The Principle of Hope

by MarisFerasi

Summary

John finds out (after Sherlock comes home heavily damaged from his mission to Eastern Europe for his sin of murdering Magnussen) that the detective has been hiding a secret for a very long time.
It's straight, domestic, fluffy, could be canon if you squint, and kind of slow.
Very heavy violence, rape, torture (emotional and physical), PTSD, recovery, some nightmares and meltdowns.
Happy ending tho!!

***NEWS*** I AM SLOWLY REWRITING SOME OF THE EARLIER CHAPTERS. NOT MUCH, JUST CHANGING SOME DETAILS AND I MAY ADD A FEW "FLUFF" CHAPTERS IN BETWEEN OTHERS. PLEASE RE-READ IT AT YOUR LIESURE :)

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
Call in the Cavalry

'Mycroft, it’s me. I’m worried. I mean…I have been for a while, but…yes. Yes. He’s…he’s bloody catatonic, Mycroft. We need to do something. You need to do something. Please. Yes, thank you. I’ll stay here again tonight.’ John scrubbed a hand over his face and walked back into Baker Street. Sherlock had recently come back from one of his brother’s mysterious jobs somewhere abroad and hadn’t quite returned the same. He was more tetchy, constantly on-edge. John felt like he knew the signs, maybe it was PTSD, that Sherlock was covering up something that had happened before he escaped and made it back with his brother’s intel.

But of course, the detective refused to share what was eating at him. John had been called, woken up at strange hours for the last two weeks, a posh voice warning of a “danger night” and requesting that he go sit-in at his old flatshare and keep an eye on the former addict. John grudgingly agreed at Mary’s insistence, and had actually stayed at Baker Street for the last two nights.

As it was, Sherlock was indeed gone catatonic. For him. He was laid across the sofa, long bare feet up on the far armrest and his curls smashed against the rise of the other, one hand on his bare chest, fingering that damned bullet wound. The other laid on the floor, motionless as the rest of him with the loose sleeve of a dirty dressing gown drooping around his long fingers on the wood. He hadn’t responded or even moved other than to go to the loo (twice) in the last three days. His mobile went unanswered, as did emails, anything John asked. He responded to nothing. Once, late in the night on the first day of this "new" behavior, John thought he heard soft crying sounds, but he couldn’t bring himself to ask Sherlock about it more than once. He dutifully left bottled water, a mug of tea, and a packet of biscuits at his hand once a day, cleared the tea when it began to ring the ceramic, and other than that, he basically did nothing but finish old paperwork for the surgery.

So it came as a bit of a surprise when Mycroft himself showed up on the doorstep later that day, after talking to John. He’d apparently been more worried than he’d let on in the call.

‘Sorry to have cut you short earlier, John. I was walking into a meeting with the UN when you rang. I came soon after. Has anything changed?’ As usual, Mycroft settled himself in John’s chair and unbuttoned his jacket and waited, metal ferrule tapping the hardwood, legs crossed. John sat opposite and spared a glance at Sherlock. His eyes were open now. That was the only change. Maybe a slight grimace at hearing his brother enter the flat graced his features. John shook his head no. Mycroft pulled a slight face of irritation and straightened his already pristine suit.

‘Sherlock,’ he said in a slightly louder voice. ‘If you don’t either tell us what is wrong, or admit that you are simply in a strop, I will have to call in the cavalry.’ John, confused, looked to his friend automatically for aid. He saw a reaction. Sherlock looked like he was caught between righteous anger and wanting to cry out of something akin to internal breakage. ‘She should retire soon anyway. I’ll give you to the end of the day, shall I?’ Mycroft stood, buttoning his jacket again and started to turn. ‘Oh, John. Would you mind coming downstairs, I have something for you in the Rolls.’ John recognized a command when it was given, and, though he bristled, he followed.

‘What…was all that about?’ he asked the elder Holmes on the stair outside.

‘Let’s have a coffee.’ Mycroft answered, and stepped inside Speedy’s. John grimaced but, once again, followed. Mycroft sent off several texts and then tucked his mobile away, looking up at the good doctor sipping his coffee. ‘What do you know of Sherlock when he was in graduate school? Virtually nothing, I assume?’ John thought for a second.
‘All I know is that he went for Chemistry and graduated early.’

‘Yes. Surprising, I know. But, there is a… reason Sherlock neglects to mention anything about that period of his life. It was, to put things easiest, the best and then the worst time of his life.’ Mycroft paused. John remained at attention, absorbing the new info and hoping that it was completely true.

‘You see, Sherlock…Sherlock was never a happy child. He was always so hard to please. He never wanted to eat at mealtimes, never wanted to go to school with the other kids, never wanted to play like a normal child. Even when he was barely three I can remember him toddling about asking for a dog, of all things. Something to keep him company and search for interesting things outside. Of course you are familiar with Redbeard, his setter, by now. But dogs only last so long, and Sherlock never quite got over his death. He keeps him in here, you know.’ Mycroft broke off to tap at his temple. ‘For emergencies. But I think I got him on the right track before we left.’

‘You know I have no idea what you’re talking about, right?’

Mycroft smiled thinly. ‘When Sherlock was in graduate school, he met someone. His first…friend. Long before you came along, he had someone to fall back on. But they parted ways just a year before you moved into his life. And, I’ll admit, you are probably the best thing that could have come along in that situation. For him. For each other.’ Mycroft shifted, uncomfortable with the sentimentality of this talk.

‘Why did this friend leave?’ John asked, kind of angry now that someone had just left Sherlock. Walked out of his life like it was nothing. Like he was nothing.

‘She was forcibly deported. Despite the fact that she was…legally nationalized here, the Americans demanded her back. You see, she does government work for them. Sort of a liaison.’

‘Like you?’ John asked. She?

‘In many ways, yes. Not quite as…in depth as my job can be. But, it may be high time for me to demand her back. She is a citizen, after all.’ Mycroft grimaced and flicked at a string that was not there. John’s eyes narrowed.

‘Why is this…woman so important? He looked like he was going to punch you or cry when you mentioned the cavalry. I assume that’s this lady?’ John was honestly lost, but getting more protective by the minute.

Mycroft sighed and took a sip of his latte. ‘I heard a few weeks ago that you stumbled across something in Sherlock’s nightstand. Explain, please.’

John sighed and scrubbed his face. ‘We were looking for a piece of evidence. A necklace, that Sherlock had nicked from the scene of a crime and taken home to test for…something. He’d lost it somewhere in Baker Street trying to hide it from Greg and his sniffer dogs. So I was helping, crawling around on the floor, getting into this and that. I pulled open his nightstand and emptied the drawer. In the back corner was an old smashed, expired box of some kind of Japanese johnnies. I sort of laughed and asked him why on earth he’d kept them, if he even realized they were gone out. They’d expired years before he even moved into 221B.’ John got quiet, remembering Sherlock’s red and then suddenly deathly pale face as the slip of silver landed in John’s lap. ‘Then a necklace slid out. A catholic saint charm, with two rings on it. One vintage-y and shiny, one a plain silvery band. He demanded I give the lot to him, and I did, asking if it was what we were searching for, but he just disappeared into the sitting room and refused to answer me. What was it, Mycroft?’ John looked ashamed, but infinitely curious.
‘It was what you’re just now thinking it was. Sherlock married the girl from University when they graduated. She was about to be deported, and despite never even having taken her on an actual date, he refused to lose her. She nationalized here and stayed as long as she could, but eventually they called her back. I don’t think he’s seen her in…at least a few years. He did, briefly when the Reichenbach incident occurred, but only a week. He was on his way to Serbia by then. I arranged a layover in America for them.’ Now it was John’s turn to deduce. Mycroft looked… genuinely sad. For a split second, but it was enough.

‘You like her.’ John said, matter-of-factly.

‘John. I adore my sister-in-law. You’d be hard-pressed to find someone who doesn’t. My parents cried harder than either of us when she got sent away. I had to put her on that plane, and it took everything in me to do so.’

‘Why…if he loved her, loves her so much, why doesn’t he try to go see her? Or hell, live over there?’ John asked, incredulous. Mycroft had never even said he liked anything in John’s presence. Let alone another person.

‘Oh, he did for a short while. During the drugs fiasco. Cocaine is alarmingly easy to get your hands on in America. Anyway, he went to live there for a short time. Less than a year. She was away a lot, travelling with the President everywhere he went, and Sherlock…well, Sherlock found drugs everywhere he went. And then he almost killed her in a car wreck while he was high out of his mind, and he hung his head and went galloping back to England with his tail between his legs.’

‘Good god. Surely she isn’t angry with him?’

‘Oh, heavens no. she still frequently talks to him. But they haven’t seen each other since he left here after Reichenbach.’

‘Why all the secrecy, Mycroft? Why couldn’t he just tell me about her. That seems like a pretty normal thing to do. “Oh, hi, my name’s Sherlock, come and live with me, I have an estranged wife.” It…it’s never once come up. Not ever. He never gave any inkling…’

‘Oh, John. Yes, he certainly did. Do you recall Irene Adler?’ John nodded, lips pursed. ‘He liked her. She intrigued him. But he never pursued her. In fact, he froze up when she tried to woo him. Janine, the farce that relationship was. He never bedded her, despite her staying at Baker Street several times, usually nude. He brushes it off as not needing human contact, but really he is just waiting for her to come home. He’s kept himself away from others, for her. I tease him. Call him “the virgin.” He isn’t, I just like seeing him squirm when I call him a prude. He’s so much higher than most of the rest of us. Vows to him are just that. Binding. Luckily, he found his match in Georgia. She’s been nothing but good to him, despite the circumstances.’

‘Georgia?’ Mycroft rolled his eyes at John as if to say that’s what you’re asking about? That’s what you latched on to?

‘Yes. Her name is Georgia P. Brodigan. Holmes.’
Sherlock was lying on his side on the sofa, his back to the room when John came back upstairs. He didn’t respond to any noises or questions, and by late evening, John gave up. Climbing the stairs to his old bedroom, he heard a soft tinkling and paused.

It was the ringtone for a skype call coming in. Curious, John shut his bedroom door and sat on the top stair, listening in.

‘Sherlock? Are you there, love, I can’t see you yet,’ a sensuous but well-mannered American accent filtered up the stairwell from the sitting room. John could barely hear what was being said, but he caught enough to make up the conversation.

‘Yes, George. Hold on. There. Hello.’ Sherlock’s voice was tight, controlled. He was less than pleased about the events of the day, and obviously warring internally about wanting to see his estranged wife. ‘How are you feeling today?’

‘Alright, I suppose. I am sorry I haven’t been messaging you. I’m due for an appointment with the cardiologist Thursday, and then I fly out—if everything is okay— later that evening. You’ll fetch me from Heathrow?’ John strained to hear her voice. He already felt comfortable with her; she didn’t act like most people act around Sherlock (that is, terrified and uncertain).

‘Of course, George. You know I would.’ Sherlock’s voice was only getting tighter. Like he was staving off tears. ‘Why are you visiting the cardiologist again? I thought you went last month? Is the valve acting up?’ genuine curiosity now. What was wrong with her heart??

‘Oh, nothing major, love. Just some undue exhaustion here and there. It still clicks something fierce. I’ve been doing my calisthenics, before you even ask. And I am taking the meds properly. Nothing to report until Thursday, I’m afraid.

‘Enough about me, you devil. I hear you’re in a strop. Or at least experiencing some form of late-thirties onset ennui.’

Sherlock groaned and scrubbed a hand over his face. He seemed to want to remain silent for the time being.

‘Alright. Well, it couldn’t have happened at a better time. I was actually going to set up a surprise for you at Christmas. I’m all set to retire, now. I’ve been training up a replacement for several months, he’s to take over Wednesday from me. The plan was to come home, all along. I hope you’re not put out. No need to throw a fit, after all.’
Sherlock snorted at that. A genuine smile stretching his face. ‘Ring off, already, woman.’

‘Good night. I love you.’

‘I love you, George. I’ll be thinking of you Thursday.’ The click of the laptop screen closing alerted John to his need to vacate the area.

Eavesdropping on such a normal conversation had made him feel weird. Nothing happened, no military secrets were spilled. It was so…un-sherlockian. So blatantly pedestrian.

It was refreshing.

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In complete contrast to his previous week’s emotional coma, Sherlock was antsy (to say the least) come Thursday. He was glancing at his phone every minute at the crime scene, and it took him a full three hours to solve a break-in at a major corporation’s computer system. John fancied that it ranked barely above a three, at best.

So, John was fascinated. He followed the detective around as usual, having finally gotten some sleep at his own house for the first time that week on Wednesday night. The Danger Nights, it seemed, were over for now.

The detective had something to look forward to.

When no call came by midnight, Sherlock got jittery. He didn’t sleep a bit. When John found him Friday morning (no clinic duty) he was sitting in the window sill of his bedroom, long legs and bare feet dangling into the alley behind Speedy’s, chain smoking. There were four empty, crushed packs of cigarettes littered around him.

‘Sherlock. Jesus.’ John picked his way through the little piles of rubbish and half-empty tea mugs with a darkening ring around the inside. When he got no response, John began to pick up the dishes and ferry them to the sink.

John poured water over the dingy dishes and then sighed, rolling up his sleeves to wash them thoroughly. They’d just be here the next time he came if he didn’t do them now. He tried to get Sherlock to answer a few times, asking if he needed anything, if he was hungry. If he wanted John to stay again. Nothing got any kind of response.

A few hours later, John was falling asleep on his old chair when a text jolted him awake. Sherlock had migrated to the sofa, his dressing gown wrapped tight around his frame in his own brand of hauteur. John checked his phone after a cursory glance across the room. Coming home tonight?--

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John scrubbed a hand over his face and stood, stretching his stiff back and searching for his brogues.

‘Sherlock, I think I’m going to go home. Unless you need me?’ a shrug. Well, at least he’s responding now. John huffed and walked to the door. He was answering Mary and shrugging onto his shooting jacket when the Skype ringtone echoed through the hall.

John made it back to the top of the stairs just as Sherlock threw himself from the sofa, nearly falling over the coffee table in his haste to answer the laptop’s chimes. The detective threw open the lid and hit the green answer button.

‘George?’ his voice cracked from several days of disuse, but his eyes were wide and hopeful that
she was on the other side. Her camera was not turned on yet, though.

‘Hello, love. I’m so sorry it’s been a few days—’

‘Why do you sound sick? What’s happened? Turn your camera on,’ Sherlock demanded, sitting himself on the low table. He adjusted the screen so his face was in the smaller square in the corner. You could hear the woman clearing her throat and then the screen crackled on.

George was in a hospital bed. You could hear the beeping in the background. The thin gown stuck to her shoulders and the top of her chest. She was trying very hard to not wince as she adjusted her head of hair, wrapped tightly in a massive bun atop her head on the oversized pillows and relax. ‘Don’t freak out. I’ll be there next week, if all goes well.’

‘What happened at the cardiologist?’ Georgia seemed to have a small coughing fit, where a slim male hand (very gay- assistant) slid into the screen and helped her take a sip of some water after it subsided. She thanked him and focused back on Sherlock.

‘He was disturbed by the deterioration of the mitral valve. Again. Had to get it replaced. Again.’ Georgia rolled her eyes and sighed, as if she were talking about getting new shoes once her old ones had worn through, rather than piecing a heart—her heart—together. John stifled a laugh and crept closer to see her over Sherlock’s shoulder.

The girl—for that’s all she was, she had to be at least 5 years younger than the detective—she had a soft, heart-shaped face and large, blue eyes. Her fiery orange-red hair must have been long, for the bun she had bound up on top of her head was massive. Her nose was small, but her lips were fuller than Sherlock’s. She had freckles sprinkled across her nose and cheekbones. If John had to, he’d classify her under “exceptionally cute.”

‘Porcine?’ George nodded yes. ‘Can I see the incision?’ Sherlock’s voice knocked John out of his stupor. The girl smiled but did not laugh. It must be hurting her. She winced (proving his hypothesis) and moved her mobile phone out to get a wider shot of herself on the screen. With one hand she fiddled with the ties (her gown was on backward for ease of check-ups) to expose the long, thin red scar travelling down between her small, firm breasts. ‘It’s a bit longer than last time.

And your sternum?’ Sherlock asked.

‘Yeh, it hadn’t sealed up properly last time, so he went in through the ribs this time. I have two sawed through here,’ she pointed to the top of her left breast where there was severe bruising. ‘He says I shouldn’t fly for six weeks, but Mycroft is setting up a private flight that will travel low enough so that pressure is minimal, and there is a cardiologist to be onboard. Things are getting wonky here in the states with the new election coming up. I’m eager to get out while Alexander has the option of settling in before a new president does.’ Georgia rubbed at her swollen eyes and sighed. She was tiring quickly. ‘I have no idea when the flight is, come to think of it.’

‘I’m sure he’ll set it for next week, if that what you were looking for. I’ll ask him.’ Sherlock dug for his phone.

‘I texted him when I woke up, just before I called you. He’ll answer when he’s not busy, you know that. Don’t pester him, I want to be there sooner rather than later. Be calm, I’ll be there as soon as possible, love. Irritating him will only delay that, and you know it.’ Sherlock groaned but agreed, pocketing his phone again.

‘Anyway, love. I’m getting tired, and Alexander says the doctor is due any minute to check the incision. I’ll be messaging you updates alright? And tell John I said hello, he’s been lurking behind you. Either that or you have a terribly opaque ghost at Baker Street.’ Georgia smiled warmly and craned her neck a bit as if peering over Sherlock’s shoulder. The detective glanced
back and picked up his laptop to show her to John and vice versa for the first time.


‘Hello there, John, I’m George Brodigan. I suppose I’ll be meeting you and your charming family quite soon?’ John instantly liked her. She may have been the yank’s version of Mycroft, but she was infinitely more charming face-to-face.

‘I suppose so, yes. I’ll erm. Be seeing you. Feel better!’ Georgia grinned and gave him a half-nod.

A male voice interrupted from the background on her end, catching the girl’s attention to her direct right. She grimaced but nodded.

‘Alright darling. The doc’s coming, I’ve got to let you go for now. I love you. Behave!’ Sherlock nodded his assent and started to close the lid.

‘Oi!’ the detective laughed aloud.

‘Ugh. Almost. I love you, too. Get better and get here.’ George’s scowl lifted and she winked, ringing off.

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‘So. You’ve erm. Been hiding a wife from me for several years. Care to explain?’ John figured being direct was best. He was making tea in the kitchen while Sherlock threw open windows and (shockingly) tidied up his general detritus.

Sherlock was silent for several moments amid several stacks of newspapers and scraps from evidence walls long since torn down, and then: ‘I didn’t talk about her because it seemed easier to negate her than continually explain where she was or what she was doing. I’d be lying all the time, instead of just omitting information.’

‘But then why make it seem like you were. I don’t know. Asexual? I guess that’s it.’ Sherlock shrugged, dumping his latest pile into the rapidly filling bin. He took up a broom.

‘Same excuse. It’s easier to avoid temptation and make it seem like I don’t want the attention than to have to push someone off you and say, “I’m married, sorry I have no proof, here’s ten more lies.” It is genuinely easier, John, to shut everyone down on contact rather than keep making up excuses. or live with the guilt of having had an affair. Which, to me, is not an option.’ For once John watched as Sherlock swept and tossed the dirt pile, wiping his hands down his thighs as though he didn’t know what to do with them when he finished the task. John remained with his arms crossed on his chest, backed up to the counter with their tea cooling on the table in between them.

‘Did she know about Irene? Or Janine?’

‘First of all, there is nothing to tell in either situation, but yes. She was… informed about my interest in Irene when she was an issue. And then I told her myself the plan with Janine. She supplied the exact tactic herself, actually. The proposal part, anyway.’ John’s eyes widened and then he laughed.

‘Yeah, I think you two must deserve each other, then. Wow. So, I guess do you need help clearing space for her, or what?’

‘No, George travels light. She will only bring a bag or two and the dog.’

‘Dog? You told me I could never have one!’ John turned to look at Sherlock with astonishment.
‘Yes, she has a service dog. Not that you could tell on screen, but George is stone deaf. She’s just extremely adept at lip-reading. She’s actually a linguist by trade, that’s most of her job description in foreign affairs for the president.’

‘Wait. Yeah, okay. Tell me about her job, first.’ John held up a hand and shook his head, trying to organize the new information. Sherlock sighed the sigh of the greatly put-upon and grabbed at his tea. ‘And why you call her George and not Georgia.’

‘It’s a…pet name, as you’d call it. She likes it, it makes her blush. Which I like.’ He side-glanced at John over his mug, as if daring him to refute the statement. ‘And her job is to follow the President around as part of his private entourage and do everything from determine foreign reactions to certain decisions to controlling media output of certain information to translating for him in a pinch. She is basically an anthropologically-minded dialect and life coach. She is outstandingly rich, though. Have you never wondered where I got my money before you set up the blog?’ Sherlock sipped at his tea and threw John a look sideways that read, you idiot.

‘Actually I really didn’t. I figured you had a trust fund. But uh…well, yeah. Nevermind.’

‘But you figured I injected it all in my younger years, squandered it. You’re not wrong. I used it for postgrad school and then what could be deemed “living expenses” for a few years. There is very little, if anything left. But I have no access to it, Mycroft has it locked until I retire. Assuming the fat trout lives that long,’ Sherlock grumbled into his mug.

‘Okay. So, now. What is wrong with her, health-wise?’ John put his doctor hat on and listened in.

Sherlock finished his tea in a long draught and set it in the sink. ‘George found out shortly before I met her that she had a mitral valve stenosis. It had been so long undiagnosed that it was negatively affecting her other senses, hence her hearing was greatly diminished. Now she is almost completely deaf, but, being as good at her job as she is, she has been able to maintain it with only a select few people being made aware of her condition. The issue with her heart is that because she has systemic lupus—which caused the mitral stenosis—she is not able to be given a new heart. It will be ruined by her immune system, just like the last. So she gets the valve replaced every so often, and uses a modified pacemaker to keep everything…running. It seems to be working, for now.’ Sherlock was staring at the floor by the end, arms crossed. ‘Porcine valves last a bit longer because the lupus doesn’t attack it. But this is her third,’ he answered in response to John’s unasked question. John closed his mouth with a click and floundered for a minute.

‘They don’t think she can have many more. Her sternum won’t heal properly now. You heard her last night, they had to go in through a rib. At this point, if in a few years she needs another replacement, assuming medicine hasn’t quite caught up, she may not get one. You see. I…” Sherlock dug his forefinger and thumb into his eyes, rubbing furiously and pausing for a moment, squeezing his teeth together. ‘I have no idea, I never do. How much longer I might have with her. These last few years have been very touch-and-go. I am willfully and blessedly distracted by cases and you and little Willa. But when I’m here, alone, I can’t help but obsess over it. So much time wasted, waiting apart for the same end. I’ve been begging her to retire for years. Since it got bad, since her second valve replacement. Part of me is sickeningly glad that she feels bad enough to be forced to retire, finally. But I hate the inevitability of it.’ John was silent for several moments. This was extraordinarily sentimental for a Holmes brother. He was, to be frank, stunned into silence.

‘Have you thought about retiring when she gets here?’ John said it woodenly, he couldn’t help it. The thought of Sherlock hanging up the Belstaff for good seemed impossible. But it might be necessary.

‘I have already decided that when it becomes obvious that I need to be around more, that we will
leave together. Probably to the countryside. She owns a small cottage on the coast outside of Stromness. We’d likely go there, I’d imagine.’

Sherlock is still talking to the floor, his face draining of color. ‘I do hope we have several more years ahead of us before that little adventure has to take place. I don’t want to leave before I have to, and I don’t want to think about her dwindling future just yet. Not when I’m so close to getting her back for good. Agreed?’

‘Agreed.’

Chapter End Notes

I am so terribly sorry that this literally took 3 months, you guys. I am (in the way of excuses) getting married in 6 weeks. I just moved 3 days ago, and I needed to get a bit of this out of my head, finally. hopefully the next round will come soon, as i am living alone and undistracted for now. I am so glad that you have been leaving comments! THANK YOU. please let me know what you think of this one, and i'll keep it up. xoxoxo
George peered out the foggy side window of the train from London to King’s Lynn, which Mycroft had arranged for her. Intermittent yet insistent rain had been pattering her nerves thin for over an hour as they rattled up the coastline. Her and her party were alone in the train car, the whole damn thing having been bought out and set up to house a gurney (if needed)(it wasn’t). Her cardiologist, Dr. Nowzick, was humming quietly to himself as she sat mostly upright in her large seat. Alexander had demanded that he at least be allowed to see her to Norfolk, to the Holmes house. He sat across the table from her now, tapping at his laptop.

The Holmes boys are due in Norfolk in the coming weeks, and she doesn’t think (and the doctor doesn’t think) that the pollution of grey London will do her any good just now. So she has been sent on with very precise orders from Mycroft.

“Good, clear countryside. That’s what you need for a bit, Ms. Georgia.” George scowled and nodded and glared at the cardiologist. Not that it did any good. Mycroft heard his side and sent her straight off, but not before his (rather grouchy) face-time call just last week. She dug her fingers into the fur atop her Frenchie, Crowley’s head. He grunted and stretched in his sleep as she remembered:

“You are NOT to make Sherlock go running up there and begin faffing about over you. You need rest, to recover from major surgery, Georgia. I will tell him that I have sent you to Montenegro to finalize details on a trade offer, nothing major and that you have your… assistant.”

“Oh, yes. I meant to tell you, Myc. Alexander is coming to Norfolk with me. Care to pick us up at Heathrow yourself, then?” George couldn’t resist poking a bit of fun at her pushy brother-in-law. She knew he had a bit of a fascination with her replacement.

“Hush.” She could see his face coloring for thousands of miles! “Do you understand? Do not entice him, he has work to finish here. Let him be angry at me, and you get to feeling better. We will be home for Christmas, as planned.”

“Understood, Mikey. Ring off, already you half-wit.” Despite herself, George knew he was right. Sherlock would be upset and in the way if she told him she was here already. He’d be rushing around, trying to help, unhappy that he wasn’t living his life on the edge, running after his criminals while stuck along the coast with his ailing wife. Best let him finish and then he could take her home after she was feeling better.

Mycroft harrumphed and rang off. George slid the phone back in her pocket and stared out the hospital window, waiting on the surgeon to arrive.
George toyed at her mobile heartlessly, wishing she could phone Sherlock now that she was in the same time zone. But she had to stick to the plan, for her love’s sake. He hated the country. Despite the draw he would feel for her, it wasn’t worth it to make him unhappy for weeks as she healed up. Best let him finish his business and have him here when she is fit and ready to go anywhere with him. She was retired now, there would be no 24/7 phone calls, no waking up and rushing off, no rushing away.

That was the key word. For so long, she had always been rushing, to something, from somewhere. Always trailing behind, always at someone’s beck and call. But not now. She was on a very, rather nice pension. She had her freedom, finally. No one to answer to but herself. And Sherlock.

There would always be them, together now. That was almost enough to make her pick up her mobile there and then. Almost.

“Brother mine, when you are done with this case, as ridiculously long as it is currently taking you, I have something short and sweet for you to do in the north. A small trip, if you will before we retire to Mummy and Dad’s for the holidays.”

“You mean before you’re going to tell me where the hell you sent my ill wife?” Sherlock was glaring absolute death rays at his brother from across the small space between them. As ever, Mycroft sat in John’s old chair, ferule tapping the carpet, tea with the saucer at his elbow. He took it up and sipped nonchalantly.

“I have sent her on a very mild trip to Montenegro to finalize some small trades demands between her previous boss, ourselves, and therefore herself. She wasn’t going to receive her retirement until this deal was made, so she opted to take it and be done by Christmas.” Sherlock opened his mouth but was cut off. “She will be there two weeks, in all. Both resting and taking care of the business side of things. Her assistant, Alexander, is with her, as well as her own cardiologist. I have not sent her off to die in the Mediterranean. You know better. Or should,” Mycroft groused, finishing his tea and moving to stand. Sherlock was fuming, ready to throw Mycroft out, physically if needed.

John opened the street door and slammed it. He had the baby. Sherlock relaxed back into his chair, unfolding his fists into open palms against the leather arms. When John and Willa made it up the stairs, huffing and puffing, Sherlock held his arms out, had a child deposited on him, and sneered at his brother. Mycroft rolled his eyes, buttoned his jacket, and nodded to John before leaving.

“What’s on?” John asked, dropping the baby’s kit bag and sinking into his red chair.

“Nothing of import. He is hiding George from me until she is healed up. Montenegro.” He said it with disdain, letting Willa take one of his fingers in her grip to chew on. John puffed up his chest and exhaled heavily, catching his breath from the climb. He’d gained a bit of weight back since the baby. Nearly half a stone.

“And the case? Not going well?” John asked, glancing up at the evidence wall in vain. There was the same tattered piece of paper flapping there that had been there two weeks now. No new evidence had presented itself since the initial scene.

“Once again, nothing of import. I have two of the homeless network watching his building, but nothing has come of it yet.” Sherlock grimaced and resituated the toddler. “What were you doing on this end of town? Bored?”
“Come to think of it, yeah. Mary’s off with a couple friends shopping, figured I’d bring Willa over. It’s been a while since you’d seen her.” John smiled at the scene before him, tempted to take a snapshot. Maybe when the detective wasn’t looking, he’d sneak one in. “So. Hiding her from you?”

“He has this notion that I’ll get underfoot and over protective of her at her bedside and that she’ll not heal properly because of it, or I will stress her out. He’s done it before, after the first replacement. He’d actually been dosing her for weeks without either of us noticing, with an experimental treatment before the surgery happened, to see if it would slow the effects of her deteriorating heart. It didn’t have much effect, sadly.” Sherlock grew quiet and his eyes turned inward.

“Wonder if it would slow the rot on the pig valve, though?” John thought it idly, but Sherlock seemed to latch on. His eyes narrowed.

“Maybe.”

Willa squealed, impatient, and pawed at Sherlock’s bangs, tugging his head down and pressing a kiss to his cheekbone. He smiled and stood, taking her into the kitchen and digging for a suitable treat.

John tried to distract the detective. “You know, the first time I handed you that baby, right after we left the hospital, I thought you were going to have a panic attack when I set her in your arms. You nearly dropped her. And now look at you. A professional.”

Sherlock neglected to say anything back to that. “Have you and George. You know.” John went awkwardly silent. Sherlock returned with Willa, her mouth and tiny fists fastened around a caramel rice cake.

“What, John. Had a child, with a wife who has a failing heart and a very feather-on-the-wind career and me, a… mess? Not very stable. Or conducive. No.” he shook his head and sat back down, resettling the infant. His face was carefully blank but John felt like he might be fighting something.

Sherlock’s mobile buzzed in his pocket. A text. He swiped the screen and smiled. George had sent him a picture message of her face, bored out of her mind, nearly asleep against a window. He couldn’t see outside, but he could see the shadow of a man—Alexander, her assistant—across from her. The top of her incision was visible, the black bruising fading slowly to sickly yellow in some patches.

Two more weeks, and spare days, until they would be leaving for his parent’s house. Until he could see her. It was so close now that it felt like every fiber of his being was torn in two. Half of him wanting to go to Norfolk on the next train and wait impatiently for her there, and part that was tearing him up inside to fly to Montenegro and find her there. Care for her on the coast of the Mediterranean.

It was irrational. But the desire was almost enough to make him do it.

Chapter End Notes
keep the comments coming guys! they're by tea n' biscuits, my bread n' butter!
Several years ago…

Sherlock’s head hung low over the chemistry text in which he was absorbed. He was meant to be studying for finals, but he was rather distracted by the faint grunts coming from his direct right in the library.

The young man was, as usual, hidden in the back corner of the nearly-dark third floor. The closest person to him (aside from this hapless individual to his right) was another student some thirty metres straight ahead at one of the desktop bays. Sherlock turned his head to see what the commotion was.

Not five meters away was a young girl, obviously undergrad, trying her damnedest to reach for a text on the highest shelf. There were no step-stools close to her (Sherlock had previously clocked the closest one—despite never needing the things—as being a good twenty aisles down in the 8000s) and after trying for the fourth time to nudge the heavy book toward herself with her fingertips and failing, Sherlock sighed heavily and stood.

He approached the girl with disdain, put off by having been interrupted by his attempted studies. She didn’t appear to notice him coming, as she had begun digging a large tome out of a lower shelf with the apparent intent to stand upon it and reach her goal. He watched for a second, bemused, before stopping her progress. No need to sit back and watch a pretty little thing get injured over schooling.

“Which do you need?” he asked, still a good three feet away from her. She didn’t appear to hear him, or at least she ignored him at first. Rankled at being snubbed at attempting to help, Sherlock took another step forward and stuck a hand out to grab her attention. “Excuse me? Can I help you get that?” he pointed up, in case she was as dumb as she appeared to be playing. The girl jumped and nearly slid off the laminated dust cover of the tome she was standing on with one foot.

“Oh! Erm… Linguistics of the Dead and Now just there, the green…that’s the one. Thank you, er —?” she tucked a strand of long red hair behind her ear and flashed wide eyes up at him. Sherlock cleared his throat and shook his head once to come back online. Her hands strayed toward him for a moment and then curled back into her chest as if concerned.

“So, Sherlock. And you’re welcome.”

“Sorry if I get it wrong, I’m almost deaf. You said Sher-lock?” eyebrows raised, Sherlock nodded once. “I’m Georgia Brodigan. Nice to meet you.” Sherlock noticed the rest of her for the first time (tended to ignore random individuals that irritated him in public) in her simple heather grey tent dress and yellow tights, her oddly long, slim legs ending in charcoal grey wellies. Her waterproof
and bag lay crumpled on the low-pile carpet, beads of rain still evident on the hood. Her hand outstretched a little once more.

Oh. He still had her book in his hands. He looked down at it as if confused, caught off guard. “Linguistics?”

“Yes, could I? Thanks.” She stuck the book in her bag and stood, throwing the strap over her bare shoulder. “I love the stuff. Always have been fascinated by how languages are built, how they are just as much a living thing as the people that speak them. It’s great stuff. Not chemistry-great, but good.” She had been peering over his shoulder since his rapid retreat seconds ago.

Strange. Good-strange. Most people don’t…wouldn’t—hmm. Deaf, lover of languages.

“American, though?” he flicked his fingers, signing. Her eyebrows shot up before a bark of laughter forced it’s way out of those plush lips. Sherlock’s eyes slid to them for a heartbeat.

“No, I don’t mind. The clutter, I mean… And well, at least you are quiet. Most study partners are impossible. It’s fine, if you want to stay.” She smiled, beatific. It made Sherlock’s ribs hurt but he smiled back a little and he turned back down to his class notes.

“No, I don’t mind. The clutter, I mean… And well, at least you are quiet. Most study partners are impossible. It’s fine, if you want to stay.” She smiled, beatific. It made Sherlock's ribs hurt but he smiled back a little and he turned back down to his class notes.

His eyes may have ventured back up a few times before their backs grew arched and pained and they called it a night. But not before numbers were exchanged and a deal was struck to meet at the Pret at the corner the next afternoon.

Chapter End Notes
sooooo... do you guys prefer shorter, more-often updates, or what? tell me. (i'm getting married in 2 weeks, omg. I am shitting.) (*runs and hides) hope you enjoyed my little spat here. let me know, I shall deliver!
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Sherlock's time in Poland (in this, he did not get back off the plane/the Moriarty teaser didn't happen). No George in this chapter, all boys. This chapter takes place several months after TAB; the baby has been born and Sherlock has left/returned from the trip Mycroft sent him on.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Sherlock woke slowly through the fog of morphine to the lull of beeping. A breathing machine huffed in his ear, a mild burning sensation irritated his left hand. IV cannula. His body jolted reflexively, conditioned to fear, but he forced himself to think.


Mycroft had gotten him out.

Before opening his eyes, Sherlock let himself breathe in the still, cool air of the hospital room. The bed beneath him was a blessing, compared to where he'd just come from. The pillow felt odd against his skull, hair shorn close to his scalp by his captors and later, the surgeons that were trying to piece his slip scalp back together. He heard arguing echoing in the hall. It was quiet, but it was over him.

He'd asked Mycroft (the only person who knew he was here at the time) to refuse to let John in. The detective couldn't stand the idea of his overprotective friend seeing him like this; broken, bald. Unsuccessful in...well, anything. And John was not taking it well. He'd ridden the train out of London to Sherlock’s location (Mycroft had agreed to refuse him access, but insisted that John be told where his friend was being held for the sake of both their mental health. Sherlock had groaned but saw reason.

“What on earth do you mean, HE doesn’t want me to see him? I refuse to believe that!” John had just flapped an arm at the door. Sherlock grimaced a smile and blinked his eyes open. Those grey eyes slid straight to his phone, turning it on and swiping a thumb across the screen. He thumbed a message to John.

I'm sorry John. I can’t handle you seeing this. -SH

He let the phone drop to his side and waited. Sure enough, the forced hissing started up again between the men outside.

“What the fuck, Mycroft? I am his best friend and doctor!” by now, John was approaching a roar. Sherlock winced and listened closer.

“Doctor Watson. I believe you would remember your own history with PTSD?” Mycroft struck a chord, there. John’s eyes flew open.

“What on earth happened to him?” John was shaking with rage, now. He hadn’t been there,
hadn’t even known it was going to be this dangerous. Little did he know, he was lucky to have his favorite person back alive, at all.

Mycroft lowered his voice substantially, leaning in a bit closer to the doctor. “I have video footage that was sent to me. I can and will explain once we are out of earshot—” John’s phone chimed. “It’s probably him, listening in.” John checked his mobile; it was Sherlock. It only served to dash him through with anger again.

“You’d better tell me everything you know happened, Mycroft. Everything. I thought you had a chip in him? If you were getting video footage, why didn’t you rush in and nab him back?”

Mycroft sighed and stuck a thumb and forefinger in his eyes. He gestured toward the seating area and walked over; John followed. “Shortly after he was captured, his holders were made aware of drone activity overhead of their mountain-base. Sherlock was being held deep within the caves of the place, but I could still locate him easily enough. I actually placed three separate chips in him. One in each arm and in his upper right thigh. He’s also had an ID chip in the false implant of a missing back molar for years. I thought, surely he wouldn’t lose all his limbs, and any decent torturer generally stays away from major arteries. I anticipated this lot.” He waved a hand enigmatically and paused while a few nurses walked by, chatting quietly. John was rapt, but feeling sick to his stomach. “I was sent footage via these men, they had set up a CCTV camera in Sherlock’s cell with the only output being my personal laptop. I was meant to get this information, you see. They wanted to disturb me. And I can honestly say, John, that the things they did to my brother…well, they succeeded. Sherlock was handed a folding knife and instructed to cut the chip out of his arm. They had waved him down with a chip scanner and only found the one in his right arm, thus far. He cut it out, they left him in there. That was day one. I…have you gotten to see his chart?” John shook his head, biting his tongue hard. Mycroft stood and left, going into Sherlock’s room. John craned his neck to catch a glimpse of his friend, but only managed to see one long foot in a cast, suspended in air. There was a short, murmured conversation and the door re-opened. His stomach clenched.

When the elder Holmes returned, he had a clipboard in tow with a fat stack of papers stuck under the clip. John reached out, automatically.

“John, I want you to understand that this is going to be bad. I have personally never seen so many injuries on one person, but then, he does seem so immortal at times…” Mycroft handed over the file and sat back, crossing his legs and waiting.

John flipped through the pages; one after the other, it told a horrifying story. From top to bottom, Sherlock’s injuries alone should have killed him, let alone the dehydration and hypothermia he’d suffered.

Looking at the X-rays, the detective had: a compound concussion with some cerebral edema, two broken zygoma, one cracked orbital bone, and two missing molars on the left side of his lower jaw. His jaw had been wired shut. Travelling down, John could see that both scapulae had been displaced, his right humerus had been snapped in two, the same radius, ulna, and metacarpals had suffered the same fate, as if the arm had been crushed as a whole. Three ribs on his right side were obliterated, splinters aiming directly at his lungs. Some of the pieces were due for removal in a few hours. Both shins had been fractured in the same place, as if bent over something and then hit repeatedly. John felt like he was having an out-of-body-experience by the time he tugged the body scans out of their envelope and held them up to the florescents. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Mycroft put his head in his hands.

There was a lot of internal bleeding around his lungs, and the right lung had been pierced, as though repairing a collapsed lung in the field, at least twice. But what caught John’s attention, and perhaps disturbed him the most, was the massive amount of trauma in his rectum. Sherlock had
sustained a very violent, and decidedly repeated amount of penetrative rape in his captivity.

“Mycroft. Tell me who did this.” John’s hands were shaking, badly, as he slid the scans back in the envelope.

Mycroft raised his head and cleared his throat. For the first time since John had known him, he looked like an angry, hurt older brother; he looked human. “There was a clan of brothers and their followers in the Carpathian Mountains, outside Krakow. They are dead now, have faith. He was to infiltrate their base and plant a device, nothing more. They knew who he was, immediately, of course. I had predicted his death within six months from the start. Didn’t he tell you?”

“No, he said the trip would last six months. He mentioned a little danger, not his impending death!” John was back to hissing, clenching the chart in his fists. “How do you know these fuckers are dead? For certain?” John was itching for a fight, to go out and personally put a bullet in the head of anyone who so much as looked at his dearest friend.

“I sent out a team with a dozen killshot assassins. I was given 147 confirmed kills, all of which included and matched the descriptions of those on the films. Each of the brothers’ DNA was brought back to me, personally, and was tested for accuracy. I would not have let these men slip away, John. Not after all this.” He’d gone quiet by the end, and John believed him.

The duo waited in silence for a bit before a surgeon and several nurses approached them. “Mr Holmes,” greeted the surgeon. “I’m Doctor Humphreys, and this,” he gestured to his right, “is Doctor Wilson, the anesthesiologist. I’ll be removing the rib shrapnel from your brother’s chest, here shortly. Do you have any questions or issues before I go in with my team and anesthetize him?” Mycroft shook his head and looked at John. Following his lead, the team all turned to look at John as well.

“Sorry, Doctor Watson. I’m his friend and physician.” They shook hands as John stood. “Respectfully, I don’t think it’s wise for you all to go in at once. I think you and the anesthesiologist should go in alone, so you don’t overwhelm a person with newly onset PTSD. I would offer to come, but apparently he doesn’t want me in there quite yet.” John side-eyed Mycroft, who nodded. The doctors agreed with John, albeit begrudgingly, and went in alone. Two nurses waited outside the door. A faint conversation was held and within minutes, a heavily sedated Sherlock was being wheeled down the hall. John audibly gasped at what he saw.

Later same day:

“Sherlock?” the detective was having trouble coming out of the anesthesia. He stirred and groaned, but did not open his eyes. Besides, there was no way he was in here.

John sat next to the hospital bed, one of Sherlock’s long, pale hands sitting in his own. John's thumb rubbed over the texture of the support wrap secured around his friend's sprained wrist and raw knuckles. He’d leaned over the bed a few minutes ago, inspecting the cuts and scabbed cigarette burns on Sherlock's shaved scalp, and the detective had seemingly sensed him, blindly grabbing onto the first thing it could, which was fine with John. It grounded them both, being able to touch just this much. Make sure the other was there, and alive. John gently peeled back the tape over Sherlock's left eye and swallowed back bile. Someone had tried to stab it out, and it had been sewn shut while the cornea healed itself as much as possible. He put back the gauze and tape and rested his forehead on their joined hands.
Maybe ten minutes later, Sherlock swallowed around a raw throat and cracked his eye open, just enough to peer around. He looked down at his left hand, much warmer than the right, and saw it attached to two doctorly hands. “John,” he grumbled. “Hmm.” He left his hand where it was. It was calming. His side hurt, terribly.

“No, Sherlock. You’ve just had surgery to remove the bone fragments, remember? Don’t touch,” John clenched his hand a little tighter, still staring hard into Sherlock’s ruined face. The detective tensed, remembering that John was not supposed to be in here, by his own wishes. He glared at the door with one eye. “Mycroft didn’t let me in, I snuck in between nurses after he left to get coffee and sandwiches. I’m sorry, but I had to see you. I don’t feel right sitting out there, while you’re suffering in here not ten feet from me. I hope you’re not angry with me. I... had to see you for myself.” John looked down at their hands and opened his, letting Sherlock decide if he wanted to pull his own back or not. He left it.

“No,” he wheezed through a wired jaw. His throat and vocal cords had been ravaged by screaming and dehydration, and he still sounded like sandpaper rubbing together. He made some motions with his hand but John just stared, confused.

“I don’t know sign language, sorry, Sherlock.” John looked put-out. Like he felt useless in all this. Sherlock tapped John’s hand and made like he was writing on his palm.

John produced a small dry-erase easel and a marker from a drawer. Sherlock clumsily (drugged and wrong-handed) wrote “BABY?”

He had been gone for nearly six months, the baby should have come by now, surely.

John laughed softly. “Yes, she’s here. Willa, after you, you sod.” Sherlock scrunched up his face as best he could and shook his head. He smeared the marker board clean and wrote, “least fav name.” John laughed again, happy to see Sherlock’s faculties and natural banter improving.

After an hour or so of this sort of small talk, Sherlock fell asleep, and so did John, his hand loosely touching Sherlock’s on the bed.

Several hours later, the doctor awoke to another doctor, one on duty, leaning over Sherlock, checking stitches and unwrapping his eye. John perked up and watched, wanting to know in case Sherlock got discharged to his care soon (hopefully). The detective looked deeply uncomfortable, but John predicted it would have been worse with a male doctor. The small, thin female trauma doctor looked harmless.

Sherlock’s face was a wreck. The eye she was unwrapping was lucky to have been saved. It looked like someone tried to gouge it out at one point, with raw, flaking skin around the lids. The right orbital bone had been cracked, and both cheekbones. His face was entirely a mottled blue-black, with patches of healing yellow around his nose and mouth. The bottom of his jaw, around the curve to neck had been broken, thus the wiring to set it properly. It was all dark purples and black as well.

“Mr. Holmes, can you see out of this eye at all?” he shook his head once, much to John’s relief. The stitches were holding. “Just blurry?” another nod. “You will likely need glasses, but I think it will heal just fine. Does this hurt? How much?” she held up five fingers and Sherlock would hold up one through five back at her as she gently poked and prodded various injuries. “Now, Mr. Holmes, in an hour or so, Dr. Humphreys will be back to take you for a few more tests. You need a CT scan and a colonoscopy,” she said as she flipped through his chart, marking a few places. Sherlock visibly tensed and John was already answering.

“Would it be possible to get a female doctor to do it? If you know the reason he needs it, you
know why I ask.” She nodded sagely and checked her watch.

“If you’d be amenable to doing it right now, I can take you back. I go off shift in an hour.” They both looked at Sherlock, who nodded once.

The female doctor, Dr. Jameson, returned with a nurse in short order. It was decided that John would wait in the private room while the procedures were done. John sat and stewed over Sherlock’s chart most of that time. The injuries alone were enough, but Mycroft said he had some footage to show him… how bad would it actually be?

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**Weeks later, London; John is watching the footage:**

John is livid. His hands are shaking, one foot tapping against the wood floor in Mycroft’s office. “Doctor Watson,” Mycroft calls again. The doctor looks up angrily, pauses the video, and removes in earphones.

“I need you to try to talk to Sherlock for me. I have asked him about this person,” he gestures to the screen and the man who has Sherlock on the cold unforgiving floor, and is thrusting deep inside him. Sherlock looks much worse this time. It is about a month in, and this Jozef character, the one who is the nicest of the lot, but in no way forgivable, comes in nearly every day. He always is gentle; he doesn’t throw Sherlock down like the other men do. But lately, he has been causing a problem.

The other men, and Jozef, up until about two weeks into Sherlock’s internment, had been ignoring the detective’s orgasm. And then suddenly, Jozef started making Sherlock come, too. He doesn’t want to, the detective cries aloud the whole time and tries to escape, something he hadn’t done with Jozef before. When he comes, he lays there and sobs, sometimes for hours, until someone comes in to clean him up or move his restrained body elsewhere.

“I need you to ask him about the nature of their agreement. If you’ll notice, Jozef always injects Sherlock when he leaves. I believe this is heroin, or perhaps a very powerful painkiller. I want to know if my little brother was kept in pain so that he would service them, or if he made the offer. He has told me that the latter was the case, but he could be lying, just because it is me asking.” Mycroft sets down his pen and checks his pocket-watch. He has a meeting in ten minutes. “Thank you. I’m going to have to leave you here. You can stay, finish that. Just tell Anthea when you’re leaving.” Mycroft Holmes stood, buttoned his jacket, and left the room.

John hit play on the laptop. Sherlock’s arms were still bound behind the metal pole; that would be the cause of the displaced scapulae. Jozef had his on his front, the man’s meaty hands bearing his weight down on Sherlock’s lower back as he fucks into the struggling detective. After several minutes of what must be a painful position to Sherlock, Jozef pulls his hips up so that Sherlock’s weight is on his face and shoulders, hips in the air. Jozef snakes a hand under Sherlock and begins tugging at the man’s cock. On cue, Sherlock buries his face in the stone floor and starts begging the other man to stop. Jozef’s face is apologetic, but he continues, even pulling out after he himself is finished and fingering Sherlock’s prostate until he comes with a sob and shudder. From the footage, it is apparent to John that the man has been given a mission he does not want to complete, but feels he has no choice. Jozef gets up, grabs a small bag, removes a large syringe and empties it into Sherlock’s femoral artery. The detective quickly goes boneless and his face slack.

John shuts off the laptop and decides to return to Baker Street, where he’s been staying and minding Sherlock around the clock since his discharge (Mycroft's paychecks are better than his surgery salary)(and he loves his friend). He has questions.
After paying the cabbie and letting himself in the street door, John is mystified to find the flat completely dark and silent. The curtains are drawn over each other, blocking out any light whatsoever.

“Sherlock?” John called. His spine is tingling; they have only just gotten Sherlock back, surely nothing too terrible has happened already?

After several seconds, he hears a croaked “Bedroom. Quiet.” John rushes into the room, hand poised at the light switch out of habit, until he sees that his dearest friend is curled in a tight ball on his bed, wrapped in numerous blankets. His broken limbs poke out from the ball at odd, stark-white angles. John is at the bedside in two steps, kneeling and placing a hand gently on Sherlock’s forehead.

The man is deathly pale, but what else is new. He is in pain. “What is wrong?” he whispers, putting his face close to the gap in the sheets.

“Migraine. I think. Or comedown, off the morphine.” Sherlock is laying very still. His phone is dead on the nightstand next to him. John plugs it in and switches it to silent.

“Have you been vomiting?” he asks, his doctor hat low on his brow. Sherlock sighs in the affirmative (thank God he's on a liquid diet with his jaw...) and his eyes slide open, roving over John too slowly for the doctor's liking. “Listen, I need to ask you a rough question, mate.” Sherlock’s brow furrows slightly and he rolls his eyes but remains silent, waiting.

“Was Jozef, the man who was dosing you up. Erm. Was he keeping you in pain so you’d service them for painkillers, or was he giving you them as part of a deal? I’ve been watching the footage Mycroft was sent.” John waits, sure he has overstepped several boundaries.

“I struck a deal with Jozef that I’d do whatever he wanted me to for painkillers, and the best he could offer was the heroin that the brothers V push across the mountains.” At John’s deprecating look, he snapped, despite the pain and violent nausea. “It does neither of us any good if you ask me to speak truth and then refuse to believe what I say. If I wanted to deal with that I would have let Mycroft over. I took the bait, yes. But do you understand, I was doing it because it made my life easier there.” John tucks his hand under the blanket a bit where Sherlock is worrying the fabric. He nearly loses a finger with the vise grip as Sherlock bleeds his comfort. “After he—after Andrzej told him to start forcing me orgasm, I knew he was trying to break me. It nearly worked. Have you gotten to the end yet?” It takes John a moment to translate what he's been slurred at between a wired jaw.

“God, no. I’m only about a month in. Why?” John is sitting on his knees, which are screaming. He lifts up and sits on the edge of the bed, in the dip between Sherlock's concave stomach and the cast of his whole right leg.

“The last thing you should see before a team of men come in and take me should be Jozef trying to kill me. He threw me onto my back, which is what broke my right arm, and strangled me until I blacked out, but not long enough to kill me. I went into shock, apparently.”

“Why would he do that? At the last minute?”

“He was scared. Didn’t know if the invaders were friend to me or foe, and didn’t want my lot to get worse. I think he thought they were a rival gang from Krakow coming into off the competition. Andrzej had mentioned selling me to them several times. They run several all-male brothels,” he supplies to John’s confused look. “If that had been the case, you do understand I would have appreciated his offer.” Sherlock’s eyes have slid closed again.
“Have you taken anything? Remind me, what triptans can’t you take? I’ll fetch some—” John starts to get up, but Sherlock’s grip is fast.

“Nothing, for now, please. There are some in the bedside, but I am trying to detox, remember?” John nods and sits still until Sherlock falls asleep, which isn’t long. He gets several messages from Mary, and a photo of little Willa, making faces at the camera. He makes the decision to tell Mycroft that Sherlock needs to go to the coast for a few days, to rest.

He lets himself out downstairs and texts the elder Holmes this as he pulls out a ragged oyster card for the tube home to get fresh clothes and see his daughter for an hour or so. Then, into battle.

Chapter End Notes

i am sick at myself for taking 6 months to update this, guys. i got pretty depressed with my writing for awhile there and didn't do much of anything. i hope i am forgiven.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Sherlock goes to see George; we see their cottage

Chapter Notes

Ok so there were some questions:
John wanted to know what had transpired; to avoid talking about it, Mycroft shows him the videos. I am sorry that was not terribly clear, I will edit to this effect.
Why Mycroft let it happen: it is largely assumed in the community here that after the incident where Sherlock shoots CAM, he becomes dispensable to the British government. That is why he is given an impossible job; if he proves himself, he will perhaps be redeemed. if not, oh well, he went out with his boots on. So, no I do not (in this fic) see Mycroft as a huge arsehole who doesn't care. I've come to like the huge prat. but, Sherlock is being punished here, and there is (assumed) to be a standing DNR order where Sherlock is concerned. he had a tracker, yes, but that did not guarantee a savior for a convicted felon and murderer, especially if more lives were to be lost saving him. IE: they were waiting until the job was done and the timing was right to go in, which is what happened.
George and Sherlock's cottage is in Orkney, the Holmes' house is in Norfolk. Just for reference. I dont think I made a distinction. I will check and fix this.

John is watching Sherlock over his book. The detective is sitting in his grey armchair, glowering at the evidence wall. The case Mycroft gave him to do before he could see Georgia has been done for nearly a week. There are four days left in the waiting period, and Sherlock has become increasingly—upsetting. Georgia has barely been speaking to him—it is assumed she is doing vital work, or resting; there has been no ill will, just loneliness.

John is watching him closely, recalling a brief time several months ago when the younger mam, still limping and cursing at Physical Therapists in the interim, decided to take one too many muscle relaxers (he’d calculated) and poor Mrs. Hudson had found him, unresponsive, drooling into the carpet. It feels like it did then. John does not like it. He crosses his legs and goes back to his book, ignoring texts from Mary.

But today is a different day. It is nearing three p.m. when Sherlock’s phone and laptop started chiming with an incoming skype call. Sherlock untwists from the sofa (his latest fit had placed him there, curled up facing the inside) and pulls the phone up in front of his face. John does not budge. He wants to hear this.

“Hmm. George,” the detective’s voice is murky from upset and disuse.

“Hi there, you lanky sod. How’re things in London? Hello, John!” Georgia made to side-eye the camera, so Sherlock turned it in the direction of the doctor. He waved and grinned and went back to staring at the same sentence in his book.
“Boring. How are you? When are you coming home?” Sherlock has narrowed his eyes at the screen. The background is painfully familiar. *Home.*

“Actually, I am in Orkney now. Got in late last night. I’ve sent the plane down to the London City Airport and had it fueled. I figured, if you wanted, you could come up here for a couple days before we go to Norfolk? Unless you’re still busy on that case from Mycroft?” before she is finished speaking, Sherlock is already in his room, yanking warm clothes out of his closet. John follows, curious. He leans against the door jamb, arms crossed. Sherlock is a whirlwind of energy, suddenly. There is a gaping suitcase on his bed, half full of jumpers and thick socks. He is throwing in trousers now and a pair of jeans.

John didn’t even know Sherlock possessed jeans. Right.

“—It won’t take more than a few hours, to be sure. Wind is negligible. I flew in, well, Alexander did, from Glasgow in less than two.” George is chatting away in pilot lingo at Sherlock, who seems to be taking all of it in, despite his obvious excitement. He is smashing a large file into the bag and zipping it up. George’s voice echoes in the loo as the detective snatches up his toothbrush and a canister of hair product before rushing back into the bedroom. He fires away a string of texts, having minimized Georgia’s face momentarily. He has dressed warmly in thick socks, dark jeans, and a long sleeved waffle-weave shirt in a dark olive drab. His eyes are frenetic.

“I am going to the hangar now. Get some rest, I will cook tonight. Love you,” he smiles at the screen, one of the rare genuine ones, and hangs up. He looks up at John with wild eyes. “I imagine you caught all that?”

John belly laughs and steps aside, walking into the sitting room. He is glad for his friend, and also happy that Sherlock didn’t take the bottle of leftover codeine pills that are still hiding in the toilet’s medicine cabinet. He’d found them earlier and was worried. “Yes, have a good trip. Are you flying?” he asks, genuinely in wonder.

“Yes, I am licensed to fly helicopters and small aircraft. Shall I text you when I arrive, then?” the detective is already slipping shoes over his long feet, the coat slung over his bag. He slides his mobile into his pocket and straightens and shrugs into a jumper—one of John’s older, more oversized knits. John nods in approval (of the statement, not the look) and can’t help but smile—he has never seen the detective in these kind of clothes—and makes to carry Sherlock’s bag downstairs. The detective goes around shutting off the lights and furnace, checking his experiments, and going back for a forgotten phone charger, before descending the stairs to where John is now sliding into his shooting jacket.

“I suppose we will see you in a week, then, in Norfolk? Bloody good to meet her, finally.”

“Mmm. Yes, in Norfolk. Look in on Mrs. Hudson before you come up, will you? She is meant to be heading to her sister’s but I think she has come down with a flu.” John nods and Sherlock grabs his bags. They go down the stairs together, but not before John locks the door to Baker Street and Sherlock scans the road for a taxi. He has spotted one and is flagging it down; they will share. John will want to see him off, as much as he can.

They slide into the cab with Sherlock’s bags, as he gives the address for the private hangar. Alexander, much to Sherlock’s dismay (he should be in Orkney with his ill wife, not tending to a man who can fly the plane, himself) is waiting in the G5 personally, to fly him north. John’s chest eases a little, though he is unsure why (subconsciously, he feels that Sherlock’s range of movement has not entirely returned and does not think that the detective should be flying an aeroplane, alone, at all, let alone into the bloody north pole). Sherlock is firing texts as fast as his thumbs will let him, until they arrive. He hands the cabbie some bills and turns to John.
“Give my love to your women,” he says, with a smirk, and slides out. His hair is billowing in the wind from the river’s mouth, just beyond the tarmac. The cabbie turns the car out slowly enough that John watches Sherlock show a badge to the guard at a lift-gate and walk in, nearing a small private jet parked to the left. A tall, waifish man of perhaps thirty exits, impeccably dressed, with short, strawberry-blond hair and a rather long nose. He pushes glasses up the bridge of said nose and extends a hand to Sherlock, taking his bag with a business-like, toothy smile.

Alexander.

John Watson has come to the steady and completely bone-deep realization that he bloody well hates tarmac goodbyes from this one, particular friend. But, he straightens in the seat and begins to reply to several texts from his wife. He will see his friend again, soon.

Sherlock is seated in the cockpit of the jet, next to Alexander, who is flying the aeroplane and regaling him with the details of Georgia’s surgery and recovery. He has been very careful in his wording; Sherlock does not know that she has been in Orkney the entire time, and probably will never know. At any rate, it is for Georgia to tell him, not Alex.

The detective is antsy; he does not like flying. He took three antihistamines as they took flight, and they are hitting him now. His leg is bouncing, bothering Alex, though he has enough decorum to never mention it to a man who is itching out of his skin to see his wife.

They arrive as estimated, just under three hours. They had caught a decent tailwind, according to Georgia’s assistant. Alexander lands the jet on the small strip laid out and ending in their pole barn several hundred yards to the side of the cottage. When they are stopped and ready to pull the jet into the barn-turned-hangar, Sherlock steps out with his bags, intent on getting to the house and to see George physically for the first time in nearly five years.

Halfway to the house, Sherlock decides to look around the land to better ignore the burning cold of his toes; he wishes he had brought a pair of lined snow boots instead of his usual soft leather brogues. Everything is covered in a thick blanket of crisp snow, his footprints are the first to crunch through in a while, going by the even layer. There are two horses in the smaller barn; he can see their steamy breath huffing out of the slatted walls. The dairy cows and most of the chickens will be in there, too. Sherlock’s heart twists as he sees the covered mounds that are to be his future apiary. He wonders if Mr. Higgins, the gamekeeper, is still in the old servant’s quarters, taking care of everything while they are gone (most of the time). He sees no smoke coming out of the chimney; hopefully Georgia has given him the weekend off.

Then again, Sherlock wonders, will Alexander be sticking around? There is a large SUV in the driveway; maybe he will leave in the morning?

As the detective enters the house, he taps off the accumulated snow on his shoes at the heavy daschund-shaped shoe brush on the back porch. The house is dark and silent; perhaps she took his request to heart and actually took a nap. Sherlock goes into the mudroom, leaving his wet shoes and socks there, hanging up his coat. He takes his bag into the hall though, walking through the familiar territory in the semi-dark without any trouble. He will pass the kitchen, back office, a small library, and the sitting room before coming to the stairs that will lead to the master bedroom and toilet. As he crosses the kitchen, though, he smells something wonderful (not napping after all, hmm?) and something is bubbling gently on the stovetop. A stew, and croissants are in the oven. He rolls his eyes and continues to the stairs, and up to the bedroom.
When he enters, he can see the light on in the loo. Setting down his bag, Sherlock goes to the
door, listening, and then tapping gently (*not that she can hear it, idiot. Out of habit*). She is in the
tub; he hears water slosh softly as she moves. He opens the door and steps into the rolling steam.

“Get in here, your majesty.” George has moved to sit with her legs going down the length of the
tub, but her torso twisted slightly to rest on the long side of the huge claw-foot. She must be
feeling quite a lot better. He says so, and she smiles beatific, straight rows of teeth gleaming back
at him in the low din. “How was your flight?” she extended a wet forearm, and Sherlock went to
his knees beside the tub. He took her hand and pressed it to his lips.

“Fine. Alex was telling me some more details about your surgery and recovery. How are you
feeling?” Sherlock folded his legs under the base of the tub and scooted a bit closer, resting his
chin on the ceramic next to hers.

“Oh, can’t complain. The incision has healed wonderfully. There is still a little tightness, but
nothing I can’t work through. I suppose Crowley is out there having a right fit? Poor thing’s
probably starved, sitting there watching me cut up that venison like he was.” Sherlock smiled,
despite his dislike of any dog (that isn’t Redbeard). Crowley was George’s service dog, a snotty
(*literally*) little solid black French bulldog. He listened for her heart and had so far saved her at
public events no less than four proven times when she would have otherwise collapsed or hither
head on a wall, stumbling.

“I didn’t see him, but I trust you are right. Are you nearly ready to get out? We could eat.”
Georgia nodded and strained forward and pressed a kiss to his lips. Sherlock returned the slow
press if lips but pulled back and pushed himself to standing.

“No, George. Come out, first.” He bent and offered a hand, reaching down further to pull the
stopper out of the drain. She stood, water sluicing down into the tub as he retrieved a towel. When
she was safely on dry land and patted down sufficiently, Sherlock took her in his arms and bent
down a bit. This, *this* was the kiss he’d been after for several years. Nothing could compare. The
most earnest lips that had ever kissed his own, certainly the only ones that had ever been honestly
interested, were pressing back now, as full and soft and pliant as the day they’d made the choice—
for it was a *choice*—to do this. As she nipped gently at his top lip, he suckled on her much fuller
bottom one. Try as he might, the detective was distracted; he was trying to tell himself not to
clutch her to him as though a man abandoned of thought. She would still be sore, surely. He still
tugged her tighter to him by hands on her back and arse, despite himself. But the towel began to
slip, and she was nearly undone, heart pounding as loud as his own (*dangerous*). He pulled back
and helped drag her towel back up a few inches.

“Should I go plate up your stew? You get dressed.” He pressed another kiss to her smiling lips
and left the room, trapping the roiling heat in behind him.
Chapter 7

Several months ago: London

There is a muted whimpering echoing throughout the dark room on screen. When the lights cut on, John’s heart stops for the umpteenth time and wiggles his headphones a little deeper into his ears.

Sherlock is restrained—nude and filthy—lengthwise to two bolts on the stone floor, one holding his bound wrists, the other his bound ankles. There is a clear hose duct-taped to his mouth and at the other end of the hose is a large funnel, lying on the floor now. Two men walk in, and one straddles Sherlock’s waist to sit on his stomach—holding him relatively still. As the one still standing—John remembers him as Andrzej—prepares something on a work table behind them, the one sitting on his emaciated friend starts running fingers all over his bare, bruised chest. Sherlock begins to squirm and is giving off bitten-out curses.

He hates being tickled.

The two are laughing at Sherlock’s weak struggle as Andrzej comes forward with what John recognizes as a petrol jug. His eyes go unbelievably wide as Andrzej tips the nozzle into the funnel connected to Sherlock’s mouth and pours in a large amount.

Sherlock immediately starts gagging, stomach reactively trying to vomit past the long tube that is partially in his throat, lodged well past his tonsils. They manage to get what John estimates as a cup of petrol into Sherlock before he manages to twist his head and vomit to the side.

They laugh, and do this over and over until Sherlock is limp and nearly (if not) unconscious on the floor beneath them. Andrzej tugs roughly at the plastic tubing and the tape rips off Sherlock’s face with an audible tearing sound, though no cry comes forth. The other one straightens and urinates on John’s friend’s prone form, chuckling darkly. He tucks his cock away and they leave, chattering to themselves, swinging the petrol jug like it’s just another Tuesday. The light is left on, and Sherlock is perfectly still.

This is not interrogation, this is humiliation and degradation; this is trying to break the Holmes brothers. Trying to get Mycroft to send in an army? What? John’s fists tremble at his side as he breathes for a moment, steadying for the next clip. Mycroft is not in the room, though the doctor suspects his movements are being monitored by the lady in the hall. He suppresses the need to get up and pace.

He raises the cursor to the next link and sits back.

He can never let his dearest friend go on a mission, alone, again.

Two months post-Hospital: London

Sherlock is sitting in a half-full waiting room for a dentist. One of John’s acquaintances. The soldier himself has just texted; the trains are running late, which means he likely dealt with a hypochondriac (one of many that frequents John, must be dealt with) which made him catch the later tube. (The doctor is, in fact, forcing himself to breathe his way calm though a crowded tube compartment with the unwashed masses to make it there in time). John Watson has been going to
every doctor’s visit and check-up he can manage to escape to since Sherlock was dispatched to his care from hospital. This is nothing new.

“Mr. Holmes,” the glass door to the reception window slides open and a woman hands him a clipboard of papers to fill out. John has just texted again (*Walking to ground level now*). He fills out the forms slowly with his arm, still in its 90-degree cast. The door opens as he sits; John walks in, exhales impatiently, and comes to sit next to the detective whose jaw *hurts*.

“Take anything today?” John asks instead of a greeting. He feels rushed, but is glad to be here. Hopefully Sherlock is getting the orthodontia off soon, and today’s trip will tell them more accurately when. The doctor’s eyes scan over Sherlock’s body, taking in casts and the crutches he has balanced on the wall behind him. His left arm is out of the support wrap; John’s eyebrows rise in silent praise that the detective bothered to actually put the sling on his right arm this morning, though it was most likely Mrs. Hudson who put it in him, and assumes he must be in more pain than he is letting John see.

Several minutes of near-silence pass, where Sherlock admits to taking half a codeine (he keeps wanting to try to talk, effectively causing the wiring and brackets to pull at his already-over-sore teeth) (it is perhaps harder than normal to take the codeine, as he has to jam it back in the small space of his missing adult molar and the broken part of his jawbone, but he will persevere in some things) and John frowns. The doctors he’s been seeing for pain management have switched him from liquid morphine to liquid codeine, finally to codeine tablets to reduce his intake. John has been there largely to monitor the drug use, but his taking it at all is so sporadic. He muses over days where his friend won’t take anything at all, lying on the sofa in a daze for hours, in contrast with stretching his lips around the neck of a bottle every three hours like clockwork. Sherlock is uncomfortable in the silence but focuses on his sore teeth instead of the screaming echoing forth from John’s mind.

Finally, they call him back, and John is at his heels. He will want to see the x-rays.

In the end, the braces and wiring do not get to come off for another two weeks. The hairline fractures at both condylar processes are still present. In fact, the wiring is tightened. Sherlock sets his teeth (as much as he can. *They ache*) and starts walking, hating his crutches more with every step. John follows, intent on a bit of lunch. They go to a nearby Thai spot where Sherlock can drink down a bowl of pho and some tea.

“Sorry mate, that didn’t quite work out how you’d wanted. I know you want them off.” Sherlock hums an assent and stirs chopsticks through the noodles he can’t slurp up.

*Irritating that this has become my modicum of speech. Hateful.*

“Still, two weeks isn’t all that bad. And that’s if you quit trying to talk all the bloody time. Text, or. I don’t know.” He breaks off to flick his fingers clumsily at Sherlock, who, despite himself, grins a little. He signs slowly back to his friend, and they carry on, giggling at John’s abortive sign language mixed with spoken words he doesn’t know.

*How did you learn?* John gives him a blank look and blinks, followed by wrinkling his brow, so Sherlock begins spelling with his fingers L-E-A-R-N.

“Ah. Ha, erm. Youtube, mostly.” John heaves a sigh and pats his pockets down for his mobile. He needs to get back to the surgery soon. John stares a little at his dearest person, noting the massive weight loss—Sherlock is down lower than the soldier has ever seen him. He can’t be over ten stone, which, coupled with his height and build, only makes him look even more unhealthy. His cheekbones are *gaunt*. The liquid diet has to go, as soon as possible. *Fatten you back up quick. Make a note to Hudders to start baking in bulk in two weeks.* He makes a mental note to take
Sherlock to his chosen tailor in the next week for a moral pick-me-up.

It is killing Sherlock to not have a power of his—speech—but it means the world that someone has bothered to learn something for solely his benefit. He stands, exits slightly behind John, and catches a cab. He will see John back to the clinic and take himself home, to brood.

And maybe take that other half a codeine. Ouch.

During the ride, John notices several texts pinging to his friend’s phone, and a certain lack of attention his way, but does not comment. He assumes (wrongly) that it is either Lestrade or—less likely—Mycroft. If it were important, Sherlock would say something.

Or—sign it.

Present: Orkney

Sherlock pads out into the cold kitchen the next morning, intent on making coffee. He is in only his boxer briefs (one leg riding up—annoying) and wishes he had brought a dressing gown from London. He is freezing in his skin.

He is just hitting brew and heading to turn up the massive Nordic iron heaters under the windows when a soft thing brushes his foot and he nearly jumps. Crowley, it appears, is ready for breakfast. The little French bulldog is sitting nicely by his bowl, waiting with his face wrinkles and his huge black eyes staring back at the detective imploringly. He has long since learned that whinging does him no good with a deaf mother. Sherlock scoops out a measuring cup of dry food and pours it into his bowl, grumbling. He does not like small dogs, but he and Crowley have never exactly got on.

As he leans against the countertop and inhales the brew, he checks his mobile for messages and e-mails. He has forty-three emails, seven of which will want immediate answers, and four texts; three from John, one from Lestrade.

Damnit. Forgot to text him upon arrival.

All is well, landed on-time last night. Will meet in Norfolk, Christmas Eve. SH

He hits send and sets his mobile down to charge on the countertop. Sherlock has not been in this cottage in years. He pokes around the kitchen, soon acquainting himself with the whereabouts of everything. Crowley munches on his kibble and watches with those huge orbs. The detective pads out into the sitting room. There is a small pile of blankets, neatly folded on the sofa. Alex left early this morning, then. Good. He decides to look around more, if only to warm himself.

The cottage is stone, hundreds of years old, a remnant of Scandinavian Vikings that explored these islands in ancient times. The old cobble floor gave way to wide, greyish salted-oak planks when George bought it, though the walls are still exposed rock in some areas. There are tapestries on most walls—despite them being covered (with the exception of an accent wall or two) with drywall and insulation—and huge, baleen-like heaters under every window, each of which is sealed off with shrink-film for winter and heavily covered to trap the little heat in. The doors are all heavy, dark wood. Everything here is old and dated, but it is pleasant. She has updated the décor though, to a soft, rustic-feel. Everything is greens, greys, or soft blues. Accents in navy and stark white and a deep chocolate brown. There is a heavy crown-moulding in every room, and a tall base board as well, in white. The sofas are of Ikea make, with fold-out foam beds and a chaise
on the end of the larger sofa that’s seat lifts. Sherlock opens the “hidden” compartment under the seat of the chaise and stows away the blankets and pillow. Crowley’s repugnant stare has followed him out to this room, where he sits and watches in the entrance between areas. Sherlock makes a point not to stare back, but can’t help thinking: *I liked Moose better* (The previous service animal, a hugely tall deerhound in softest grey that liked to lay on the then-chemist’s shoes, when they were in the same place).

In the back spanse of lawn are several buildings; one is the gamekeeper’s hut, a smaller stone cottage that is one large room and a smallish but working loo, put in by George. Previously it had only an outhouse, with chamber pots for winter of course. *Freezing your arse off to piss; how about not?* There are two barns, one for the jet and a small yacht (for island-hopping when the weather is able to keep itself up) and the other for livestock. There is a large shed for garden supplies next to the gamekeeper’s, and another smaller one for his own apiary nearer the hives.

Sherlock goes over to the sofa and pulls his (John’s) chunky, cable-knit jumper over his head. As he re-enters the huge U-shaped kitchen, his mobile buzzes. John has replied (*Sodding cock, you are. Good job then. See you next week*). He hears a rustling in the bedroom; George is getting up.

“Thanks for that. Didn’t even feel you get up.” He hums and sips his coffee. She crowds into him, tucking her wild head under his chin and sets her own mug behind his left elbow. After a few minutes, when coffee has taken over the stale taste in her mouth and his, she tips her face up for nibbling kisses along his jaw, then further as he bends his neck for a kiss, at first trying to hide his gusto and then deciding *why the hell not*, wrapping a long arm around her. Her ice-like fingers have crept under his jumper, searching for skin contact, and he flinches away from their burning chill.

Soon they have decided to cook something akin to breakfast, though it is nearly eleven o’clock. She fries up some bacon and he decorates sandwiches of a dense, home-made bread with pale tomatoes (off-season) and mayo.

“She is sleep-worn and mussed, but he has never seen anything more beautiful. There are pillow lines on her face, marring the freckles there. Her hair is down, red curls drifting around her waist, dressed in his long undershirt from the night before. The hem is brushing her thighs, she is so short. She seems to be ignorant of the cold, or is too cold herself to notice, though she has crammed thick, sherpa-lined socks on her feet. Crowley comes over and puts his foot on hers. She looks down, flicks her eyes to his empty bowl, spotting the crumbs, and looks back to Sherlock.

“Why does no one seem to trust me. Why would you not? How
could you not? He swallows down the nausea, because he thinks he knows the answer to that, and
stands back as she comes over with the bacon. They eat without appetite. Soon after, George
goes for a shower. As she nears the door, she asks him to join.

“Two minutes, start without me,” he mutters as he starts to ferry dishes to the sink.

They decide, after fingering scars they’ve not seen yet (she has so many questions about Krakow)
becomes too much to bear so soon back in each-other’s arms, that a bath seems more do-able.
Sherlock is at one end of the hugely deep basin, his long legs on either side of George’s slim hips. She
rests against the other end, her hair thrown over the side.

“I thought I’d die, not being able to soak after the surgery; it gets more irritating each time.” She
frowns down at her scar and treads water impatiently with loose fingers. He catches them in the
steam and keeps them.

“Come,” Sherlock opens his arms, thighs going a little wider under the water. She tugs a hair band
off her wrist and swiftly ties all that hair atop her head in a ragged bun and pitches forward, as if
this is what she has been waiting for. Her head is now buoyed on his chest, toes brushing his
ankles. Before long, she moves so she can read his lips better, sitting in the gap between his legs,
her knees drawn up and peeking out of the water’s edge.

“Liam. Do you remember our. Well. First time?” he smiles when he looks over to see her ears
have gone pink.

“Yes. You nearly ruined it. But I saved us, of course.” He fires a winning grin her way and wraps
his long fingers over the tops of her arms. She glares, but there is no venom in it.

Cambridge, several years ago:

Sherlock has never opened the street door to his flat so fast in his life. Georgia is pressed against
him, chest to thigh. Her tongue is snaking past his lips in a way that he can only describe as
“sinful.” They stumble (half-backward, at times) up two flights of stairs to his apartment’s door.
As soon as it is shut and locked, he submits to a wild animal gesture and scoops his hands under
her arse, pressing her to him then into the back of the door. She growls, his lower lip caught in
her teeth and her fingers clenching his curls. Her legs tighten around his hips and he shoves off
the door, looking in his mind’s eye for a more suitable place to put her down so that he can climb
on top.

He has never felt like this before, but he can’t entirely say he doesn’t like it. Going on the simple
fact that he is harder in his pants now than he has ever been in his life, he should say that he likes
it rather a lot, particularly when she starts popping the buttons of his shirt open and sliding her
cold hands inside. She thumbs a nipple and he drops her—and lands on top—on the sofa. He
quickly undoes the buttons at his wrists and shrugs the shirt onto the floor, coming down onto her
in a frenzy. She laughs at his pawing hands and then gasps as those long fingers probe under the
hem of her dress, seeking the waistband of her tights.

“Erm—Sher-” she gets out, but not before Sherlock’s mouth has covered hers again, groaning.
She is lost, fingers winding in his hair and clenching at the meaty muscle of his shoulders. He
shifts to smother her mouth again and their groins come into contact as he swings her up,
straddling his lap and tugging her hips close to his own. When she lands, her weight on the rigid
length of his clothed cock, he gasps into their wet kiss, lips sliding off hers briefly. It is enough to
jar her mind back online. She starts to stand, legs working backward, but his hands encircle her
waist as his eyes travel down, a small furrow deepening between them. He lets her slide off his
lap but keeps a hand clenched in his fingers. She flushes red and stares at a bite mark on the meat
of his right trapezius. He is out of breath, heaving, mouth red and hair a wreck and she feels more
ashamed than ever.

“Sherlock. I... you have to understand. I never expected...this.” A hand waves ambiguously between them. “If I knew your intentions before I was swept up by your. Chivalry... I would have warned you better. I. Am sorry. I’ll let myself out,” she tries to pull her hand from his jerkily, but he holds fast with his own. His eyes are flicking all over her form, taking in the small but rapidly deflating tenting of her dress at her groin. His jaw drops, but not out of surprise. She will not look directly at him, as mortified by herself as she is.

“I...am not surprised.” She chokes a little and tries again to twist her wrist out of his grip. He lets her this time, but stands to follow her. He will not back her into a corner, but she is going to hear him out, dammit. “You mistake me,” he says, standing between her and the door as she gathers her bag and coat. She is crying now, openly, and even more angry at herself for it. “I said I am not surprised, not that I cared. You are one of the only people I can stomach at all, why would I let something like someone’s sex get in the way of me liking them?” she crumples a little at that, and he brushes her bag and coat back to the floor.

“Do you mean that? I’m not a one-off?” she is crying again; he thumbs away her tears, stepping closer now.

“I think the concept of monogamy rather dictates that should not be the case, yes?” she nods, wide-eyed against his chest. “Well then. How about we take this down a notch and clean up a bit? I could use a shower now, to get all this mucus off me,” he chuckles, leaning back to see her face. She has calmed, considerably. She nods and he hums appreciatively, leading her into the toilet by the hand.

Several minutes (and more than a few exploratory gropings later) they are acceptably clean and ready to get dirty again. Sherlock has found during his own stimulation that he does enjoy prostate play, so he is old hands at slicking up his beautiful (she says so) fingers and sliding one in smoothly.

Before ten minutes is up he is watching the last of his long, slim cock sliding up into that tight-tight-tight heat as she rides him with enthusiasm. His first orgasm with another person is explosive, and she shivers around his tender length less than a minute later, his hand on her, rutting his softening member into her and working a rough thumb over the head of her small cock.

Before his limpness even slides out of her he has decided that he could never have another person, as long as she will take him.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

uhm...if you have PTSD or any history with it, you may want to skip this one. Its very violent, and rapey, and there is some emotional terrorism...2 Video clips/Krakow scenes, but a little fluffy George scene to make it better, maybe?
i am awful, sometimes.

Mountains of Carpathia: Near Krakow, a year gone:

Sherlock has descended into his mind palace. This is his only means of escape now.

In the real world, he is on his back, on the cold stone, though he scarcely feels is anymore. His arms are (mercifully) bound overhead instead of under his weight. His legs are pushed up to his chest. One of the various guardsmen have come to pay him a visit, and is thrusting into him with intent. Sherlock has learned to become numb to the more predictable torments; this, the constant nagging hunger. His head is swimming from dehydration. Distantly, he feels the guard straighten to let a large dollop of spit drop down to his hole and ease the way.

But Sherlock is midway through a jaunt in one of his favorite rooms. This one is hidden from the others, for various reasons. Least of all because if these kind of people found out, Sherlock isn’t sure what he—or Mycroft—might do.

This is George’s wing of the Mind Palace. There are so many rooms, built up over the years, but the first room on the left, one of the largest, is the best for calming him in stressful situations.

He is in the room where he keeps their more intimate times. One of his favorite things to do is sit and recall, with deceptive accuracy to his transport, the feeling of her skin on his. He doesn’t feel skin anymore. Not like he wants to—his captors are of course different. He doesn’t want their skin. John sometimes brushes his hands or bumps into him. Not that, though.

He has to be careful in this room when the men are “visiting” though. Once he had made the mistake of recalling her particular way of kissing and had developed an erection while one of the men had him gagging on their cock. He’d been harassed for days over it; they’d threatened to eviscerate him, cut off his bollocks, burn his genitals. He’d been beaten, badly, only to have Jozef come in and jerk him off.

Every time he came in their hands, he felt another little piece of himself leaving, until he was so sure there was nothing left. But it always happened again. The next day, and again the next.

The guard in his arse suddenly pulled out and dropped Sherlock’s legs, making him gasp with the pain of his bruised hips falling to unforgiving stone, and the sudden vacancy inside. But as his mouth opened, the man surged upward and thrust his cock in deep between cracked lips, sliding all the way until his bollocks pressed against Sherlock’s unshaven chin. Sherlock’s eyes flew open wide. He couldn’t breathe at all around the man’s girth. His throat worked, trying to push out the invasion, but the man only groaned, trying to bury himself deeper. Sherlock’s arms thrashed as much as they could; the man was sitting on his chest, knees on either side of Sherlock’s head, separating his arms out wide. He tried turning his head to no avail; the man was lodged deep. He kicked weakly but his broken legs were no use; he couldn’t lift them high enough to kick at the
man.

Just as the detective’s vision went cloudy and he started to pass out, the man withdrew and instinct to breathe kicked in. He let Sherlock gulp down two lungfuls of air and jammed his cock back in, just as deep. Sherlock heard and felt a loud pop in his jaw; he saw stars and a rush of pain overtook both sides of his face. The guard slid in a couple more times and came, staying deep as Sherlock gagged and was forced to swallow several times, his jaw clicking in his ears at the movement. As the guard stood and tucked himself away, he made a puzzled face down at the prone captive.

Sherlock had lost consciousness. His breath was coming in short gasps. It would not do to have killed their pet; the bosses would be angry. The assailant checked a little further and seemed to come to the (correct) conclusion that Sherlock’s lung had collapsed. He took out a slim blade from his pocket and felt for a space between ribs. In a quick motion he slid the blade in, puncturing Sherlock’s lung, and held it there at an angle as bubbling blood began to siphon out, allowing the lung to re-inflate.

Hours later, when he came-to, Sherlock was floating. They had drugged him, more than usual. There was a dull throb in his jaw and backside, but it was fairly easy to ignore. His side was on fire. Ignored. He’d not shut down his mind palace properly, and it was easy to enter in this state. George was still waiting in the room with all her lovely skin, and he was eager.

George’s wing was reminiscent of old regency halls, with dark wood everything and tiffany blue walls and ancient paintings on every surface of those walls. It looked like the nest of a magpie, if he was honest. There were books and baubles and treats from nearly every country in the world. There were ancient maps and scrolls crammed into cubbies here and there. There was Moose, the huge Scottish deerhound, lounging in the window seat of the bedroom, in a sun-spot. And George herself, standing by the large pintucked bed in a thin green and blue oriental silk dressing gown. Her tiny, shell pink nipples were just visible as the opening in the gown swayed when she turned to face him. He closed the door and approached, and she grinned triumphant.

Georgia had a particular way of stealing his breath away when she kissed him. He wanted to drown in it. She would let him have her bottom lip, much fuller than the top, with a coy pout. And while he was suitably distracted, pulling at it with his tongue and teeth, she would capture his upper lip. With her tongue she would trace the dip of his cupid’s bow, dragging her bottom teeth across the surface behind as she lifted off with light suction. Just the tip of her own bottom lip would brush after, leaving a soothing balm to the lightly scraped flesh. His eyes were the first to give in, drooping in a drunken state. She would continue, leaving behind little nips and scrapes of teeth after each deep plunder of tongues, her slim fingers carding through his curls until his mouth was as red and swollen as her own, and his body pliant as ever to her whim. He would run his long fingers over her soft, perfect skin, needing the contact, a grounding line for his haywire mind. Crushing her to him was not always an option (the surgery seam on her chest—even in here he was practical at times), but if he felt the push of a small, rapidly filling cock on his belly—well, he couldn’t always help himself.

Even now, in his mind and outside of it, he could feel the dull throb of an erection starting to form. Reluctantly, he backed out of his mind palace and opted for the sensation of floating high on his meagre dose of heroin.

He would give up everything he had left in this world to see her again. He would retire, give up the Work. Move to their cottage. Just for one more turn in her arms. A small spark of hope was set off deep. Determination.

He would live through this.
Orkney: Present

Sherlock awoke to a soft snuffling against his thigh. At first assuming it was the dog, he began to roll over, only to be stopped by an indignant squawk and tinkling laughter. George had snuck herself out from under his arm and burrowed under the duvet to awaken him with a lazy blow job. He lifted the duvet and peered down at her with bleary, sleep-filled eyes. He rubbed at his face with one hand and jumped as her tongue snuck out over his thigh where she lay down between those long, slim legs.

“Darling,” he tapped at her shoulder and indicated she look at him. “You don’t need to do this,” he felt bad, in a way, because of her recent surgery and heart medications, she could not sustain an erection, nor orgasm properly.

“Are you telling me no? Because I want to, badly, but I would respect it if you said no.” she stayed where she was and her small pink tongue snaked over his inner thigh again, higher this time, making him hiss. His cock throbbed alongside her cheek. He nodded, teeth clenched. Go ahead.

Before his head fell back on the pillows her mouth had closed over his glans and he jumped. He’d not had a mouth on him since the last time he’s seen her, at Baker Street some mo— oh! His leg was trembling, like a dog getting its ear scratched just so.

George, for her part, missed this terribly. She was a giving lover, and not being able to come herself would not put a damper on this fact. She threw the duvet up and off of her head and let Sherlock snake his long fingers into her hair, which she’d let down. She was lapping at the full length now, not entirely able to get the whole of his long, slender cock in her mouth at once. He was shaking, stomach clenching and bollocks drawn up within minutes, yet no orgasm was forthcoming. She popped off, praising him for his hardness, the dull throb against her tongue, knowing full well the lewdness was not a turn-off for her beautiful lover. Quite the opposite, he moaned louder and thrust up a bit, cock glancing off her chin.

“I’ve always loved the fact you were cut,” she grumbled, tonguing at his slit and frenulum in turns, mouthing the faint scar from his circumcision, making his hips twitch in abortive thrusts. He clenched his fists in the sheets and let out a desperate groan that was so low it ended in a whine. She felt the vibration from his chest on her tongue and sucked him down, lips meeting fist where her mouth couldn’t reach.

Georgia scooted lower, sucking both of his (trimmed!) testicles into her mouth at once, rolling them with her hot tongue before letting one slide out at a time and blowing on them softly, watching the skin wrinkle backup from cold. He howled, cock dripping, but didn’t come. He was so close. So George moved further south with her wicked tongue, lapping over his soft perineum and then lower, to his entrance as her hand pumped his cock lazily, just like he preferred, with a twist at the tip.

She hadn’t forgotten a second of this. Of making her dearest person in the world come undone in minutes. She couldn’t hear him, but she felt him vibrating under her mouth, wriggling, and it spurred her on.

As she lapped at his hole, pressing lightly with a thumb and then tongue, his stomach juddered. One, two, three more swipes and a pointed jab in and he was coming, hard, all over his stomach, head thrown back, growling like a beast in rut.
Once he’d stopped spurting and lay there boneless, ethereal in the morning light, she slid off the bed and retrieved a hot, damp flannel to wipe them off a bit. “Wow, love. Was that the first time since—well.”

“Your last layover?” he said,

“Europe?” she said, at the same time, recalling very different things.

“Oh. Yes,” he commented, done with the thought already. She felt the shift and let the flannel drop, sliding back in the bed and tugging the eiderdown back up over them. The air was cold this morning.

“You’re sure?” he asked quietly, motioning down between them where her thigh was draped over his hip again. He clasped her to him, tightly.

“Nah, the body’s not cooperating. Took my meds just an hour ago, now. Maybe tonight.” He hummed, a soft vibration under her cheek, and settled. The jet needed refueling for their flight to Norfolk in a few hours.

But both were content to lay in a bit longer, relishing in the connection skin-contact gives like no other.

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London: Baker Street, just out of Hospital:

John is breathing heavily, hands fisted in the material covering his thighs. He is trying not to tear up; the sound of him losing it would wake Sherlock from his shallow-drugged slumber beside him. And the poor man, god knows, needs his sleep. Now more than ever.

Sherlock has been discharged into John’s care at home for little more than a week. Getting him up the stairs had been murder, but no worse than trying to bed-bathe a squirming and uncooperative thirtysomething man with a flannel every two days. Sherlock is making John both very pleased (because he can be here, for this. It’s important that he is) and very displeased that he chose to follow the medical profession (because it was expected of him to look in on Sherlock, which is fine, yes, fine! But the man is working on his last nerve).

Angry tears are brimming as he looks down to his left. Sherlock is topless; he has been all week. It’s easier this way; they don’t have to flounder at sitting him up several times a day and tug off a shirt for checking scabs and dressing incisions. Or Sherlock’s least favorite: changing his colostomy bag.

John, for his part, has been tastefully clinical about all of this in Sherlock’s presence. He’s never seen the detective so flighty and anxious, let alone helpless. He is roughly seventy percent casts and plasters and dressings right now. Three limbs in hard casts, one in a wrap. Jaw wired shut, and bruises everywhere else. At least his eyes are starting to open from their swollen blackness. There is a healing hole in his throat from the trach they’d had to jam in nearly three weeks ago when he’d suddenly stopped breathing on his own. His cheekbones and eye sockets are yellowing now from their original mottled browns and purples. His hair is still close-shorn, hospital-shaven in haste to paint antibiotics over the numerous cuts and cigarette burns. There are places that will never grow back, but the detective’s penchant for keeping it long will cover the worst of the patches.

But the colostomy bag is Sherlock’s worst nightmare. He’d never even thought about the
possibility of having to leave the hospital with it until they checked, the day before his release, and
determined that the damaged sustained to his rectum was still bad enough, still raw enough that
they had to keep the re-routing of his bodily waste to avoid sepsis. Which would be angering
enough as it is, except that it sits below his ribs, on the right side. And he can’t reach it, with his
right arm in a 90 degree angled cast and his left wrist unable to bend, let alone that far. His
dexterity has also been compromised from the hypothermia. So, John has to do it. And John has
been a perfect angel about it, not hovering awkwardly, but refusing to leave the room beyond long
enough to use the loo himself, or fetch snacks and drinks and medicines. If he sits in the living
room while Sherlock naps, he leaves the door open and uses no sound, ever vigilant.

The meds are also terrible, but for the simple reason that they are liquids because of his jaw. And
they taste horrible. But they work quickly, which the detective appreciates.

John swipes at his face and forces his breathing to slow. He has been staring at Sherlock’s prone
form beside him for several minutes. Eyes tracing over every sustained bit of damage, every open
wound. The cigarette burns on his ribs he hasn’t seen in the videos, yet. He hopes that man burned
alive, in his head. The guilt, particularly what he feels himself over not being there for his best
friend, is irrational. John knows this. But it’s still there, and that knowledge won’t keep it from
cropping up at unwelcome times. So he waits for these quiet times, when Sherlock’s long, hard-
cast white thigh is pressed to his own under the duvet and his soft snores—dragged though wiring
and clenched teeth—are the only sound in the otherwise perfectly silent flat, to have his little melt-
downs. And hopes Sherlock can’t—what? Smell the tears on him, when he wakes the detective
for his next round of meds in the middle of the night.

Hours later, Sherlock jolts awake with a shout. He’s sweating though the top sheet and quilt, right
hand floundering, claw-like, in the ether. Someone grabs it and another hand lands on his
forehead. The detective blinks several times, ribs screaming from his tearing breath and fear-tensed
muscles. John’s voice muddles through the fog of thoughts.

“Sherlock! Come back, come back to me, mate. It’s John, you know it is.” His voice is strained
but even, low. Sherlock blinks some more and forces himself to swallow. He doesn’t want to
experience vomiting with his teeth clamped shut. He delicately squeezes John’s fingers and lets
out a gust of air he hadn’t realized he was holding. All his bandaged limbs are taut, nervous
system in fight or flight, and suddenly he is completely exhausted. He’d be asleep again already if
not for the enormous amount of pain he is in. A whine slips out, despite his attempt to choke it
back with the tears he’s suppressing. He crushes John’s fingers and tries to relax each muscle back
into the mattress. The warmth of someone he trusts so close helps tremendously.

John stretches across the bed to (what has this week become) his table, not letting go of Sherlock’s
hand (appreciated, beyond words). He remembers wishing he’d had a friend to be there when he
was getting his first post-release PTSD nightmares, and how a hand in his own would have helped
enormously. For what it’s worth, Sherlock keeps it as John pours his pain-relievers down his
throat and slips a straw in the side of his cheek, letting the younger man sip at it until he lays his
wild head back.

“Where are we?” John asks, quiet. It’s a basic post-night-terror question, grounding. Sherlock
sighs and struggles to roll onto his side. John tugs at him with their conjoined hands and sticks a
pillow under his casts, supporting the top leg and his arm decently well.

“Baker Street. John. It’s okay. I worked it out quickly enough.” Sherlock sucks spit back in his
mouth, swallowing in disgust. ”The...smells." he waves his left hand around vaguely. "Warmth."

“Anything in particular?” John is imagining a particular rape, or beating. He isn’t entirely wrong;
he just hasn’t seen this video clip yet.
London: three months after release from hospital:

John is sat in the Diogenes Club. Once again, Mycroft has leant him the space and video clips, along with a pair of in-ear headphones while he attends various meetings and what-not. John didn’t ask. The soldier has worked his way through five videos today, and is about to finish up and go home (Mary has been texting; she wants out of her turn with watching Sherlock, and to go out without little Willa. Understandable) when one thumbnail catches his eye. It’s in the last row, and it is completely black, unlike the low-light images of the others. When he clicks on it, the whole screen goes pitch-black, except one tiny pinprick of light in the corner. He hits play and screws his earbuds back in.

Heavy, panicked breathing is all he can hear. For several minutes, there is warbling, indistinct chatter and thumping that John rightly assumes is footsteps. The breathing stops abruptly and becomes a low whine. John suddenly realizes it is Sherlock making the noise. He is watching the video that regularly gives his friend the worst night terrors.

There is a harsh grinding and splitting, and the lid to a very thin, cramped coffin is wrenched open. John realizes with horror that the camera has been affixed to the lid and he has been directly in Sherlock’s face the entire time. Two meaty hands go past the angle and drag Sherlock’s emaciated body out of the prison, letting him go on wobbly feet. One man adjusts the camera-lid so that John can now see the whole room. He makes a kissing face at the camera and rounds on Sherlock, kicking the back of one knee so he falls to the stone floor in a heap. There are tear-tracks through the muck going down that long face, one hand flying up to shield it as the man (it's Andrzej) comes closer and fists a hand in his curls. Sherlock’s head is wrenched back with a squawk from him and both hands go flying, aiming for support as Andrzej seems intent on taking him to the ground.

John is mystified momentarily at Sherlock’s body. He has, unfortunately, seen photos of Holocaust victims that looked better. His man is covered in sores and scrape-wounds; one arm hangs awkwardly at his side, and his weight is largely on one leg. He keeps his head down, but John can see the bruising and cuts a mile away. His weight is appalling; John has always thought Sherlock was lean, bony even. But this is… gut-wrenching. The doctor fancies he can see every exposable bone on his friend, his stomach has gone concave, his once cheeky arse slid into thigh meat. There isn’t a single extra calorie of fat on the man anymore, he is a mound of matted curls, bones, and raw skin.

They don’t bother so much with tying Sherlock up anymore. He’s been there for nearly four months now, and he has learned not to run or fight back. Although they make him hurt no matter what, the near-escapes are worse. They hurt his soul.

Andrzej begins to unzip his fly, coming down on one knee and batting Sherlock’s leg aside. John strains to hear his friend begging, one hand floating up mid-air in a plea.

“Proszę pana. Pozwolić mi korzystać usta zamiast. Będę dobry.” Sherlock is visibly terrified, but desperately needs them to leave his arse alone before it’s ruined. He begs them to use his mouth, instead. John scrunches his face and tries to search for context clues without Mycroft here to translate.

“Oh, now you want to play sweet with me, slut? We do in English, for your boyfriend. He’s no good with languages, yes?” Sherlock shakes his head and lays there, too scared to move. “I am sure he’s watching these, you know. All of them. How your arse stretches for us so easy, how you cry and squirm. But what, you want to suck my cock now?” he puts a hand over himself and tugs,
cackling. Andrzej shrugs and pulls Sherlock into a kneeling position, tugging his cock all the way out of his flies. He slaps Sherlock with it a few times, dragging the tip through the tear-tracks that line that mottled face. “You open up and show me how you want it, with enthusiasm, yes?” Sherlock drops his mouth open and nods, shuffling closer and closing his mouth over the man. After a few licks, Andrzej pulls back and clamps a hand over Sherlock’s throat. John’s fist clenches as the man wrenches his friend up and off-balance, hovering off his knees, weight on his captor’s grip of his neck.

“I said with enthusiasm, cocksucker. You want me to get them all in here, we all bugger you raw and then I show you who the real terror is here?” by the end he is shouting and shaking Sherlock by his neck; the detective has gone wide-eyed and silent. John isn’t sure he’s breathing. “Odpowiedz mi!” the man screams, flinging Sherlock to the ground, hard.

“No!” Sherlock cries, tears running down his face anew. He’s so dehydrated, it’s a wonder he has any at all. “Prosić!” Andrzej is bearing down on him, standing above, menacing. Sherlock won’t look at him, but is watching warily for an attack. He opts to go still.

“Maybe I make true on my offer. I cut this off,” he clenches Sherlock’s withered cock in his fist, hard enough to make the younger man scream and bat at it with his one good hand. Andrzej takes that hand and places it under his boot, bearing his weight down to keep it trapped there. Sherlock cries out, eyes like saucers. “You don’t need it, you’re a hole, only. But you forget one half of promise, yes?” He taps Sherlock’s forehead hard a few times. “Gotta get rid of that big ol’ brain, don’t we? Can’t have you be a good whore gift for my rivals to sell if you’re thinking all the time, eh?” Sherlock screams and tries to fight, to get away and hide. John’s jaw drops, he has never seen anything so primal in his friend.

“So, cocksucker. You show me that you want it, that fear is making you act correctly, for once. Or I cut off your cock, have my soldiers stick an ice-pick through your eye and scramble that big brain of yours, and sell you to a whore house. You won’t be able to wipe the cum off your face, you’ll be so stupid.” Your choice.” Andrzej steps back and waits as Sherlock scrambles onto his knees, the terror so pure its unnerving. He opens his mouth, breathing harshly, and shuffles forward on his knees.

John watches in abject horror as Sherlock proceeds to deep-throat the man’s cock like his ride to freedom was on the other end, swallowing around the head and not even using his hands. Within minutes, Andrzej comes, hands fistied in the back of Sherlock’s curls so he can come in his throat. As soon as he is done and pulls back, Sherlock is lapping at his softening member like a puppy, chasing it, trying so desperately to please. John feels tears burning his eyes as Andrzej scoffs and pets at his head.

The video closes with the huge Pole bodily shoving Sherlock back into the coffin and slamming the lid closed on his screaming, pleading face, tears and snot and come staining it, and John dry-heaves into the rubbish bin a few times before he feels he can even pull the earbuds out and stand. He wipes his hands on his thighs, trying to forget the look of pure terror on his best friend’s face, and finds that he only wants to get home and check on him faster.

The next films will be worse, he reasons. They can’t get better after that.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Christmas at the Holmes' house

Chapter Notes

forgive the lapse in update time, i am flipping a house (to live in) that apparently housed a hoarder. it’s taking up all of my off days. hope this is adequately fluff-enough to get the stench of all that violence of the last several chapters off the back of your tongue.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

En route to Norfolk: the Holmeses

“I’ve been thinking of selling the house. Maybe buying again, further south. What do you think?” George tilts her fiery head to catch sight of Sherlock, to her left in the tiny cockpit. He is dry-mouthed from the motion-sickness tablets and squinting in the cold light of the sun. They are ten minutes from landing the small passenger aeroplane in his family’s side-plot of land.

He frowns.

“Why on earth would you do that?” Because she wants to retire fully soon, and you'll never go that far north. Not and be happy. She is silent for a few whole minutes, chewing on her lip. Despite the rush of wind, Sherlock fancies he can hear her pacemaker’s slip-tick. She tucks a long line of hair behind her ear and he watches the words tumble out, imagining if he were the deaf one, for just a moment.

It is a heady distraction from the lowering of the plane and the skyrocketing of his blood pressure.

“I’ve just…been thinking. Maybe the cold isn’t good for my heart, maybe...” she huffs and the plane lowers over a thousand metres. “You’d be happier, with London closer. John, and.” She brings the craft further down, narrowing in on a small stripe of land to the far left of the house. They thump down gently and coast a bit before dragging to a halt. “I don’t yet know for sure. But think on it.” She grabs the dog and a small bag (she knows struggling to carry another one will upset him further) and slides out of the aeroplane.

Mummy Holmes is already rushing out of the door, apron flapping, to greet them. Sherlock grits his teeth and steps out, kit bags in hand. His father is standing back, on the porch waiting. Smiling, hands in his pockets. George sets Crowley down and opens her arms for a gentle but firm hug. Sherlock accepts two cheek kisses and trods after the women into the house, breath huffing in the freezing air.

He is due to venture out and fetch John and his women from the train station in King’s Lynn in a
few hours.

Sherlock is at the huge table in the kitchen, methodically peeling carrots and potatoes for dinner. Mummy and George have been talking intermittently, but mummy has disappeared down the hall with a cuppa for Dad in his study.

George is singing, the first he has heard in years, and he is loathe to interrupt her.

Say you'll love me every waking moment

Turn my head with talk of summer time

Say you need me with you now and always

Promise me that all you say is true

That's all I ask of you

He is quiet, listening and hoping that Mummy won’t interfere. It’s good that her diaphragm is healed enough to sing, to hit those bone-chilling notes he loves. When he hears his mother padding back toward the kitchen, and hears her pause in the doorway, behind Georgia’s back, he knows that the night will end with his violin and her voice in front of the fire. They can never refuse if she’s feeling well.

He suddenly realizes that Georgia is trying to goad him into a duet, and he refuses to sing. He shakes his head, focusing back on the potatoes. She continues with a pout.

All I want is freedom

A world with no more night

And you, always beside me

To hold me and to hide me

Say you'll share with me one love, one lifetime

Say the word and I will follow you

Share each day with me, each night, each morning
Sherlock looks up to see her waiting. In a fit of sentiment, he says, “You know I do.” And she grins down into the dough she’s kneading. They both notice a shadow in the hall and she continues, humming quietly. Sherlock glances up as his mother comes in, throwing the cubed-up remains of three potatoes into his provided pot.

Mummy eyes him silently and he nods. She comes in and takes the kneaded roll dough from Georgia, telling her to go into the sitting room with daddy and rest. (She shouldn’t have been kneading dough at all, but she was already elbows-deep before either of them realized). They both know she must be feeling the strain, as she takes a mug and obeys. Crowley clacks along after her on the wood floor, his black wrinkles swaying, ever vigilant.

Sherlock sticks his tongue out at the dog and checks his mobile. It’s time to go; John’s train will be in the station soon; he has just enough time to enjoy a few cigarettes in the car before he is cut off for the weekend. As he stands and takes leave of his mother (stealing the keys to her Range Rover) he wonders aloud if Mycroft is coming this year.

“Ach, you know him. He’ll say no and then turn up just in time for lunch tomorrow.” She shrugs, but admits that he’s said he is coming. Sherlock grunts, straightens, and dons his coat and boots.

He arrives in King’s Lynn in short order with no issue, and a fair few stubbed fags tossed into the snow. The Watson’s train has pulled into the station; he can see the steam rolling above the roof of the station. The man himself is standing right inside the platform, tastefully to the side, with the baby on his hip and Mary sorting through a bag at his feet. He is looking around, and pulls out his mobile. For me, Idiot.

He advances before John can call, catching the soldier’s eye. He stoops and picks up a bag in greeting, nodding his hello to Mary and accepting a shy coo from Willa. They brace for the tundra outside and make their way to the car.

“So how did it go?” John asks, in the front seat with Sherlock. He has never seen the detective bearded. The ginger scruff that coats his chin is...endearing. Like he didn’t quite mean to grow it. Sherlock eyes him from the side and cocks a slanted grin his way. He scrubs a handover said chin and sighs. “Is she feeling well...healing?”

“Yes, yes. She’s doing just fine, considering. She made the rolls tonight.” John pauses before his eyebrows shoot up. “Yes. Kneading. Without consent, by the way. She just handed me a bag of potatoes and sat down to it.”

“So she’s uh. Feeling lively then.” John blushes in the (thankfully) dark. Sherlock does not take the bait, but is smiling thinly himself, wondering at John’s green-tinged tone.

“You’ll find, I think, that not much gets her down. She really only has the one weakness, if you want to call it that.”

But he decides to leave out which that is. That story (and explanation, if it needs one) can be had a different day, when John has fallen for her. Just like everyone else does.
When they arrive at the house, Sherlock helps John take the bags up to a spare room while Mary and the baby talk with Mummy in the kitchen. Georgia is still not to be seen, and Sherlock takes a roundabout way back to the women, by way of the living room.

His wife is asleep, her head knocked back on the sofa, mouth agape. Daddy is not faring much better, a few feet away in his armchair. John is close behind him, he knows, so he taps at her hand until she stirs. “George. Everyone is here.”

The little fiend is up like a shot, on her feet and craning her neck around her husband to see the shorter man behind him as John enters the room, tugging at his cardigan hem. Sherlock huffs a laugh and side-steps out from between them.

“John, this is Georgia. My wife.” John (barely) remembers to close his hanging mouth and steps forward, reaching a hand out.

“Hi, I’m. Well. Nice to finally meet you, Georgia.” She takes his hand, pumping it delicately. “Glad to see you in person, and that you felt well enough to come.”

“Well, John. When I heard there’d be a doctor in the house…” Sherlock gets to a point where his teeth are rotting from the conversation and he nudges them into the kitchen to babble with the other women. His hand is on George’s lower back, guiding gently when he suddenly feels her tense stiff as aboard. Alarmed, he looks down in time to see her eyes darting away from Mary and back to John, controlling her features in a carefully schooled move.

He looks over at the blonde, helping Mummy set out place settings, and instantly knows…knows that his wife knows everything about the woman’s past.

She knows A.G.R.A.

Chapter End Notes

short n’ sweet, because my last bitter/vile post got no feedback. hope you like this one better, ladies n gents. tell me.
*in case you didn't recognize it, the song George sings is from Phantom of the Opera*
Chapter Summary

George/Sherlock flashback; Christmas Eve dinner; AGRA

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Cambridge, several years ago:

The sex is rarely awkward; not since that first fateful night. So when George finally relents and lets Sherlock sink his beautiful mouth down around her, it can only be described as “earth-shattering” to them both.

They are in bed, and the windows are rattling from a thunderous storm. It has been a few weeks since their debut into such activities, and yet, Sherlock knows there can be nothing organically better in this world. He is on his belly, long cock smashed into the mattress beneath him. His shoulders bear the weight of slim thighs as he mouths at a pretty, cut, rather small cock and tight bollocks. Both fit rather nicely in his mouth if he stretches it a bit. He likes that she is perfectly hairless here, and exemplifies this by trailing an adventurous tongue back to the soft, tight opening he has come to adore quite thoroughly.

Above him, Georgia’s mouth is open in a perfect O of surprise and pleasure. She is young enough to have not had many experiences before this, and not altogether good ones, anyway.

But that is a tragedy perhaps better left for another time.

“Sh-Sherlock, darling, agh!” she fists a hand in his curls as he mouths his way back up, tongue dragging slow over the bollocks that barely protrude from her pubis, up the underside of her cock.

“Hmm?” he is enjoying himself, more than he thought possible with another human, especially outside of a logical setting. He trails long fingers over her hole, teasing. Wanting, waiting.

George can hear the blood rushing in her ears, and thinks nothing of it. Lust, and a bloody good tongue. She drops her knees open and shoves a depleted bottle of lubricant between them. Sherlock bites at her thigh, licking over the teeth-marks as he shoves up onto his knees and uncaps the bottle with a snikt. Because of their rather obvious height difference, he lifts her hips and shoves a pillow underneath before smearing lube over her twitching hole. Anticipatory. Marvelous; she lets me so close.

She makes small demands, tugging at his shoulders or hair until he leans up and over, kissing her into distraction, fingers pumping delicately in and out; hypnotic. Before he is finished, his mouth is on her again, edging twice before she is nearly screaming at him to “get it inside already, you tit!” hands clawing at the sheets and his skin, without remorse.

He hopes he can see the marks tomorrow. Perhaps add some more.
When she really falls apart, is putty in his hands, is when he is sunk in to the hilt of his long, slender member, driving with short, abortive thrusts, and his thumb is working rough over the head of her. And George comes nearly instantly, breath caught in her throat, back arched to the ceiling.

It’s this frozen moment, when she is coming so hard her vision whites-out for a few seconds, that she feels the wrong inside her chest. Something is burning, clawing at her, and before she can suck in a breath, her veins are bursting, lungs on fire. She can’t inhale, and it ratchets her heart rate up higher until it too freezes in her chest. Her arms are numb; she has no way to alert him.

And Sherlock, bless him, is seeking afterglow kisses against her clavicles when he senses something is wrong. George feels him rear back, stick two fingers to her throat, and start yelling, pressing down in chest compressions, trying to get a response. He is panicking, but thinks enough to grab at his mobile and dial 999.

She is breathing by the time a bus arrives, and Sherlock has put a nightgown on her, trousers on himself, and an open shirt. He is pale and barefoot, she can see, though the EMTs are rushing around. They are flashing lights in her eyes and poking things in her arms, and her eyelids are so heavy; and she is lost.

When she wakes again, her chest hurts. Her limbs are heavy. But she manages to crack her eyes open, only to be greeted with a blinding overhead light and the sharp smell of iodine solution. A steady beep is to her left, a burning in her right hand the sign of a hastily placed cannula. Sherlock is to her right, pale, eyes sunken. Hastily dressed and visibly upset. He is eyeing her with wide eyes, fearful. Her throat is too dry to speak; she tries to swallow and flops her hand closest to him onto its back. A clear offering for reconnection. He lays his fingers in her palm and clears his throat, sitting forward.

“Erm. The doctor. He’s. He said that you had a heart-attack. That it’s not the first time, going by your records.” He is hurt, angry. But concerned. “Why haven’t you ever told me you were so sick?”

She eyes the water jug next to them and he pours some into her hospital mug, slipping the straw in her mouth. While she sips, she notices her open chart on his crossed legs. He knows everything to date, then.

“It’s not simple, but basically I didn’t want you to be concerned. Or, rather, I didn’t think it would happen again in the time we were to be together. I don’t want a pity fuck, or a short-term boyfriend. I wanted…I need things to be genuine. So I didn’t tell you about the lupus. Or the damaged heart valve because of the lupus. If you can’t handle a transgender, dying girlfriend, then I understand. And you can be on your way. But I needed it to be real while it lasted.” She is shocked at how calm she can be for this, despite how it’s wrenching her heart out, anew. But instead of sighing or sitting back like she expects him to, Sherlock simply pitches forward and plants a kiss on her sweaty temple. He squeezes her fingers and holds them.

“What did he say about the sex?” she asks, quietly. Sherlock snorts and finally relaxes into the chair.

“He said your new medication is likely to cause issues with getting or sustaining an erection, but that you should be able to orgasm several hours into taking it. As in, before the next dose. But if you feel chest pain at all in the day to avoid ‘ratcheting up your heart rate.’” He smiles at her groan, a little sadly. “Georgia.” He squeezes her fingers and waits until her eyes are back on him. “I want you to know that, other than my concern for your safety, I don’t care. It’s so rare for me to like someone. I’m not willing to give up, to let you go, until you decide that I’m not worth it. Your health and happiness are paramount. I hope you understand that.”
Georgia goes a little quiet after that. And if she swoons a little, it is good that she’s already in hospital.

Norfolk: Present

Georgia had fallen in love with the baby the minute she was presented. The two are now in the floor of the sitting room jabbering back and forth (it was deemed unwise for her to pick the infant up, of course). George is crooning Disney songs at Willa for her great amusement. To the untrained eye, it looks as though all tension has bled from the woman’s body.

Lucky for most, Sherlock’s eye is far from untrained.

In the midst of all their greetings, Mycroft blew in from god-knows-where with a torrent of misty snow at his heels. He is warming in front of the fire (with the abominable Crowley lounging on his lap) on the sofa next to Sherlock and across from John, who are all discussing a fat lot of nothing while the two Holmeses try not to stare too hard at Georgia’s obvious (to them only) anxiety.

Sherlock wants to get her alone and calm before gently interrogating. Mycroft wants to keep her calm so she isn’t put at risk by being outed to a former killer. All evidence currently suggests that Mary does not know Georgia’s face, at least. All they can do is hold their breath for a few days and hope they don’t get snowed in.

Mummy and Mary send Dad in from the kitchen to announce that the food is ready. John scoops up the baby and Sherlock helps George to her feet for the trip to the dining room. He signs at her abortively, questioning, but is dismissed with an underhanded ‘later’ that does not go unseen by the elder Holmes.

They dine, with George sitting at one corner of the table, her eyes lowered but attentive to the far corner where Mary sits, feeding little Willa. Her heart aches, but not for the usual pain as much for the concern she now harbours for an innocent life caught up in the claws of a vicious sociopath once known to her as Alexandra Gretchen Reyes-Alcott.

To her right, Sherlock is straight-backed and silent. On the one side he is desperate for news and information on someone he will never see as a direct enemy. He wonders what other truth George can behold; even to his eyes, the information on the flash drive (of course he had looked) he and John were given seemed heavily edited and combed-through. Exactly the amount of misdeeds that John would be able to overlook. And lo’, it had worked in her favour.

Mycroft is talking to John amiably about a recent cricket match; the only sport aside from the occasional horse race in Ascot that the British government pays any mind to. He munches through a second roll (after all, his favourite sister-in-law made them) and sits back, suitably full. John shifts his attention to asking Sherlock about a case Greg had asked about just before the detective had skipped town, but he will be disappointed; Sherlock turned it down. They argue pettily for a brief moment before George coughs roughly into her fist and excuses herself from the table, hand holding her chest.

Of course, Sherlock follows.
When Mycroft slips into his little brother’s room several minutes later it is to find the younger Holmes on the floor between George’s knees at the edge of the bed; the two are signing rapidly back and forth.

--who she is? Really?

Ex-CIA, special task force of spies for the government. Used to infiltrate, expose, and kill if necessary. Sherlock, I KNOW she has killed no less than ninety people. I’ve seen her reports. Hell, I’ve had to sign a few.

--But does she know your face? Or name?

No, I can’t imagine she would. I must be one of literally five people left that would even recognize her, the world over.

--okay, so, we ignore it? See if she does something brash, use your word to expose—

No! Sherlock, Mycroft—here, her eyes look up pleadingly at him—you can’t say anything until she has been neutralized. That baby—I’m not convinced, based on her history, that she would let her or John live through an up-front attack. I am certain that she already has papers to leave the country under a false alias if she started feeling suspicious.

Both of the brothers nod, for separate reasons. Mycroft is ready to start checking in at all the document-forgers he knows of (which are, in his humble opinion, all of them). Sherlock is trying to think of the best way to remove John and Willa from the danger before anyone can get hurt or killed.

It seems, love, that we must wait it out, for now.

Georgia nods and looks up at Mycroft. She holds up her hands and hesitates more than once. She is responsible for the death of Eustace Barnes and Heather Kitterly. A muscle twitches in the elder Holmes’ jaw, but otherwise he does not give away the stab of hurt and hatred that lances through his gut for the woman downstairs, enjoying a Christmas feast with his own parents.

All three of them sit and wonder for the best course of action, what the future will entail, but only one of them wonders about John, in all of this.

Chapter End Notes

i will be busy at work (60 hour weeks and a new schedule, oh joy) and moving the next 2 weeks, so i will likely not post again until closer to the end of the month. please leave me a comment and i hope you've enjoyed this installment.
Hellooooo. i have moved, i am miserable, and I now have a house full of in-laws, two of which are literally senile, another of which is a fat nosey thieving bitch. i literally applied an entry-way doorknob to our bedroom to keep her out of my more prized possessions and away from my pets.
phew.
anyway, here ya go. leave me comments, please; i check for them like you would not believe. they give me drive when I have none.

**London: post chapter 1:**

The thing that “gets” John more than the torture ever will is the quiet muttering of his best friend in the “quiet hours.” The last clip is playing now, and John is quickly whittling down his nails with his front teeth. He jams his hands under his armpit and huffs.

Sherlock is back in the makeshift coffin; it is silent outside of it, but the space is filled with Sherlock’s quick breaths and murmured lines. John has heard them several times now, he mouths the words in time with the barely-spoken words on screen.


The detective-turned-captive says this mantra over and over, sometimes adding a line that—until recently—confused John.

*I will find her, and we will go to the sea.*

Now, of course, he knows that this means George.

John’s thoughts—and Sherlock’s mutterings—are interrupted by the sound of a door slamming and heavy boots closing in. The lid of the coffin is lifted and Sherlock is dragged out. He has learned not to make a sound now, and doesn’t as he is thrown to the ground and stretched out. They don’t tie his legs anymore; one of them is twisted to the side at the knee and he hardly fights anything they do to him. As his arms are strapped down and a towel is thrown over his face, the two men begin talking to one another in what John assumes is Romanian. One of them dumps a stream of water over the towel, and Sherlock’s chest quickly starts heaving to struggle with breathing through the fabric. They let him struggle for several minutes at a time before removing the cloth and letting him catch his breath.

Before John’s stomach starts turning, he hears several pops echoing through the cave tunnels outside of the door. The men shoot up and wrench the door open, and Jozef comes sprinting in, terrified and bloody. He is yelling animatedly and swinging a gun around. The two men run to the side table and grab up their weapons, darting back out into the darkened hall. Jozef slams the door shut behind them and turns to the limp form on the ground.
John pitches forward, turning up the volume. Jozef has straddled Sherlock’s hips and tore the wet towel off his face. He begins whispering quickly to the nearly-unconscious detective.

“Mr. Holmes, we are being invaded. They are professional-kind of men, dressed in all black, and are killing all of the men here. I don’t know if they are friend or if they have come to steal you away and kill the competition. Do I make good on our deal now, or no?” the man’s voice is tinged with definite desperation, and Sherlock’s eyes fly wide before he glances to the camera. His mouth works a few times before tears start streaming down the sides of his face.

“Oh God. I’m… FUCK!” his body jerks as the last of his withering hope leaves him in this one, shouted syllable, and he lays still again, under Jozef. “Ah. I am so sorry, John. Know that. Mycroft, show these to him, and find her. Show her too. Fuck.” He heaves a huge breath before nodding to Jozef. Huge brown hands wrap around Sherlock’s long throat and he bears his weight down. Sherlock’s body struggles lightly, but he has chosen this, and it disturbs John beyond belief to see his friend willing to die so horribly, again. He struggles to keep his eyes on the screen.

As Sherlock’s body goes totally limp and his eyes droop to half-mast, mouth working for air that won’t come, the door is flung open and Jozef takes a bullet to the head. As he drops off of Sherlock’s prone form, the man violently puce-colored and seemingly strangled to death, several men in black clothing and balaclavas enter the room, guns drawn. One waves a microchip reader over Sherlock’s skull and John hears it faintly beep. Another lowers his weapon and approaches the camera and says, in perfect English, “Acquired target Pluto sir. Returning to base now.”

Two of the men tug Jozef’s trousers off his dead body and place them on Sherlock’s too-long legs to cover his nakedness. One then throws John’s dearest friend into a fireman’s carry and they exit the room. The clip ends, and John supposes he knows where it picked up; at the hospital in the English countryside where he’d met Mycroft.

Norfolk: Christmas

Sherlock is anxious, and John can’t decide why. His best (and only) friend sits across from him in the fire-lit sitting room while the detective’s foot bounces in an uncharacteristic display of desperation. All John knows is that since the brothers and George returned from the soiree in the back bedroom, Sherlock has avoided John’s gaze like the plague. He alternately stares into the flames or at little Willa. Mostly at George as the woman croons to the baby, on the floor between Sherlock’s ankles. John supposes that maybe she is more ill than they are letting on, or that something was uncovered in the bedroom that the detective is deciding how to act upon. Either way, John decides that it will be his business when a Holmes decides it is (or begins to cause issues more prevalent than temporary avoidance), and not before.

“Georgia,” Mycroft steps up to his sister-in-law and seems to reach down to her, but instead taps the side of her head, over her ear. John frowns at the awkward behavior, but when Mycroft’s hand retreats, there is an outer cochlear implant adhered to the side of George’s skull. When he backs off, she is glaring, but reaches back to adjust her hair around it and leaves it. “Mummy and dad would like a song, if you’re willing.”

As the elder brother sits, George lets the baby crawl back over toward Mary, also on the floor,
seated between John’s feet. She tries not to make a show of watching a mother pick up her child. “Alright,” she pipes up in her broad American tongue. “What do we think, a Christmas ballad, a bar tune?” The answers are mixed, and by way of replying she hands Sherlock his violin case and reaches back to turn off her hearing device.

Sherlock tucks his violin under his chin to tune it, and stands demurely behind her while they seem to have a nearly-silent debate on a tune to play. The matter is quickly settled and George clears her throat. Sherlock begins, drawing the bow across the strings slowly, low and sweet.

George touches her fingers to the bottom of the violin, behind Sherlock’s upturned palm, and emits a perfectly-tuned note.

\begin{verbatim}
Of all the money
E’re I had,
I spent it in
good company.
And of all the harm
I have e’er done,
Alas, it was to none but me
\end{verbatim}

John finds that he recognizes the song from the Army, and hums along quietly. Mummy and dad seem to follow his lead, and hum along, too.

\begin{verbatim}
And all I’ve done
For want of wheat,
To memory now,
I can’t recall.
So fill to me
The parting glass!
Goodnight, and Joy be to
You all!
\end{verbatim}

Too late, John realizes that George is tuning herself to the vibration of the violin at her fingertips, and Sherlock is playing in a key that suits her voice, perfectly. The song is hauntingly soft and sweet, as they take notes from one another.

But the hour is late, and there is a murderer in the house. The younger Holmeses turn in immediately after, with George rubbing at the seam in her chest. She needs her nightly medications; in fact, she is overdue by a couple of hours. Sherlock bundles her off to bed in short order. Mummy and dad follow soon, with Mary retreating into the bedroom the Watsons will be
sharing, with the yawning, drooping baby. Mycroft and John share a not-entirely-uncomfortable silence for several minutes before the loo is vacated and subsequently taken-over by the British Government himself. John scrubs a hand over his face and goes into the bedroom after depositing his mug in the sink; he changes for bed, switches out places in the guest loo with Mycroft, who heads for the sofa, washes his face and teeth, and goes to lie down.

After all, tomorrow is Christmas!

In the far back bedroom, George is researching causes of death for recent natural-birth mothers over 30, on a secure webpage.
Christmas, and Surgery

Chapter Summary

Sherlock has casts and surgical pins removed, is drugged. Christmas at Norfolk happens, Georgia plots.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Six months post-hospital:

Sherlock’s hand clenches into a fist as the tube in his throat is gently and swiftly tugged out by a bored nurse. He chokes and suppresses the full-body gag that follows. John is sitting not a metre away on the waiting chair, watching intently alongside the gastroenterologist at the TV screen, displaying the damaged lining of the detective’s stomach in HD. They hum and point fingers at red splotches before turning to tell Sherlock what he already knows. The petrol torture is still taking a toll on his squirming insides:

*The burning and food sensitivity will be permanent. Lifestyle changes, less acidic foods and propping up when sleeping. For life.*

Sherlock sets his teeth and listens, blandly. John is avidly listening to the other doctor and mentally taking notes, even if his best friend is not (seemingly) concerned enough to.

They bundle up and John walks a step behind Sherlock, watching his balance. The detective has only just had his leg casts removed, and is still wobbly on them despite extensive and near-daily physiotherapy. He refuses John’s old cane at every juncture. But today, determination wins out, and he walks steadily onto the kerb and into a waiting cab. John, as per their new tradition, gives the cabbie an address for a tiny restaurant they both love. For his part, Sherlock is on low-boil, glaring out the window and already scanning through the menu in his mind, deleting options based on his new dietary demands.

“Not bad, all things considered. Should have those spots removed soon, like he said. Could lead to cancer, if. Well.” John fidgets in his seat, wanting feedback from his friend, but is unwilling to dig at him to get it.

“Hmm.” Is all he gets back before they arrive and take seats. John salivates over the idea of a bit of roast, but in lieu of his friend’s position, he elects for the salmon. Sherlock orders an appetizer and barely picks at it, still unused to chewing after several months in a wired jaw. John asks several questions, many of which go unanswered or are simply grunted at.

Sherlock has Orkney on the brain, and little else. But he can’t talk about that here, to John, who not only doesn’t know, but can’t. He pulls out his phone as they pay and exit. He will follow John to the Watson abode, for a few things. Sherlock is due for a minor surgery to remove pins from his wrist, tomorrow, and John will be there overnight for two nights to oversee his friend’s usage of the at-home painkillers.
When they arrive at John and Mary’s flat, Mary is too-ready to hand over the baby and escape for a few hours. She waves her hands in thanks and is out the door like a shot. Sherlock perches on the sofa, where John notes after several minutes of digging for a dummy for Willa, that he is still on his phone, firing messages as quickly as he can tap them out.

Instead of asking, John plops the baby on his friend’s lap, to Sherlock’s apparent horror, and backs away. The two look at each other in near-silence and squirm for a moment before she takes a handful of scarf and stares at his bright mobile. Thus encouraged, Sherlock seems to relax minutely, and John escapes to pack an overnight kit.

When he returns, several minutes later, Willa is fast asleep over the detective’s shoulder, where he stands at the window. His phone is gone, his good arm supporting her gentle weight while his cast wrist (the elbow piece had been shorn off last week) hangs at his side. John takes a moment to absorb the quiet peace of the scene before he steps into the room and Sherlock turns.

Instead of waiting for Mary to return from her “mommy free time,” the men take Willa to Baker Street. Sherlock feels in need of a hot bath and some alone time, though he will not ask John for the latter; he prefers his one-time-blogger there, most of the time. The bath is a ruse, though a few months prior it wouldn’t have been. Sherlock tucks Willa into her car-seat with a grimace that does not go unnoticed by a friend that is getting better at deductions, all the time.

“Hurting?” John asks, shouldering her bag and his own.

“No.”

John frowns but doesn’t press; he follows Sherlock to the street door, where his friend hails a cab with Willa hooked over his good arm as John locks up the flat. Soon they are exiting onto the kerb at Baker Street, and Sherlock is unlocking his own door. Mrs. Hudson follows them up the stairs and chatters with John, mostly over Sherlock’s ailing innards and fussing over the size of the nearly-one-year-old infant in her carrier, who is now awake and kicking happily. Sherlock dutifully ignores them all and begins stripping layers as he heads toward his bedroom. John lets the baby out and putters around the kitchen, putting the kettle on and talking to Willa as she crawls around the place on shaky, wide-set knees. He digs around for something to make for the two of them for dinner, and settles on some okay-looking fish in the freezer, over wild rice that he finds in the back of a cabinet.

His friend is overdue for a trip to Tesco, instead of several trips a week to various doctors. John makes a mental note to make a shopping trip, tomorrow, after he gets the detective home and in bed from his surgery. He goes to the bathroom door and knocks, listening to the water tinkling aside.

“Come in,” he hears. Casting a look into the living room for Willa (who is playing with her soft blocks in the middle of the floor) he cracks the door and speaks.

“Going to make fish and rice for dinner, okay? You’ll eat.”

“Yes.”

John nods, to no one; Sherlock can’t see him from this angle. “Good. Tea is on. Bring it to you?”

“I’ll be out soon.” John nods again and closes the door,retreating to the kitchen. He is still baffled at the new level of modesty (or lack thereof) they seem to have fallen into. But then again, you’ve changed his colostomy bags and helped with catheters, soooo a little nudity is hardly something to gawk at. John shakes his head and pours water over the bags, stirring crystalized honey into one
methodically.

When Sherlock enters, flexing the fingers of his bound hand and grimacing, John notes that he has elected to change into soft bottoms and an ancient tee shirt. He takes his tea with a hum and goes to sit in his armchair, wrapping his blue dressing gown around his slim form tightly. John takes mental notes on his slow weight-gain (obvious, but not nearly enough). Willa crawls around to Sherlock’s ankles and smashes a foam block into his toes. Sherlock frowns and looks down, pitching forward to take a few blocks in his long fingers. He builds a stack of them in front of her, to her delight, she claps and knocks it down almost instantly. John watches the exchange and glances down to a ping on his mobile. Mary is on her way to 221B now, and is ready to take Willa home.

At eleven the next morning, Sherlock is half-conscious on a gurney, being walked into surgery. John is chewing his fingernails in the private room and trying to pay attention to the telly. Despite it being such a routine and simple surgery, he hates his friend going under the knife; he reckons he has simply had to see it too many times in such a short acquaintance. He answers texts as they come, from several people including Lestrade, Mycroft, Mummy Holmes, Mrs. Hudson, and Molly. For the day, he is in charge of hourly updates and keeping Mummy in Norfolk, and out of the way.

Within an hour, Sherlock is returned and in post-op recovery. He comes out of the anesthesia slowly, but does not vomit from it, which is possibly a first. John fires off messages and listens to the surgeon, who is briefing him on the surgery itself, as well as home care. John nods and bites his lips, not taking his eyes off the detective. The man’s eyes are swimming, rolling loose in his head. John points this out and the surgeon notes that they had given him a second dose of anesthesia halfway through, because he seemed to be waking up. It will wear off in several hours. The surgeon leaves and John moves to sit near Sherlock’s head. The detective tracks his movement with slow eyes, which John doesn’t like at all.

“Feeling alright?” he asks, leaning close and peering at both pupils and incisions. Sherlock hums and closes his eyes. Within seconds he is asleep. John answers a few more messages; one is a request for a photo from Mycroft (trying to tell me you can’t hack into the video surveillance and get a still frame?) he wonders, but takes the snapshot and sends it.

He won’t know for another year and some months that the request came from America, and helped a weak heart calm itself in the middle of an intense bureaucratic meeting.

Christmas in Norfolk:

It’s Christmas Day and there is a very excited toddler in the kitchen. George had woken up early, unable to sleep, and had extracted her from John’s sleeping form on the sofa. She is feeding her oatmeal and slivers of fruit as the soldier wakes up and stumbles, sleepy and slow, into the kitchen in hopes of scaring up some coffee. He is pleased to find the scene he walks into (he was sure Mary had come and gotten the fussy, teething girl) and is even more pleased to see fresh scones and hot coffee waiting on the counter.
He waves to his girl and signs a brief greeting to Georgia as he pours himself a cuppa and moves to sit on the other side of Willa’s (Sherlock’s old) high chair.

“Was she fussy when you got up?” he asks, signing what he knows and stumbling over the rest. He’d gotten rusty since Sherlock’s jaw had been unwired.

“Oh lord, no. your perfect girl was just babbling on the sofa when I came out early to stoke the fire. I couldn’t sleep—my meds usually prevent a good night’s rest. So I got up and figured everyone would like some good fresh scones. I didn’t want her to wake you, so I brought her in here.” They watch Willa smash a grape in her fist and squeal at the mess she has made. For a moment John allows himself to look at George in the thin morning light. She is pale, both naturally and with the sickly sort-of way that having a serious disease would leave on you. She is thin, but not in an unhealthy or concerning way; she has wide-set hips that give her the appearance of a slim pear. Her hair is long and unruly-thick, falling in fat, vibrant-red ringlets to her lower back. But she is short, barely even matching John for height. He decides that her face is very pleasant. It’s small and heart-shaped, with wide blue eyes and a tiny nose covered in light freckles. Her full lips hide large, white, and perfectly straight teeth. As her attention shifts from the baby to him, he realizes that she has asked him a question.

“I’m sorry, what?” he shakes his head and takes along draught of coffee. She huffs a laugh and asks again.

“When do you think this lot will wake up for presents?”

John scrubs a hand over his face and is about to say he doesn’t know when a floorboard creaks and they are joined by Sherlock, daddy, and Mycroft. They all go straight for the coffee, and then brew more. Sherlock comes over and nudges at Georgia with a knee until she stands. He steals a grape from Willa’s fingers and pops it into his mouth, pulling a face at her (which makes her shriek in delight) as he sits and tugs George backward to sit on his thigh. They chatter over their mugs and munch on still-warm scones until the women join them, and the party slowly moves to the sitting room.

Mary has taken Willa back, and is sitting on the floor with her to ease the act of unwrapping gifts with a toddler. Georgia positions herself—and therefore Sherlock—across from them and to an angle; easy to watch, without seeming suspicious. Mycroft is the last to settle into the room and therefore has the duty of playing Father Christmas. He is silent and pinches his lips together, but hands the gifts out dutifully enough.

In the end, Georgia receives several soft, tunic-like shirts, a new tartan scarf in a burnt orange and teal (which clashes with her hair, but she loves) and a chewing bone for Crowley. The pugnacious dog is curled at her feet and begins licking the flavor off the thing immediately.

Sherlock unwraps a beautiful fountain pen, a new scarf as well, to replace the old blue one that had gotten caught on a fence he vaulted over last month and unraveled, and a new pair of soft leather boots from Europe, which he is speechless over.

Mary helps the baby shred the packaging on a few soft, suede-faced dolls and several sets of clothing, which she could not care less about. The best gift, however, is a hastily-arranged one from Georgia that comes in a hand-painted card. Mycroft and Sherlock recognize it immediately as from a collection of hers, which are from the famous painter and trans artist, Lily Elbe, before her surgeries and untimely passing. The card alone is worth several million, and the Watsons will be forewarned before it is destroyed or tossed in the bin. But within is a pre-set trust fund for the child, that will accrue massive amounts of interest until she comes of age and will likely need it for University or a wedding. It is not expressed in the fine print, but Mary is not mentioned in the
paperwork as her legal guardian. Therefore only John can access the trust in the event of untimely death of his spouse, in times of financial need.

John is touched by the card, and the trust fund renders him speechless. He is trying to keep his shining eyes on the paper and not look at either of the younger Holmeses across from him now. His mouth works a bit before he finally grumbled out a thank you and stuffs the card and bills of trust in his wallet. Mary seems largely untouched, but is overt in her thanks, coming over for a hug and full of big smiles.

Everyone comes down from the high and the last few presents are opened, before coffees are once again passed around, and Georgia disappears into the back bedroom for some quiet time. Mummy goes to start lunch, with Mary not far behind. John, Mycroft and Daddy Homes start up a conversation loosely about the state of the economy and the growing strain of foreign policy with Russia and the US. Sherlock minds his namesake for a few moments where she is sat on the floor with her new toys until he becomes curious and follows his wife into the bedroom. He finds her on her mobile on the bed, stretched out under the duvet. She quickly shifts between several different webpages on her browser, drinking in information in silence, though she does scoot backward a bit to accept and share a warm kiss and spooning from her beloved husband. Gradually she turns the phone off and rolls over to kiss and pet him some more, finding him needy and quiet in the cold morning air.

Sherlock lets himself drift in and out of the kisses, feeling her teeth scraping at his lip like he’d remembered in the Polish mountains. They are exactly as he’d recalled, and had hoped to feel again. It is brilliant to have her here, in his arms. He’d not let himself imagine he could have this again, since his return home. Though the thought had kept him from giving up in Poland, it hurt worse once he got back to English soil and felt home but incomplete. And he tells her so, as she slowly lets his lips slide from between hers, a cool hand snuck between the buttons of his shirt. She slides open a couple of buttons, and he sits back, letting her. He fully understands the needs for touch, especially to reassure, and he knows his wife is on-edge. What he does not know, is that she has figured out a way to quietly rid them of the issue of Mary, and gathered proof, via several connections that she has (which Mycroft, oddly, does not) that will convince John that it was necessary and for the best, both for himself and the baby, and for the rest of them. Sherlock feels a swell of sympathy for his friend, but also knows that although John did move back in, and is living in marriage with his wife again, that his hackles have been quietly raised the entire time.

John barely sleeps a full night anymore, and certainly not via sharing a bed with her. He usually gets up with the baby in the wee hours and sleeps the rest of the time on the sofa. When he can, he finds excuses to stay at Baker Street, which means that Sherlock’s extensive injuries and surgeries gave him a certain amount of freedom over the last year that he’d missed in the time Sherlock was away.

The how has been decided. A food poison, possibly a favorite for assassins, such as ricin, that will take effect several hours after administration, perhaps while in bed, so that John has a chance to feel like he saved her. It would mimic a sudden, violent bout of a systemic virus, complete with heart arrhythmia and cardiac arrest. She would be gone within an hour of the onset of symptoms. No time even for an ambulance ride, and no antidote.

Now the only time is to decide when. Which, for Georgia means getting her hands on the proof of Mary’s intent to leave the country with the baby and disappear into the ether. Georgia is now certain that such paperwork exists, and is intended to be used at the slightest indication of suspicion from any of them.

Before he can move, George finishes opening Sherlock’s shirt and rolls him to his back so that she
can shimmy her way on top. His hands slide up the sides of her hips, to her waist, under the
nightgown she is wearing. As he pushes it up and off, he feels the beginnings of a delicate throb
against his own waking member, and glances down at her pushing her knickers off, surprised. A
shy smile is what he sees when he looks back up, and he barely hears a murmured “Merry
Christmas, my sweet love,” before his long, slim cock sinks up into that tight, tight hole and he is
lost to oblivion, head thrown back in a stifled groan.

Chapter End Notes

Howdy-do everyone. so i'll readily admit that i'm struggling here. I love this story
greatly but I am losing the will to write.
keep me right, readers. i love you all
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

- a flashback within a flashback....oh snap
- first kiss/first attack (mentioned)
- druggie baby Sherlock, protective Jawn
- all fluffs today

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Ch13:

The day that Sherlock’s stoma was approved as “sealed and healed,” he demanded his first real shower in nearly a year. No amount of protestation and foot-stomping on John’s part could dissuade him. John made him wait until after the appointment, and then after the physiotherapy on his one unbound leg and arm. After he’d worked up a good sweat and quite a lot of pain, John took his dearest friend home for a bit of a clean-up. Sherlock digs his two “reward” codeine out of his pocket—along with his mobile—and tosses them back dry once he’s seated in the cab, and headed home.

“Sherlock, a shower is still not a good idea. You’re just going to end up back in the office tomorrow being re-cast, or get an infection. Just…” John has been babbling to the window the entire time, but when he whips his face around to fix his glare at Sherlock, his complaint dies on his tongue at the wistful determination he sees there. He decides to keep his mouth shut and quietly stew until they hobble up the steps at Baker Street, and Sherlock throws his crutches at the nearest wall as John watches and walks several paces behind. He sees that in his fewer nights spent there, Sherlock has managed to teach himself how to walk again by hobbling from wall to wall and from one piece of furniture to the next in short grab-shuffles, not unlike how baby Watson will be doing in a few months.

Sherlock drags his bum leg into the loo behind himself and wrenches the linen closet door open to grab two cello-wrapped pouches with large rubber circles inside.

So there they are, currently sat in the loo, with Sherlock sitting on the edge of the tub in his pants, unwrapping a cast-cover for his leg and another for his left arm. He’d ordered them several days previous in eager anticipation, but getting it on one-handed was proving difficult. John stood there against the door frame, watching Sherlock struggle for several minutes. He’s angry, in the sense that this is an unneeded risk for infection, but he is also forever unwilling to watch his friend struggle through something that he can fix with ease.

Sherlock is growling and shaking the vinyl chute open with his one unbound arm with a sense of violent finality. He is going to take this shower, damnit, whether he needs fresh casts afterwards or not.

“Maybe if I just soak them, I’ll get the new 3D-Printed casts, yeah?” Sherlock has already taken his post-PT codeine, and his speech is the first thing to go. Just now he’s lisping and his eyes are
beginning to de-focus. John tugs the cast-cover from his lissome fingers and stretches the sleeve cuff over Sherlock’s toes, ankle, and then up the cast to settle it above the fiberglass rim at his mid-thigh. The collar seals itself against Sherlock’s slender leg, waterproofing the inside of the vinyl sleeve. Sherlock watches the process and fingers the opening to the cover for his arm. John takes it from him and does the same thing, slipping the rubber over the L-shape of Sherlock’s elbow to settle it over his atrophied bicep.

John glares at him again for good measure before starting the water and letting it warm. John wipes his hands on his thighs and waits for Sherlock to stand, just to prove to himself that his worries are unfounded, that his friend can remain on his feet for the duration of a shower. The detective kicks his pants off, swings his legs into the bath tub and stands and wobbles a bit before finding an easy way to stay upright. He is tiring visibly already, the drugs and exhaustion from physiotherapy taking their separate rolls on his weary body. John leans over and flips the shower head tab, closes the curtain most of the way and plunks himself down on the lid of the toilet so he is close at-hand if his friend starts to flounder.

Barely ten minutes later, Sherlock has one-handedly washed his hair and most of his body, and is absolutely falling asleep on his one foot, leaning heavily against the wall of the shower, with the warm water beating down on his skin and the steam quickly lulling him under. John has been making him keep up loose conversation, but has decided that it’s time to get the man out and in his jim-jams for bed. He shuts off the water, to much grunted protestation, and swings back the curtain again and swings his legs over clumsily. John removes the covers and brings out another towel to pat Sherlock’s top half off. Sherlock’s phone had pinged several times during the entire process, so John hands it to him while he goes and retrieves pyjamas from the en suite.

When he returns, Sherlock has the mobile in his cast hand, and is thrumming across the screen with both thumbs as fast as he can type. John wonders minutely who on earth he has been texting so much, but it drifts right back out of his mind as he works bottoms over Sherlock’s leg cast and a top over his head and left arm. The detective is yawning hugely by the time John drops the towels into a hamper and helps Sherlock stand and hobble in to his bed.

Once the detective is settled, John digs out his evening’s handful of tablets. Muscle relaxers, antiemetics, ulcer medications, sleeping medications, anti-anxiety meds, et cetera. John shakes them out individually and hands them over. Sherlock frowns down at them but knocks them back dutifully enough and swallows a mouthful of water after. He lays back, and struggles to find a comfortable position. It's barely six o'clock but the detective is bone-weary and ready for sleep.

John takes some time to straighten up the mess they've made and get his own clothes changed before coming back to check on Sherlock. He’s laying in bed on his side, which he knows he is not supposed to do. John snorts angrily and stomps over to jam pillows under Sherlock’s cast leg for support, so it doesn’t weigh down his hip.

“Why do you do this shit to me?” he grunts, hauling the duvet up and over his friend’s limp form. The only movement on the bed, aside from how John is puppeteering Sherlock’s limbs, is the man’s eyes over the screen of his mobile.

“I wish you talked to me half as much as you talk to this other person. Surely Lestrade can’t have a case for you.” Sherlock’s pale eyes flick up to John’s face, scanning it briefly before he thumbs his phone into sleep mode and lets it drop down to the bed beside him. He watches John come and sit on the other side of the bed with his laptop, under a different blanket.

“How’s Mary?” Sherlock asks, so quiet that John barely hears him. Frowning at the turn of mood, John stops typing (with his two-finger-method still fully in-tact) and mumbles an answer to the effect that he is sure she is fine, but doesn’t really know. She is healthy and whole, and not on the
top of his concern list, when Sherlock is lying there half-useless in casts, and just took his first shower since leaving London before Willa was even born.

Guiltily, he shoots her a text and gets a speedy reply, saying all is well and asking after Sherlock’s health. By the time John puts his phone down, his mind is on another train of thought entirely.

“I’m awfully amazed at how well you’re doing, to be honest Sherlock.” He sees a thick eyebrow creep up his friend’s forehead and huffs a laugh. “I can’t imagine, Sherlock. I literally can’t. And your attitude has honestly been great, despite the pain and emotional torment. You’re healing so well, and dealing with the uhm…well, the other stuff so…well,” John felt himself flush at the lame ending, but he didn’t quite know how to tell his friend you bounced back from horrific amounts of rape really well, good job!

“John. You’re a doctor. You can say the word rape.” Sherlock snuffled into his pillow and settled. “Besides. It’s not like it’s the first time.” John froze at that, unsure what to even ask back, but Sherlock was already nearing sleep as his medley of nightly drugs begin to melt into his system and turn everything into a blur.

“Sorry, what? Sher—Sherlock? Sherlock did you just say you’ve been raped before this?” but the only response he receives is a soft snore.

Sherlock, despite his medications, has terrible dreams.

Sherlock stumbles through the dark streets, his shirt sleeve pressed to his bleeding mouth until he reaches a door he’s made himself avoid thus far. He whips out his flip phone and calls her, stepping back from the street door so she can look out her window and see him clearly.

“Hello? Sherlock?” Georgia answers after several rings, obviously he woke her up. He can tell he’s been put on speaker so she can hear.

“George, come to the window.” It takes her a moment to decipher what he said, with her muffled hearing. But he sees her appear between the curtains and waves, flipping the phone closed. Within a few seconds, she is downstairs letting him in. Georgia stands back against the wall as he bustles in, limping lightly. She frowns at his face but closes and locks the door and chases him up to her bedsit in the second floor. When they’re safely ensconced, she rounds on him, swatting his hand aside and inspecting a bleeding nose, cheek, and lower lip.

“I’m going to patch this up, and you’re going to tell me everything, Liam. Everything.” He nods in silence as she goes into her miniscule en-suite loo and dampens a flannel. She tugs out a travel-sized first-aid kit and returns. Sherlock has stripped off his coat and button-down, sitting in her one chair in a vest and his scuffed trousers.

George brings her supplies over and sets the kit in his lap, perching herself on one of his knees. As she daubs at his cheek, she looks at him expectantly and he heaves a sigh.

“Did Victor do this?” she asked, sagely. Sherlock’s eyebrows shot up and he froze. He had never brought the other man up, how had she—oh god. “I’ve seen your pining glances, and his, often enough.” Sherlock lets out a sigh of defeat, and to his horror, a few tears leach out with it. She dabs at them with another corner of the flannel and continues.

“I didn’t even do anything, I didn’t initiate it, but…” He groans as she swipes at his lip where it is split in several places. **He kissed me**, as we were leaving the study room in the science hall.
Just…backed me up to a shelf and snogged me right then and there, after he’s been telling me for weeks now that, No, we can’t be caught, that no one could know because of his family position, so we never could—so he never would—I didn’t know what to do, but I wanted it, so I stayed. But then someone came in, and it was one of his lacrosse mates, and Victor switched us quickly so it looked like I was the one pressing him to the wall. He punched me in the mouth, and the—the other blokes started screaming and accusing me of awful things. They smacked me around a little, uhm. Nothing too bad,” he drifts off, going quiet with flashes of memory.

George stayed on his knee, slowly digging in the kit for two butterfly plasters for his cheekbone and wound glue for his lip. “I’m very sorry that happened to you, sweetheart. No one deserves that sort of hate from the person they like.” She slips the plasters over the cut on his cheek and pats his lip dry, holding it between her fingers. “But I’ll say this; you’re not the only person, even in this room, who’s ever been smacked around for kissing a boy they liked,” her fingers swiftly applied a line of glue to each split on his lower lip, and she holds it and blows gently to dry it so he won’t split the seams back open. They sit for a moment in silence as she puts her supplies away and offers quiet comfort.

“George, why do you insist on calling me Liam?” he asks, just realizing that his forearm is draped over her upper thighs where she sits on his lap. His hand is twisted in the hip of her nightie.

“Well, Liam, why do you insist upon calling me George?” He shakes his head and nearly bites his lip, but she places a quick thumb over the site before he sinks his teeth in and breaks the tenuous seal of the glue.

“I don’t… you have been hit by a boy you liked?” he asks, slow to catch on in his distraction. Georgia flashes a wide smile at him and chuffs. He runs his eyes over her body rapidly, as if he can see old, invisible injuries.

“God, yeah. Several times, since I was little. You know, at first it’s cooties, then it’s ‘not cool’ then it just turns into juvenile shyness and eventually petty humiliation. I’ve…a boy broke my jaw once, after he raped me.” Georgia toys with the hem of her night gown and a crease forms between her brows. For a moment, Sherlock doesn’t know what to do or say, but it hits him all at once that perhaps tonight he kissed the wrong person. And that perhaps the right person is the one he ran straight to, instead of running home with his tail between his legs to his nosey brother. He shifts his large hand to cover one of hers and stares resolutely at the silk ribbon bow-tie at the neck of her gown.

“They…tonight, the other boys made me uhm. Well, they… used my mouth.” He looks horrified for a second, that he let that slip, and them clenches his teeth shut on any more truths that might eke their way out. Georgia purses her lips and leans down to rest her forehead on his shoulder.

“Come on,” Georgia stands and holds out a hand, which he takes and follows her into the tiny loo. She tells him to shower in the mini-stall while she digs around for a pair of oversized sweats. She comes back and pokes a dismembered arm into the room, dangling a pair of loose shorts and the only large t-shirt she owns, covered in vinyl lettering. He grimaces, but is thankful for the idea of a place to sleep where his brother won’t be beating down his bedroom door and demanding to know what happened to him within hours. A tooth brush and mouthwash are pointed out, in a shallow drawer, and he makes use of them, rolling two rounds of mouthwash around for several minutes before spitting.

There is only the one narrow bed, and the floor to consider. But before he can open his mouth, George is pushing him toward the bed and crawling in behind him. They struggle to find a comfortable position, but eventually Sherlock lays on his back and sticks his left arm under his
pillow, and Georgia burrows into the void he creates there. They share bated breath for several minutes before he turns carefully for face her fully and gingerly pats a hand out toward where he knows her face is. His fingertips collide with her nose just before they hook around her jaw, angling her face up as he looms in, covering her mouth with his own. She is so careful with his torn bottom lip, suckling at the top one instead in the most fascinating way he can possibly imagine. Her teeth scrape lightly up, with her own bottom lip coming in close behind to soothe the tingling sensation left behind. He breaks the kiss gently, letting his hand drift to her shoulder to help her turn, fitting her impossibly small waist and hips into the curve of his own. He wraps an arm around her, palm flat on the bed before her belly, and inhales a deep yawn that seems to come from his roots. He nuzzles into her nape where her hair has been pulled up in a bun for sleep and presses the lightest kiss there, drifting off now in the comfort of the moment.

Chapter End Notes

'Eyyyyyyyyy..... so, dont be mad at me, i'm very sorry for such an awful delay. nice,pretty,fluffy chapter to make you happs??
also, sorry I "Inceptioned" the shit out of you, there.
also-also, HAVE YOU GUYS SEEN DR STRANGEYETOMG. I saw it at 7pm for the IMAX premiere and then again at 11am this morning by myself (hubs is sick). dont judge, dr strange was my favorite character before they assigned Ben's utterly beautiful shark face to him.
*fans self, digs out vibrator*
leave me life fuel-i-mean-comments :3
Chapter Summary

George gathers evidence, John has a rare moment of happiness, Sherlock is nostalgic

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Chapter 14: 6 months post-Christmas, London:**

Sherlock is roving through the flat in a fit of nervous fury. George left the flat three hours ago, managed to slip Mycroft himself (he’d texted), and has actually turned her phone off. Every time he makes a cycle around the living area, he stops to glare out each window before beginning again. His hair is on end, dressing gown flapping behind his light limp. John is sitting in the red chair, watching in silence. He keeps getting angry at John too, as the good doctor keeps smashing his new, hateful glasses onto his face every chance he can—which is partially why Sherlock is making the point to pace.

“Why on earth did she demand we watch Willa today, and then leave?” Sherlock stops dead in the middle of the open space and stares down through fingerprinted lenses (John’s whorls, not his own arched prints) at his namesake playing on the floor with her favourite blocks. Suddenly an eyebrow shoots up, and he goes very still.

*You idiot, she’s gone to find proof of Mary’s intent to leave. It’s happening. The baby’s here in case the forger deigns to call his client and Mary bolts before we can get there to snatch her.*

John watches, eyebrows in his hairline, as Sherlock comes slowly over and sinks into his own chair. He pushes the frames up with a middle finger, which John admits he finds far too endearing. He clears his throat and shakes his head a little. “Figure something out, did ya?” In answer, Sherlock purses his lips and glares into the cold fireplace. Silence stretches on for a few minutes before Sherlock’s mobile chimes and he is back across the room, texting like the insane and carefully stepping over little Willa and her spread of foam building equipment. She giggles and throws a chunk at his foot, squealing “Ewa!*”* as he steps over her back.

Willa has her own way of disarming the detective when he’s in a strop, like just now. Her *uncle/teacher* grabs at her lost block with his long toes and tosses it backward to her pile, making her squeal in delight. Some of his anger is diffused, but very little worry is. He is quite upset that he was left behind on what he sees very rightly as a *mission*.

Across the room, John shakes his head, remembering walking in to the kitchen one morning to find George teaching Willa a few Welsh terms, sounding them out in the fake-posh accent she puts on for minding the toddler. (When questioned for this practice, she gave two excuses: first, that John would surely not want her to grow up talking like a yank, as her nanny did, and she would undoubtedly do when Georgia babysat more days than not. Second: it was no worse than her own mother falsifying an accent, so he shouldn’t be bothered, should he?) (John had nothing to say to that, but thankfully he simply assumed that Sherlock had given her some sort of lowdown on Mary’s history—well, what he knew of it). But she’d pointed at Sherlock and tried to
teach baby Watson everything from Da (they’d all frowned at her for that) to Uncle Sherlock, to just Sherlock (she wandered around screaming *Shur-cock!* for days on end after they’d all exploded into giggles over it), before single-syllabic grunts became a favorite. The Welsh *Ewa* is used to denote important males, such as uncles or instructors, so she’d tried that and it stuck.

Sherlock throws himself over the sofa (and his glasses on the jumbled coffee table) and stews; he can’t remember the last time he was honest- to- god this furious with his little dove. He thinks for a moment and decides it must be when the argued relentlessly for days over her reckless decision to undergo a sex transition surgery, having finally found a doctor willing to attempt it despite her heart condition and Lupus.

***

“Georgia you can-NOT still be serious!” Sherlock stormed into his flat and threw his bag down, fuming. He rounded on his three-month-new lover as she entered the room and closed the door, drawn and visibly tired. She’d just come back, late, because of another consultation with the sketchy surgeon, and behind Sherlock’s back. “It is incomprehensible how dangerous that surgery is for a healthy person, let alone you with a myriad of already life-threatening conditions.”

George stood in the middle of the room, strangely silent and grey-faced. She looked down at his shaking fingers and whispered, “I simply want to feel like every bit of myself that I can before I go, Sherlock. Is it too much to ask, really, for you to be at my side when it’s done, to help me enjoy it after, feeling whole and not like some sort of…. Of farce?” by the end she is crying, her own fists clenched. She draws them up to her ribs and turns, heading for the sofa. She needs to sit down before her legs go out. Unbeknownst to Sherlock, to quell the issue of the surgery itself she has not been taking her regular doses of blood-thinners, and her body is not taking it very well.

Sherlock goes quiet, sets his teeth, and follows her, seeing that she is safely on a flat surface before he sits down on the edge of the coffee table and joins her. “George. Why is it not enough for me to love you the way you are, and that I want to keep you around a while longer for me to continue to enjoy? From my standpoint over here, this surgery could very well take you from me, years before your time, and for that I could never forgive you. I love the body you’ve got, and I wouldn’t stand in your way or—or bloody well leave if you defied my wishes and went through with the bottom surgery, but if you died on that table, I would be irreparably ruined, and we both know it.

“So, I refuse to stand by and lose you over some misguided assumption that I’d prefer a vagina, or that I don’t already adore you the way you are. You want breasts, fucking go for it. But surgery on those blood vessels and neuro-receptors is astoundingly dangerous, as you well know. Please don’t do this—risk taking yourself from me forever—for the sake of vanity. If I am truly your last, then it shouldn’t matter, as long as we are both okay with the current package, right?” Sherlock doesn’t tear his eyes from hers as he pauses to wipe a snotty nose across his shirtsleeve. She barely nods and he reaches forward to wipe at her face before taking it in both of his large hands, thumbs swiping at fresh tears (of both exhaustion and joy at his first-ever declaration of love to another human being). “Also, you’d better start taking your medications properly again, or I’ll never give you a moment alone again.” She huffs a damp laugh into his palms and he pitches forward, letting their stress melt away with the joined heat of kisses that have been too sparse over the last several days.

***

Sherlock groans into his palms, uprights himself, and lets his leg start bouncing. John watches this for all of about ten seconds before he stands and holds out a hand to his friend.
Sherlock furrows his brow at it and looks up into the face of a worn-out soldier, not in the mood for any bullshit. “Park?” he grunts, and Sherlock nods once, getting up to put on proper trousers, shoes, and his coat while John dresses Willa (amidst much screaming—she was NOT done coloring). When Sherlock returns, his face is treated to John nearly poking his eyes out to get the frames back over his ears. He sighs the sigh of the greatly put-upon, and shoves them onto his own face; they grab the pushchair and a few colorful toys (jammed into Sherlock’s deep pockets) and head out the door for some “fresh” London air.

George herself was currently sat across town in the grubby old underground office of a certain Jonas Jenkins, admiring the damp and his own apparent resolution to not lose his hair, despite his obvious genetic aptitude for balding. He was, admittedly, terrified of “outing” his most fearsome client, Mary Morstan—or, as he knew her, Alexandra. But the things George said to him as soon as she blew in his front door were worse. He’d managed to stay quiet enough that Mycroft Holmes, a famous purveyor of collecting seedy businesses like his own, had thus far overlooked him. Of course, that could easily change since the very sister-in-law of that fearsome man was currently breathing down his neck as he pulled every copy of every paper he’d ever written for Mary. He pulled out government issued ID’s; a voter registration card for the US; Driver’s Licenses; Passports for the US, Canada and Sweden; birth records for herself and a child for each of those “countries of origin;” a divorce settlement from the UK; and an American Social Security Card, and a Swedish one. He mentioned (under duress) that she’d told him her intent was to default “back to Canada” after she had the divorce papers in order.

Thus stocked with a manila folder jam-packed with physical evidence, a video of her interaction with the man on a sim card in her phone, and her own notes on the meeting, George put the barrel of her small pocket pistol against his forehead, and leaned down a few inches. “Do I need to tell you what exactly will happen to you if Mary hears a word of this interaction?” Jenkins shakes his head, eyes wide. “Good. Because this gun was here for my safety, not a threat. I’ll be in contact with Mr. Holmes every day for the next few weeks. If she makes contact in any way, you will keep your mouth shut on this visit, or I will open mine. Are we clear, Mr. Jenkins?” the man nods jerkily and watches her stuff the folder into her bag and let herself out.

What he does not know is that she has left a few bugs in her wake.

****

By the time she is texting Sherlock, she can tell he is incensed. She skips hailing a cab for the quicker option of the Bakerloo Line and nearly descends below the street level when a town car slides up beside her. The window rolls down, and none other than Mycroft Holmes beckons her inside. She gives him the benefit of a heavy eye-roll before stepping inside and they lift off into traffic for Baker Street.

“Better make it quick, your brother is very angry at me, Myc” she sighs, out of breath, and drops her bag and the file into the seat next to her.

“Mycroft,” he corrects, eyes narrowed.

“When you have as little time as I have left, things like bloody extra syllables get left by the wayside. It’s for my health, I assure you.” She sniffs (very much like his mother and settles back into her seat, legs crossed. Mycroft stifles a thin smile and schools his face back to business-mode.

“What did you uncover at your…rendezvous?” Mycroft asks, clearly fishing for information on her informant. He is forcing himself to ignore the parcel, and therefore calls her attention straight
back to it.

“I told him that if he misbehaved, you’d have his name within a second and his freedom a second after. He won’t squeal, he’s old-school and likes his current lifestyle. But I do have this,” She slides him the file. “I want that back, I’ll have to present it to John after she’s dead, Myc. He won’t accept her murder any other way than definitive proof of her intent to bolt with the baby.”

“Do you think he will accept it, either way?” Mycroft asks, letting her use of his childhood nickname slide for now. It’s simply not worth the argument, let alone if she calls mummy for revenge…. He thumbs through several sheafs of legal paper with their perfect watermarks and hand-lettered information, the left eyebrow creeping up his face tellingly.

“Definitely not at first, no. But I do think that if these papers had shown her intent to leave alone, he would happily give her the option to divorce him and go. The baby having four socials and sets of birth records will push him over the edge into our favour.” Georgia allows herself to look smug when he glances back up, handing her the file and sitting back. He fondles the hook-handle of his umbrella for the next few seconds as the car smoothly comes to a stop on Baker Street. “Oh…Well, thank you, Captain Hook,” she eyes the umbrella handle speculatively, “but do you think your driver could stand a trip over to Regent’s Park? Apparently the boys are there with the baby.” Mycroft nods and the car glides the few blocks down to the small park.

When Georgia does exit the car this time, she has stuffed the parcel into her bag and is scanning the (to her—silent) crowd for two men and a toddler. She sees Sherlock and Willa not far away and advances upon them.as she gets closer, her heart stutters and she whips out her phone for some good, old-fashioned evidence-taking.

Sherlock is walking bow-legged, nearly bent in half, with Willa clutching his fingertips and wobbling on her own two feet between his own. She has a determined set to her face, and is after a brightly coloured ball that had rolled several metres away. She realizes a beat later that John is sitting near the ball, watching avidly. Afraid to move lest she disturb the moment, George freezes and opens the camera to “video,” just as Sherlock tugs his fingers free from Willa’s grasp and she takes four tentative, juddering steps to her father, collapsing on the ground and getting her ball. She looks around as they all cheer and clap, unaware of the joy they feel of her crossing another milestone. The boys look over to see George pocketing her phone and Willa squeals, crawling over to her through the soft grass.

“If you got that, you better send it to me!” John is wiping a few happy tears from the corner of one eye and laughing openly, overjoyed. Sherlock is rooted to the spot, both happy for the baby and his friend, and being able to share in the moment, but still upset at his wife. He clenches his jaw and waits, silent.

Georgia coaxes Willa back into the group, and she goes happily, grumbling along at the grass between her fingers. The retired diplomat goes to her husband, offers up a quick peck on the lips and a furtive wink before they all settle into talks of dinner plans. In the end it is discovered that John already had plans with Mary, and should be headed home. George hesitates but smiles his way, letting the Watsons go below ground as they pass a tube station.

“So erm. Sorry,” Georgia offers up into the silent void as the Holmeses walk back to Baker Street. Sherlock grimaces, but admits that he probably would have done the same thing to get the information he needed on short notice.

“Did you get what you went for?” Her eyebrows arch and she nods. They decide to get a bite to eat and hail a cab. Sherlock is certain that the flat has been bugged, and will not want to review the paperwork there. They head for Angelo’s, a reasonably controlled environment, and she tugs out the folder to show him once they are sanctioned into a booth and away from other patrons.
As Sherlock leaves through the horrendous evidence, Georgia orders several small plates for them to share, mindful of his once-again-rising *H. Pylori* count. A few times, she bites at the side of her thumb where a callous has formed, watching his eyes widen and eventually his jaw drop open slightly.

It’s worse than he’d predicted. She has every intent to bolt with the infant, at the first sign of suspicion, and John would be devastated. For the first time since all this began, Sherlock is convinced that divorce, separation, or arrest would not be safe or *final* enough. His eyes rove over the bank accounts, the rising of the digits on the pages, month after month, and agrees:

For the safety and betterment of them all, Mary Morstan Watson has to die.

Chapter End Notes

I am ever thankful to the ONE PERSON (Medhes) out of the several HUNDRED of my readers who continues to leave me comments and/or kudos, they clearly drive my writing "drive," as I am already depositing another chapter within a week of the last. Ahem... Fair warning: the end is written, and you will not like it. we have a few chapters to go before we are there, though, so remain strong, perhaps buy some tissues. take your anxiety medication. Also: I am thinking of writing a one-shot after this is over, sort of a longish epilogue, to tie up loose ends. maybe it will just be an epilogue? Idk yet.
Comiseration, and the Meaning of Friends

Chapter Summary

Mary dies, John deals, and the truth is out. What will happen between the Holmeses and Watsons now?

Chapter Notes

Sorry it's been an age. I have a really shit job. Also, recently my laptop decided it didn't like the space bar anymore, so now I have to take twice as long typing, re-teaching myself to type leftie so I can hit the damn thing /just so/ so I can hammer out a few lines at a time before going back and spacing nearly every word. Fml.

Hope you like, please leave comments for me :)

In the end, it goes smoothly.

Georgia produces a chamomile teabag laced with the stuff and then it is only a matter of time once it's stashed in the packaging in her cupboard. John doesn't drink it, and the baby is too young for tea. It was the easiest way.

And John gets his chance at heroism. He jerks awake, early in the morning, still well dark outside, to a sweating Mary, gasping for breath. It mimics a heart attack, not uncommon for late-birth mothers over thirty. Despite her relatively fit lifestyle, she is gone in minutes, tears streaming down her cheeks from struggling to breathe. And John lets himself scream into the night, to rail against the unfairness of the world, but it does little except wake Willa. He calls an ambulance, explains the situation in dead tones. They arrive, collect her body while he shushes the baby and sends a text or two.

Within minutes Sherlock has answered that they are in a cab, on the way. John sets his teeth and picks Willa's things up, preparing a bag for her mechanically. And when he hears the key sliding into the lock across the room, he realizes that he only managed a few diapers and sets of clothes before sinking into the sofa in a daze.

The look on Sherlock's face says it all as he bursts in, all nervous energy and concern. John must look a right mess, he figures. George closes the door and comes over, checking that Sherlock is holding him upright decently enough and that he's not on the verge of a complete breakdown—though obviously shock is inevitable—before going into his screaming daughter's room and scooping her up. She takes a few steps into the master bedroom and glances down into a now-cold mug of chamomile tea on Mary's bedside table. Swiftly, the sodden bag is swapped out for another untainted one, and the mug is emptied down the en-suite sink with copious amounts of water and hand soap. Willa is still soaking and soppy-eyed by the time the two make it out into the living room, where John is silent but has clutched onto Sherlock's arm like a life-line banded across his chest.
The two Holmeses tuck him into a coat and Willa into a carry-seat, and thus shuffle the two remaining Watsons down and into a waiting cab. Despite John's protestations to just take the baby and leave him to cope for the night, Sherlock openly refuses to leave him there alone. It is decided by the three of them that they best course of action for all is that George and Sherlock will mind Willa, and John can cloister himself up in the spare bedroom of Baker Street for the next several days, after which he will be able to make his own decisions with a much clearer head and heart.

The entire day after is spent goading answers out of John for an official autopsy record.

What had happened that night?

What had she eaten, drunk?

Was she acting ill at all that day?

Was she allergic to anything?

Nothing out of the ordinary; Spaghetti and tea before bed, same as always; No; No.... John answers them woodenly, and Sherlock answers the few that his friend can't seem to manage. They leave from there to make arrangements with her lawyer (the will) and the funeral home to decide on her internment after cremation. They both turn out to be easy visits; she had written a living will shortly after John had taken her back, bequeathing him a security lock box, and the key to it, and the accounts to several banks in her name in places he's never heard of. she'd also bought small plots for herself and John after their marriage, and the lawyer had the paperwork in her file. it is a simple manner of planning a day, shuffling and signing papers, and shaking hands. Sherlock does an admirable job of being the silent but there partner, and steps forward when he seems to feel it's necessary only. John simply tries to keep his wits about him long enough to finish the last form, pick out an urn, and follow Sherlock into a cab.

Within several minutes, they are back at Baker Street and John is little more than a shadow on the wall once more. Georgia calls them into the kitchen where she's feeding Willa to belay a message:

In the end, it is decided and recorded by the mortician on duty that it was a simple post-trauma cardiac arrest, brought on by the late-age birth of Willa. John takes the news with a grunt and disappears up the stairs to his old room in silence.

"What about her accounts from-er-before John?" George asks, stuffing mashed vegetables into the happily kicking baby with grace. Sherlock sinks down into a kitchen stool opposite her and rests his elbows on the table. Willa, he thinks, is the luckiest of them all. She'll barely remember more than a scent or sensation, in a few weeks. To her, it's just another day with 'Lock (his new title) and Gigi. He sighs and buries his knuckles in his eyes.

"Her will is going to be under investigation, because she was married under a false name. Mycroft's on it, but there won't be much hope to get him even half the amounts due."

"But still, several thousand would be better than nothing. Save it up a bit for this one, yeah?" George is trying to remain positive, but the idea of giving John the evidence is weighing on her mind. Selfishly, she hopes that he takes the autopsy report for what it is and leaves the questions he has to rest.

"Honestly I think he'd be lucky to see a dime beyond the safety lock boxes, with how she's hidden it in overseas shady banks."

"Hm. Very American of her," George huffs with a false laugh. Willa shrieks and slaps her tray,
willing them into a more entertaining conversation. Sherlock frowns and puts a finger to his lips, which she mimics with a chuckle. George fusses over the rest of the baby food and then it's off for a bath with the little one. Sherlock recognizes the routine and moves himself out of the way and into his leather armchair. George wipes the tray, unbucks Willa from her seat, and gracelessly plops her into Sherlock's arms.

"Give her a bath," she says, exiting the room swiftly. Sherlock is left guppying his mouth after her and looking down to the sticky thing in his arms. Willa squirms away a little and she coos up at him, fingerling his chin and lips in thoughtful peace for a moment. Before her tacky fingers make it into his hair he's up and walking into the loo with her, trying not to think about what this level of domesticity means for him.

Willa wobbles between his knees on her fat little feet, clutching the fabric of his trousers in her tiny fists to stay upright. Sherlock turns the taps to an acceptable temperature and pries her hands loose so he can squat down to her level. She babbles up at him, curls bobbing, in a language that only she understands while he tugs off her top, bloomers and socks, and finally a lightly wet diaper. She beams up at him and toddles to the tub, grasping for her sponge, in the shape of a frog with one of its back legs missing. Sherlock places her on her bum in the warm water and lets her have the toy. His knees fold up under the basin of the tub and he rests there for a moment, listening to her talking to the sponge and poking at his faded eyes curiously. She drowns him a few times before slapping the detective's arm with its sopping body.

"Alright, come on," Sherlock mutters and takes the sponge, soaping it up and washing her. He pays methodical attention to her face and chin and fingers, coated in greenish-orange slop from her veggie mash earlier. By the end of his ministrations, the lavender soap has done it's due diligence and she is slow-eyed and tugging at her curls. She drapes over his shoulder as he pats her dry, standing to go back into the living area where her bag has been deposited. George has already pulled out a fleece babygro and fresh diaper, but is nowhere to be seen. He fancies that he can hear her low voice emanating from the bedroom.

"Gigigigigigigi," Willa claps her hands as Sherlock tucks her feet into the legs of the sleeper and stands her up.

"Yes, Gigi." John shuffles upstairs; pacing going by the sound of it. "Want to give daddy kisses before bed?" she laughs and lunges forward with her lips pushed out, trying to reach his face.

"Aaaddddadadadadd!"

"No, I'm Sherlock. Daddy's upstairs," he mumbles, coloring a bit. She still plants a wet kiss on his cheekbone, but lets him push her hands into the sleeves and zip the fleece closed.

"Papapa!" Sherlock watches as she wiggles her bum and toddles toward the stairs, pointing up to where she saw her "papa" disappear to previously. The detective scoops her up and walks up the stairs, ready for...anything.

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John paces, alternately fisting his eyes and shoving his hands under his armpits, as though the outside pressure from his forearms will prevent his chest from exploding. he hears life continuing downstairs without him, and perhaps despite him. But he knows that's not true. He knows, really does, that his friends are helping. They're keeping his little family, what's left of it, functioning while he's up here panicking in the face of parenting alone, now. Of everything from here on out, alone now.
But maybe it doesn't have to be that way. He knows that he's awful about asking for help. That he's incapable of accepting it until it's too far gone and can't ever be properly fixed again. He hopes that isn't going to be the case with Willa. He knows that he's the only thing she has left, and that he is her whole world, now.

He also knows that without George and Molly and Mrs. Hudson to help, he's fucked.

Just as he's about to start going under again, there's a soft knock on his door. He swipes at his face roughly. "Yeah. Uhm. Come on," Sherlock cracks the door open and walks in with his daughter, bundled up for bed. Her wet curls tangle with the detective's, separable only by the dramatic difference in colour. He reaches when she lunges for him and takes her, nuzzling several kisses into her soft cheeks before the tears start again.

"God, I'm sorry I can't," John wheezes and sets her down as another wave of hysteria hits. She looks up at him curiously but toddles off quickly enough. Sherlock shuts the door so she doesn't make her way to the stairwell, and comes forward. John covers his face with his hands as the frustrated, desolate tears come out for the umpteenth time that day. But the genuine surprise comes when long arms wrap around him and the top of his head lands in the middle of Sherlock's broad chest. He clenches his teeth against a choked sob that slips out and a large hand lands on the back of his head. They stand there for several minutes before John lets an arm snake around his friend at the same time that a small body wedges itself between their knees. He pulls back until his arms drop and looks down at Willa.

"Ow?" she asks, pointing at them. John huffs a laugh and stoops down to fetch her. He lands her tiny hands on his face and he kisses at them before shining a watery smile on Sherlock. The detective's face is carefully neutral, but a small smile flashes back at him as he takes Willa from John and retreats down the stairs to settle her for bed.

John scrubs his hands down his face and sits on the edge of his bed. Slowly, he lets himself lay down until he's prone on the bed, phone on the floor—it's dead anyway—listening to Sherlock recite Byron to his barely-walking baby until she clearly drops off, and then some. Until he is blinking slowly, and that deep voice is resonating through the floorboards, and he too is lost to dreams.

Sherlock stomps up the stairs into their flat, openly angry and clutching a ruined, bloody scarf to his ribs under his right arm. John follows, even more furious.

As ever, Sherlock had run off without back up, and assumed John was following. And, as ever, he'd gotten hurt, but this time it was deep and was a fence by some bins, and he'd probably fractured something as he fell hard on the other side. It was too tall for John to easily scale, so by the time he'd gotten over it and sent the blood, he was livid, and to make Sherlock's attitude worse, the bloke had been caught by Lestrade.

Sherlock always wanted to catch the prey himself.

"Loo. Now."

"Shirt, Sherlock." The doctor dove under the sink for the tackle-box sized first-aid kit that was common procedure for them now. It was, however, the first time he'd been required to give his friend stitches. John turned and lifted up Sherlock's right arm over his head, making the man hiss when his wound reopened. Blood oozed out slowly. John huffed and held his breath, swiping at it with wipes and gauze until it was clean enough to sew closed.

He worked methodically and quietly, only interrupted by the low hiss of his new friend as the needle found a tender spot. Sherlock kicked him in the shins and groused until the wound was closed, glued and deemed "good enough" by Sherlock's own personal physician.
John floats for a while between several renditions of the same dream, and his constant nagging worry over loss and, what he deems worse, being left behind. Sherlock has a terrible knack of leaving him behind, particularly at crime scenes and when he has a "job" for his brother. and now, he feels left behind by his wife, though at least he knows she didn't do it on purpose. and he can't even blame Sherlock for this one, despite his vow to protect her. 

Because no one can prevent a heart attack, right?

Unbeknownst to Sherlock, Georgia has negotiated with Mycroft to have the expert spy himself give John the folder full of Mary's fake papers. John comes home in a fog. He's angry, but he's not quite sure who to be most furious with. it's clear that to some degree, the very people he is staying with, who he immediately entrusted his daughter to when he because unable to cope, knew about these papers, and it fills him to his very core with vitriol.

it's Sherlock who notices the change first, in the way the door bangs open and then closed, in the pattern of John's footfalls on the stairs. George sees him tense up from across the room, and thanks her stars that Willa is at playgroup today and won't bear witness to this row.

"John." Sherlock puts his manuscript down and stares at his friend, assessing the direction this conversation will take.

"Hmm." John flexes his fingers and looks over to George, on the sofa. "Did you know about this?" he lifts his other arm, where the file has been stuffed back together and throws it down onto the coffee table. The Holmeses share a loaded look, which John sees every inch of, and he wipes a hand over his mouth, on the verge of losing it.

The doctor has a certain sense of helplessness about him; he wants to rend and punch and fight, to destroy something. But before him are two friends, one which he has patched up almost to the extent of making a whole new person, after his near-death a year previous. And the other, his best friend's wife and a heart patient living on borrowed time.  Instead, he clenches his fists around the hems of his coat and waits.

"We knew a bit. We were trying to decide how to broach the subject without her cottoning on and bolting," George supplies, looking every bit the part of the abashed hero. "Not in any way that we didn't trust you to keep the secret John, but she was smart. she could see through Sherlock easier than most," George looks down at her hands, idly folding through Willa's and John's freshly cleaned clothes. "I...well. We are very sorry that we didn't tell you, but we feared that the risk of her immediately bolting with Willa was too great."

John stands stock still for several minutes, looking between the two. Sherlock's face is schooled to perfection, but John can tell he's cautious enough. He usually gets punched in these sorts of conversations, and John is only slightly ashamed to see he's tensing for the blow.

"So you knew there was a chance that I'd wake up with my wife and daughter gone, in the dead of night, with me none the wiser, because Mycroft was poking his nose into her past?" George shakes her head and puts down a onesie.

she takes a deep breath and stands, hands out to her sides, palms up. Diplomatic behavioral training at its finest. "John, I need you, we need you to see that you're searching for a scapegoat here, because you don't want to blame her and also feel like you failed her." John and Sherlock both tense visibly. "But blaming Mycroft for finding this out is not going to remove her guilt, and it's not going to assuage yours. You could not have saved her, you do not own a defibrillator and had no way of knowing that she'd have a heart attack in her sleep. If anything, Mycroft digging
into her secret plans gave us a leg up in case she did bolt. then we'd know four of the most likely countries to start in."

It's not that John can't see the truth, it's that he refuses to accept it just now. he knows it, deep down. but it's just easier to turn and walk back out the door, ignoring their calls.

Just like he will ignore them for the next several weeks.

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four weeks later:

John is at his wit's end. She screams, day and night now. She won't do anything he asks. Everything is a fight, everything throws her into another tantrum. And he knows, he knows she is teething, but it honestly only makes matters worse to know that, because it still isn't normal, underneath.

Because he knows that the reason she's wailing is because she goes to play group four or five days a week now instead of a maximum two, because he isn't talking to Sherlock and Georgia right now. He knows that it's because she's miserable, and she's going to make him miserable too. Because she doesn't understand why Gigi and Lock don't want to see her, or why papa only wants to feed her and put her to bed when he picks her up, instead of play fun games.

He knows that she's starting to notice the stark absence of a woman around, except for Miss Daisy at playgroup.

John buries his face in his hands and groans through another teeth-rattling wail before he picks up his phone and almost dials it. He throws it down before he can do something he's not emotionally prepared to do just yet, and scoops up his food-smattered daughter for her bath.

Before he's done getting her re-dressed a few minutes later, he hears the ping of a text coming through. Sherlock has been texting when there is a case, slightly hopeful that he'll be let back in eventually. after everything else, this really shouldn't seem like much, but it becomes a steeper and steeper climb for John to get over with each passing day.

So he ignores Sherlock for a moment and puts Willa in her cot to sleep, reading her a story from one of her favorites. She pouts through the entire thing and eventually drifts off into a fitful doze, under the influence of baby painkillers for her throbbing gums.

By the time he reaches his phone, he has an odd feeling scratching at the back of his neck. He picks the mobile up, swipes across the screen, and his heart lands firmly in his stomach.

*George in St Mary's. Please come. --SH*
The In-Between

Chapter Summary

PT and the "fugue state" that led to chapter 1.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**AEight months post-hospital/return: London:**

Sherlock lay on his side with one arm curled into his chest, facing the void that now took over the other side of his double bed. John had gone back to staying at his own home since the last of the detective's casts and pins had come out.

It was hateful.

He rubbed his nose and rolled to his back, exhaling slowly with fingers dallying in his short curls. It still hurt a bit to flex his right hip and knee. They'd been the last removed from casting, and he'd been rather remiss with the physiotherapy on days that John worked at his surgery. Which meant he'd done a fat lot of nothing for four days now. And, as a result, the melting, luxuriant mess of four "post-PT" tablets of codeine were swirling through his stomach acid, on the fast-track to his blood and nervous system.

But, least his hair had begun to grow back. He fingered through it again, tugging at a forelock, and huffed. He hadn't slept in days.

Turning back over onto his left side, Sherlock thumbed his phone screen awake and typed a brief message to his "someone special." She replied in a few seconds, making him grin.

_I love you, too, Liam. Are you doing your steps and breathing exercises? I'll have a layover between New York and Milan. I'll be in London for three hours Saturday. See you? _-GB

_Of course. Not doing exercises; John is working and I do not see the point. _-SH

She chastised him, but both of them knew her heart was barely in it. Sherlock scrubbed a hand over his face. Her heart. _Got to get you here, keep you well. Not London._

Sherlock felt his eyes drooping, but before he could sense that there was something off about his most current high, he was under a thick, rolling black tar that left it hard to breathe; his dreams were inescapable.

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The detective jerked awake with the raspy-harsh bellow of Redbeard! on his lips, and two stinging cheeks. Mrs. Hudson and John were hovered over him where he had collapsed on the floor of his bedroom in the night.

"Sherlock?" John called from a half-straddle above him, tapping his cheekbones and pulling one eyelid down with the impatience of a drug addict's physician. Sherlock grunted, fought to stabilize his breathing, and tried to move away. The sight of long red curls and bright blue eyes in the
sunlight and the soft splashing waves still rippled in his short-term memory. He blinked several
times and shook his head. John came back into focus, helping him sit more upright, just as Mrs.
Hudson's shrill tones began drilling into his ears.

"Sherlock! How could you?! Scared me half to death! John, thank goodness you were on your
way over, he was totally unresponsive when I came in with his tea tray!"

"Mrs. Hudson, I've got this, will you please go clean up the tray?" John's voice was stiff, even to
Sherlock's drug-deaf ears. He propped Sherlock up on the side of the bed and followed Mrs. H to
the door, closing it behind her and her fussing.

Sherlock blinked memories out of the backs of his eyes and shook his head. He was tousled and
half-here when John returned and knelt in front of him. "How many codeine tablets did you
take?" John asked, furious. "Tell me, now." Briefly, Sherlock studied the set line of his lips before
holding up four fingers and bracing himself for the onslaught.

What he received was a tired sigh as John scrubbed at his eyes and stood, wiping his hands on the
thighs of his jeans. The detective looked up at his friend, befuddled, and attempted to roll to his
knees in vain. Vertigo was still an issue, even sober. And he still had a bit of the codeine in his
system. John shook his head and helped him get up onto the edge of the bed. Sherlock fancied he
saw the tip of a tail disappear behind the far corner of his mattress and tipped over trying to see
Georgia's old deerhound Moose, to no avail. John catches him before he hits the floor again.

He has just enough time to think how strong John had gotten during all of his physiotherapy,
before the good doctor threw him back onto the bed and started snarling. "You were doing so
good, Sherlock! Why did you have to do this now? Because I went home? Because I went to see
my actual child?" John is fuming, and all Sherlock can think is: well, this is more like it.

The detective listens to John's flagellations with half-tuned ears. He pats the space of the bed
beside him (he is still flat on his back, across the width of the bed, long legs drooped down the
side closest to the pacing soldier) for his mobile. He has two texts. One from his brother, saying
what George has already told him, last night: that George is likely to have a layover in London in
two days' time. the other is from the woman herself, with test results from her latest blood draws
and an attached (and rather private) message for her intentions on him for her three-
hour (decidedly conjugal) visit. John only notices when eyebrows start creeping up into hairlines
and a faint pink graces those slashes of cheekbone. Sherlock notices the silence (coming back to
himself, albeit slowly) and locks his mobile.

"Are you fucking kidding me?!” John roars. Sherlock winces but lies still, waiting him out. So far
he hasn't been hit, which is usually a good sign that the worst is already over.

"John,” Sherlock slurs. His mouth doesn't quite want to work right. He notices that his face is wet,
and wipes away god-knows how much drool.

Right.

"I didn't try to get high, it wasn't for that. I can't sleep now.” he sighs and tries to use his weak
abdominals to sit up. He ends up rolling to one side and using his elbow instead. John looks like
the air's gone straight out of him. It was he who started sleeping in the same bed as his friend, just
under another blanket. It's his fault that Sherlock felt protected and safe, and now feels too alone
and unprotected in his own flat all by himself.

The soldier has never claimed to be able to see everything that Sherlock sees; how could he? A
thousand people would shoot him down in a heartbeat. But he has come to read Sherlock better
than anyone, caring for him as he has for the last eight months. And he sees all of this before his
friend even sits up all the way. John sees it in Sherlock's baggy eyes, in the way his shoulders slouch more than ever, in how he was found facing the door, something he has historically never done before his most-recent torture stint. And it weighs John down just a little bit more to see that despite the fact that Sherlock is coping remarkably well with what has to obviously be PTSD, even mildly, he can't bring himself to sleep alone quite yet.

"Alright," John huffs and kneels down in between Sherlock's ankles, looking at nothing, and everything, dead ahead of him. "Alright. But no more codeine. Give them, I want them all, Sherlock." John holds a hand out and waits for his dearest person to throw a tantrum of facial twitches before clenching his grey eyes shut and growling "drawer!"

John digs out the bottle with seven tablets left inside (out of thirty, Jesus) and walks firmly into the loo with them. Sherlock tenses as the toilet flushes, and his painkillers with it. When John returns, he makes a fuss over getting Sherlock into a dressing gown and out into the living room for some brunch, before he's off to the surgery for a half-shift.

Nearly an hour later, Lestrade comes bounding in with a stack of cold-case files and a half-cocked grin, ready to trade places with John for some old-fashioned babysitting of everyone's favorite junkie.

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**London: St Mary's Hospital: Present:**

John comes rushing into the third floor of the hospital, barely sparing door numbers a glance until he rounds the final corner. Sherlock is stood in the hall, facing the grey-green wallpaper, in his shirtsleeves. His long fingers are laced behind his head, and he is utterly motionless. John's heart drops a few more inches, and he is suddenly very glad that he threw Willa at Mrs. Hudson on the way.

"Hey," John exhales, approaching carefully. He has not been briefed on the situation, but it clearly can't be good, if his friend is out here hiding. Sherlock half-turns his torso toward John and nods that he's seen him. The doctor catches his breath for a moment and peeks in the door-window, seeing Mycroft sat in a chair to George's left. He can't see her face from this angle, but he can see several heart monitors strapped to her chest and limbs, and at least three bags hanging from an IV tree.

"What's, uhm," John pauses, looking closer at Sherlock's face. it is lined with worry, above all, but also a lifetime of anxieties and pain he rarely lets out. John waits for a second and begins again. "Do you mind if I go in?" Sherlock shakes his head and lets his arms down, ready to follow.

Mycroft stands as they enter, and nods. Sherlock makes a show of shutting the door quietly and moves to the window-seat. George is asleep, though barely. Her brow is covered in a sheen of sweat and her fingers twitch intermittently. John, on autopilot, grabs for her chart and starts reading file after file. There is a mountain of heart research, and lupus treatments assigned and scratched out over the years. But the top one, what they're here for this time, is in bold letters at the top of the first page. Blood screen: positive for pneumonia, grade three.

"Jesus, how long--"
"She suppressed the symptoms for several days before letting me bring her in when she nearly collapsed yesterday evening." Sherlock is speaking woodenly, staring at a spot outside. Mycroft is looking over his sister-in-law's prone form with a twisted expression that John takes for worry. He's not far off. John eyes her IV bags and the medications wherein for a moment before leaning in to examine her throat where they've inserted a breathing tube.

"It's bad, then." No sense in buttering it up, they're all miserable now. John thinks back to Sherlock, mentioning retiring soon, because of her health, and wonders crassly what will become of that plan, now.

She's not likely going to pull through this, and if she does, she may need that breathing tube for life. Life in Orkney, so far from doctors on their little lonely coast will not be an option. The ghost of her voice echoes quietly in his subconscious though, reminding him of hearing her on the phone one day, requesting that a location be eliminated from Google Earth. He wonders if her prior life in government has simply made her more cautious, or more of a target.

For now, the job is to wait, and keep Sherlock sane until they know more as her body slowly battles the infection. And John knows what a feat lies ahead of them all.

Chapter End Notes

shorty-short chappy. I was bored, here ya go.
Chapter Summary

Sherlock and John talk, and get back into the realm of casework, briefly

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

London: present

Sherlock comes back into the living area from the bedroom, having settled Georgia in his bed. She’s just back from hospital and faring well, so far, from her recent bout of Pneumonia. It could have easily taken her from him; the thought still sets his hands shaking.

John comes down from his room. He and Willa have been living there for less than a week. He’s just settled her in as well, and comes looking for a stiff drink to calm both their unraveled minds. The doctor at St Mary’s had only released Georgia under John’s care, as one medical professional to another, despite John’s relative lack of knowledge in heart defects, but with herself and Sherlock to guide the way, he was more than happy to take a strain of a long hospital stay off of all of them and let her return home under his supervision.

By the time the good doctor has made it into the common area, Sherlock is seated in his chair with two tumblers and a decanter of what John really hopes is scotch. He sees the side of Sherlock’s face lift slightly, a tired smile, and as he pours for them both John sinks into his own armchair with an exhausted huff. Sherlock hands him a glass and sits back with a quiet hum of assent, agreeing to John’s silent complaints. His friend’s eyes are far away from the living room, the doctor can see.

“How is she tonight?” John asks quietly, swirling the amber liquid in his glass and propping his feet up next to Sherlock’s thigh on the worn leather. He sees the distance it takes for Sherlock to travel back from wherever he is in his head and waits, sipping. It’s a good vintage, if sharp on the palate. A gift from Mycroft (or rather more likely, lifted from the back of one of his town cars after an “abduction”).

“The seam in her chest hurts from the coughing, but she’s already recovering quicker than at the hospital. Thank you,” he adds quietly, barely meeting John’s eyes. His friend nods and they fall into an easy, calming silence. By the time Sherlock tips the decanter into his tumbler again, John has questions on the tip of his tongue.

“You love her, so much,” he whispers, knowing that it’s not something Sherlock wants projected, but still isn’t necessarily ashamed of. Intimacy is just that; intimate.

“Yes,” he replies, sitting back and taking a mouthful of Lagavulin. He’d (as predicted by his long-term watcher across the way) swiped it from Mycroft’s infamous black car when he’d been lifted off the street several weeks back. Now, back in the flat and out of that tiny, stuffy hospital room, he’s got the nerve to throw back a few at last, relaxing with everyone he loves back under one roof.
“When?” John asks, nestling back into his chair, ready for a story. Sherlock, in lieu of answer, furrows his brow. He knows where John is going, but doesn’t quite know where to begin.

They began so much earlier than he ever knew.

John chuckles, speaking through a smile. “When did you figure out you loved her?”

“How.” Sherlock starts, twisting his lips into biting back his own laugh. He’d been so slow, in the beginning. Laughable, really. In his naiveté. “Not sure where to start.” But John is patient, and waits him out, expectant.

“Do you remember Sebastian Wilkes?” Sherlock asks, pressing his own shoulders back into the grey leather. John looks confused for a moment but recovers, nodding. “We went to university together, as you know. He brought it up, when we took his case?” another nod, though now John is scowling, remembering the flash of anger he felt when the banker mentioned having made a game out of teasing Sherlock in school. It warms Sherlock’s heart faster than the liquor burning in his belly. He winces, regretting the drink momentarily. Ulcers have returned in the stress of George’s illness, and his own pain is on the back burner in the face of hers. He’ll deal with it soon enough. Shaking his head, he gets on with the story: “Well. Part of his method was temporarily blackmailing me into doing some of his more complicated essays for him. You see,” he begins, at John’s utter confusion, and huffs a laugh despite himself. “He knew about an affair that had happened, a tryst, really, between a boy and myself in our third year at University, and took it upon himself to use this information for his own benefit. Naturally I wouldn’t have cared to go along with it, but Victor was terrified. His parents were very… conservative. He was scared they would cut him off from his inheritance if they found out, and asked me to go along with it, until he figured something more permanent out to buy Sebastian’s silence. So I did, tapping out a low-grade paper every few weeks and handing it to that slime ball. But then I met George in the library one evening. She was struggling to reach a book off a high shelf, near my table where I was studying, and I moved to help her. And she never left. She studied with me almost nightly after that, and one day after we’d started seeing each other a bit more…uh, privately, she was helping me set up a slideshow and found the file of essays for courses I wasn’t even taking on a thumb drive, while going through it for me to find files I needed for a presentation in one of my higher-level courses. In my idiocy I had labelled it SebWilkes and it was easy enough for her to connect the dots without even opening the file. Incensed, she questioned me and I didn’t even try to lie. I told her about having slept with Victor when we were young, about the sporadic attention since then, and after the att-…uh, well. By then I was done having to deal with the situation, it had been years by this point, and it was insipid that I had even continued doing the task for a friend who wasn’t even at school with us anymore. Victor had moved on to another school by then,” he supplemented for John, taking a sip of scotch to loosen his tongue a bit further. He was ready to continue. This is when it really got good, in his opinion.

“I found out later just how long she’d stewed on this, but one evening, while we were studying in the library, we heard some obvious noise coming from a few aisles down. And she was half-deaf at this point.” Sherlock smirks, implicating what they’d been listening to. “George is facing the doorway, and sees Sebastian coming in with a girl under each arm, cocky as you please. He’s clearly going to get laid tonight, and is very full of himself in this moment. Without saying adman word to me, Georgia gets up and goes over there, smacking Sebastian around the ear so hard he goes down in shock. And I sit there and watch, stunned as she lays into him for knocking her up.”

John’s eyebrows shoot up, rapt with attention and shock.

“What?!” he breathes, nearly laughing.

“She starts screaming for everyone to hear: I never expected you to pay for the abortion, you low-
life scum. Honestly I didn’t even expect a ride to the clinic, but the fact that you can’t even CALL ME afterward to see if I’m alive is proof enough of what a sack of shit you can be, and she’s bellowing at this point, chest heaving, hands clenched. The girls that had been under his arm have scuttled off, whispering to each other in awe, glad they hadn’t been duped, as well. And—it works; she’s single-handedly ruined his sex life on campus in two and a half sentences, and I’m just sitting at our table with my jaw on the floor, watching.” John is laughing into his hand now, picturing it in his mind’s eye. Such a tiny woman, deftly ruining a young man’s life as revenge for him mistreating Sherlock. It’s so perfect. Sherlock laughs too and continues, eyes crinkling in memory. “And Sebastian gets up, enraged, and I’m getting out of my seat to go prevent him from—I don’t even know, slapping her I suppose—but she goes toe-to-toe with him, glaring for all she’s worth, rage in every molecule, and says, real low: Stop this shit, now or you’ll be paying to get a girl on your knob the rest of your miserable life. He’s mine, and you’ll keep off the grass. Hear?” Sherlock wipes his eyes, still chuckling quietly, eyes in the past. “And Sebastian looks at me over her head and glares, furious, but nods and stalks out, knuckles white. And she just… She just comes back and sits down, tucking her hair behind her ear and shoots me a smile, getting back to her own project on her laptop. And I’m reeling, completely knocked sideways that someone has even defended me, let alone so thoroughly and without the promise of any kind of payoff, except my own happiness. No one had ever… well,” he pauses, recalling just how much John has done exactly that for him over the years, and sends his friend a soft smile.

And so, after two more tumblers and a few more quieted fits of giggling, Sherlock slowly stumbled his way to his bedroom, carefully stretching out beside Georgia on his bed. It was never easy, dealing with the hospital stuff, having to watch her, anxiety beating a tattoo on his ribs for weeks while she slowly recovered, but at least he had John to help them through this round.

At least he didn’t have to say goodbye, just yet.

Four Months later: British Museum, London

John suppressed a giggle at his best friend, tugging with a grimace at his tight bow tie not two feet away. They were properly dressed and scouting the crowd at the Act Up! Charity event at the British Museum, champagne glasses half-empty. It was sweltering on a late summer night, between the humidity and the press of thousands of bodies of the world’s richest and most elite. Whoever had deep pockets was at this ball, the world over.

John took another sip of his drink and let his body take cues from the detective, who could actually see over the heads of the majority here.

So far, it had been two hours and the man they were looking for hadn’t shown up among the few groups they’d passed through. All they had to go on was a photograph from Mycroft and a request (which is how Sherlock preferred his job requests from his brother dear). Less information up front generally made for a more pleasurable outcome, let alone less bias.

Sherlock pressed the Bluetooth device in his ear in a bit deeper, listening to the interaction his wife was having from across the room. Jean-Luc Martín, the man they were hunting, was a smooth-talking Frenchman with a vast bank account and so much blood on his hands you could fill a decent sized pool. And it sounded like George was already chatting him up.

“Chérie, tu devrais rentrer à l’hôtel avec moi,” the man was very close to her hearing device now, which was just at the collar of her yoke-neck gown. Sherlock grunted his displeasure, meaning that Martín was dangerously close to both blowing their cover and feeling up his wife. For her
part, George giggled playfully and seemed to shoo the man a few inches away from her chest. They carried on flirtatiously until she excused herself to the powder room. Sherlock caught sight of the gold band that made up the collar of her dress as she slid through the crowd, largely unnoticed. Martín’s eyes followed her as well, biting his lip. Sherlock growled under his breath and made to move to a better vantage point.

*He could still be arraigned with a few less fingers, right? --SH*

John’s head had snapped to attention at the sound, ready for action, but Sherlock shook his head, motioning for them to find a table amidst the crowd on the second floor. Then he could see more clearly. They easily found a blessedly half-empty cocktail table near the stairs where Sherlock could easily see most of the ground floor, where his wife was entertaining their target.

She was a good bit of prey; striking with her hair and doll-like features, wide eyes and hips that caught every man’s attention no matter what. She spoke several languages fluently, and had no fear of letting a target in close. It made both of the men she lived with unspeakably uneasy to let her be the bait, but she was an obvious choice. Martín was not renowned to be much of a talker even to his own close circle of paid “friends,” but a girl might be able to get him drunk enough to talk a little.

Sherlock was waiting for her signal, a sentence they’d decided upon previously, before he made his move to collect her. In reality, they didn’t even need much info from this man, it was more of a way to get him out of hiding and into Mycroft’s clutches. He was wanted for terrorism in several continental nations, including France, for connections to ISIS. One of his lackeys along the way seemed to have gotten lazy, leaving a paper trail of funds that had been easily traced to the massive terrorism group, and he turned out to be one of their chief sources of money. He had a bad habit of buying artifacts from world heritage sites from them, as well. A lucrative business, no doubt, but obviously highly illegal and unsavoury. He had to be dealt with.

“*Ce qui vous fait penser que je ne me manquerai pas de cet événement, ma chérie?’*” she purred, letting her hand rest on his forearm a little too long, eyes wide and sultry. Martín cocked an eyebrow, looking around them as if to suggest to her that no one had interrupted them so far, why would she be noticed at all, let alone if she was missing.

But that was Sherlock’s line, and he was prepared. The detective handed his drink to John and buttoned his jacket, slipping through the press of bodies easily enough, making a beeline for his wife.

John huffed at being left behind and slammed their flutes down, speeding up to follow, hand already clenching and unclenching, ready for a throw-down if necessary.

It had been ages since they had a real, honest, chase-the-bad-guy case, and the thrill of adrenaline was humming in his ears. He traced the bob of dark curls easily enough, staying a few bodies deep into the crowd as they approached Martín and Georgia.

By the time Sherlock left the mass of people and appeared into the clearing where Martin and Georgia were sat, the man had a hand fairly high on her thigh and was kneading suggestively with his fingers. George took it with ceremony, of course, letting him touch as he pleased for now, under the knowledge that Sherlock, John and half of MI5 were waiting and close. The detective stepped closer and huffed a deep breath, making himself appear a little hapless and irritated. He puffed out his cheeks and came closer, extending a hand to his wife, speaking quickly.

“There you are, love. Come on, this is awful, I’m ready to go—oh, hello.” Sherlock paused with his hand extended, grasping at George’s own. She did a grand job of appearing to be caught-out and appalled, standing up to join him swiftly. John reeled at how much they made it seem like she
was the one cheating, trying to slip away in the night, and that Sherlock was just discovering her bad behavior. “Who’s your friend, dear,” Sherlock asked, making a face like he wasn’t quite sure if he wanted to shake a stranger’s hand or punch him. He ran his eyes over George conspicuously, like he was making a show of ensuring she was still fully dressed. She rolled her eyes and waved a hand, falsifying nonchalance.

“Jean-Luc, something or other, I didn’t catch it all. He’s a benefactor out of Lagrasse. Owns a castle, yeah,” she was using her (John would say prat, others would say posh) accent, lilting slightly to show that she’d not come from money, but rather likely married into it.

It was all markedly intricate, and John stood by, appreciating the show with a slightly shocked grin on his face. He shook it clear and paid attention as Martín stood and buttoned his jacket, sour at his ruined tryst but needing to appear polite in public. He extended a hand to Sherlock and said his surname clearly, straightening. They’d spoiled his game, and he was quite angry; Sherlock observed the lines around his mouth and cocked a lopsided grin, looping one long arm around George’s waist and shaking Jean-Luc’s hand with the other.

“Good to meet you, I’m sure your wallet is getting lighter here,” Sherlock laughed it off and stood back, placing himself slightly in front of Georgia. “I’m Georgia’s husband, Sherlock Holmes,” he waited for his name to ring a bell on the man’s face, but got very little more than a twitch of the eye. Clenching his jaw, he made to move them aside and back into the swell of the crowd. “Thank you for entertaining her, by the way, I got a bit sidetracked, and you know—women tend to wander,” he chuffed another laugh and tugged at George’s waist, willing her to move toward John. Jean-Luc grinned, predatory, and puffed up like a rooster.

“Don’t mention it, detective. I’m sure I’ll see you at the next event. Tell your beautiful wife the same, from me,” His smile turned twisted and he waved a hand. Three men departed from tables around them and followed their boss out the closest door. Sherlock grimaced and turned to see Georgia and John standing a few feet away, expectant.

“Let’s go home, I’m sure the tracker she put in his wallet will be sufficient enough for Mycroft’s purposes. If they don’t already have him,” he waved both arms at his two dearest people and followed them to the lobby and into a waiting cab, ready for the night to be over. That he kept his large palm over Georgia’s thigh where Jean-Luc’s had been before was not ignored by any of the detail-oriented people in the car.

The first thing to go was his bow tie, swiftly pocketed with a low growl.

Chapter End Notes

y’all are killing me, beloved fans.
sorry this took so long, but i lost heart. in my mind, George was already dead. i’d written her out and was ready to close this. but i had a lot of requests to not let her go quite yet, to keep it fluffy a little longer. so i tried to comply.
guess i needed to stew on some plot for a little longer.
i hope you liked this new addition, please let me know. i have an idea on how to close it out less painfully now.
End Notes

if you are a follower, please take a minute to re-read when you can. I am slowly adding
to/taking from some of the previous chapters as I see fit to make the story a bit more well-rounded.
I have issues, sorry -_- 

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