Sherlock gave a deep sigh and blinked his lids forcefully as he rolled back his eyes, pushing away tears that were too stubborn to dry. He twisted his lips, breathing unsteadily, and looked back at his brother with a sharp stare. “You don’t understand at all. You don’t understand what it is to have friends ripped from you, Mycroft. You don’t have friends.”

“Love is universal. Really, I do understand.” Mycroft clasped his hands behind his back, his heart fluttering. He was a Holmes, he wasn’t given to telling Sherlock he loved him in blunt terms and he knew he never would be, but part of him wished he could shout it across the room at him there and then.

Sherlock’s stare hardened further. “You don’t” He shouted, “John is lying in a hospital bed with a wound that I caused - it is because of me that he is there. And Lestrade...is dead...and it’s all because of me, because they care about them, because I l...,” he stammered, halting himself. He couldn’t say it, wouldn’t say it, not to anyone but John.

Mycroft’s chest tightened at the look of pure anguish on Sherlock’s face, even across the distance. “I know what you think, how you feel, but you have to abandon this guilt because it will tear you down, it will stop you thinking. I need you to think.” He unlocked his arms from behind him and walked slowly into the kitchen. He paused at the island, and placed his hands on the countertop. Sherlock shook his head. “I can’t,” he said with gritted teeth.

“You must,” Mycroft insisted firmly.

Sherlock inhaled deeply through his nose. “I can’t - because letting the guilt go means I’m letting go of how I feel. And I can never let go of that, not for John.”

Mycroft’s expression softened. “I know; but you must.”

“You’re not listening!” Sherlock shook his head, and held out his right hand as Mycroft went to speak again. “‘No! I can’t. And I am thinking, Mycroft. I’m thinking of him. I don’t care what happens now, what Skinner’s reach can do, all I care about is seeing John and knowing for myself that he’s alive, that he’s okay. Until I know, Skinner may as well still be alive and coming at me with a gun because if I died, I wouldn’t care, not if John isn’t safe.”

“He’s safe where he is,” Mycroft said in a measured voice, though his words were sharp despite knowing his brother’s mind was far from stable.

Sherlock shook his head again. “Lestrade should have been safe there too, but he wasn’t. He died, Mycroft. He’s dead, he’s gone. I didn’t get to thank him, or say goodbye. And he’s dead because he cared about me, because he saved me time and time again. Mycroft, I can’t abandon that, the guilt that that causes, because then I’m abandoning how integral that man was to my survival, to my life. How important he has always been.” The tears he’d been fighting back obscured his vision once again and this time no amount of blinking would keep them away.
Mycroft didn’t react, though every fraternal nerve in his body wanted to. He drew his hands back from the counter and held them at his sides. “And if you give up now, he died for nothing.”

“And what if you're next?” Sherlock asked him so suddenly it took the older Holmes a moment to register the words, and their implications.

“I won't be.” He insisted. “Sherlock, I won't be.”

Sherlock openly wiped his eyes dry with the backs of both of his hands, “You could be, we all could be.” He breathed out heavily. “I don't care what you have to do or say to get me there, but I need to go the hospital and I need to see John.”

In true adherence with his style, and in a manner in which Sherlock would never fully understand, Mycroft had a car outside of the house within ten minutes. The showdown with the guarding officers, such as it was, was managed with a firm tone and a stern look plastered across Mycroft’s face.

“He recently underwent renal surgery and has been experiencing pain,” Mycroft said as he helped Sherlock into his coat for effect. “I have a waiting car on the doorstep that is under instruction to take us to a specialised hospital that is equipped to assist him in his care. If you still have the intention to question him over the events here tonight, you can inform your superior officers that they can do so when his health is restored.”

Transferring into the less than ideal car was not an easy feat, but Mycroft abandoned all stoicism to ensure Sherlock’s comfort. In a manner entirely unlike himself, he hooked his arms beneath Sherlock's knees, and the other around his back, and lifted him from the chair into the back seat in an awkward and effortful but quick manoeuvre. Once in the car, Sherlock couldn't hide that the discomforts he'd been feeling had advanced into true pain, nor could he keep the tears from his eyes. Lestrade, John, the pain, the reality - it hit him like a tonne of bricks and he could barely keep his chin from quivering as the car pulled away from the house, even as Mycroft's eyes focused on him sadly.
Mycroft walked quickly behind Sherlock, his steps sure and focused, with his eyes on the back of his brother’s head the entire way. Sherlock made assumptions as to John’s location, and Mycroft was willing to follow him whether the direction was wrong or not. But after a time, he quickened his pace and caught up to Sherlock, walking at his side. “We could ask, Sherlock,” he said quietly, “It might allow us to get to him quicker.”

Sherlock shook his head, “He had surgery - he’ll be in intensive care,” He said with certainty.

“Yes, which means we cannot just waltz in and expect to be granted access to him,” Mycroft reasoned, placing his hand down onto the handle on the back of Sherlock’s chair, bringing his brother to a sudden stop. “Listen to me,” He insisted with sharp eyes. “We are here, and we are going. I’ve given you what you want and now I need you to listen. If Jack Skinner has people here, which I wouldn’t be too quick to assume is impossible, then they already know that John is here, and will soon know that we are too. It will not take long for word to reach them of his death and we would be wise to assume they’ll be vengeful. So please, quash your emotions for just a moment and use your head. We need to be careful.”

“I don’t care what Skinner had planned, or who he has lying around, I told you that.” Sherlock looked up at him. “I care about getting to John and making sure he’s okay. And you can come with me, or you can go off on a sniper mission around Queens, I really don’t mind. But I’m going to John.” Sherlock gave the wheels of his chair a sharp push. They succeeded in moving him slightly, but Mycroft’s grip remained firm enough to prevent real propulsion.

“Mycroft exhaled through his nose and made a show of removing his hand from the chair. Sherlock moved again and Mycroft stayed close. Mycroft couldn’t deny that he was in awe of Sherlock’s resolve as he spoke to nursing staff when they reached the ICU. Clear and yet emotional, Sherlock was quick to explain who he was and why he was here, and insisted on being allowed to see John. It took a little persuasion, but the ward sister did show Mycroft and Sherlock into John’s cubicle with their express promises to be quiet and to keep their encounter short.

As Sherlock moved into the low-lit bay his breathing quickened. The machines frightened him, reminded him of where he was not all that long ago, and filled him with dread as to what he was going to see when his eyes finally landed upon John’s body. He swallowed against the emotion that constricted his throat, making it tight and painful, and flicked his sharp eyes around the curtained room.

“John…” His voice escaped all too quietly, sounding squashed and husky as it pushed its way through a wall of fear.

In the bed, John turned his head on the pillow, dragging his tired eyes open as he moved and immediately his blue eyes were wide and tear-filled. “Jesus...Sherlock…” He exhaled, “Thank God.” His chest vibrated at he cried in relief, unable to take his eyes off Sherlock as he got closer to the bed. John’s hands fumbled with the controls of the bed to raise his head until he was sitting enough to be upright without putting pressure against the stitching in his chest. He held out his right hand as
Sherlock drew up close.

Sherlock held out his right arm, stretching until his fingers touched John’s. “I was so scared he’d killed you too.”

John screwed his eyes closed tightly, pushing the tears free, and bit his bottom lip between his teeth as he cried. “Me too,” he nodded, his voice higher than usual. “Love, I’m so happy you’re okay.”

“You’re not okay, though,” Sherlock shook his head, his eyes wide and imploring. “I’m sorry…”

John shook his head and gripped Sherlock’s hand tighter in his own. “Don’t you say sorry, don’t you go down that guilt road, you hear me? He’s a twisted bastard. That’s not on you.”

Sherlock blinked hot tears down his cheeks. “But Lestrade,” he inhaled shakily.

John’s brows crinkled together at the bridge of his nose, “I know, Love.”

Mycroft stood in silence at the foot of John’s bed, watching Sherlock’s fingers lace tightly in John’s, examining the look of combined grief and relief on John’s exhausted face, and would be a liar if, when asked, he said it hadn’t been a painful scene to witness. The sound of Sherlock’s rising emotions made Mycroft’s stomach tie in knots, and hearing it echoed in John only added to the weight in his chest. For all he tried to fix the world around him for his brother, he knew he could not do a single thing to fix this. He just wished he had the lack of pride to tell Sherlock that he loved him like this, too.

“Skinner’s dead,” Sherlock said quietly, moving his thumb back and forth where it lay against the groove between John’s thumb and forefinger.

John’s brows twitched, “He is?”

Sherlock nodded, “I saw it all - there was video camera where they had Lestrade; I saw it all. Heard it all.”

John looked across to Mycroft, “How?”

“Detective Inspector Dimmock. Jack Skinner’s arms stretch further than anyone imagined.” Mycroft said slowly, reserved and in control - somehow. “There was a man who had worked with Jack in apprehending and beating Gregory Lestrade. He is now in police custody. But we cannot be certain that that the end of sympathisers; we need to assume that he has a neatly knitted web and remain on guard.”

John inhaled as far as his aching chest would allow and blew it slowly through pursed lips. Sherlock didn’t like the wince his face made, he didn’t like the bandages, he didn’t like the machines. John looked down at his hand as he felt Sherlock’s fingers tighten their grip on him and he reciprocated. “Love, I’m okay…” he said with a firm but lethargic nod. “I’m okay.” He looked back to Mycroft briefly, “What do you know about Greg?”

Mycroft’s shoulders tensed. “Very little,” he answered. “I’m aware that the staff here are waiting for his family.”

“A girl came up here, nurse or something on the ward he was on,” John said quietly, “They mentioned a blood clot. It would make sense; he’d been beaten senseless, had injuries everywhere. All it takes is one clot to shift inside of his damaged body and lodge in his heart, his lung…” He exhaled carefully. “She said that they’d tried to resuscitate him but it didn’t work.”
Sherlock wet his lips, “Skinner died too soon. He should have been alive to see everything he’s done, he should know what he’s ruined.”

Mycroft clasped his hands behind his back, “He wouldn’t care, Sherlock, not how you want him to. It would be good to him, and you know that. Maximum suffering for you - he’d be happy.”

John held Sherlock’s hand tighter still, “Stop it. I don’t care about him. He’s dead, it’s what he deserves. But Greg didn’t. And he doesn’t deserve to be lying in some waiting space on his own. You should go to him, say goodbye from all of us.....”

“I don’t want to leave you,” Sherlock shook his head.

Mycroft inhaled through his nose, “I can go.” Sherlock turned his head, looking over his shoulder at his brother. Mycroft nodded at him slowly, “You have to promise me that you’ll stay here, you won’t move anywhere.” Sherlock nodded quickly.

“I’m not leaving.” Sherlock whispered, turning back to face John.

Mycroft stood tall for a moment, “Look after one another.” He said quietly, and walked away without a further word.

“Are you in pain?” Sherlock asked into the quiet of Mycroft’s absence.

John nodded his head, “A bit.” He coughed and the wince on his face didn’t do justice to the depth of the pain he felt. Sherlock’s brows furrowed deeply; unable to help, he felt useless. “Explain the video…” John said quietly, trying to ignore the pain.

Sherlock shrugged his shoulders. “Dimmock came in with Donovan. He said he knew them, was related. That I could watch Mycroft die and he showed me an uplink on his phone. I saw the room - I saw Skinner and you, I saw the way you stepped up when he wanted you to kill my brother. The things you said, you were so stupid but…he could have killed and you still…,” he breathed in sharply and moved as close to John's side as he could, wrapping his fingers in John's.

John closed his eyes, hating the pain in Sherlock's voice. It wavered, it shook, it sounded small and innocent and lost. It sounded scared, and Sherlock being scared was, to John, one of the most hurtful things he could imagine.

“...if he had killed you,” Sherlock paused and shook his head.

“Shh,” John soothed. “He didn't. And now that bastard is dead, and he'll face his consequences when he shakes hands with the devil.”

“That's not enough.” Sherlock insisted. “It isn't enough, he should have suffered.”

“He will.” John spoke quietly.
Mycroft recalled the ward that Greg had been squirreled away on and made his way there, assuming that all heroic measures would have been taken on the spot and that, now, he would have been laid out there in anticipation of his ex-wife’s arrival. There was a different feeling to the hospital now; it felt deserted and quiet, church like to a degree. Mycroft found himself wondering if it felt the same way to the staff. If wondered if they felt the hollow silence that seemed to be readily afforded the corridors and rooms, even if it was unintentional.

What he was greeted with, though, made him feel sicker than he’d been anticipating. Shrouded, though his head was exposed, Greg’s body was already prepared for the morgue and was still painfully alone. The room was small, isolated, and low-lit to an almost sad and romantic level. Mycroft’s chest felt tight and his limbs felt heavy as he walked closer to the trolley. Greg’s face was pale and waxy, his brown eyes were hidden behind closed lashes and the cuts and bruises that adorned his face seemed more harsh against his complexion. Mycroft swallowed and it hurt to squeeze the action past the growing constriction in his throat.

Where was the justification for this? How could he have been talking to this man a short time ago, and now be standing at his deathbed? That didn’t seemed to be a rational explanation, there didn’t seem to be a way to settle it in his mind, and it was that that was almost too much for Mycroft to bear. Sherlock had survived, John had survived and Jack Skinner had got what he deserved. But Greg? There was no reason for this, no reason at all, only lack of warning signs from a medical condition that probably couldn’t have been detected. Mycroft wondered if quicker intervention could have helped? What about blood thinners, what about extensive x-rays, what about not giving up on CPR?

The question he couldn’t move from his mind, though, was ‘what if I hadn’t left’? Would he have noticed, could he have helped, would he still be here?

But what use was it now? He was gone. He wondered if his ex-wife had been and gone, he wondered if the girls had been with her, he wondered if she was still travelling here solely to identify her ex-husband and arrange his funeral. What kind of trip was that - bringing two teenage girls to a city many flocked to for it’s nightlife to see their dead father? He felt the knots in his stomach twist and tighten. Another person he had never told his true feelings too, another person he had never been open enough with, but this person would never get the opportunity to hear it.

There was still time to tell Sherlock he loved him.

He moved closer to the bed again and stopped at the middle of Greg’s body, his eyes moving quickly over his face. He wanted to say so many things he felt he should and so many more than he knew he couldn’t. He wanted to tell the man that John and Sherlock were sorry, that they loved him and ‘goodbye’, but the words would not come out. A casualty of war, a personal war, had never been this close to Mycroft before and he felt that numbness of grief that he had never really experienced before. Grandparents had passed when he and Sherlock were younger, but there was an air of detachedness in that. Seeing the death of a...friend, seeing the lifelessness that accompanied the word ‘death’, that brought him true pain, true anguish.

“I’m sorry,” he said quietly, his eyes moving away from Greg’s face. Even in death, he couldn’t look at the man to admit his failings. Because he did feel like he had failed him. He didn’t foresee this, he didn’t prevent it, and in Mycroft’s mind that was an oversight.

What mattered to Mycroft now was disassembling anything that Jack Skinner had built up. If there
were people still linked to him living, or walking free, Mycroft intended on ensuring that that didn’t last much longer. Whatever it took he would give to make sure that every trace of Skinner’s power was eradicated. He knew that it would take the feeling of easy breathing that would come from knowing that Jack’s empire was destroyed for him to feel comfortable enough to continue to support Sherlock through his new life. What frightened him, though, was knowing that he would now spend the rest of his living hours looking at his brother and being reminded of Skinner, of Lestrade’s death, of everything that had existed before. He knew that he would look at his brother for as long as they both continued to live and would see nothing more than memories, nothing more than all the things that could not be; he knew he would look at Sherlock and feel pity, and it made him feel sick.

He knew he should be saying so much more to Greg in the hopes that, if God existed in any form, Greg’s soul was able to hear. He wanted to apologise properly, he wanted to confess and clarify, he wanted to fix and promise and share - but his mind would not allow it, the constriction in his throat would not allow it, and neither would the feeling of tears in his eyes. If he were to speak now his voice would waver, belie his stature, and bring crashing to his ankles that hard-hearted appearance he showed everyone. Even alone with the man, he didn’t want anyone to know that he care infinitely more than he could ever express.

He inhaled deeply, overwhelmed by the powerful hospital smell, and reached out his right hand. He very tentatively lay his hand atop the shroud, carefully exacting a little more pressure as the seconds passed. When his hand was carefully but firmly placed over Greg’s bicep he nodded his head.

“Godspeed.” He said stiffly.

He wasn’t sure how to say goodbye when the chance to actually say it had been missed.

He drew back his hand and held it at his side. To passers by he might have looked like a soldier who was standing to attention, waiting to be dismissed. Perhaps he was? He felt like he had lost part of the network who had worked with him for too long to recall the exact number of days. Lestrade may have been important to Sherlock in an obvious way, but Mycroft could not say he had not been important to him, too. He mattered to Mycroft because he had saved Sherlock’s life - time and time again. He mattered to Mycroft because he had fought even when he was being fought against. And this, right here, it made him feel like every thank you he had never uttered would somehow have saved his life.
Chapter 84

Sherlock watched John fall asleep slowly and kept hold of his hand until he knew the man was settled. He drew back his fingers slowly, keeping his eyes on John’s face to ensure he hadn’t disturbed the man, then reached for the handrims on his chair and slowly propelled himself away from the bed. He moved carefully into the hallway, trying to avoid hitting the footplates off the doorframe as he exited the room. He was greeted by the ward sister as he passed the nurses station, who smiled softly at him.

“Don’t look so worried, he is really doing remarkably.” She reassured him.

Sherlock looked up at her with tired eyes and nodded, “I can see that.”

“He’s remained stable since the surgery - he’s already proven he’s as tough as old boots.” She smiled and placed her hand on Sherlock’s shoulder. “Are you alright?” She asked him, “You look exhausted.”

Sherlock’s gaze flicked away for a moment but he nodded his head, “I’m fine.” He barely had told Mycroft he was in pain, he couldn’t bring himself to tell her that it felt like he was carrying a bowling ball in his stomach. The pain was severe in his back but he was handling it and he wasn’t about to crash and burn when John needed him around. “Is there a bathroom I can use?” he asked her and she nodded with bright eyes.

“Down the corridor about one hundred yards,” She said, “Take the first left and it’s another hundred yards or so down on the right hand side. The lights are automatic.” She explained, pointing down the corridor ahead of her.

Sherlock nodded his thanks and moved quickly down the corridor, following her directions until he found the easy-access toilet. Once inside he made sure the door was locked before he let his defences down. He pushed his hands into the armrests of his chair and tried to raise his hips a little, wanting some kind of pressure relief and position change in the hope that it would ease the pain in his back. When he moved barely enough to even raise his bottom, he flopped back down and sighed at the effort it took to even support himself. He bent at the waist and reached to the cuff of his trousers. He lifted it and examined the bag strapped to his leg - it was full to its five-hundred millilitre capacity and was a little darker than he hoped it might be. Sherlock pursed his lips at the work it took to get his tailored trouser leg over the bag enough to unstrap it. He lifted the bag and unhooked the tap, emptying the contents into the toilet. Even as it emptied the bag continued to drain, his abdominal pain decreasing as the urine was drained away now that there was space for it to go. He closed the tap and repositioned the bag on his calf, watching the urine collecting again. He twisted his lips in annoyance waited, rubbing his left hand against his lower stomach.

The bag was half filled again before the pain turned to a mild ache, and he emptied it again before pulling down the leg of his trousers. Better though he felt for the alleviation of one annoyance, the pains in his back were beginning to prick tears in his eyes. He felt hot under the lights, the effort and his coat, and he was rapidly losing patience with himself. He inhaled deeply through his nose arched his back, finding momentary relief at the engaging of his muscles. He sighed slowly and sat straight, and blinked at how quickly the back discomfort returned. He washed his hands at the sink and dried them in a wad of white paper towels. He caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror and understood why the nurse had been so kindly toward him. He was pale with bluish-black rims of exhaustion under his eyes. He looked drawn and dishevelled. Is this what grief looks like, he wondered, arching his brows at himself. He licked his lips and looked away, gripping the handrims to turn the chair. He unlocked the door and moved quickly into the corridor, immediately relieved by the flowing of air he
was greeted with. He inhaled deeply a few times, steeling himself, and turned back up the corridor to return to John.

As he turned the corner he heard feet behind him and stopped, turning to look over his shoulder. He was a little surprised to see Mycroft approaching and frowned at him. “Lestrade’s wife arrived?” he asked.

“You weren’t supposed to leave John’s side.” Mycroft said firmly, stopping beside Sherlock and giving him a withering look.

“I had to pee,” Sherlock said sarcastically and Mycroft’s brow twitched.

Mycroft’s voice softened considerably. “Are you alright, are you still in pain?”

Sherlock inhaled deeply through his nose, “A bit,” he admitted. “My back feels like it’s tightening.”

“You’ve been sitting for hours, Sherlock, and under stress, if your muscles were not tightened I’d been surprised. You need to be out of the chair, perhaps I should take you back home…” Mycroft suggested, knowing full well what his answer would be.

“No, I’m staying here with John.” Sherlock shook his head and reached for the wheels again. Mycroft walked alongside him.

“Perhaps the nurses could provide pain relief, or relaxants for the spasms in your back?” Mycroft wondered aloud.

Sherlock shook his head, moving slowly, “I don’t want anything.”

“When did you last take your medication? I’m sure something can be offered, if only mild to at least alleviate some of the discomfort?” Mycroft went on.

“I took them at home, and I don’t want anything, didn’t you hear me? I said I didn’t want anything, stop pushing this. Stop pushing me.” Sherlock snapped and stopped moving, drawing his arms in against his waist, and took a deep breath inwards. Mycroft’s eyes remained fixed on him. “The nurse said that John is doing well, that he’s stable. But stable doesn’t mean okay, does it? It just means that, at the moment, there aren’t any issues. What if he gets a blood clot, too? What if he has a heart attack? What if there’s internal bleeding?”

“What if the world explodes this very moment…?” Mycroft said calmly, surprising himself.

Sherlock looked up at him with a frightened stare. “Did Lestrade’s wife arrive?”

Mycroft nodded, “As I stepped out of the room for a moment, I saw a woman and two girls arriving. I moved from the doorway and they stepped inside, I supposed that having me there would not be appropriate so I left.”

Sherlock sighed, “Did he look bad?”

“Peaceful,” Mycroft said, more wistful than Sherlock suspected his brother had ever been. “Perhaps it would be a comfort to assume that he died long before the medical staff attempted to intervene, that perhaps he was peaceful at death despite the attempts they made on reviving him. It will do you no favours to assume he was subjected to complete suffering.”

Sherlock swallowed audibly, “It would do me more favours for him to be alive.”
“But death cannot be reversed, Sherlock, not even if you wish it. Not even if Sherlock Holmes demands it.” Mycroft spoke with a soft tone that was ever so slightly edged with concern. He jutted his chin, “Let’s get back to John.”

Sherlock shook his head, “No. Just - five minutes.”

Mycroft frowned worriedly, “Are you in more pain?” Sherlock shook his head again, pursing his lips, and Mycroft saw the tears that glistened in his mood stone eyes. He cupped his right hand over Sherlock’s left shoulder. “Take it easy,” He said quietly. Sherlock inhaled shakily and Mycroft could feel the trembling of his body beneath his hand. Sherlock breathed in through his nose and out through his mouth in short bursts and his suffering made Mycroft’s heart beat ectopically, giving rise to the feeling of being on a fairground ride or driving over a hill deep in his chest.

“Make calls,” Sherlock looked up at him, blinking the tears from his eyes. “Investigate everything, shut down anything Skinner had planned and make it so I can go home with John and not feel like I have to look over my shoulder.”

“It won’t be that easy,” Mycroft admitted, “There could be a trial - perhaps a rehashing of what happened with Mark. Everything might come forward that we thought was hidden, and people might still be clinging onto promises Skinner could have made to them. At the very least, there’ll be an inquest into Inspector Lestrade’s death and that might even bring up what happened. It might well be safe now that Jack is dead, but it doesn’t mean that everything is over. Sherlock, I would love nothing more than to be able to get in touch with a few people and know that it will all be over within a few, short hours. But I can’t promise that.”

Sherlock licked his lips, “I know that.” He nodded slowly, “And I’ll take whatever comes. But promise me that you’ll try.”

Mycroft drew back his hand and nodded his head, “That I can promise.”
Chapter 85

“State your full name for the tape, please.” Detective Hardy stared across the table at the slim man who just stared back at him, smug in every way possible.


“Any clues for us, Mister Holland?” Hardy asked, his thick Scottish accent having that slightly sarcastic sound that seemed to go down well for police chiefs.

“Clues to what?” Neil answered him, raising his eyebrows and only serving to make himself look more cocky. “Existence of God?”

Hardy leaned forward, leaning his arms on the interview room table, and drew down the corners of his mouth as he nodded his head. “I’d like that, yeah, but I was thinking more about the reasons for you waving a gun in the middle of a residential street and killing a man.”

Neil matched Hardy’s stance, “That weren’t no normal man, though.” He said and cocked an eyebrow. “That was Mycroft Holmes, an’ his brother is a fuckin’ murderer.”

Hardy nodded his head calmly, “Thing is, Mister Holland, you’re a murderer now, too.”

Neil sat back, “He deserved it.”

“Why’s that?” Hardy asked and opened out his hands when he was met with silence. “We’ve got as long as this takes, Mister Holland. Start from the top, see if you can impress me.” He smirked.

Neil cricked his neck each side and sat forward again, clasping his hands before him on the table. “Mycroft Holmes and this West Country cop who works with you lot, they covered a murder for that skinny one, the one Jack had me mark from the flat window. ‘Cause he killed his brother and Jack didn’t want him getting away with it because you pricks let him off. So I helped him, first we shot Sherlock Holmes, then we brought that Lestrade in for a proper good hidin’, and then I shot Mycroft. They deserved it, all of them, for coverin’ up what they did to Mark.”

Hardy listened intently as the man gabled unintelligently. He drew his eyes away from Neil though where there were two sharp knocks on the door of the interview room. He paused the tape and gestured to the officer at his side as he turned and got to his feet. He pulled open the door and was met by his chief. “…I’m in the middle…”

“I know, but it’s important to this.” He spoke carefully, “Mycroft Holmes wasn’t the man killed in the street - he’s alive. But - DI Lestrade is dead.”

“Fuck…” Hardy’s eyes grew wide and he felt a sinking in his stomach.

“I know,” Lyle nodded slowly and drew a deep breath. “There’ll be a post mortem but they’re assuming an embolism. Dimmock’s being held next door.”

“Dimmock, our Dimmock?” Hardy’s eyes widened further.

Lyle nodded his head, “He had orders from Skinner to kill Sherlock Holmes if there were any measures put in place to attempt to stop what Skinner had planned for his brother and partner.”

Hardy exhaled a deep breath. “Holland’s already admitting his involvement. What’s the best thing to
get him on?”

“Attempted murder of Sherlock Holmes; attempted murder of John Watson… I suppose we could push it, go for manslaughter for Greg, and if you can coax it from him, we can pin Charlie’s murder on him too.” Lyle suggested, “But this is bigger than I expected - when Greg came to me with this I thought we were looking at canning Skinner for the shooting on Sherlock. This is deeper than I even imagined. And Lestrade….”

Hardy drew the door closed and stepped out into the hallway. “What’re you pinning on Dimmock?”

“Conspiracy to commit murder,” Lyle said plainly, “Reckless endangerment.” He shrugged as a consideration. “I can throw his assault on Sally Donovan on top of that, too, but I think the conspiracy will get him where he deserves to be.”

“Who was it then?” Hardy asked suddenly, “If the man he shot,” he thumbed behind him to the door, “Wasn’t Mycroft Holmes, who was it? The officers on the scene ID’d him.”

Lyle shrugged, “No ID yet, but it was not Mycroft Holmes - he telephoned not ten minutes ago, he informed me of Lestrade’s death, of what had happened to Doctor Watson, and said that if we followed a specific line of direction that he would have faxed over to me, we would find Jack Skinner dead.”

Hardy rubbed his hands across his face and shook his head as he drew them down again. “What the fuck happened here?”

Lyle shook his head, “I can’t even begin to work it out.”

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“Sherlock, please - let me take you home.” Mycroft stood on the opposite side of John’s bed, his eyes scanning his brother’s exhausted and contorting face. His pain was worse, his posture was terrible and if he had three mouthfuls of the drinks Mycroft had been trying to encourage him to drink then that was all.

Sherlock shook his head lethargically, “I don’t want to go.”

“You’re in pain, nobody can stay in the same position all day. You need to rest your back.” Mycroft insisted.

“I’m not going home while he’s here, just to lie down!” Sherlock snapped, “I’m not going. I’m fine.”

“You’re not bloody fine, Sherlock. You’re risking your health sitting here, don’t you understand that? Your back, your skin, your kidney.” Mycroft’s voice rose just a little. “I’m worried about you.”

Sherlock regarded him quietly for a moment. He sighed slowly, “I can see that.” He said, “But I’m worried about John. He had major surgery, and I don’t want him to be here on his own. He didn’t leave me,” He whispered.

Mycroft nodded his head, “No, he didn’t.” He agreed quietly, “But he hadn’t been through then what you have now. You’re adjusting, and you’re post-surgery, and, Sherlock, you’re in pain. John wouldn’t want you sitting here in his state.”
“I’m going to be in pain forever,” Sherlock looked at him with imploring eyes. “And if going home would make it so that wasn’t the case, perhaps I’d consider it, but it isn’t. Sitting, lying, with pain medication or without, I will always be in this chair, and I will always feel pain in my back that cannot be soothed. So why run and hide somewhere to feel it when I can stay right here with him and feel slightly better knowing I did for him what he did for me?” Mycroft’s shoulders dropped and he admitted defeat, holding his hands out in front of him. He knew he would not win this argument.
“What was Jack’s endgame?” Hardy asked, watching Neil's face with intense eyes.

Neil snorted and sniffed, wiped his left hand under his nose, and shrugged his shoulders. “That Sherlock Holmes would kill ‘imself, on account of his brother being dead because Jack wanted him dead.”

Hardy nodded his head, “And he wanted Sherlock to feel what he’d felt?”

Neil nodded his head, “That's what I'm saying! He wanted that prick to know what it felt like to have someone take your brother away from you, he wanted him to know what that was like.”

“Okay,” Hardy frowned, “So why shoot Sherlock?”

Neil grinned, “I wanted to kill the bastard but he wouldn't let me; he stopped me, he said just hurt him so he can't do out when we get the brother to kill him.”

Hardy frowned, losing himself in Neil’s wording. “So the purpose of shooting Sherlock was to hurt him and incapacitate him, and only so he wouldn't be able to physically stop any measures to kill his brother?”

Neil nodded his head with a wide grin, “Magic, ain't it?”

“It's something,” Hardy inhaled deeply. “Tell me another thing,” he said, “Greg Lestrade - you're intention was to kill him too?”

Neil shrugged his shoulders. “Not mine, but I dunno if it was Jack’s.”

“You're sure about that?” Hardy asked. “So if we go over the video link that Lincoln Dimmock had access to, we won't find you beating Lestrade?”

Neil smirked, “That's you implying that the video was recording.”

“And Charlie Hawkes?” Hardy asked, his resolve beginning to weaken.

Neil shrugged at him again, “Pass.”

“Any part of this motivated by sexual intent?” Hardy asked and did all he could to avoid smiling at the look of abject disgust on Neil’s face that spread rapidly across his features. “That’s it, isn’t it?” Hardy continued to provoke, “Jealousy, or just an as-yet-unknown form of wooing and foreplay.”


“Oh, so you weren’t trying to get Sherlock Holmes out of the way, giving you access to Doctor Watson for yourself? Or was it Jack that was after him, or is Mycroft Holmes more his cup of tea?” Hardy folded his arms across his chest. “I don’t see any other reason why you’d go around offing a load of gay men if it wasn’t for the fact that you wanted their other halves.”

“I ain’t gay.” Neil said firmly, teeth gritted.

“Sure?” Hardy baited him, “Cause there’s plenty of people where you’re going who’ll take you as you come. Puns completely intended, mate.” He watched Neil’s face, the colour pouring to his cheeks and the way his jaw stiffened and found it amusing. Hardy got to his feet abruptly. “End of
interview; take him back to the hold.” He exhaled.

“Sir?” The constable at his side looked up, frowning, as he stopped the tape.

Hardy fastened the button on his blazer, “We have another person to question, and there are a few witnesses I want to talk to. We’ve got enough on this dickhead for now.” He said firmly. “Take him back.” With that, Hardy left the interview room.

John winced, even in as he slept, and the aching pain drew him abruptly awake as he inhaled too deeply for his newly stitched chest. He evened out his breathing and blinked himself back to reality, inhaling through his nose and blowing it out through his mouth steadily. He turned his head to the right, and felt simultaneously glad and worried to see Sherlock peering back at him. He frowned at him, “Sherlock - it’s got to be the early hours. Please, Love, go home.”

“It’s an argument you won’t win, John.” Mycroft’s voice crept in on his left side and John turned his head to him. “All attempts to persuade him fall on profoundly deaf ears.” Hecocked his left brow.

John smiled but the action propelled a breathy laugh from his nose he wasn’t prepared for and forced an inhale that stammered in his lungs. Sherlock looked at him with fear, then at Mycroft, before settling his eyes back on John again. “I’m alright…” John coughed as lightly as he could, clearing his throat. “It’s just a bit tender to breathe too deeply at the minute.”

“You had surgery, of course it’s tender.” Sherlock berated him. “Mycroft spoke to the police,” he said suddenly, and John’s brows twitched up his forehead quickly. “They’ve got Dimmock, and the guy who beat Lestrade.”

John turned his head to Mycroft, “So it’s over?”

Mycroft shook his head, “I don’t think it would be wise to assume that we’re clear of the woods just yet.” He reined back John’s look of excitement slightly. “There will need to be thorough investigations into whether there was anybody else working with them. But with testimony, video evidence, statements and Greg’s death, there could be some positive results ahead.”

“Murder charges?” John asked.

“Manslaughter at the most, attempted murder, or accessory to maybe…” Sherlock clarified. “But their charges will build up - kidnapping, GBH... and with the right judge the sentencing should be the maximum.” He licked his lips nervously.

John inhaled steadily, “Jesus…” he shook his head.

“I just wish Skinner was getting the same treatment. He deserves to rot.” Sherlock huffed angrily. He shifted as best as he could, changing the position of his back just enough for a moment of release in his tight muscles before they seemed to spasm again. Neither John nor Mycroft missed the pinched look on his face, or the way his mouth drew open before he bit his lip to prevent a groan.

“Take him home,” John looked at Mycroft and held his hand out. It wavered weakly as he pointed at Sherlock.
“I’m staying here.” Sherlock insisted.

John shook his head, “I’m fine - I’ll be fine. You need to get out of the chair, you need your medication and you need to reposition your spine. Don’t you realise the damage you’re doing to yourself?”

“I’m staying!” Sherlock gritted his teeth, trying not to raise his voice. “I’m not leaving now, not after everything. Pain I can take, you here and something happening without me…,” he shook his head, “I can’t.”

John held his tongue a moment, “You can’t sit like this indefinitely.” He finally said, his blue eyes fatigued and filled with worry. “Love, please - you need to go home, this isn’t a decision I’m letting you make, it’s one I’m making for you. The spasticity in your back will worsen if you stay like this. Go home, get medication, and lie down.”

Sherlock shook his head, “No.”

“Sherlock, for me?” John’s eyes bore into him.

But Sherlock shook his head again. “I’m not leaving you. It goes wrong when we leave.”

John exhausted face softened sadly, “Love, if you don't leave things will go wrong with you. I swear to almighty God, if you don't go home and take care of yourself, I'll make them admit you for self-neglect!”

Mycroft's brows twitched up in appreciation for John's strength. “Sherlock, you've been given permission. You're not leaving now, you're doing what John wants. Let me take you home.”

Sherlock looked between the two of them. “You promise he will stay safe here?” He asked his brother.

Mycroft nodded his head, “I’ll ensure John is cared for and protected.”

Sherlock inhaled sharply, “Then I think I need to see a doctor.”

John frowned, “What?”

“The pain’s too bad,” Sherlock’s face contorted as he allowed himself to give in. “It feels like before…”
Due medical attention was quickly gathered on Mycroft’s demands. How he managed it, John wasn’t sure, but Sherlock was whisked away with Mycroft close behind, leaving John alone to worry. He called the nurse and passing HCAs in intermittently but was left with very little information. He assumed that Sherlock’s spine was in spasm, and he took him to mean that he had abdominal pains when he said ‘the pain is like before’. He assumed he’d be hooked up to antibiotics for another stubborn infection that had resurfaced, and that made John feel sick. This would be it, wouldn’t it? Sherlock suffering even at times when he, himself, was incapacitated. He felt useless to Sherlock, as he knew Sherlock did to him, and it brought the reality of life ahead to his mind once again. Yes, they would find a groove and life would settle. But until then, would it really be this precarious?

John shifted slightly on the bed and reached for his call bell. After half an hour without even a HCA popping their head into the room, he decided he’d attract their attention himself. He waited mere moments before the nurse stepped into the room and looked at him expectantly.

“Are you alright, John?” she asked.

“Where’ve they taken Sherlock?” He asked her, “Is he back on renal, or urology? Is it an infection, do you know?”

The nurse stepped closer to his bed, “I logged into the computer when you asked before, when I promised I’d find out for you. He’s not on the system so he hasn’t been admitted.”

“Surely they wouldn’t go the long way and bring him through triage in A and E?” John frowned. “One look at him and you could see he wasn’t well, and with the surgery…” He hissed as he inhaled too quickly.

“Relax,” The nurse insisted, touching his forearm gently. “I’ll see what I can find out, but you are my concern right now, okay? You’ve a road of recovery ahead of you that’ll be a painful and treturous one if you don’t take time to rest.”

John let his head rest back and breathed steadily. “I don’t want him sick like before, he was…,” he shook his head. “He survived bullets in his back to be sickened by a urine infection and a bum kidney. I don’t want him to go through that again - even less so when I can’t be with him.”

The nurse nodded her head, “I understand, really, but you’re my patient and what I want is for you to get better. So calm down - your blood pressure through the roof is not something I want to have to try to explain or rectify if it can just be avoided.” She raised her eyebrows at him.

“I can’t just calm down,” John sighed, “Somebody tried to kill me less than a month after they tried to kill my partner. Tonight, they succeeded in killing one of my best friends.” He fixed her with intense blue eyes. “Would you be able to calm down?” He watched her eyes narrow, her face falling sadly at his words.

“No,” She shook her head, speaking quietly. “I don’t think I could.”
Despite realising Sherlock could have used immediate medical attention, Mycroft had him promptly admitted to a private clinic a little way out of the city. He moved fast, and before three am could greet them Sherlock was hooked up to IV antibiotics for a return infection and was being forced hourly drinks to boost his fluids and flush the infection through as speedily as possible. Sherlock’s urine test results had proved positive for another particularly stubborn bacteria, one exacerbated by the catheter, and Mycroft had been appalled.

Alone with his brother in a private room, decked out more like a hotel than a hospital, Mycroft sat beside his bed and tried to work out why this kept happening. How could he be back at his brother’s bedside so soon? This was not supposed to have gone this way. He and Greg should have been able to handle it, should have been able to prevent it all going so far. They preempted Jack’s moves for so long and then it all seemed to blur, and they lost the man to his own bitter and twisted madness.

Mycroft couldn't make sense of how, not really, not when they'd been on his tail lights for so long. It made very little logical progression in his mind that they could have gone from being moments from shutting Jack down with Charlie Hawkes’ statements, to being minus on key player - minus a friend.

Mostly, though, he didn't know how long he could continue to watch his brother suffer. He didn't know if he could stand another day of his obvious depression creeping in further. He could arrange counselling, of course, but he knew Sherlock too well. He wouldn't speak; he barely spoke now. The man had lost his independence, his health, a friend, and had almost lost the love of his life in a month - who wouldn't be struggling to deal with that?

He inhaled and exhaled in a noisy sigh. “Sherlock?” He spoke quietly. His lethargic brother turned his face to him. “Is the pain any better?”

Sherlock shrugged his shoulders, “My back is less uncomfortable.”

Mycroft nodded his head, “That's good.” He hoped Sherlock might say something else, but the younger Holmes fell quiet. “John will be fine,” Mycroft said, a little too quickly, and his words jumbled together uncharacteristically. Sherlock blinked his eyes to look up at him. “And concerned as I am for him, my most pressing concern is you.”

“It's just a UTI.” Sherlock said quietly.

“Which could compromise your entire health, precarious as it is.” Mycroft said firmly. “But it is not just your urinary tract that is concerning me, Sherlock. It is your mental state. There has been a lot of adjustments, loss, change…. frankly I'd be alarmed if you weren't different to the person you once were, but I fear that you might be struggling to right your mind.”

Sherlock’s nose crinkled in a look of repulsion at the inference in Mycroft's words. “I'm not depressed, Mycroft.”

“ Aren't you?” Mycroft challenged. “You've lost the ability to walk, to independently move, to dress and bathe. You've lost a friend. I, too, would struggle…”

“I'm not depressed.” Sherlock insisted sharply. “I'm angry. I'm in constant pain - I've spent the last month with John looking at me with a disgust he's tried to hide but can't quite manage it. I'm not depressed - I'm just trying to work out how this is supposed to go forward.”

“What?” Mycroft frowned. “How is supposed to go forwards?”

“Me - how can I build a life around numb legs, urine infections and my bladder on the outside of my body? What do I do next? I'm useless to John, I couldn't save Lestrade, and the job I loved, the job I created, is gone. I can't do it anymore. And who's to say that, just because Jack is dead, I won't have
to face a trial over Mark? Jack could have fed information to other people.” Sherlock sighed heavily. “I'm not depressed.” He reiterated. “I'm lost.”

“Why does it have to be gone? Your work, I mean.” Mycroft asked him, “Sherlock, your brain is your work not your ability to walk.” He raised his eyebrows as Sherlock twisted his lips. “Whatever Jack has fed to people will be discredited, do not worry about that. There will be no case against you, I promise.”

“You can't!” Sherlock shook his head.


“It shouldn't have happened.” Sherlock closed his eyes.

“None of it should, I know. But things cannot be altered. The future can be controlled, though, and we shall do that. You will not see a trial, and John will be well. You and he have many years ahead of you, I aim to ensure it.” Mycroft insisted.

Sherlock looked at him, “How?”

“By never letting you down again.”
Mycroft waited until Sherlock could no longer fight his fatigue and drifted off to sleep before he left the room. He didn’t leave the hospital, but he slipped from the ward Sherlock was on to make a few phone calls. It wasn’t until he stepped out and reached for his phone that he realised the time; five-am was dark and, outside of the windows, looked cold and wet as rain fell on the Southern streets. His first point of call was Anthea - he instructed her to be in touch with Queens hospital and leave word with John that Sherlock was well, being cared for and that, when he was considered well enough for a transfer, he could join him at the hospital where Mycroft would be more certain of his safety.

He knew that calling the police station who were handling the case would be less than productive at this hour, but the desire to do it was overwhelming. He wanted to know what was happening - if there’d been confessions, what Dimmock had told them and if the slug who had beaten Greg was going to be charged… Questions raced round his mind at ten miles a minute and it made him feel plagued by vertigo. Exhaustion was nothing to him now; it was the worry, the grief that was eating him up. Greg was gone and he felt as though he hadn’t done enough to secure his safety, John could easily have been killed and was lucky to be alive, and Sherlock was once again on the last thread of his internal health. Mycroft didn’t know when it would stop, if it would stop, but he hoped that it would.

He had promised Sherlock that he would do everything that he could to ensure he and John were safe, to ensure that nothing came to their door that would mean prison or further hurt and separation. But honestly, he didn’t know that he could promise it. Yes, he would try - he would lie down in traffic if it meant that Sherlock would be safe and well - but he had no real grip to make sure that his promises would be made truth. But he returned to Sherlock feeling emotionally exhausted, though he had not allowed himself the privilege of tears. He never really did, if he were frightfully honest. But if he were to continue on that line of honesty then he’d admit that losing Greg had hit him deeply. The man was a rock, a spirit, a backbone when others were spineless, and he had proved himself to be a man worth of intense sincerity and loyalty. Mycroft was all too aware of how rare people of such value were - the demise of one was saddening, the demise of one who was also a friend was crushing.

He watched from the high-backed, easy-clean chair at Sherlock’s bedside as the younger Holmes slept, and recalled when this was all beginning. In minutes, his mind went from Sherlock’s first day at home, to his first day at school, to his confirmation, to his graduation, to University life, to his first overdose, to his first stint in rehab, to Mark’s death, to Sherlock’s reinventing of himself. He recalled John’s entrance into Sherlock’s life and the amazing change it had brought about and then he remembered sitting at Sherlock’s bedside as the young man sobbed and broke down, faced with a life ahead of him of uncertain terms and conditions. He never imagined, on that very first day of meeting his little brother, that Sherlock would be here now, broken and bruised in many ways, learning to live by himself, to cope alone, once again. It brought a tightness to his chest and made bile rise in his throat to consider that a mere eight weeks ago, this didn’t even factor into his thought process and now look - his every waking minute was occupied by Sherlock, and whether the man was strong enough to survive.

He knew Sherlock would have John, regardless. John was as devoted to his brother as he’d ever seen one person be to another, and he’d seen how Sherlock had reciprocated in as much a capacity as he was able. Sherlock had been open with affection for John, in ways that he had never been for
anyone else - not him, not their parents. Sherlock had always pulled away from affectionate touches if he wasn’t in the mood but he allowed John to seek out affection even if he didn’t feel like it. Mycroft knew, if he were an open and affectionate man, given to sentimentality, he would have thrown his arms around John, clapped him on the back and thanked him for loving his brother. But he wasn’t, and he hadn’t, and part of him hoped that John could see what his true, depressed feelings were just by looking at him when they spoke.

He sometimes wished he had the capacity to be open with his innermost; an area of his brain, deep inside, wished he would have the courage and lapse in pride to hug his brother, to tell him he loved him and would support him throughout. He wished he could have told Greg how integral he was, how...central he was. He wished he could say and do a lot of things, but the truth of the matter was he wasn’t capable of anything on that level and he never would be. It was always there, on the tip of his tongue, considering tumbling from his lips, but he would never be brave enough to utter the words ‘I love you’ to anyone - and it was there that he knew Sherlock would always be stronger than he was.
Nightmares were rife for Sherlock, John and Mycroft for week to follow. John would wake, breathing heavily and sweating profusely, every night only to find out from messages passed to him from Mycroft that Sherlock had also been wide awake, retching and vomiting out of fear and anxiety. Mycroft had tripled his security and surveillance on his brother and John, but it did nothing to quieten the tortures in his mind. Life had changed and he could not return it to normal and it frightened him to know that nothing would ever be the same again, and nobody would ever be blamed in the way that they should.

For Jack Skinner, death was too easy a get-out clause.

Had it all ended any differently, Mycroft considered his entire world might have ended. Had Sherlock died, a colossal part of him would have died too and life, such as a life would have remained, would not have been worth living. Part of him wondered if Sherlock would have felt the same if he had died. He wasn’t sure, even, what he’d have done had John’s life been cut short, too. He knew that if he and Sherlock survived and John did not, neither one of them would ever have felt entirely whole gain. Not that he was belittling the loss of Greg - he missed that man with every fibre of his skin. A more solid friend he had never had, and his presence was missed.

The weeks and subsequent months that followed John and Sherlock’s hospitalisations had been tumultuous. With Skinner dead they had nobody to pin the pain they had suffered upon, but it also meant that nothing the man had ever claimed against Sherlock could be held up.

Three men were arrested in connection with Skinner’s plans and all three were held to await court hearings - set for the following year. None were being held up on attempted murder, none were held accountable for GBH, or ABH, or assault, or any other form of accountability for the harm they caused to Sherlock, or Greg’s death. It made Mycroft’s skin crawl that, despite all the strings to his bow, he could not bring out the justice he felt his family deserved. While knowing that Jack Skinner was cold and rotting in the ground helped to bridge a void, it did not bring Greg back, nor did it reverse Sherlock’s injuries, or change the fact that John had barely pulled through open heart surgery with his life in tact. Mycroft had wanted posthumous sentencing for Jack and vowed it would happen, no matter what he had to do to achieve it.

Sherlock was released first, and was settled back into the house with Mycroft at his side for an entire week before John was deemed medically fit for discharge. Sherlock sobbed when he thought his brother could not hear him. Sherlock’s every need was met by Mycroft, in a strange and silent dance that the two somehow managed to complete. Mycroft helped his brother to bathe, ensured he ate, administered his medication, and somehow completed catheter care with grace and dignity. And then, at last, John was home.

Silence fell on the house on that first night all three of them were reunited in a familiar setting; Sherlock couldn’t bare for John to be more than a foot away from him, and John could barely find the strength to keep his hand held out long enough for Sherlock to grip it.

Christmas had vanished into the ether, and New Year felt anything but renewing... But somehow, with the many hands that volunteered, life moved on.

It had warmed John’s heart to see how many people rallied around when both he and Sherlock were
free and able to return home. Mrs Hudson made herself a regular at the house; she cooked, and cleaned, and washed laundry as though she had simply uprooted two-two-one. Molly dropped in whenever she could and provided company in whatever way Sherlock would let her, and even Stamford would swing by with homemade meals and the occasional takeaway, just to check in.

By the month mark, Mycroft no longer spent the night and Sherlock had begun talking in full sentences again. John managed to shower independently, and the pain he felt in the tight scar that ran down his chest began to ease. And life, such as it was, began to return to something parallel to normal.

And then, one day, it was normal.

Chapter End Notes

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