

## **Some things change, some things don't**

by mazaher

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*I have been reading afrogeekgoddess' masterful After Life and After Death. I am not completely convinced by the dramatics in the first two chapters of After Love (which however imo slides back into line \*brilliantly\* soon after) and they made me rethink for the n-th time my own, more understated idea of the reunion after the hiatus years.*

*Read the trilogy at <http://archiveofourown.org/series/11192>: you won't regret it.*

*Then, there is the spectre of Mary Morstan looming in the background of Season 3.*

*Then again, a fascinating discussion with fennishjournal about gender roles.*

*I should have been writing something completely different in the J&P saga, but I got this sudden flash, and...*

*Here we are.*

*Betaed by athens7, who knows how to wait-- thanks!*

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Mary Morstan, librarian at Barbican, formerly Mrs. William Fairclough, is standing on the terrace of the eleven-storey building where she lives.

It is a grey evening in early October, a chilly drizzle soaking London and drawing out its myriad smells and scents.

She has been a widow for exactly three weeks, five days, eight hours, three minutes and fifteen seconds.

She is absolutely certain she doesn't want to see the sixteenth.

She jumps into a swan dive.

She always loved diving.

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John H. Watson, MD, is tidying up the surgery where he takes three shifts a week.

They are closed already, but he likes to take his time of an evening. The foreign silence of this anonymous room is a comfort of sorts, in this bleak time after...

After.

Only the lamp on his desk is lighted as he goes about his business, wiping with antiseptic the plastic surface of the examination couch, picking up bits and pieces, dropping them in the waste basket, collecting the bag and neatly tying it up for the cleaner to dispose of next morning.

He can't get rid of a faint buzz in his ears.

Suddenly, a hurried step at the door. Loud knocking.

"Please, is there anybody in there? It's an emergency. Please?"

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This is how they met.

She, broken, conscious and supine on the pavement after rolling off the tarp covered lorry which has cushioned her crash.

He, kneeling and peering into her face with round blue eyes.

What he sees is her sorrow at being still alive.

It mirrors his own.

::

They get married six months later.

They are not in love with each other: they both know they are still too deeply in love with someone else.

But survival is easier as a team.

Together, they can give and receive something which would be lost otherwise. It makes life tolerable. Almost. Both keep for themselves a loneliness, a plot of waste land where once an orchard used to grow, and now there is only barren soil left.

The gate is shut.

The place is sacred.

But there is another place where they stand together day after day; where if one falters, the other holds.

The little noises in the next room. A light turned on, coming home after a day at work. Sharing cooking, books, a bed, a couch.

Walks in Regent's Park.

Sometimes, when a summer shower has cleaned the air and London shines bright and wet and cool in the late afternoon sun, or when the winter fog rubs on the windows like a huge lazy gray cat, they share memories of their lives before.

It's not enough.

They make do.

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Then it happens.

It's a Sunday morning in June, right after breakfast.

John is reading «Rugby World».

Mary is rolling a sheet of puff pastry around a layer of marmalade and chopped almonds to bake as a dessert for tea-time.

John's mobile buzzes. Text coming in.

"Would you please get it for me?" John asks, without turning his head.

The buzzing stops.

"John?"

"Hm? Who texted?"

"John. You should read this."

Her voice is blank, and John shudders, remembering how she used to sound in the early days, in hospital. Before they gave each other hope.

He takes the mobile.

\*That\* number.

John, I'm sorry.

I need to see  
you. Please?

His heart stops for half a second, then stutters on.

This is impossible.

He feels Mary's hand faintly trembling on his shoulder.

He frowns.

Who are you?            he sends back.

May we talk?

I'll explain.

John can't speak. He shakes his head, passes the phone to Mary for her to read.  
Her hand grips his shoulder a bit tighter.  
The phone buzzes again just as she's handing it back.

Look, I know  
this is a bit  
sudden, and I'm  
so sorry, but it  
was the only way.  
There was a fake,  
and it was my  
death. You will want  
proof that it's  
really me. Which  
proof do you want?

John types quickly:

What were my words  
after we fucked for  
the first time?

"Bless you" comes the answer.  
Complete with inverted commas.  
And a moment later:

Can we meet once?  
I need to explain.  
Then, if you want,  
I'll go.

"You should go."

"I'm not sure I want to. Or what I'll do... if it's him."

"You do. You owe it to him-- if it's him. You owe it to yourself even if it isn't. In the fucking mess that is life, blessings are not to be wasted. I know what I'd do if Will texted me. You'll do the same."

"Would you come with me?"

"I promised I would be there for you. You were there for me. If you want me, I am here."

His warm hand covers her cool one, resting on the place of the scar on his shoulder.

He texts:

We'll be in  
Queen Mary's  
Rose Garden in  
40 minutes.

Together, they take a breath and stand.

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360° image of the Rose Garden:  
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