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Where I Cannot Find You

by [withoutawish](#)

Summary

When Hamish is diagnosed with cancer, his parents have two entirely separate ways of coping.

Notes

Dedicated to my amazing brother who went through this when he was eleven, recovered, and is now a BAMF military intelligence genius (who is also full of rage and jam and kittens.)

I did a bunch of research before I wrote this but alas, I'm a historian and not a pediatric oncologist so I apologize if anyone reading this is one and there are inaccuracies in here—aaahhhhhh. Rest assured, it was betaed and checked over by a medical professional beforehand (thanks andreanurse) so it should be fairly decent but still, preemptive apologies in case there are any glaring errors. Ergo, all mistakes henceforth are entirely mine and will be fixed as best I can. More spoilery notes at the end.

Translation update: There are multiple translations of this fic in the works right now, and they'll be listed here once they're finished :)

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

“In this part of the story I am the one who

Dies, the only one, and I will die of love because I love you,

Because I love you, Love, in fire and blood.”

-Pablo Neruda

*

“Neuroblastoma.”

Sherlock observes as John tightens his grip around Hamish’s fingers substantially at the grey haired oncologist’s succinct verdict. The six year old winces a bit in response, but is seemingly unflapped as he turns back to the colouring book aptly titled *Shipwood’s Human Physiology: Volume 2* that the detective had brought home for him from Foyle’s last weekend despite John’s exasperated sigh and complaint that it wasn’t ‘at all age appropriate.’ Hamish continues to blissfully scribble away, adding a thick layer of burnt orange to the outside of a ribosome and ignoring the three men who stand together in the tiny examination room.

“Metastasized?” John questions back as calmly as he can under the given circumstances.

“No, only localized in the lung tissue.”

“Stage?”

“Two, no lymph node involvement yet.”

“Operable, yes?”

“Immediately.”

“Oh,” breathes John, “*Oh.*”

The silence that permeates the paediatrician’s examination room, the room with the pictures of Mickey Mouse in a doctor’s uniform and the three months’ worth of *Parenting Today* in the corner, begins to flower and grow until it is sliced through by a tiny voice belonging to the boy who has finally looked up from his colouring book.

“What does that all that mean...Dad? Father...?” Hamish looks quizzically between both men; his bright blue eyes and face begin to instinctually crack once he registers exactly how startlingly grave everything has gotten.

Neither man responds and so their son asks more persistently this time.

“I know that I’m sick but what do those words mean?”

Sherlock sags imperceptibly into the counter that he’s leaning on and John tips forward to scoop Hamish off of the examination table and into his arms. He hugs the boy fiercely and breaths through his nostrils into their son’s hair.

“It means we’re all going on an adventure for a while, alright? We’re just going to go on a little adventure, Hamish--but it’s all going to be fine, just fine.”

Sherlock numbly watches as John nuzzles his face further into their son’s dark curls. The boy drops the colouring book and burnt orange crayon to the floor and it lands with an irreverent crack, splayed

open on the page that details the aortic ventricles. Hamish latches onto his father's neck and buries his head into John's shoulder—sheer instinct and nothing more.

“Please, spare us the childish metaphors, John,” Sherlock says as he eyes the diastolic valve and wonders why on earth, as a doctor, John would ever let their son colour it lime green. It's decidedly unfortunate, but then again, John has never been considered a paradigm of strict accuracy in regards to their son's forays into the scientific world.

Apparently, now it might not even matter. Ironic, and oh, how he loves a bit of good irony.

*

“We need to discuss options. I obviously have a professional opinion, but as I understand, you're a doctor as well and most likely have already decided what you want to do.” The grey haired oncologist smooths the grained wood surface of his desk in between his two palms, looking all business. The adults have stepped away and into an office titled with a brass plaque *DR. RICHARD PEDERSON PAEDIATRIC ONCOLOGIST*, leaving their son in the waiting room to watch the endless loop of *Toy Story*, at the part where the toys have finally rebelled against Sid. Both fathers sit next to each other in the overly padded leather chairs as Sherlock silently counts the number of medical books detailing oncology that climb the walls, which at present is 143.

“We'll operate,” John counters, meeting the doctor's gaze, “as soon as possible. When would be your next available opening?”

“Exactly what I would have suggested. It should be a fairly clean surgery--just the tumor and then we're out. I could do tomorrow at 4:00, the Oncology Department at Bart's—“

“No,” Sherlock interrupts distractedly, still not drawing his eyes away from counting. 176—no, 177. “Bart's is not an option.”

“Different hospital?”

Back to John. “Yes, please. The best, whatever that is.”

Dr. Pederson ticks his head to consider this for a moment. “I also work out of the Royal Marsden in Surrey. The hospital houses the Institute of Cancer research—it's one of the best paediatric units in the world, but I should let you know, it will be substantially more expensive.”

“Money is not a problem,” Sherlock affirms with a blatant note of disgust. 206 now, better.

“What he's trying to say is that's fine,” John exhales as he shoots the man next to him a *look* which Sherlock promptly ignores, “I can scrub in for the surgery there, yes?”

“I normally don't advise it, but yes. You won't do any operating, but you'll be allowed in the room.”

“Stage two is relatively recoverable, correct?”

Dr. Pederson nods. “Approximately an 85% full recovery rate. His prognosis looks very good—he should be ready to return to school on time this fall. In fact, you're incredibly lucky that you caught this over summer holiday.”

“I suppose we should pick up a few lottery tickets on our way in then,” John laughs, but his laugh is humorless, his grin is only teeth and no soul, “Four o'clock tomorrow then?”

“Four o'clock. The nurse will give you additional instructions.”

“Perfect. Thank you,” John says with a flattened smile as if they’ve just made one of the world’s smoothest business transactions.

Sherlock nods, relatively distracted as he stares straight ahead once more, his fingers lightly resting on the top of John’s jacket sleeve. He completes the count at 252, noting the last three nestled on top of the doctor’s desk, and deems it just marginally acceptable for one of the leading pediatric oncologists in the country, but just marginally.

*

What was the news in regards to my nephew’s diagnosis? –MH

Don’t bother. –SH

The Japanese Embassy is *fine*, thank you for asking. -MH

*

They’re back at 221B after a brief layover at the toy store in which John has just purchased Hamish three new sets of Legos, the large sets. As soon as they had returned to the flat, first thing, he had unpackaged the pirate ship with the sharks and working cannons and spread the pieces in a pile in the middle of Hamish’s room. Promptly after, he had rejoined Sherlock in the kitchen and began attempting to make dinner, per usual. Everything is going on just fine, per usual, besides the fact that he had bought their son the large sets of Legos this time which in all honesty, he does, never.

“We should have gotten Chinese. He likes it far better than your futile attempts at cooking anyway,” Sherlock snorts as he clicks through what he claims are pictures of eviscerations on his laptop as he sits at the kitchen table. However, as John glances over, he can see articles with titles such as ‘*Etiology of Neuroblastoma*’ and ‘*Recovery Rates in Childhood Cancer*’ reflected in the glass of the oven behind him.

John ignores both of these facts and turns back to stir the pasta that froths and bubbles on the stove top.

“Do we notify....?” The doctor purses his lips as he rather dislikes saying her name for obvious reasons.

Sherlock sighs heavily and clicks his mobile phone once before setting it against table again and returning to his research. “Despite the fact you’re currently insinuating that I am wholly irresponsible as a parent, I preemptively did while on our way back. No genetic anomalies, nor history of family diseases. No allergies, nor anything else we need to be aware of before going into surgery--perfectly healthy.”

“You,” John chews the word as he prods the softening noodles, “*are* irresponsible, most of the time. Need I remind you about your little potassium chlorate experiment last week? I was finding candy bits engrained in the fibers of Mrs. Hudson’s carpet for days, Sherlock—days.”

“Irrelevant; Mrs. Hudson is on holiday, it’s technically not her carpet at present. It was successful, was it not?”

A tap of the wooden spoon against the metal pot and John stirs once more, looking down into the pasta

and searching for an answer there that he's not entirely certain he wants to find.

"Since you're obviously not going to ask--yes, in America still," Sherlock quietly responds to what John is thinking as he continues to click and scroll, "And no, I told her that if she even thought about turning up, I'd have her head cut off on sight."

Unsatisfied, John nods once, taps the spoon again, and calls Hamish for dinner. Everything as normal, per usual.

"Ironic, is it not?" Sherlock asks. He stretches his legs underneath the table as the two hear their son come thundering down the hallway.

John sets his hands on his hips and exhales. "A bit, yeah. Doesn't mean I'll ever like it, though."

Hamish sidles up to the kitchen table with a block of grey Lego *something* in hand. Sherlock quirks his lips in a shadow of a half smile at the boy before snapping his laptop closed shut rather quickly.

"What are you looking at, Father?"

"Eviscerations," Sherlock says as he presses his fingers to the corners of his eyes, but his tone is still consistent, "Perhaps we'll go through some later if you're good. "

"No, you will not—Sherlock, no murders at the dinner table, we've discussed this a million times," John warns, a little rougher than intended under the present circumstances, as he pours the pasta out in a colander at the sink, "Hamish, sit. Set down your toys."

The chair creaks as Sherlock shifts to push the laptop aside. "What precisely is in your hand at present?"

The small voice is exceedingly proud. "A great white shark—I made it myself, do you want to see it?"

"Hm, it appears so. Scientific name first."

"Jesus, Sherlock, he's *six*," John throws over his shoulder, steeling himself for yet another spat on the subject, "Six years old—"

"—which is precisely the age at which development of the cerebral cortex is at one of the peaks of its maximum productivity, John--"

"—just let him be six. I didn't even know that you *knew* scientific names, I thought those were the types of things that you deleted—"

"—mind palace, John, honestly—Hamish, please demonstrate that you're not a complete idiot, nor a normal six year old, and recite the scientific name for a great white shark.

Satisfaction permeates Hamish's answer. "Carcharodon carcharias. We read about them last night."

"Excellent." The doctor hears Sherlock assess with a smirk as John reaches for the jar of pasta sauce on the counter. If their son weren't present, he would consider throwing it in the direction of that smirk, and rather hard. "I suppose there is a perfunctory educational purpose for seemingly ridiculous playthings such as 'Legos' after all."

However, as John turns around to slide their son's plate of pasta across the table, Sherlock is gone. The detective doesn't eat dinner with them that night.

Then again, he never does.

Everything per usual.

*

John Watson feels just a tiny bit amused at the fact that his life has come to a point where he's dressed in his pyjamas and holding a penguin in one hand and a monkey in the other as he stands in the middle of his son's darkened upstairs room, the room which used to be his until a kiss occurred unexpectedly amidst a row about the proper places to cultivate reticulate spore samples approximately seven years prior. As John awkwardly palms the two choices again, he feels strangely as though the question he has just asked his son could potentially hold the key to all of life itself.

"Which one do you want to bring tomorrow, Hamish? Your penguin or one of your monkeys?"

The dark haired boy shifts in bed and blinks up at him, outlined by the faint orange glow of the nightlight.

"Father always tells me to call that one a lemur," he says decidedly in a very six year old fashion.

John pretends to groan loudly as he tosses it with military like precision on top of the boy's packed bag that lies in the center of his room. He carefully picks his way to his son's bedside, taking extra precaution to avoid the scattered Legos that are currently tacked together in pieces of a half formed pirate ship. Hamish has inevitably inherited his *other* father's lack of organizational skills. "Oh, of course, a *lemur* then—my apologies. You only have seven stuffed monkeys after all, it's impossible to tell the difference of each one."

"S'it's fine. I call it a monkey too sometimes, but don't tell Father. I know all the different names of them in the book he got me—do you want to hear them all? We went through the primates and monkeys last week before I went to sleep."

"I heard—in fact, it sounds like you know a lot of different scientific names right now." The doctor smiles as lightly as he can under the present circumstances and settles down on the edge of Hamish's bed while gently tucking the covers around the tiny body that is starting to seem frailer by the minute. "But how about we save those names for tomorrow? You need to get some sleep tonight."

"Is Father...?"

John exhales as he leans forward to press a soft kiss to his son's forehead. "No, he's not. And no, it's not your fault, Hamish—he's just in another one of his moods, again."

With today and all, he wants to add, but in typical John Watson fashion, doesn't. The tiny boy encircles his arms around his father's neck and doesn't let go. Six seconds later, John finally asks what is wrong even though the answer is quite obvious.

"Dad, it's going to be fine," he says confidently, his breath tickling against John's cheek. His voice sounds infinitely smaller than all of his six years on this planet and John wonders when he ever agreed to let Sherlock start teaching him how to deduce emotions based on body language because really, that was a bad idea. "I know that you're worried, but it's going to be fine."

"You're absolutely right," John echoes with a smile as the tiny iron arms release him; as those arms let go, the doctor tries his best to embrace the same level of blind confidence that their son obviously has. He touches Hamish's cheek once and stares into the light blue eyes that are now a somewhat haunting carbon copy of those that belong to a man downstairs somewhere, that belong to the other half of his heart.

After a moment, John finds his voice again, "Just fine, love."

*

John has scooped up a pillow up in his arms and is in the process of pawing down a folded fleece sheet from the top shelf of their master bedroom closet when Sherlock finally speaks up again under the lump of blankets that is currently their bed. His voice is muffled, his face smothered under the covers. When John first entered the room he hadn't even been sure that Sherlock was there until he had tried to sit down and the pile of blankets had shifted and called him an idiot. This is nothing new, however, he should be used to it by now.

"He doesn't want you to sleep in his room tonight."

With a small jump, John finally swipes the fleece sheet down. It falls to the floor in a melted pile of cream colored fabric and the doctor stares at it for a moment as he considers the man's words.

"Is it because he really doesn't?" The bracketed statement hangs in the air [or is because you want me here?] but as usual, neither speaks the latter half of it out loud.

Sherlock shifts over a bit in bed before sighing, which John takes to mean *both*. To this, John mirrors his sigh because, per usual, Sherlock is most likely correct. The doctor folds the sheet back up and sets it aside to be put up on the shelf at a later time.

"You're obviously upset and now I have to ask it," John says as he swallows thickly. He tosses the pillow back on top of their bed before he pulls back the crumpled duvet covers and slides in next to the man. John licks his lips once before he continues, "are you more upset about the fact that Hamish is ill, or are you more upset about the fact that you missed the signs of his illness until it got this far?"

"I did not *miss* them. If you recall correctly, I was the one who suggested that something might have been amiss in the first place. You're a doctor, John, it's your job to see these things as well," the pile of blankets acerbically retorts back, but moves over even further to accommodate John's presence. Two seconds later he feels fingers lightly brush the soft curve of his hipbone under the waistband of his pyjamas; ten seconds later John prays that they don't go any further because tonight is not the night—not after today's news. Normally, yes--God yes--but not tonight, no.

"No, no—you can't pin this all on me, Sherlock. And Christ, he really did have the flu last month so the chest pain would have been easy to attribute to that. Hamish has a really good chance for recovery though--85%. We have to believe that right now it's going to be just fine—after all, he *just told me* it was going to be fine, which reminds me—when on earth did I agree to let you start teaching him how to make deductions? I thought we were waiting until he was just a bit older."

"You didn't; you were with your sister in Portshead for the weekend. Furthermore, that level of blind confidence in 'everything going to be fine' absolutely reeks of the Watson genome."

John wants to point out that their son technically doesn't have any of his genetic makeup but the pile of blankets continues on:

"Statistically speaking, you're also aware that there is a 15% chance you could be entirely wrong."

The doctor doesn't let himself consider that possibility as he boxes the pillow behind him before settling back down. His head hurts from trying to deal with all the logistics of the next day and so he just says what he thinks is the blunt truth-

"Look, he's your son, Sherlock. Despite the fact that you think you're both more unique than the bloody Hope diamond, most likely you will be disappointed to find that he tends to be disgustingly *normal* in this regard."

That shuts the pile of blankets up for a bit until, "You obviously have something else to say."

While deciding how to continue on, the doctor's stretches his legs out in front of him and rolls his bad ankle, the left one. He had fractured it years ago while stupidly jumping out of a helicopter in Afghanistan from twenty feet up in a vain effort to reach an intelligence camp that insurgents had car bombed. There was a scant reading of survivors, all had died but one. John still remembers the soldier--Bryce, bright blonde and 24--who bled out in between his fingers (amidst the dull throbbing of his ankle) before John could even put pressure against the flowing wound in the man's upper thigh. In his last breath, the soldier had made John promise that he would tell his wife back at home *those three words*, the three words that people in situations like these *normally* say all the time. John wishes it were that easy now. They never say these types of things, they *never* do as it's against the unwritten rules of 'Sherlock and John' that have dictated the last seven years of his life. However, it seems as if tonight is as good of a night as ever to maybe start, and so he takes a hesitant breath and, "No matter what...it doesn't change the fact that, Sherlock --"

"No, John," Sherlock cuts in, before burying his head even deeper into the pillow. Sherlock removes his hand from John's waistband and rolls over into a tight ball of blankets and limbs. Neither of them really feels like attempting for more after today's news, apparently, "You're well aware that we do not say those things, even now."

"No," John agrees. He twists in bed to face away from the detective so that Sherlock can't deduce how much his eyes burn right now for a variety of reasons, exhaustion being the only one that he'd ever admit to.

Some things never change, now do they? No, they don't.

*

To: management@stjohnshealthclinic.co.uk

From: drjohnwatson@stjohnshealthclinic.co.uk

RE: Paid LOA

Confirmation of my three week leave of absence starting today.

Sincerely,

Dr. John Watson

To: drjohnwatson@stjohnshealthclinic.co.uk

From: elizabethbucher@londonchildrensorchestra.co.uk

Re: RE: Orchestra Rehearsal

Dear John,

That is absolutely fine, we'll be more than happy to save him second chair for clarinet as soon as he's back in action. Send Hamish all of our best wishes for a speedy recovery!

Thanks,

Elizabeth

To: drjohnwatson@stjohnshealthclinic.co.uk

From: coachgregson@westlondonyouthfootball.co.uk

Re: RE: Practice Schedule

Hi John,

Football practice won't start up again for fall until the end of next month, so you should be just fine. Please tell Hamish that all of us here tell him to get well soon!

*

“Christ, this looks rather posh, doesn't it?” John stares slack jawed as he stops in the middle of the entryway and looks up to see the skylit ceiling of the Royal Marsden, reminding him of a crystal cathedral he once saw while watching a travel special on the telly. The three look like a small pack of mismatched wolves, Sherlock tall and dark leading the way, Hamish small and dark walking in front of him, and John medium and fair to the side. John carries two overnight bags slung across his shoulders. He adjusts the bags and then keeps walking, catching up to the others several large steps later as they start up the stairs.

“Money is not a concern, John,” Sherlock responds as he tightens his grip on the boy's shoulder to steer him into the oncology waiting room to the right as they reach the third floor, “Money is never a concern.”

The check Hamish into the sterile looking waiting room and John sets him and their bags down in the corner with *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* despite the fact that Sherlock had scoffed and tried to switch it out with Kant's *What is Enlightenment* earlier that morning. A red headed nurse comes out and meets them before motioning them to follow her behind the oak door and into a separate office with two chairs and a desk. She settles behind the desk and hands the fathers a clipboard full of liability releases. Without a second thought, Sherlock passes it to John who scratches his name across the bottom of the stack full of documents. As he signs, the nurse shifts uncomfortably and pulls her pink scrub jacket closer around her body before she asks *it*:

“Which one of you is the father? Or...is there even a genetic father present?”

“If you're speaking on a strict genetic level, I highly doubt that you'll have to do a Punnett square if you simply *look* at the boy.”

“Sherlock,” it's a one word warning as *John H. Watson, John H. Watson, John H. Watson.*

But the detective continues on, “Furthermore, despite the fact that it makes you feel more individualistic, have you asked your husband how he feels about your new hair color? Most likely not, perhaps because his job requires a copious amount of international travel--yes--however, it's far more likely that you haven't asked him because you would be forced to confront the fact that he's currently--”

“Ignore him,” John says, waving a hand, “Please. *Sherlock.*”

A skeptical pause. “You are the father then, Mr...” she glances down at the name, “Holmes? I know

this might sound a bit...insensitive, however, I need to know if you two are married. I only ask as it's regarding liability and who gets to see him post op."

Per usual when asked this question, Sherlock starts in again before John has a chance to offer a decidedly kinder explanation, "The antediluvian institution of marriage is an insufficient measurement of—"

"I'll just cut to the chase and let you know that what he's really trying to say is yes, legally we are, actually—for purposes like this," John exhales wearily as he continues to sign their son's life away, "And believe me, sometimes even *I* honestly question that decision, if you can see why."

*

"Why on earth did they give us wristbands, John? It not as if I'm going to forget who my own child is."

John fingers his own purple *PATIENT: HAMISH WATSON-HOLMES, FATHER 1: JOHN WATSON* as they walk down the hallway glancing over at Sherlock who is violently trying to twist his *PATIENT: HAMISH WATSON-HOLMES, FATHER 2: SHERLOCK HOLMES* off.

"Just...leave it on, you idiot. It's so they'll let us in with him."

Hamish, *PATIENT: HAMISH WATSON-HOLMES*, glances up at them as he walks along the hospital corridor and smiles.

John catches his grin and returns it in kind because he knows that their son likes it when his fathers call each other that name. After all, during Hamish's 'show and tell' last fall in school, Hamish had presented both men and then proceeded to inform their entire class how his family 'called each other idiots all the time' while the doctor stood there with his face pressed to his palm and tried to direct their son's presentation in a more positive route amidst the laughter of 24 other primary school children and one teacher. Sherlock had bickered with John in the process (of course), which lead to further inevitable shrieks of laughter and left John more red faced at their blatant lack of parenting skills than he ever thought imaginable. However, as Hamish excitedly told John over their dinner of macaroni and chicken fingers that night, apparently they had been the hit of the class that day.

Sherlock had initially tried to get him to take the skull to school instead. However, John had gone and as a rule, wherever the doctor goes, Sherlock will find him, albeit eventually.

*

Hamish's oncology CCU room, 12C third floor, is the largest on the entire unit and placed directly in front of the bustling nurses' station. It looks startlingly like a usual sterile hospital room in most ways: one bed, a multitude of machines and outlets, and a curtain that can be drawn around it if additional privacy is needed. There are two blue fabric padded plastic chairs in the corner, a dresser, and a long teal fabric bench under the window that could be used to sleep on if necessary. There is a bathroom on the far side with a shower as well.

Hamish's room has bright pictures on the wall of kittens hanging off of branches and horses with cowboy hats that loudly proclaim "HANG IN THERE" and "GET WELL SOON, PARTNER." Hamish's room is cheery with sky blue walls and a white ceiling despite the fact that a startling number of children who have resided in it before do not leave in the way that they were hoping to go.

Hamish's room also now has Hamish in it and the moment that they are finally settled in, John unzips their overnight bags and begins unpacking because Hamish's room needs to look more like *home*.

John sets the boxes of Legos on the floor next to the small bedside table and dives deeper in his bag to

bring out a stack of DVDs that are some of Hamish's favorites (according to Sherlock, scientific documentaries, according to John, 'normal six year old movies' like Pixar and Star Wars—he's brought both.) Next to the stack, John also unpacks colouring books at are not *Shipwoods Anatomy Volume 2*. He tosses Hamish's favorite pillow on the bed and tosses both his and Sherlock's favorite pillows on top of the padded bench. John places the rarest and most precious object, a framed snapshot of the three of them taken last Christmas by Mrs. Hudson, on the very corner of the small bedside table.

There, home.

Sherlock just stands there as he palms his son's shoulder. He's observing, apparently, but as to *what* he's observing, John does not dare ask at present. He doesn't want to know the statistics of how many children have never made it out of this room, not now.

John is all movement, now gently taking Hamish over to the bed and tugging off his jumper and shirt before tugging on his light blue hospital gown that he's practically swimming in. The boy is all dark curls and knobby knees as John makes him sit on the edge of the bed while he pries off his trousers, shoes, and socks. He folds the clothing in a neat pile before he slides said pile into the bottom dresser drawer.

Sherlock just stands there.

John lightly taps the side of their son's face once he is finished. "Slide in bed, love. Nurse will be in soon."

Hamish does so and as he starts to settle into the bed he winces a bit and brings his fingers to his chest but says nothing. His blue eyes crinkle at the edges before he smooths his expression down once more because, bottom line, he's used to this, this 'not talking' that they all do so frequently.

John notices though and it alarms him substantially. "Does it hurt again?"

"No, Dad, I'm fine," The boy replies too quickly with a shake of his head. Watson-Holmes genealogy through and through. Brilliant, but emotionally stunted.

"Hamish, it's alright if it does."

"No."

John's voice is gentle. "I may not be Father, but I can see that it does. Remember what we said about lying?"

"...maybe a little," Hamish finally admits as he picks at the edge of the blankets, not meeting the doctor's eyes. The movement makes John's heart ache with a dull carving sensation that he never thought he could experience until now.

John cups the back of his son's head with his palm and plants a kiss into the precise center of his hair. He tries to keep his voice as even as possible and says, "I know. We're here to fix that. It's going to be fine."

"Just fine," the small boy echoes back.

As Hamish scoots down into the covers, John finally turns to Sherlock and throws him his best 'what the fuck' look, however, the detective is texting away at his phone now and doesn't even meet the doctor's gaze. Really, why would he? He's fine as well.

They all are.

*

Sherlock's phone vibrates against the windowsill and it's a text from Lestrade requesting a consultation on a case involving a serial killer who has murdered two Uni girls over the last week, cut off their lips, and carved '[De mortuis nil nisi bonum](#)' into their chests before leaving the scene of the crime. The detective's eyes look hungry and grateful as John watches him pick up the phone from against the white plaster and step out of the room to call Lestrade back immediately. The doctor can't help but wonder if he requested to be involved or if it was just something that fortuitously happened.

Knowing Sherlock, he settles on the former, and quite quickly.

"Hand me my laptop, John," Sherlock demands upon return. He flops back down in the unoccupied chair and looks decidedly more resolute.

"Sherlock, can't this wait?"

"No," he responds in a clipped tone, "It can't."

Despite the fact that the answer was far more serrated than expected, the doctor sighs before he reaches down into their bag because bottom line, he's John.

As Hamish's tumor is ultra sounded by a young blonde nurse technician named Amanda later that day, the detective clacks away at the keyboard under the pretense of 'research' while John leans against the wall with his arms crossed in front of him. Sherlock frowns at various intervals as he scrolls away while sitting flopped in a chair with his feet up on the bed and crossed at the ankles. Hamish's deduction that the tech thinks John is cute draws a wry smirk from the detective but does little else to pry his eyes away from the laptop while searching for potential information on the killer.

"Lips, why lips?" He muses at one point before casting his eyes in the direction of the doctor, "Obviously a metaphor, decidedly dramatic, I approve--but is the message directed towards the families, the victim, or society in general?"

"Sherlock, I am *not* you offering any sort of opinion, obviously—we're dealing with something far more important right now," John says before shaking his head and placating the detective who now stares at him looking something akin to an indignant beaten puppy, "...which, this case is important too, I suppose, in its own way...do you have any theories?"

"Eight at present," he responds and returns to scrolling and clicking and ignoring, "Fascinating murderer, wouldn't you say?"

What John doesn't point out as he stands and leans against the wall while his eyes track the tumor on the ultrasound screen is that there is a killer of a different variety right in the middle of the room. It's not as exciting as lipless carved corpse apparently, even though it has the potential to rip out a heart.

*

"Get off your bloody laptop."

The detective doesn't move from his chair. "It's for a *case*, John. Besides, if you had let me bring my violin, this wouldn't be a problem at present."

John pinches the bridge of his nose and exhales. In truth, he's doing his best not to reach over and strangle the man who sits in front of him right now. He wants to, he really does, however it would mean that he would have to change out of the hospital scrubs that he just changed into (which is a whole process in and of itself.) Instead, the doctor stands there in the now Hamish-less 12C and hopes that he doesn't look as ridiculous as he feels before he sets his hands on his hips.

“Our son is about to go into major surgery—he’s back there right now, in case you actually care--and you’re ‘working on a case?’ Jesus, Sherlock, this is--well, I would say unbelievable, but it’s *you* so I believe it.”

A pause. The detective glances up, his brow furrowed. “I’ve upset you.”

John’s voice rises to a dangerous level. “Oh, did you deduce that now?”

But the detective simply goes back to whatever article he’s reading and so John continues on:

“Do you even know what operating room he’s in? He’s scheduled for surgery in 20 minutes and—“

“You should be with him then,” Sherlock responds over his laptop screen, rather nonchalant, “A bit obvious.”

“Sherlock,” John pauses and starts again, “I’m asking for *me* right now. Please just...be there.” His voice is rapidly approaching 'simmering' and 'seething' but he’s still doing his best to keep the edge out of it as he turns on his heel to leave the room.

Still somewhat fuming, John takes the elevator down and strides back to the second floor Oncology OR where they’re prepping their son. He scrubs in with brusque movements, ignoring the flecks of iodine that splash against his face.

“Where’s Father?” Hamish slurs, his voice heavy and warm. As John approaches the operating table, he swallows down a small smile at the obvious fact that the IV drip is starting to take effect. Their son’s curls are covered with a hairnet and John wishes that he could nudge it off to run his hands through Hamish’s hair just one last time. In moments such as these, it reminds him exactly *why* he chooses to stay with the impossible man currently sitting in an empty room upstairs.

“Coming, as usual. Late, as usual.”

Even half drugged, the boy knows better. His eyes are half lidded as he lies on the table and muses, “... Really?”

And John knows that he’s taking a risk with this one, but, because he’s John, he says it anyway. He drops a reassuring kiss on Hamish’s forehead. “Really. Just relax, love.”

Approximately 12 minutes later, John and Hamish are counting backwards from 100 together when, as if on cue, Sherlock bursts into the OR covered in a yellow paper gown. He barely has time to look down at the boy once and hear the half breathed ‘I love you, Father’ (to which he responds ‘Be good’) before he is shooed out by Dr. Pederson and the assisting surgeon for being ‘too late.’

John visibly sags in relief. As he watches them begin to cut their son open not even two minutes later, in order to keep himself from doing something entirely different, he focuses on how incredibly lucky Sherlock is that the other surgeons got to him first. Lucky, yes, that’s Sherlock. Late as well, but he knew that already.

*

“Perfect surgery, no thanks to your late arriv—“

Lips hungrily meet his before John is able to continue and he drops the surgical mask that he has been holding in the middle of the empty waiting room. Sherlock’s kisses in public are *rare* and this one is especially raw: it’s seven hours of waiting, desperate, and gaping with pent up emotion. He cups John’s face fervently, their lips sliding together, and John can do nothing but respond in full as he

kisses Sherlock back and *hard*. In fact, he can't remember if they've recently kissed this hard in public before, if ever. They had discussed this sort of thing (as much as they could) at the beginning of their relationship while sitting on the sofa one Friday evening, sharing a 30 year old bottle of merlot, their fingers barely touching. Mid sip, Sherlock had mused something along the lines of *I will only kiss you in public to lay claim on you, not to indulge in a disgusting display of sentiment*. John had grunted in agreement before telling him that *well sod it, it's a good thing we're not 'in public' at the moment, now isn't it?* and then he had crushed a bruising kiss to Sherlock's lips which turned into something else and that was that. Thus began the unwritten and unspoken rules of 'Sherlock and John.' Now, the intensity of their current kiss (much like that one so long ago, actually) leaves the doctor feeling as if as he is blooming from the heat despite the fact that he's absolutely shattered.

"You manipulative sod," John murmurs against the detective's lips as they finally pull apart before bringing his hands instinctively to rest on Sherlock's hips. He wants to keep kissing him, he really does, but he's *just so damn tired* and still rather angry as well.

To this, the detective responds with a smirk. "I figured it would preemptively circumvent a decidedly different reaction."

"A bit possessive though, yeah?" John says weakly as Sherlock begins to move again. Sherlock's thumb finds the dip just behind the angle of the doctor's jaw, while his other palm cradles the tender ache in John's lower back. He knows of John's post-operative aches and pains from sheer habit and even though John is still angry, he is stirred by Sherlock's careful attention, the attention normally paid to his body only in private. John finds his voice after several seconds, its somewhere amidst the dopamine that his brain is currently pumping out by the gallon under the skilled fingers of the world's only consulting detective. "Next time, a simple hello would do."

"Far too predictable." But Sherlock's blue eyes are bright and clear and most importantly, present for the first time all day. "How is he? Isn't that what people ask?"

"He's going to be absolutely fine. They were able to remove the entire tumor—it was a very clean surgery. He'll be a bit out of it for a while, but fine."

"Good." The detective nods once, looking even more *here* by the moment. "I'm pleased to hear you confirm it."

They stand there, in the middle of the egregious fluorescence of the surgical waiting room for God only knows how long, Sherlock continuing to stroke the spot behind the doctor's jaw. Finally, John reluctantly clears his throat; unfortunately, they have somewhere else far more important to be.

"How's the case?" he asks hesitantly as Sherlock's fingers find the back of his neck and begin to massage small circles. The pressure feels so good that it makes John inhale a little too sharply, which draws a very satisfied smirk from Sherlock.

"Fascinating. I gave Lestrade my initial opinion approximately three hours ago; he's sworn to call me the moment new evidence turns up. I believe it's the work of a recently emigrated serial killer from Bristol. According to newspapers, there were several murders quite similar to this one around February and November of last year, in addition to those that took place last week."

John snorts, leaning further into the pinpoint pressure of the detective's fingertips. "Nine month gap. Sounds like he has to gestate the ideas."

Sherlock stops mid circle. His pupils widen with realization. "Or it sounds like 'he' is not a he at all. John, you're—"

"Fantastic, I know. You can call Lestrade back later with that," the doctor cuts in before Sherlock goes

off on another tangent. He hopes that if his next phrase goes awry he can blame it on the heat and delirium of the seven hours in the OR, seeing as they never really address these things. “And I’m assuming that per usual, we’re not going to discuss why you just kissed me in public right now, besides the fact that you were hoping to avoid another concussion? Not that I’m complaining, but it usually means that you’re after something.”

To this, Sherlock refocuses back on the doctor. A small smile normally reserved for their most intimate moments--moments tangled in an amalgamation of blankets and limbs on lazy Sunday mornings, moments with Sherlock’s sleep mussed hair tickling the underside of his chin in between open mouthed kisses pressed against his warm palm (not too sweetly, of course)--begins to tug at his lips.

“I cannot be ‘after something’ that is already mine,” he murmurs simply, tipping forward once more.

This time, John smiles against lips and tongue before bringing his arms up around Sherlock’s neck. His world grows substantially brighter as Sherlock’s mouth meets his and he can feel the cool heat radiating off of Sherlock’s cheek and chin and forehead. He kisses Sherlock harder this time, he melts further into him because this is what they *are* and always should be, even though they’re not because they’re ‘Sherlock and John.’

All is forgiven.

Everything is perfectly hopeful.

*

The surgical recovery room is full of beds, twelve in total. Luckily, only two others are occupied and they’re on the far side of the room, traditional pairs of parents huddled around the respective bedsides. Its 1:14 am when John leads Sherlock back through the darkened room, the only sound is the sound of the discordant beeps and clicks and whirrs of various machines that are willing the three children in those beds to live. The doctor still looks utterly drained from the surgery. He still hasn’t changed out of his hospital scrubs and he can feel the heat of the detective’s eyes against his back as they approach their son’s bedside, carefully assessing and calculating his every move.

Hamish is lying amidst the blankets, pale as a corpse, looking quite dead all the same besides the snaking tubes and IVs and beeps and clicks and whirrs that tell his parents otherwise. John scrapes up one of the chairs in the partitioned section, settles down in it, and instantly takes the child’s small hand.

“Shhh—good, love, just breathe. Father and I are here.” John lightly caresses Hamish’s hand, doing his best to avoid the web of IVs that protrudes from the back of it. “You were such a good boy—you did so well, Hamish. Father and I are so proud of you right now.”

Hamish sleepily whimpers something against the plastic oxygen mask as John carefully fingers down the front of his hospital gown to check the bandage. He nods once before deeming it sufficient, seeing as he himself took part in the surgery not even two hours earlier. John presses his back against the uncomfortable plastic chair. It will be a long night, after all. Best get settled in.

Sherlock stands over the bed like a looming bat, his hands stuffed in his coat pockets, breathing heavily, and his pupils dilated just a millimeter more than usual. John glances up at him and his face softens substantially.

“I promise you, he’s fine, Sherlock,” he murmurs with a nod to the other chair, “But you might want to sit—we’ll be here for a while.”

“Of course he’s fine, don’t be obvious.”

“...Right. My mistake.”

The machines click and whirr on.

*

“No chemotherapy necessary. His test results look perfect—congratulations.”

*

Seven hours later, back in 12C, Hamish sleeps on. Amidst John’s hushing, *Sherlock shut the hell up or get out of the room*, the detective confers with Lestrade via Skype for approximately a minute and a half about the newly grasped fact that the killer has twice dealt with a nine month gap in between murders. He has just started in on the fact that the suspect is most likely a woman when the DI shakes his head incredulously and says, “Sherlock, look, I know that you requested this and all, but we can handle it for the time being, honestly. Focus on your son right now. He just got out of surgery, didn’t he?”

“Don't be absurd, Lestrade, I have it all under control. When have I ever had an issue with *time management?*”

But the DI is firm. “Again, thanks for the new information. We’ll call you if we find anything else new but I’m not doing it a moment earlier.”

John makes a mental note to buy Lestrade an extra pint at the pub the next time that they’re out together as Sherlock curls up on the teal bench by the window and sulks, but not for too long.

*

Parents: John Watson and Sherlock Holmes

Nurse: Jesslyn Green

Patient: Hamish Watson-Holmes

Rotation: Afternoon shift

2255: Patient 14 hr postop; transferred back into 12C three hours after surgery, awakens fairly easily, oriented x 3 but groggy, incision site on center of chest--approximately 6" in length--with dressing. Slight swelling and bleeding, no bluish discoloration, sutures intact. Drain inserted with 20 mL bloody drainage measured. Drain remains secured in place with suture and anchored to L anterior chest wall with tape. Pt. rated pain 5/10 but stated he felt nauseated and promptly vomited 100 mL of clear fluid. Pt. attempted to get OOB to ambulate to bathroom with assistance from pt's father (Watson), but felt dizzy upon standing. Pt. encouraged to take deep breaths and cough qhr, and turn frequently in bed. Lungs sound clear bilaterally. Explanations given regarding these preventive measures. Pt's father (Holmes) verbalized understanding before articulating that pt. needed more pain medication. Pt. rated pain at 7/10 now. Requested and doctor advised against . Pt's father (Holmes) verbally threatened, potential anger issues? Requested again, doctor authorized 2mg more morphine, administered.

*

Molly meets John in the hospital hallway and her bag is slung over one shoulder due to the fact that she has just gotten off of work at Bart's morgue. She has come right away and despite her protests otherwise, it's a fairly decent train ride from central London to Surrey. The doctor appreciates the gesture immensely as Molly throws her arms around him in a warm hug.

"I got your text—I'm so glad the surgery went well."

The doctor smiles into her hair before releasing her. "Oh, you're not the only one, believe me."

"Of course. Have you slept at all? God, you look horrible, John."

"No," John says with a small laugh, a real one. Before Molly can apologize, he addresses the look of horror on her face, "it's fine, though, don't worry. I know what you mean."

"How's Hamish now?" She asks as she pulls her fingers through her side ponytail, falling in step with John as they walk back to his son's room.

"Better. You'll see for yourself in a moment though. He's been absolutely clamoring to see his favorite Aunt Molly—be careful, I think he may have a book to read to you about natural phylogeny or something of the sort, which is hilarious at present since he's still on a fairly strong dose of morphine."

"I would assume that's his *other* father's work," Molly says and shoots him a knowing grin before her face falls in concern, but just slightly, "...and so I guess...how's Sherlock doing..?"

John wants to say, *you know him too well*, but instead he just responds with the truth:

"Once he knew Hamish was going to be fine? Better. Much better. "

*

Fifty two hours later and Hamish sits woozily awake in bed as Sherlock restlessly flicks through the latest issue of *New Scientist* in the chair next to him. Other than the tubes and drains protruding from the front of his hospital gown and the nasal cannula, the dark haired boy looks startlingly normal.

Hamish stares at a special titled 'Sharks: Blood in the Water' on the small television that warbles noisily from the corner of the room while simultaneously shoving spoonful after spoonful of strawberry ice cream in his mouth straight from the carton.

It is approximately two minutes later that John emerges back from taking his first shower in three days, running his fingers through his freshly dampened hair, before he practically has an aneurysm at what he sees before him.

"Hamish, why on earth did the nurses allow you—" John stops himself short as he *realizes* approximately two seconds later, "Sherlock, can I speak with you for a moment outside?"

The detective doesn't even glance up as he languidly flicks the page, skimming '*The New Transformative Theory of the Higgs Boson Model*', "Its fine, John, we can speak right here."

"Oh, I highly doubt that you're going to approve of that."

"He's angry, isn't he Father?" Hamish pipes in, his mouth full of strawberry ice cream before adding to the television, "Ooooh, Australian Bull Sharks, my favorite"

"Obviously," Sherlock says with the half smile reserved for especially for their son in these moments as he flicks the page, flicks the page, flicks the page, "Scientific name?"

It's said with a mouthful of ice cream. "Carcharhinus leuca"

“Good. You’re almost finished with phylum chordata.”

With an exasperated sigh, John crosses the room and pries the carton of ice cream out of Hamish’s hands. The boy lets out a dissatisfied yelp and in response, the doctor shoots Sherlock a look which apparently doesn’t even merit any form of acknowledgement. John hates being the bad cop, he really does, especially in moments like these where they’re bonding, but ice cream is not on the list of approved post-surgical foods, nor has it ever been.

*

Summery Test Results

Patient: Hamish Watson Holmes

Ultrasound-Clean

MIBG-Clean

CT-Clean

MRI-Clean

*

“How’s the case...?”

“Hm? Nothing new from Lestrade, and despite the fact that they’re all idiots, they’ll call me the moment that new evidence arises. Until then, I think I’ve given them sufficient information to muddle through and if she kills again, obviously they deserve it on some level.”

“...Glad you finally sorted out your priorities then.”

“Oh, my priorities are always sorted out, John. As ever, you simply fail to comprehend them.”

*

Harry stop by 12C later that evening, having just returned from dinner with Clara. Much to John's pleasure, she smells absolutely nothing like even the faintest trace of alcohol.

“Hello John, Sherlock,” she says as she practically drags in stuffed gorilla that is substantially larger than the boy it’s intended for, “I heard that he likes monkeys.”

“And sharks—Father is teaching me all the scientific names of those now. That’s a gorilla,” Hamish states proudly, “They’re primates, but I guess they’re like monkeys too.”

“Wrong. In actuality, they’re entirely separate species-“

“Sherlock,” John says in his best *he’s six for God’s sake* voice.

Harry shoots John an amused look as she sets the black mass of fur down in the corner of the hospital room before swooping over to plant a kiss on Hamish’s forehead. Her engraved heart bracelet, *to Harry, love Clara*, jangles against her wrist as she leans over to brush her fingers through Hamish's hair. John wants to ask his sister, *is that how you two do it then, is that how you say those things*, but before he has the chance to even suggest that they talk alone for a moment after her visit, Harry speaks

once more.

“How are you feeling, love?”

“Alright, I s’pose Aunt Harry.” Hamish shrugs a bit, only wincing slightly as he does so. “You and Clara are girlfriends again, aren’t you?”

Harry shoots a quizzical look at John “Did you--?”

“No,” the dark haired boy says quite simply, “You look happier, that’s all. Oh, and your earrings are new as well.”

Sherlock snorts once and his lips curl in satisfaction from behind the book that John bought him to read from the hospital gift shop. Said book is boldly titled *John Snow: How Cholera Changed the Variegated Concept of the Microbial World*. John knows that history isn’t his favorite, but Sherlock is reading it anyway because it came from John.

“Very impressive,” Harry coos as she sits down on the edge of Hamish’s hospital bed, “Are you going to be a consulting detective like your father when you grow up, Hamish?”

“When I grow up, yeah,” he says with a grin as he picks at the web of IVs that is now his hand, “Either that or a doctor, or a marine biologist, or maybe a pirate too.”

“You’re letting him read far too many of those fantastical books again, John. Piracy is not a viable career option.”

“What?” the doctor starts with a shake of his head, “If I remember correctly, and I do, according to your brother, you wanted to become a pirate as well.”

“That was entirely different.”

“Oh, can I ask how?”

But Sherlock is smiling from behind his book, and the smile is the most real that John has seen in a while. “...Irrelevant.”

*

The die has been cast. Sherlock starts off, per usual, “Tell me about that one.”

It is a Tuesday mid-morning. The curtain to their son’s room is drawn back and Sherlock is sitting in the chair next to Hamish’s bedside, their two heads of dark hair staring out into the hallway and scrutinizing the gaggle of four nurses buzzing around the station directly outside. Both boys have their chins resting lightly on top of their fingertips which are clasped in front of them in the traditional Holmes prayer position. Sitting side by side, they look like almost identical impressions of one another, besides the fact that the smaller of the two has just had surgery to remove a potentially deadly tumor not even a week earlier.

“The brown haired one?” Hamish points.

“Shh,” Sherlock hushes Hamish and presses his arm down lightly. As he does so, he’s careful to avoid the IV’s that are still taped to it, “The first step is never to point—we’ve been over this multiple times before.”

“Oh,” Hamish’s bright blue eyes narrow in concentration. “Alright. Well she’s old, like you.”

Sherlock snorts. “Hamish, she’s most likely in her mid-thirties, that is not *old*.”

“She’s probably a mum, though.”

“Good,” he coaxes, “How can you tell?”

“She just *looks* like a mum.”

“While intuition is a good starting point, remember, always look for empirical evidence. How do you know? Observe.”

“She...I don’t know why, she just does.” Hamish’s voice falters a bit as he bites his lip in concentration. After all, he’s six and still learning, never mind the additional factor of the mind numbing pain medication that currently courses through his veins.

Sherlock sighs, but keeps his tone as even as he can. “It’s glaringly obvious, Hamish, observe. Look at the other three, what is different about her?”

Hamish’s blue eyes narrow again at the four nurses for approximately five seconds before he answers, “Her hair. All of the other nurses have their hair down, her’s is all up.”

“Good,” Sherlock assesses, “Anything else?”

“She looks really, really tired.”

“Find your emotional state from that.”

“Tired?”

“Superficial, however you’re still fairly drugged, so it will suffice. Next...?” The detective prompts.

“Look for jewelry or other pieces of status,” Hamish recites, looking like a mini carbon copy of his father, “Her’s is dirty and doesn’t match.”

“Excellent.” Sherlock glances over at their son before cocking his head in his usual arrogant manner. He raises one eyebrow and says, “Anything else you would like to add before I proceed?”

Mini-Sherlock shakes his head, the nasal cannula pulling against his face as he does so. He looks at his father in rapt fascination, knowing full well what show comes next.

“Well,” Sherlock begins, “Yes, she’s a mother alright, you can tell from the fact that while the other three nurses have their hair straightened, down, and flat, her hair is up and messy. She obviously didn’t have sufficient time to take care of it in the morning, you can tell by the bags under her eyes that she hasn’t gotten much sleep. Her ring, well worn, has a name etched into the side, I saw it when she was here earlier—again, that’s not cheating, that’s just observing. ‘From James’, most likely the husband and father to her one child, yes one, she’s wearing a necklace with a birthstone in it. It’s an opal which contrasts with her wedding ring. Her ring, set with rubies, is obviously her birthstone and not her child’s. However, they’ve fallen on hard times—her shoes have been re-soled two, no, three times, probably not a lot of money. The fact that she’s wearing two day old makeup means she worked a double shift. Creases around her eyes denote stress, probably due to the fact that since she’s working all the time now, she hasn’t found out that her husband is having gratuitous se—“

From the corner of the room, John practically throws down the newspaper he has been reading in order to interrupt their little deduction, *immediately*.

“I think that’s quite enough deductions for today, Sherlock,” he says crisply, standing up and walking

over to hand the boy a rather large box with a picture of a castle and a dragon on the front, “Here, Hamish, play with your Lego’s.”

“Oh John, don’t give him those base excuses for amusement again. Don’t succumb to the mass homogenization of corporate children’s entertainment.”

John throws a look over his shoulder as he returns to his chair and flaps the newspaper open once more. “He’s *six*, Sherlock—let him be six. They’re *fun*.”

The boy glances at the box for a moment before shrugging a bit and prying it open. The detective looks at the box then back to John, he's more than a touch wounded at his unfinished deduction.

“Furthermore, I wasn’t entirely finished.”

“Oh no, I think you were.”

*

“He’s not healing as fast as I’d anticipated.”

“He’s still on the slow end of normal though, correct? But normal, nonetheless?”

“Yes...however, if it’s entirely alright, Dr. Watson, I’d just like to run a few more tests a bit later this week.”

*

“My boys,” John says with a bright grin as he enters 12C, greeted by the usual HANG IN THERE and GET WELL SOON PARTNER.

It’s been two weeks since the surgery and John has just made a quick run across the street to fetch Hamish a McDonald’s hamburger because it is all that he’s been talking about eating since after breakfast this morning, which was some sort of green Jello and thin broth. Sherlock had spent the entire time tearing the bagel that John had brought back for him from the hospital cafeteria into minute pieces while simultaneously elucidating exactly how gelatin was made, leaving Hamish wide-eyed and fairly frightened to eat it. In contrast, Hamish’s eyes widen in excitement as soon as he sees the doctor enter the room once more. Despite the fact that even after two weeks Hamish looks still looks like a pin poked rag doll, he is sitting up and smiling and as John glances over at Sherlock, he can finally see why and-

“Oh,” John says.

“*Oh*,” John groans into his palm approximately three seconds later once he realizes *what* it is that is sitting on Hamish’s tiny bedside table.

“Oh,” Sherlock echoes sarcastically, but there is no real edge in his voice. He catches their son’s eye and this causes Hamish to burst into a fit of giggles.

“...My boys,” John says with an entirely different tone to his voice as he sighs and pulls up the vacant chair to their son’s bedside.

Apparently it might have something to do with the partially dissected brain that they are both fingers deep in.

“I’m just not even going to ask, really.”

“It’s far better if you don’t.”

“Dad, Father and I are like brain surgeons! Isn’t this cool?!”

“Educational and simultaneously *fun*,” Sherlock’s voice still twists around the word as if he has a hard time saying it.

“Yes.” John ticks his head in the direction of Sherlock with a strangely hopeful tone in his voice as he sets down the bag of food on the table next to the brain. He does his best to swallow down the smile that is trying to crack through his visage because unfortunately, there is still something glaringly wrong with this scenario and Sherlock needs to hear it. “Yes it is. Although, perhaps ‘legal’ should be a requirement as well.”

*

John supports Hamish by the elbow as he wobbles to the bathroom later that evening. The boy’s movements are slower than normal, just a touch, which under the careful scrutiny of both parents seems practically glacial in comparison.

“Hamish, how are you feeling?” John asks with obvious concern as he walks along, his son’s elbow in hand.

“Just a little dizzy,” Hamish says, holding his head and sagging deeper into John as he pushes more weight on the IV pole for support, “I’m fine though, Dad.”

Sherlock shoots him a *look* and God, John knows that look. They call the nurse immediately and the tests are moved up to the very first thing the next morning.

With Hamish’s sudden change, Sherlock takes a sudden change as well.

John doesn’t sleep that night as he sits awake and stares at their son’s steady heart monitor, but at this point he’s rather used to it. Sleep over the last few weeks has boiled down to hours at best, which for the doctor is rare, but as usual, because he’s John, he pushes right through. He’s had worse, he supposes. He’s had sleepless night lying awake and overstimulated via army strength uppers to the point of convulsing while waiting to die under the starless black sky in the hot windswept desert of Afghanistan. He’s had sleepless nights lying awake in a twist of blankets and sweat and bone wrenching pain after the individual next to him took an little unplanned jump off of a building, a jump which left them both bleeding out on the pavement in front of Bart’s in two entirely separate ways. This? This is nothing. This is being a parent.

Sherlock stays awake as well, flopped in the other chair, languidly clicking on his mobile phone in between sighing at various intervals as he looks through an endless loop of pictures of lipless corpses with increasingly scrutiny. John frowns as he glances over because last time he checked, Hamish was still in possession of lips.

“Lestrade called again?”

“Two more girls, apparently. No lips, this time with a different message: ‘[Sidera scire occultis](#)’ ” The detective responds, now Googling Latin reflexive phrases and John wonders exactly *what* he promised Lestrade in exchange for more information.

"I thought that they had it all under control."

Sherlock widens his eyes sarcastically at the small screen. "Obviously not."

Even though he's not entire certain, John points *it* out anyway, because it's staring to seem somewhat

strange, “Funny how that seems to coincide with Hamish--”

“Lestrade’s an idiot,” Sherlock spits to interrupt him, “If I were *there*, this case would have been solved two weeks prior.”

"You've *done* cases before without being present before, that whole bit with the car and the hiker-"

"This is different, John, as I had *you* on the other side and the killer wasn't still wandering about. At best, Lestrade is a tenth as competent as you are, and that's not saying a whole lot. *I need to be there.*"

The doctor resists the urge to grab the mobile phone and send it crashing as hard he can through the third floor window. He wants to scream at Sherlock, “YOU’RE NOT THERE, YOU’RE HERE. YOU’RE FINE WHEN HE’S FINE BUT WHY THE HELL CAN’T YOU JUST BE HERE IN MOMENTS LIKE THESE?!”

Instead, he just asks him to pass the bag of leftover McDonald’s chips. John doesn’t eat them, he just stares into the bag because as he learned in Afghanistan, uncertainty is the best way to kill an appetite.

*

At 10:00am the next day, Hamish is wheeled away for three more tests and this time, John allows himself to curl up on the padded bench for *just five minutes* to get some sleep before he will go and find their son on the third floor. The detective has begrudgingly gone out as well, under the pretense of finding more reading material as there were apparently no new updates from the DI today despite the fact that he had obsessively called him fourteen times that morning. Sherlock has agreed to meet both of them upstairs after he finds his respective reading material and after John has his respective five minutes.

John wakes up to find that the room is hazily lit by the last shards of dusky sunlight as encroaching shadows stretch up the walls. He blinks to see Sherlock standing over him; the man is wearing a look that he has never seen him wear before. It looks like apprehension, but John’s can’t remember if indeed the impulsive detective has ever been apprehensive about anything. Sherlock looks a mile tall in his dark coat and scarf.

John rubs his face once, hoping to clear his sleep deprived brain. “Mmph—how long have you been standing there?”

“Approximately six seconds.”

It is then the doctor looks around the room and realizes that their son still isn’t back.

*

“Hamish has developed recurrent neuroblastoma. This time it’s spread to his lymph nodes. I’m sorry,” The grey haired oncologist says as sighs and shifts his clipboard to his opposite arm, “I’m sure you know what this means—your son’s cancer is now in stage four.”

“Options,” John requests, breathing heavily, as he settles on the bench outside of their son’s room in front of the nurses’ station. Sherlock remains standing to the side, his hands clasped behind his back. Dr. Pederson stands in front of them both, the end of the clipboard pressed against his crisp lab coat and stomach, looking incredibly grave.

The oncologist glances down at the paperwork, flips the page, and sighs.

“Options,” John demands again, fiercer.

“High dose chemotherapy is probably our best bet right now. We can start first thing tomorrow. Of course there are other treatments--stem cell transplants, and some clinical drug trials--but it could get quite expensive as the majority are experimental and not covered by private insurance.”

“Money is not a problem,” John recites before glancing over at Sherlock.

The detective surprises John and echoes him numbly with, “No, decidedly not.”

John opens his mouth to say something like *thank you for finally being bloody interested for once*, but Sherlock crisply continues on, “Any treatment that you might deem beneficial, start him on it immediately. That should work, yes?”

The oncologist clears his throat, “Well if you have every treatment option available, which apparently you do, the probability is high that we should be able to find something that will work. Let me get started on a plan right away and I’ll get back to you in a few hours.”

*

Sometime during the course of their conversation with Dr. Pederson, Hamish has returned to 12C. The first thing that John does when he goes back into the room is flick on the telly and luckily for him, it’s playing *Mary Poppins* which is on ‘the list’ of approved movies for their son that both parents had managed to settle on—but only because of an incident several years prior. They had been flicking through channels at 221B years ago, trying to find something that would settle down a three year old crying Hamish for even a *moment*. John had paused to lean over and tell Sherlock something along the lines of *get the hell up and fetch Hamish's favorite stuffed penguin before I send you to sleep upstairs with him*, when the remote had settled upon the aforementioned movie. Upon seeing Mary and her umbrella on the screen, Hamish had pointed and called her “Uncle Mycroft,” making both parents pause, look at each other once, and then ache and ache with laughter until all three were laughing and everything was fine again, just fine.

Things had been better then.

“Dad, I’m,” Hamish whispers as he presses his fingers to his neck while he looks up at John. There is something very childlike behind his usually inquisitive eyes now and it makes John’s breath hitch, “Dad...it hurts, a lot actually.”

It pains the doctor to see Hamish this honest and this six. “I know, love. The tests hurt today. Your pain medication should be kicking in rather soon.”

In response, John toes off his shoes and lies down on top of the hospital bed next to Hamish. In one scoop, he draws the frail boy into his arms. Their son curls into him, looking very much like the six year old child he indeed is and John buries his face into Hamish’s dark curls, seemingly for the last time in quite a while. Chemotherapy will take care of that, apparently, but John doesn’t know how to broach the subject at present and so he doesn’t. “Better?”

Hamish nestles himself further into John and nods. It is several moments before they speak again. Mary and Bert start singing 'Jolly Holiday'.

“Am I dying?” the boy finally asks, his cheek pressed against John’s button down shirt as he keeps his eyes on the movie, “They did a bunch of tests today and now you’re acting like I’m dying.”

Mary turns and flaps her umbrella on the telly as John curses any and all inherited and instructed deductive abilities. He flicks his eyes to the detective for support because, *how do you tell an six year old that yes, you are?*

The support is exactly that:

“Yes, you are,” Sherlock answers simply in between tapping on his mobile phone and it takes *every pore and ounce of strength* in John’s body not to reach over and throttle him on the spot.

“Oh, Sherlock, *Jesus*,” John growls, “You can’t just *say* thing like that-”

“Oh,” Hamish says with startling clarity, not taking his eyes off the movie. His speech is growing slower with medication now and John can feel the tiny body become even more malleable against his own, “You’re going to fix it though.”

“Yes, of course we’re going to fix it, Hamish,” the doctor adds fiercely as he tightens his grip around the boy, “Tomorrow you’re starting a new form of treatment, alright? We’ll meet with Dr. Pederson and talk all about it tomorrow morning, what it is, and how it’s going to affect you—for now, just watch the movie.”

Sherlock looks over to search Hamish’s face for several seconds before his eyes narrow in apparent perplexion. “Why aren’t you angry or upset right now? I’ve just told you that you’re going to—”

“Not. Now. Sherlock.”

Hamish doesn’t look away from the television, but smiles against John’s shirt, seemingly to himself. His voice is muzzy and dripping with morphine as he answers his father’s question; the light from the movie dances against his eyes as he does so, “Because I like the penguins, that’s why.”

For once, to his credit, Sherlock doesn’t ask Hamish for a scientific name.

-“*Oh, it's a jolly holiday with Mary*

No wonder why it's Mary that we like!”-

*

To: management@stjohnshealthclinic.co.uk

From: drjohnwatson@stjohnshealthclinic.co.uk

RE: *Extended LOA*

My son has transitioned from stage two to stage four neuroblastoma; requesting additional time off.

Sincerely,

Dr. John Watson

*

“You can’t just *tell* him that he’s dying,” the doctor spits at Sherlock in the hallway, their son now having fallen into a drugged sleep before the Banks children go fly kites at the park at the end of the movie, “You don’t just *say* things like that—there’s a right way to put them. You don’t tell your own child—”

“He has the right to know, John, it’s the truth,” Sherlock interrupts, his voice sounding a shade more obsidian than normal as he stands with his hands in his pockets.

“He’s *six years old*. This is *not* how you do these things, Sherlock—“ John says and throws up his hands, mostly to keep them from wrapping around a too pale and slender neck, “I swear to God sometimes—“

*

To: drjohnwatson@stjohnshealthclinic.co.uk

From: management@stjohnshealthclinic.co.uk

RE: RE: Extended LOA

Request received, paid LOA denied, unpaid LOA granted.

*

Hamish is resting lightly after his first day of chemotherapy when John enters 12C after a progress meeting with Dr. Pederson to see Sherlock sitting on one of the chairs. The detective is completely oblivious to their son, instead he's focused on a thick stack of aged newspaper articles. The doctor indulgently allows himself three seconds before speaking, hoping that those seconds will help soften the edge in his voice that threatens to break through.

“You know,” John starts with a wry twist of his head as he sets both palms on the back of the empty chair to lean into it, “you could try being interested in the fact that your son is in the hospital. You could stop researching the motivations behind female serial killers and perhaps channel some of that energy into, I don’t know—researching the best method of treatment, perhaps.”

"Science is science, John. We have him on every method of treatment possible at present." John leans closer and he can see the greying stack that Sherlock is nose deep in bears various fonts of the same title--*The Bristol Evening Post*. Apparently, he had coerced some poor receptionist into sending the articles via FedEx to the hospital, but then again John’s not surprised; manipulation is Sherlock’s specialty, after all.

“Sherlock-”

“Not in the middle of a case, John,” Sherlock says as he waves a hand dismissively. He continues to sift through the pile and muses, “I believe I informed you that I was married to my work quite some time ago.”

John sets his jaw. He doesn’t mean it, but the words tumble out anyway, “Yes, you did. Perhaps *your work* can take care of our son then.”

The doctor storms down three flights of stairs to the hospital cafeteria where he stands restlessly in the long line until he receives three texts *John, Hamish has woken up and is crying for you* and *John, where are you?* and *John, come immediately*. John begins to text back *PERHAPS YOUR WORK CAN MAKE HIM STOP CRYI--* before he deletes it, sighs, and pockets the phone.

John manages to grab a cup of coffee and a lemon poppyseed muffin on the way out, practically shoving money at the cashier, before heading three flights of stairs back up to their son’s room. He takes one bite of the muffin before throwing it out in the second floor rubbish bin.

Their son is dying; of course he has no appetite. He learned that in Afghanistan as well, funny how fast all that comes back.

No, not funny at all.

*

Patient: Hamish Watson-Holmes

Parents: John Watson and Sherlock Holmes

Rotation: Morning shift.

Nurse: David Shepherd

700 – Assumed care of pt after reporting on the primary nurse. Received pt in bed after chemotherapy resting quietly with eyes closed. Easily aroused to alert and fully oriented state with voice. Pt indicates by shaking head that presently he has no needs and no pain or distress. Respirations uneven, slightly labored. Pt is receiving humidified oxygen @ 28%, 6 liters, via oxygen mask. SaO₂ 97% on continuous pulse oximetry. Compazine 1 mg IV. Breath sounds are course, with diminished air flow @ bases anteriorly and posteriorly. Suction and ambu bag, set-up are at bedside. Instructed to call for any needs; pt's father (Watson) verbalized understanding. Pt's father (Holmes) not present

*

It's two weeks into chemotherapy and Sherlock is Skyping in a Hamishless 12C again. John has just returned from chatting with one of the nurses whose niece went through the same thing last year, and has come back relatively reassured at the current state of things. However, over the last two weeks, Hamish has shown no signs of progression or regression and everyone is getting just a little restless.

“Nothing new?” Sherlock demands to the camera, “No new discoveries, no new body parts? No new dubious Latin phrases carved upon any somewhat risqué Uni girls after a night out?”

“I'm sorry, Sherlock, there's just *nothing* today.”

“It's been three days, Lestrade—three days. If you had competent individuals working on the case as opposed to your usual suspects such as the paradigm of critical thinking that also hails to the name ‘Anderson’, this case would a) have additional leads by now and b) potentially be solved.”

Enraged, Sherlock snaps the laptop shut. John instantly leaps to his feet and pries it from the detective's hands before Sherlock manages to apparently throw it out the window, which from the velocity of his motions, is definitely a viable possibility.

“Useless. Completely and utterly useless.”

“Sherlock, just—easy. Calm down, they're doing the best they can. We all are right now.”

“Yet again, you don't understand, John—you simply don't understand,” he spits, “I can't *solve* this.”

With a sweep of his coat, Sherlock storms out of the room, presumably to have one of the cigarettes that John smuggled in for him earlier that week. John doesn't call after him and in truth, he's glad that Sherlock is temporarily gone. John had made a promise to escort Hamish back from treatment which ends in approximately ten minutes, and yet again, he didn't want to have to make up *another* excuse as to why Father didn't come along.

John doesn't realize until later exactly what it was that Sherlock actually meant with his last statement, but by then it's too late.

*

"I'll shave my head too, I will Hamish, if you want it."

The boy giggles, albeit weakly, looking practically lit up from the soft glow of the machinery in the darkened hospital room. "No Dad, you'd look really, really bad without hair—"

Hamish pitches forward to vomit again and John holds the basin out under him as he lightly rubs the boy's back. He looks up for Sherlock amidst the darkness and the detective is just sitting in the plastic chair. Sherlock's fingers are steeped over his nose and his eyes are shut tightly. He looks like he's praying, but John doesn't ask what for because he's not entirely certain what the answer would be.

*

Two nights later, John is running his hand through his son's darkened curls and as he pulls away his fingers, the hair comes off in tufts. He bites down on a sob and drops the hair into the small basin that rests on the bedside table. He sits and stares numbly for a while at the pieces of their boy that he's not entirely certain he can handle keeping.

He doesn't wake Sherlock who is finally asleep, curled up in a tightly woven ball of limbs on the small padded bench, after spending all day analyzing blood samples under a microscope in the basement lab of the Royal Marsden that Lestrade had apparently sent over the first thing that morning. He doesn't wake Sherlock because Sherlock is finally sleeping and he needs to sleep.

Sometime during the night, John finally tears himself out of the pressing numbness and he sits and clenches onto their son's hand for the rest of the evening. He grasps onto the boy until sunrise, and his knuckles are ghostly white.

*

Three weeks into their son's new treatment plan, Hamish is wheeled away for a routine MRI and a cat scan to check on his progress. Despite John's insistence, the nurses are adamant about him staying behind, so instead the doctor sits restlessly in the waiting room of the MRI scanner.

When Hamish finally comes back, Dr. Pederson asks both John and Sherlock to meet him in the temporary office they have made for him on the third floor. The detective is busy on what he calls a lead and is harshly Skypeing with a witness to the latest murder. As John stops by 12C to collect Sherlock, this time it is the doctor who snaps the laptop shut mid-call because he's had enough, he *really* has.

*

Dr. Pederson sits behind his desk and taps his pen on Hamish's chart as he speaks, John sits in front of him, and Sherlock stands to the side. This is how it is these days, a new 'per usual' and one that neither man ever imagined while safely back at 221B.

"A little improvement, however, he's certainly not out of the woods—"

John watches Sherlock set his jaw, apparently still angry that John cut him off mid-call. "Can you quantify 'out of the woods', doctor?"

"Sherlock," John groans in his best 'not now' voice because despite his efforts, the detective still doesn't understand the moments when not to embark on philosophical debates and this is definitely one

of them.

“As a scientist of sorts, I deal with empirical data, ratios, and statistics. I do not understand proverbial adages.”

“To answer your question, Mr. Holmes, anything on the other side of 75% is what I would consider ‘out of the woods’”

Sherlock pauses before nodding and clasping his hands behind his back. The detective opens his mouth to speak, but the word takes a hairsbreadth of a second longer to come out than it normally would. To John, the difference is alarming. The split second silence is so maddening that he wants to open his mouth to say *something, anything*, to fill that gaping pause, because *it's just plain wrong*, but he's so exhausted that the words do not come.

“However,” Sherlock finally prompts, much to John's strange relief.

The oncologist deflates substantially and both men know, *they know*. John's heart thunders at the rate of what he can only think is relative to seven thousand miles an hour. The blood pounds in his head.

“However, there's 75% rate of return in this stage,” Dr. Pederson says with a sigh as he runs his fingers through his hair. Grim would be an understatement as he delivers the news, “It's metastasized again. Two more tumors were found in today's tests. Pancreas and liver.”

John simply looks at Sherlock who has gone somewhat rigid as he clenches and unclenches his fingers minutely behind his back. He can see the pattern of the clenching, if John knew more about music, he would know that the pattern is an adagio, Schubert's *Serenade* to be exact. However, John doesn't have to know precisely what tempo it is to understand the gesture and realize that he is on the verge of losing this man permanently.

“He needs to go in for more surgery tonight,” Dr. Pederson states as he pushes his pen back in his pocket, “John, I think it's best that you sit this one out.”

*

Back in 12C, Sherlock hasn't even opened the laptop before John shakes his head.

“No, we are not doing this right now,” John says, his resolution blood and iron as he takes Sherlock by the hand, not really caring for what the non-articulated rules of their relationship are--they are past that now.

*

During the surgery which is scheduled to last six hours, John leads Sherlock to the hotel across the street from the hospital. They rent a room and Sherlock fucks him fervently and desperately while crushing his lips against John's to the point where the doctor begins to choke and gasp for air. Sherlock is practically savage as he bites into John's neck; he leaves a flowering bruise almost instantly due to John's obvious anemia from proper nutrition, combined with his sheer lack of sleep. As Sherlock thrusts into him with thick, rapid strokes, the doctor fights against limbs and tongue to push himself up on one elbow against the scratchy pastel hotel duvet, just for a moment--*only for a moment--he's just so damn tired* and he's dizzy and starting to feel strangely nauseous as the world begins to dim to a pinpoint of grey--

“Sherlock, *wait*, I—“

But the detective's eyes look so raw and desperate and unhinged as he pins John's shoulders back

down again that John can simply do nothing else but kiss him back and pull Sherlock's lip with his teeth. John ignores his own half leaking cock pressed painfully against his stomach as bites down on Sherlock's lip and draws as much blood as he can manage. John ignores himself yet again because he knows deep down inside that this is the only thing that is keeping this man alive and right now, he refuses to lose them both.

*

A week after Hamish's latest surgery, John is just barely asleep in one of the plastic chairs for the first time in God only knows how long, his head resting lightly against the sky blue wall. He is almost colorless with exhaustion at this point, his jumper now two sizes too big, but if Sherlock notices these things (he observes them, he does), he certainly isn't doing anything about it. He can't, of course, because he's in the middle of a case.

While John tries to sleep, Sherlock is right in the middle of frustratedly sifting through a manila file filled with the carved victims' pictures. He has put on a DVD to keep Hamish quiet, and their son is watching a half muted special on the very important difference between Kodiak bears and Brown bears. All is stable, all is normal, per usual,

--until without any warning, Hamish suddenly tips over and vomits blood all over the crisp white hospital sheets. Sherlock looks up just as the heart monitor leaps and jumps and whines. Hamish coughs roughly before doing the same thing again and hell, without John right there, Sherlock has no idea what to do.

“John?!” Sherlock's voice is visibly panicked as he reaches back to smack the doctor's shoulder before standing and grabbing wildly for the basin that rests on Hamish's bedside table, because that's what he's seen John do. The case file falls to the floor and the pictures scatter and glide across the tile, he will have to pick those up later.

“D—Dad—“ Hamish chokes and gasps before leaning over to vomit again, the third time now—this time the blood splatters all over the detective's hands as he reaches out with the basin because that's what parents do, right?

“John!”

The doctor blinks and rubs his face once before he comes to the horrifying scene and if there is one thing that Sherlock is certain of, it's the reaction time of a former soldier. John springs up before he even knows what is going on, “Hm--? What is—Oh God—*shit*—“

“Dad—“

Before anyone can say anything else, a flurry of nurses and doctors descends into the room and tears Sherlock away from their son, pushing him back to where John now uselessly stands in the corner. Sherlock just drips blood as both men stand there, sanguine pooling against the cool white tile. He just *stands there and bleeds* because he doesn't know how to do this; he doesn't know how to be a parent in these moments or how to *cope* because he's always had an out *until right now*.

“John—“

John's voice is even, but louder than normal. He's trying to stay calm, he really is. “-Hamish, it's going to be just fine—“

“-DAD—“

Their son goes into full cardiac arrest two seconds later and as Sherlock watches the team of nurses and doctors force oxygen into those tiny lungs, he realizes that the world has irreparably tilted and shifted

and he's not even trying to hold on anymore. He has willingly slid off and is flailing in the starless sand swept darkness, just like the nights that John had told him about in Afghanistan, and above it all—52 chest compressions now, the rising bile burns his throat, *just live, live, damn it*--above it all, *he just has to get away*, he just cannot watch their son die because *it hurts*. It's punched him in the face and taken him and shaken him and beaten him relentlessly—*it just hurts so God damn much and this is the first time its happened and he doesn't know what do to--'John'--what the hell to do--*

*

Once Hamish is declared stable again, John leads Sherlock by the sleeve to the bathroom at the end of the oncology unit and scrubs the blood off of the detective's hands in the sink.

He does not meet the man's eyes in the mirror as he does so, too afraid of what he might find.

"One hundred and thirty two," Sherlock muses quietly and John knows that he's answering another silent question long ago.

He's counting ghosts, the children that did not leave 12C. As the blood and water swirl and mix counterclockwise down the drain, John grabs onto Sherlock's sleeve tighter before pitching over to dry heave everything that he hasn't eaten during the last two months all over the counter.

*

Later that evening, Sherlock leaves Hamish's hospital room to take a phone call. When he comes back, he has an announcement. On some level, John has expected this.

"Three woman were discovered mutilated ten minutes ago behind Coulston Hall," Sherlock says as he sweeps into the darkened room, "The situation has escalated, Lestrade has requested my presence. I'm needed in Bristol tomorrow morning."

John shushes him, his eyes quietly flicking over to Hamish who is in a heavily sedated sleep. Hamish is deathly pale, even more tubes poke out of him now. Once checking to make sure that their son remains undisturbed, he turns his face back to Sherlock and tries his best not to reach out and strangle the man in front of him despite the fact that it's the only thing he's really wanted to do at various intervals for the last several weeks, really.

"Are you fucking mad?" John hisses as he stands, his blood jumping from 'cool' to 'boiling' at the instant. He has expected something *like* this, yes, but not this--not *this*, "Our son is fighting for his life right now and you're leaving on this case?"

The detective just stands there and nods with cool reservation. He looks like a statue, backlit by the light from the hallway, but John can't decide if it looks more like an angel or a devil, even though right now he's vehemently pushing for the latter. "Correct."

"Sherlock, never in my life have I asked why with you, but I'm going to do it now. Lestrade knows how ill Hamish is and I'm fairly certain that he hasn't requested your presence at all," John says as he presses the tips of his fingers to his forehead; he feels as though he has just aged 100 years, "So why, why, *why*."

Sherlock pauses before he speaks. John is perplexed because the pause looks like uncertainty, but Sherlock is not uncertain and their son's room is too dark to decipher anything else at present. Finally, Sherlock says, "I don't want to leave you, John."

John is incredulous. "Then stay. It's not a choice--"

"I can't," Sherlock interrupts, his tone resolute.

John exhales through his nostrils, trying to remain calm. There is clearly some sort of rational explanation that he's just obviously missing and so he blinks before he says what is normally considered a criminal offense in 'Sherlock and John'. Under present circumstances, he just doesn't give a fuck anymore, "Sherlock, I don't understand."

"I wouldn't expect you to."

John pushes down the wave of exhaustion that threatens to crash over him by staying on the teetering cusp of *really angry now*, "Try me."

The detective inhales before he continues. His baritone is surprisingly low as he speaks, and he draws his fingers along the back of the unoccupied plastic chair as he does so, "As a doctor, I'm sure you're aware that cerebral anoxia occurs in conjunction with cardiac arrest. Our son was technically deceased on a biochemical level for approximately two minutes earlier today."

John takes a step forward. In the different light, he can see it etched across Sherlock's face now and it looks startlingly like guilt and it is in that moment that he *realizes*. John forms a deduction of his own and it's not particularly forgiving.

"Is that what this is about, really?" The doctor is trying to be as quiet as he can, but he thinks that he's getting rather loud. "Is that what this distancing yourself with this case is all about then? 'I can't solve this', you meant Hamish, didn't you?"

"John." The guilt looks like pleading now, but the doctor doesn't care because damn it, on some level, these things (not the others though, no) need to be *said*.

"You've not used to being on the other side of it, and now that you are, you can't handle it can you?" John says coldly, "You've never had to honestly say goodbye before, it's always been people saying goodbye to you. It's not easy to feel helpless, so instead, you're just going to leave so that you don't have to deal with these types of things—you're just going to distance yourself like you always do. At first it's just a case, but now that he's actually—" John swallows hard, "-dying, you leave so that as always, you have the final word."

Sherlock meets his gaze and does nothing to close the distance between them. "Shut up, John, just... shut up."

But the doctor is on a roll. "Oh of course, you're right, we never talk about these things, now do we? Well, take it from someone who has had more than their share of a lifetime of opportunities to mourn a member of the Holmes family—it's not fun and no, it's certainly not fair but we all have to cope with it. As parents, we--"

"Not everyone can be the *hero*, John," Sherlock spits back, his temper is rising as well. Once provoked, their fighting has the volatility of six Chernobyls and it's starting to look precisely like just that.

"I am doing my duty as a parent. I don't have a choice right now, Sherlock—I can't afford to just shut down like you because we have a son and he needs me."

"Ah, the consummate soldier, always doing his duty--what a disgustingly romantic notion," the detective retorts, his voice rising to a dangerous level as he says what he's *observed* but not what he's *seen* over the two months, "No, John—you are coping with this insomuch as that you are flinging yourself to absolute pieces, one at a time. You stay up endless nights, you never eat anymore--you claim that you're too busy but you're obviously not, you've lost fourteen pounds since we've been here, you spend every waking moment with him, you sugarcoat his prognosis when all empirical data points decidedly otherwise--"

“That is being a *parent*, Sherlock! A good one!”

“In case you have yet again failed to reconcile the glaringly obvious, John, I am not a *good parent*. The fact that our son only and always wants you lends credibility to that statement.”

Sherlock’s observation breaks the metaphorical dam. John doesn’t care if he’s practically yelling at this point because this is everything that he’s wanted to say and then some and then some more:

“He only wants me because I’m the only one *here* for him, God damn it!” John froths, tasting blood in his mouth where his lip has apparently just cracked, “And no, you know what?! You’re right, Sherlock—you’re not a very good parent. Do you want to know why—do you?! You’ve been so bloody detached from the moment he was diagnosed—you tell him exactly what’s going to happen to him, you aren’t even present half the time or if you are, you’re on your laptop or mobile phone. Oh, you’re fine in the normal moments, of course, but the moment that he suddenly looks any less than being alright, you shut down entirely. Now you’re about to leave because you can’t handle the fact that for once in your life, you don’t get to choose when you have the last word. But you know what? Despite the fact that you don’t deserve it right now, it doesn’t change the fact that he *loves* you—God, Sherlock he does and you can’t just leave him—not now.”

Sherlock’s voice is strangely mangled as he crosses to their son’s bedside, and for one brief second, in those eyes *he’s six and he’s Hamish* and he’s lying right there on the bed as well, “Don’t ask me, John. Don’t ask me, because you know that I will. I *can’t*, but you know that I will all the same because it’s you.”

Heavy breathing fills the pause before John speaks again. He shakes his head, exhaustion has made his logic substantially slower. John tries to rationalize, he does, but he still doesn’t understand what the hell Sherlock is trying to say because all he can hear is *I’m leaving John, yet again, I’m leaving*.

John finds his words after a moment, and gives up: “What—what are you trying to say right now?”

“Think,” Sherlock breathes as he turns, pausing to touch their son’s cheek once. His touch is lingering, obvious regret etched in his face, before he straightens up and smooths those carved *emotions* out, “You never think.”

“Sherlock, no.” John shakes his head again and swallows down the panicked sob that rises in his throat because *there is no way that this is happening right now*. He’s torn between begging and saying *fine just go and never come back*, but this time it’s for *Hamish* and not for himself so John swallows that pride and says, “Sherlock, do not do this right now. You can’t leave him, not now, you *can’t*.”

The bracketed statement flaps irreverently in the air between the two like a sheet on a clothesline in the middle of a storm--*[me, you can’t leave me again]*--but as usual the detective brushes it aside as he turns. He is a brooding pillar of cheekbones and flapping coat now, per usual.

“Sherlock,” John feels like he’s cracking and imploding from within, in every way possible, *yet again, yet again*.

Sherlock pauses in the light of the doorway. His tone is ice once more, the moment of opportunity has apparently passed, as he echoes the two most horrible words that John Watson has ever heard in his entire life,

“Goodbye John.”

And John is gutted. Now alone, he just stands there in the darkness, clenching Hamish’s bedside railing until the cartilage in the joints between his fingers aches and his palms are numb and everything is *numb and numb and numb*.

But he does not cry, no. He is a parent, after all, and he has a duty to uphold.

*

-So when the cat has got your tongue

There's no need for dismay

Just summon up this word

And then you've got a lot to say

But better use it carefully

Or it may change your life

One night I said it to me girl

And now me girl's my wife!

She's supercalifragilisticexpialidocious!

Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious

Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious

Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious!-

*

“Sir, we have counseling upstairs if you need it.”

“No, I’m fine. He needs me here.”

*

It’s been three days without Sherlock when Hamish’s sleepy musing starts John awake in the darkened hospital room. He had fallen into a restless slumber on the crook of his elbow on the edge of the hospital bed, he’d spent all day with Hamish in chemotherapy again. Without Sherlock present, John had put in *Cars* and they both had spent the entire session curled up on the bed, watching Lightning McQueen race around Radiator Springs. John had promised Hamish a trip down route 66 for his seventh birthday in order to stop him from crying as they inserted the seemingly endless needle into his arm this time.

“...Daddy...?”

“Yes, son?” John exhales and blinks before scrubbing his face, barely realizing that this is the first time that his son has called him ‘Daddy’ since he was three years old. He reaches forward to slide the oxygen mask off of Hamish’s face and then pauses. John takes a moment to glance down at his son’s O2 stats before he completes the action, luckily the stats look somewhat sufficient at present.

“Why does Father not want to see me right now? Why did he take a case?”

He could lie, easily, yes, he could but the time for lying is finished. John draws the tips of his fingers

across his son's sweat damp forehead with his softest smile. He's practically entirely bald now.

"Because he's an idiot. Go back to sleep, love."

This makes Hamish smile for the first time in three entire days as he rolls over on his side and presses his face into the pillow once more.

*

"His white blood cell count is still low."

John swallows, not entirely sure if he wants to know the answer as he stands with Dr. Pederson outside 12C. He debates for approximately three seconds before he finally he asks what parents ask, "How low?"

"WBC is at 1200, hemoglobin is still rather normal on the plus side, but there's a more pressing problem," the oncologist reads the chart and then pauses, "We're going to have to stop chemotherapy. His are kidneys shutting down; he needs to be put on dialysis and I don't think his body is strong enough to handle both right now, I'm sorry."

"Shit," John breathes between his fingers, "Shit, shit, shit."

There is a hand on his shoulder and the oncologist's voice is delicate, "Dr. Watson, John, look, this is never an easy conversation to have. We're going to give this all that we've got, and we can try to resume the chemo once Hamish is stronger, however..."

But John is strangely serene and even voiced as he looks up and murmurs the two words that he never, ever thought he would have to say in regards to his own child, "How long?"

*

How is my nephew's prognosis, John? –MH

Sherlock has stopped answering both my calls and my texts. –MH

Not good. –JW

Is there anything I can do at present? –MH

No. –JW

Thank you, but no. –JW

*

Without even being asked, Molly comes and visits Hamish every night after she gets off of work now. She brings John food, his favorite fish and chips from the Golden Fish Bar, in a grease stained brown paper takeaway bag as they sit and watch their son's heart rate monitor beep away evenly. Every night, John turns on the telly and they will watch programs--old reruns of *Doctor Who*, the seven o'clock news, trash program recaps--every night, because it's their new 'per usual' and even if it isn't the norm, John finds himself just thinking how damn nice it is to have someone *there*.

Molly hands him the fish and chips bag again tonight even though she knows that he won't eat it.

"You're a good friend, Molly," the doctor says, thinking about how glaringly obvious he sounds at

present as he sets the bag on the bedside table before settling back down in his usual chair next to their son.

“You need one right now,” Molly says simply as she sits next to him and John knows that Molly knows Sherlock too well to ask anything further. Her voice is gentle when she speaks again, “John, you’re exhausted. Let me sit up with him for a bit.”

“It’s fine. I need to be here for him--I’m fine.”

“John,”

Molly takes John’s free hand between hers and all he can think about is how it’s just so nice, it’s all so nice.

"Pick a program," she says and hands him the remote.

*

Hamish’s liver shows signs of failing the next morning at approximately 9:22am.

John is pulled into the hallway again and then up into the office and Christ, he hates both places right now.

Words like ‘life support’ and ‘arrangements’ are becoming startlingly familiar and in the midst of it all, John finds himself simply wishing that he had someone there to say them to. In the end, he still puts Hamish on the transplant list because, how can he not?

He promised him route 66 for his seventh birthday.

*

He’s dying, in case you actually care. –JW

They’re giving us a week. –JW

Days, maybe. –JW

He needs you. –JW

He’s scared, Sherlock. He’s terrified. –JW

He asked me why you didn’t want to see him—what on earth was I supposed to tell him?
–JW

*

“His respiratory system is failing, Dr. Watson, we’re going to have to intubate soon.”

*

John palms the phone as he sits in the waiting room while waiting for Hamish’s respiratory therapy to be finished. He keeps finding his eyes rolling back in his head and the strange sensation of lurching over before he realizes that he is swaying as he sits in the chair. How many days has it been now since

eating and sleeping and 'per usual, per usual' and 221B? He doesn't even remember.

There's a mobile phone in his hand.

It's his, apparently.

Fuck you, is what he really wants to type for some reason, but then-

I once asked you something, a long time ago. -JW

It was a simple request then. -JW

And I know that you heard it. -JW

I asked you not to be dead then and you took three years, but you weren't. And I know that it's always on your own time but,-JW

We do not say these things, I know. -JW

I need you. -JW

Now. -JW

God damn it, *I* need you, Sherlock. -JW

*

Too early the next morning, John enters 12C freshly showered and carrying a Styrofoam cup of badly brewed Extra Dark hospital coffee from the cafeteria downstairs, the beverage that has been his steady diet for the last week and a half. He sips it once, his stomach burning and his eyes sore from lack of sleep as he refocuses his grasp on flimsy cup and steers towards his son's bedside once more. This is his life as a parent.

He nearly drops his coffee again as he toes back the curtain surrounding his son's bed.

Sherlock is lying on the bed with his shoes still on and his charcoal coat spread about him; Hamish's small frame is curled quietly in his arms. His baritone is impossibly low as he quietly narrates *The Phantom Tollbooth*, one arm stretched out to hold the book in front of their son. The other is lightly resting on the small of Hamish's back, John's spot, and rubbing impossibly light circles against the paper thin hospital gown. Hamish has eyes shut and his head rests against Sherlock's chest. One small fist tightly clenches a handful of the detective's button down shirt. His breath comes in rasps against the oxygen mask, surely it will be only hours now until he is intubated and then...

Sherlock's watery eyes flick to meet his and the doctor's heart stops in his throat and chokes him. He can't speak and so Sherlock starts first, his voice merely a whisper, "I observed that he seemed comforted when you did this last time."

The coffee splashes to the sterile white tile. John is imploding and John is trying to speak now and trying to *say it, say it--*

Careful not to disturb the sleeping boy, the detective shakes his head vehemently, his voice now unsteady and low. As ever, he is still adamant. "No, we do not say those types of things, John, we do not say them—"

But John is stripped and broken and sobs it now as the coffee continues to bleed and pool across the

floor because those three words are the only three he can say at present and damn it, Sherlock needs to *hear* them for once.

“I love you. God damn it, Sherlock, I love you.”

Sherlock just meets his eyes, cerulean washing against steady and fathomless blue. The detective's entire body is screaming and praying and crying out for *John and John and John* because *I am doing this for you, I am dying for you yet again in an entirely different way and I do not know how to handle it*. Tears roll relentlessly down his face as he sobs back those words in his own way, “It’s only and always for you, John. *Only and always for you*. If you ask me, or even if you do not, no matter what the circumstances are, I will always, always find you.”

Sherlock's vision is obscured with tears now, but he feels both of John's hands find his hair as a wet cheek presses against the crown of his head. Still holding Hamish with one arm, he drops *The Phantom Tollbooth* and reaches up to grab onto one of John's wrists. All three are linked together--father, father, and son; father, father, and son. Sherlock encircles John's wrist tighter, feeling the life blood beat far too weakly against the pads of fingertips, and a bone shattering sob rips through his body once more because he’s been so bloody *stupid* and *ignorant* and he’s let him slip—he’s let John fall this time and it’s *wholly unacceptable* because this man, this man *is his life*, the marrow in his bones, and they will never survive in a world where they are not together, no, not ever.

John sits on the bed to hold Sherlock now and buries his face into the detective's neck. He's telling Sherlock *how strong he is* and *that it's going to be fine, just fine*, but he's wrong because Sherlock is not strong, no.

There are things in this world that are considered strong and even though he’s still crying, Sherlock can easily name thousands off the tip of his tongue--steel and titanium and alloy and diamond.

Those things are transient, those things are not *his*.

There are things in this world that are considered strong, but those are smoke and veils and shadows and nothing more.

There are things in this world that are *considered* strong-

And then there is John Watson.

*

The die is cast again. Sherlock starts first, “You won’t be able to speak, alright?”

Hamish barely manages a weak nod.

Sherlock mirrors his action and looks quite serious as he stands over him. “This will be a perfect opportunity for you to practice the art of non-verbal communication. I’ll teach you more about it, of course.”

The dark haired boy smiles an opiate glazed grin into his pillow. “Mmm...I...know, Father. I’m glad...you’re back...”

The detective’s voice is stripped of anything besides sheer honesty at this point. “Obviously,” the next part is softer, “And I as well.”

John catches Sherlock’s eye and moves to sit lightly on the opposite side of Hamish’s bed. He glances up at the nurse who has entered the room, a cart of intubation equipment following her.

“Do you still want to be a consulting detective like Father when you grow up, Hamish? This will give you a good opportunity to practice those skills,” John leads as he gives the nurse a nod. John takes their son’s hand carefully in between his own for the last time that their son will know of.

“Mm...no...” Hamish breathes, his voice sounding shallow against the plastic oxygen mask, “...last night...he told me...I should be...a pirate...instead...”

The nurse moves in and John reluctantly detaches himself from the boy. Both parents stand and move aside to the corner of the hospital room as the nurse is joined by one of the morning shift doctors. As they watch the tubing swallow their son whole, Sherlock reaches over and takes John’s hand fiercely in his. At first, John thinks it is just a hand but then he comes colliding face first into the detective’s coat before feeling strong arms wrap around his shoulders. John collapses into the slender man and he fists the coarse wool material on the detective’s back, he fights to keep himself upright for a variety of reasons, most of all exhaustion.

But this time, Sherlock is strong. The detective draws his nose across John’s temple before he brushes his lips softly against the doctor’s jaw. His grip tightens, every pore and sinew and tissue and muscle in his body says *I will not let you go*.

Again, they do not speak these things, no, not yet.

Instead, as they stand and brokenly breathe and hold each other, Sherlock’s lips softly begin to whisper against John’s skin. He may be forming words that are ‘I’m sorry’ or ‘You are everything to me’ or ‘I’ll never leave you of my own volition again’—but the doctor doesn’t care.

He does not try to decipher it because in ‘Sherlock and John’ it means something that transcends the confines of human language.

*

Hamish is placed on full life support later that evening.

Lestrade makes three Skype calls but Sherlock presses ‘ignore’ every single time. On the fourth time, Sherlock picks up and tells him that he is off the case permanently and will be taking an indeterminably leave of absence from consulting for the Yard.

He glances over toward John who is all but passed out on the bench in their son's room. After not even a moment's consideration, Sherlock takes off his coat and furls it protectively over the doctor. He wants to stay with John, but he is a still *parent*, damn it and so he scrapes up a chair to Hamish's bedside as he had seen the doctor do so many times in vigil.

Sherlock still feels lost as he sits next to their son, his fingers pressed together and steepled under his chin.

He still feels lost until he looks back over at the man who is finally asleep and God, he is found once more.

*

“Dr. Watson, Dr. Pederson needs to meet with you—oh, sorry—you’re not—“

“We’ll be out in one moment.”

There are four muffins stacked haphazardly on a plate next to him as gentle fingers find the dip behind his jaw and carefully hold him awake. John blinks to find crystalline eyes practically boring into his. He's warm--too warm--and as he shifts, he can see the collar of Sherlock's coat just underneath his

eyelashes. He has fallen asleep on the bench in 12C, apparently. The doctor doesn't even know how long he was out for, but all that matters is that those hands don't leave his skin, ever. Sherlock begins stroking just behind the angle of his jaw and although John isn't fully awake yet, from what he can make of it, the man is looking at him as if he is the most precious object in the entire world. It's a look normally reserved for their more intimate moments, but apparently that doesn't matter anymore.

"You've lost six and a half more pounds, John." John can hear Sherlock swallow dryly. "Entirely unacceptable."

"How," he can barely form the words, his entire body is sore and aching for more sleep as he twists on the bench, "How...mmph--long was I out?"

"Twenty two and a half hours." Sherlock's voice is heavy and apologetic before soft lips find the corner of John's mouth and kiss him further awake. The doctor inhales and they are breathing together, in place of their son who cannot.

*

All three men, Sherlock, John, and Dr. Pederson are standing in the hallway again. Quite frankly, John isn't sure who hates the hallway the most at this point, despite the fact that he feels marginally more alive due to the first actual good night's sleep in almost three months.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Watson, the best we can do is keep him comfortable at this point I've upped his morphine dose by 2ML, that's the maximum."

"How much longer do you recommend then?" John's voice is even. Calm. He feels like he's floating away and that this conversation is happening to a different man also named John Watson, because it is. It's happening to a John Watson who is about to lose the most important of his many titles, that of a father.

"He's on life support so ultimately you get to decide—I can't make any recommendations. I'm so sorry, John, Sherlock. I'm incredibly sorry for your loss."

This time, it is who Sherlock finally snaps. "Yes, we already know how sorry you are *doctor*, we don't need to be constantly reminded of something that we're both glaringly aware of. Will being 'sorry' bring him back? No, it won't, so you can cease your endless reiteration of that obvious fact."

The hospital intercom thankfully crackles to life and pages Dr. Pederson to OR 6, immediately.

Seemingly unaffected by Sherlock's reaction, the oncologist apologizes one more time with a sad nod before he turns to head back down the hallway.

Sherlock just stands there and watches the oncologist walk away. He looks what John would deem as utterly lost and so John finds him--*grounds him, tethers him*--because that's what he does in these moments.

"Sherlock," John says as turns to take the detective's shoulders in the palms of his hands.

"Our son—" Sherlock tips his head to glance down at John, his baritone beginning to crack despite the obvious struggle. He takes a breath, smooths his expression, and starts again, "Our son—is dying, potentially today, John. How can you just stand here and be completely alright with this all?"

John leans forward to press the crown of his head against Sherlock's shoulder and prays to God that the tears he holds back won't somehow escape. He brings his hands down to Sherlock's forearms and holds the man tightly, but says nothing. He is unable to trust his voice right now, he is unable to trust his body right now as well, but he's finding Sherlock right now and that's his main priority. He has a duty to uphold.

“My son is *normal*,” Sherlock continues on as John grips him far too tightly, “My son is not part of the 15% that dies from this disease.”

“Sherlock,” John finally murmurs. He moves one of his hands to cup the back of the detective’s neck before looking up into Sherlock’s blue eyes that are not so much breaking—they are already broken. He touches Sherlock’s cheek once with his other hand, as he often did to their son, before he says “Sherlock, there is absolutely *nothing* we can do at this point.”

“Did he know, John?” Sherlock asks, his eyes searching into the doctor’s through the vestiges of the human body and into his very soul, “I never told him, but did he *know*?”

“God, yes,” John breathes incredulously as nods, his visage is creased and drained of absolutely every emotion besides sheer fatigue and grief. John sways a bit, his body is greedy and it needs more sleep but *he’s fighting* because he’s finding Sherlock and he will fight on, “Being loved by you isn’t easy, Sherlock, I will say that much, but he is *your son*.”

“Our son,” his correction is almost uncharacteristically soft, “I don’t know how, but he is more yours than mine. Watching him like this, John...”

John nods, hearing the brackets because he feels the same way, but in reverse, “I know.”

Despite his best efforts, John lets his forehead fall to Sherlock’s shoulder again. This time he stays there as a palm cradles the back of his head and fingers slide through his hair. He is fairly certain that Sherlock is telling him how exhausted he still looks, but it doesn’t matter because there are lips at his temple now, now at the slope of his nose. John tilts his head up to meet those lips and they are kissing, but not because Sherlock needs anything this time, no, because it’s what two halves of a single soul simply *do*.

*

That night Sherlock leads John by the hand to the hotel across the street.

They do not fuck.

He doesn’t know exactly how to do these things, but he’s going to continue to try.

Sherlock sits John down at the small Italian restaurant inside and makes him order four dishes. He holds John’s hand over the table and with a scrutinizing gaze, he watches the doctor struggle to eat. Sherlock doesn’t care about their previously unarticulated ‘rules’ because he’s past that now, they both are. Once finished, he kisses John once and pulls him to his feet. Sherlock can feel the map of bones under his hands as he steadies John by the hips and it brings bile to his throat.

He swears on his life that nothing like this will ever happen again, no, never.

Now marginally satisfied, Sherlock rents a room and he half drags, half carries the man upstairs where he helps him undress before simply tucking his doctor into an actual bed for the first time in three months. Sherlock undresses, climbs in next to him, and holds John against his chest until they both fall into a dreamless sleep.

At some point during the night he feel’s John’s words against his bare chest, ‘Thank you’ first and then those three words again, ‘I love you.’

Sherlock finds John’s face smooth and relaxed with sleep when he rolls over the late next morning. He traces the outline of John’s lips with his own and in that moment as his eyes rove over the impossible man who breathes lightly next to him, Sherlock knows that, yes, he has done something *good*.

*

John signs Hamish's proverbial death warrant two days later. They will take him off life support at approximately 6:00pm that evening—Hamish's favorite time, sunset.

Sherlock doesn't look away from the window for the entire day as both fathers sit and hold onto one of the dying boy's hands in 12C. The only sounds in the room are the beeps and clicks of the life support machine. Occasionally throughout the day, John and Sherlock will glance over at the other, but most of their talking is done in brackets at this point.

At 5:40pm, the detective finally speaks.

"He can hear me." It's not a question.

"God, yes." The words are a mere whisper.

"I need a moment alone with him...please."

John wearily squeezes Sherlock's hand. The detective traces John's jawline with two fingers, his breathing unsteady.

"John,"

Fingers press against Sherlock's lips and cut him off.

"Hamish, tell it to Hamish."

Sherlock murmurs one last request, "Stay close outside...would you do that for me, please?"

*

John watches through the window as Sherlock paces the room, three steps at a time. He stops. A turn. He paces the room, three more steps. He stops. A turn. Repeat. He does it twelve more times.

And then it just all falls out, apparently.

Even though he's outside 12C, John can still hear the words but that's the point, he supposes.

*

"Ironically enough, I am not entirely good with stories, but I have some...circumstances that I need to explain to you that should have been explained many years before."

"I said goodbye to your father once a long, long time ago. As you have indubitably heard, I had to make a choice that involved the safety of his life or the sanity of my own. However, in all honesty, there was never a choice to be had. It has *always and only* been your father. Although we never say these things, I cared for your father as ardently then as I do now, even though it may appear like I do not care for him in the traditional sense, I assure you it is entirely the opposite. However, this is where John would inevitably remind me that you are six years old and do not wish to hear of such romance, but it does not change the fact that it was the most difficult goodbye of my life, until now."

"Hamish, much like you, at your age I was planning to become a pirate. I was not fighting for my life, nor spending nights hooked up to infernal machines, nor spending my days undergoing tests, nor spending my time wondering if I would live or die. You are not a normal six year old and for that, I have failed as a parent to some extent. As much as I have examined the evidence, I cannot see how I could have changed anything and that, that is what breaks me the most. I am powerless over what has

happened to you, Hamish, and that is something that I have never been.”

“I apologize for my weakness when I left you. Luckily your father, John, yet again proved himself as the bravest man that I will ever have the privilege to know. Even to this day, I do not know if he truly understands what he means to me as we rarely say these sorts of things. Hamish, for the lack of a better metaphor, he is the blood in my veins and the marrow in my bones. Hamish, he is my anchor and touchstone and the only thing in this immutable world that matters. I hope that you know how much he loves you because really, truly, he loves you with all of his incredible heart and then some.”

“Paternal...love has never been my strength, Hamish. It was one of the many fears that I expressed to your father when I was informed that your mother was pregnant. I am a high functioning sociopath, I do not *love*, nor know what the word means in the traditional capacity. I love your father in ways that I do not understand, and that quite frankly, terrify me. I love him so much as I *am* him and I cannot exist in a world in which he is not present and safe. I would do anything for him and everything for him and then some. Things that normal people should never consider, I have. Things that normal people have never attempted, I have. However, I was worried that I would not be able to express the same level of sentiment regarding a child, a child that halfway belonged to one of my enemies, none the less. You changed all that. You, with your unruly hair and your bright blue eyes. You, with your father’s ridiculous bravery and selflessness and heart. You with your inquisitive mind and your athletic talent as well. Hamish, I could never wish for a more perfect son and I know that I did not say it enough while you were...here...but it does not change the fact that...”

“God, the words are so hard for me to say, because I do not say these things, but Hamish Watson-Holmes, *I love you.*”

“It is no secret that I would follow your father anywhere on this immutable world. I would follow him to the very depths of hell itself if it meant that he were safe. And Hamish, I love you as I love him, and *God, I love him*--I would follow you as well but this...death...”

“I know that this is an impossible request, but you are an *impossible* man like your father and I must make it nonetheless. I see so much of him in you that it hurts—it feels as if a piece of him is leaving me as well and try as I might, the harder I grasp the more it slips through my fingers,” Sherlock sobs as he presses his face to the boy’s morphine-warm palm, “Hamish, *please*. You are six years old and dying and it is just...*cruel and unfair* that *I love you so much* and yet you are going precisely where I cannot find you.”

*

Ten minutes later, John nudges the door aside to find the taller man sitting hunched over Hamish’s bedside, both hands tightly clenching one of their son’s, his shoulders shaking. Without uttering a single word, John scrapes the other chair next to Sherlock and settles in it, wrapping his arms firmly around the man’s slender frame.

It will be minutes now.

Sherlock draws the back of his hand across his eyes, John captures it and tangles their fingers together before reaching out to take Hamish’s with the other.

They sit, all three connected to one another for the last time. John in the middle, Sherlock, and Hamish. Father, father, and son. Father, father, and son.

“I don’t want him to die,” Sherlock breathes heavily as John rests his chin on the detective’s shoulder.

The life support machine beeps slower; it will be seconds.

“Neither do I,” John whispers against his neck.

“I love you,” And he’s speaking to both of them, his boys, *his boys*.

“...Sherlock.”

“John,” Sherlock chokes because it is the one word that he can actually say at present...but it's not merely that, it's not just *one word*, no.

The word, *his name*, is Sherlock’s prayer, it is his touchstone, it is his rock and anchor, it tethers him to shore in a storm-tossed and churning sea. It is being tucked under the reassuring crook of John neck on nights when his brain is tearing itself to absolute pieces in madness, it is the quips and smiles given at crime scenes the next morning without even a second discussion. The word is flesh and blood and warmth and approximately 160 pounds of ex-army doctor *grit* churning behind him as they run through the streets of London. It is kissing and fucking and *loving* until the very pressure of that *love* threatens burst through his veins, and it *hurts oh God, it hurts and then some but this, this is what life is really about. It hurts, loving and losing*, but by God, he’s *alive* and solely because of that word, that one single word.

The word is *his*, and so he gasps it again because it is all he can say at present. It is *please Hamish let go for Dad and I, and thank you, John, thank you for continuing to go on even when you physically could not, and I love you both so much, oh God, I do. It is I'll never stop loving you until I cease to breathe and even once I've turned to ash and charred bone I will still love you, only and always you, only and always and ever you,*

“John.”

End Notes

I am humbled and awed at the insane amount of talent in this fandom. Truly, I am speechless for the following and I thank you from the bottom of my heart!

A [beautiful fic cover](#) by the amazing [devinleighbee](#)

Art:

By [picturesquegoddess](#)

1) ["John lightly taps the side of their son’s face once he is finished. “Slide in bed, love. Nurse will be in soon.”](#)

2) ["John sits on the bed to hold Sherlock now and buries his face into the detective's neck. He's telling Sherlock how strong he is and that it's going to be fine, just fine, but he's wrong because Sherlock is not strong, no."](#)

And by [netherworldvineyard!](#)

1) ["Sherlock is lying on the bed with his shoes still on and his charcoal coat spread about him; Hamish’s small frame is curled quietly in his arms. His baritone is impossibly low as he quietly narrates The Phantom Tollbooth, one arm stretched out to hold the book in front of their son."](#)

2) [Gorgeous representation of the Holmes-Watson family in action](#)

As an ostensible historian (or so they tell me...?) I feel the need to footnote this a teeny with the fact that the title is actually from the Wuthering Heights quote: 'Be with me always--take any form--drive me mad! Only do not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you!' Favorite book, ever. More footnoting--if you work at the Royal Marsden, I SINCERELY apologize for whatever liberties that I've taken with the hospital?

Also, this has both a prologue and an epilogue, more for my own background purposes than anything else that deals with the whole Irene-Sherlock-Mary-John paradigm of angst and then how Sherlock and John move on from this and start talking about things. This will DEFINITELY be turned into a series as I'm working on the next two right now-AAHH.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!