Summary

After Moriarty nearly blows John and Sherlock up at the pool, Sherlock realises he's been holding some important things back, and he knows he needs to speak up before it's too late.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

“You’re sure you’re all right?” Sherlock sat right next to me in the cab. His hips were less than a hand’s breadth from mine and there was a world of empty space on his other side. I could feel the heat off him.

“I’m fine,” I assured him. Sherlock silently turned back the cuffs of my jacket and ran gentle fingers along the friction burns the zip ties had left on my wrists in those hours I’d been trussed up at that sports centre, waiting to die with him. “Mostly fine,” I amended. My skin rippled into gooseflesh under Sherlock’s fingers, and he modestly turned my sleeve back over my wrist. I cleared my throat and tried hard not to clench my left fist, though I had to squeeze my knee in the end to hide the tremour. I’m sure he saw it anyway. “Where on earth is this cabby taking us? This isn’t the way home.”

“I need to stop off before we go home,” Sherlock’s face was rigid with anger in the cold, red glow of the taillights around us, but when he grasped my wrist, his touch was soft and careful. “Just here,” said Sherlock presently, and we rolled to a stop in front of one of those stately old edifices that always has a whiff of institutional grandeur about it. Sherlock hopped out of the cab and leaned down to address the cabby, “Wait here for us. We’ll only be a few minutes. John,” he looked at me, “Come on.”
I got out of the cab and followed Sherlock to the door of the building, his hand still grasping my wrist protectively, even after he’d rung the bell and we were shown into a sort of waiting room by a vaguely imposing personage I can find no description for but butler. Didn’t know they still made those.

“Sherlock, where are we? What are we doing here?”

Sherlock’s jaw was tight, and he answered through his teeth, “I need a word with my brother.” I opened my mouth to question him further, but we were interrupted by the butler’s reappearance. He signed something to Sherlock, and Sherlock signed back in the same hasty, huffy manner he tends to use with strangers when preoccupied. The butler nodded and exited. Sherlock sighed impatiently and towed me to a little bench, “We may as well sit. He loves to keep me waiting. Bastard.”

I sat, “You know sign language?”

Sherlock nodded, “When I was younger, I often had difficulty speaking when upset or overwhelmed. My mother insisted the entire family learn BSL so that I could communicate.”

“Is the butler deaf or something?”

Sherlock shook his head, “This is the Diogenes Club. You think I’m unsociable. Members of the Diogenes Club are forbidden to speak to each other on the premises with bans of varying duration imposed for any violations. Five violations means a lifetime ban.”

I digested that, “Jesus. Well. Typical drama queen Mycroft, I suppose.” Sherlock smiled faintly and drummed his fingers against my arm in lieu of reply. His skin had warmed to mine, and I’d nearly forgotten his hand still held me.

After a few minutes, the butler returned and showed us into a room with a little plate on the door that read, ‘The Strangers Room.’ Inside, Mycroft was sat in a club chair near a cold fireplace. There were identical chairs on either side of him, and he held a little glass of amber liquor, which he raised when we entered and nodded to Sherlock looking almost pleased, “See the conqu’ring hero comes.”

Instead of sitting in one of the proffered chairs, Sherlock paced like an angry tiger, “I am here for explanations, Mycroft, not congratulations. And don’t bother putting on stupidity. It’s an ugly colour on you.”

“Sherlock,” Mycroft began in a let’s-be-reasonable older brotherish way that got under my skin, though he isn’t even my brother.

“An explanation, Mycroft. At once. And a good one.”

Mycroft glanced at me, “Our sting incorporated a rescue mission. I thought you wouldn’t mind two for the price of one. Moriarty’s going to be in prison for the remainder of his natural life, and you have your doctor back. All’s well that.”

“You knew!” Sherlock reached out for me and gripped my arm again. “You knew he had John, and you didn’t tell me! How could you do that?!”

A flicker of surprise chased by annoyance passed over Mycroft’s features, “Sherlock, do stop raving and shouting like a madman and sit down.”

“You and your perfect intel,” Sherlock spat. “His bodyguard is our agent; we know exactly where he is and what he’s doing at all times. Just use his crush on you to bring him in, there’s a good little
brother.’ You knew that MANIAC had my.” Sherlock shut his mouth with a click, and his jaw worked furiously, “He could have been killed. Not John, I told you. I said it straight off; it was my only stipulation. John was not to be involved.”

I looked between Sherlock and Mycroft, but neither of them seemed about to fill me in voluntarily, “Hang on, I’m lost. That was a sting? At the pool? You two set it up?”

Mycroft looked at me, ‘Good old Dr Watson. Don’t worry; I’m sure the uptake will tire eventually if you keep after it as you have done. That soldier’s stamina can be marvellous, can’t it, S-”

“Shut up shut up, for the love of god SHUT UP!” Sherlock actually stamped his foot. He raked a hand through his hair, leaving it standing on end. Mycroft fell silent and watched Sherlock struggle to compose himself. It took a moment, and Sherlock shifted his hand to link his arm with mine and haul me a little closer to him. “Our professional relationship is entirely at an end,” Sherlock said finally. “Find yourself another lackey.”

Mycroft looked at me rather than Sherlock when he answered, “I daresay I could order you, if I had need of you.”

Sherlock gazed at his brother with unprecedented loathing, “I’d like to see you try.”

Mycroft smiled, “Perhaps you will.”

Sherlock drew himself up, “Then I’ll tell on you. I’ll tell Mummy. Come on, John; we’re going.” And with another tug on my arm, he drew me out of the room.

…

Back at Baker Street, once we were safely inside 221B, Sherlock finally let go my arm. It felt cold without his hand, and beside the friction burns, there were faint impressions of Sherlock’s fingertips.

“I’m for a shower,” he said brusquely, hanging his coat up and rather roughly divesting me of my jacket to give it the same treatment. “Do try not to get kidnapped while I’m in the bath, won’t you, John?”

I scowled, “Are you really going to be a dick to me about Moriarty kidnapping me?”

Sherlock hung his head, “No. I’m sorry. I.” He looked up and edged closer to me, those silvery eyes pinning me to the wall at my back, “John. What I said before. I would be lost without you. I meant it.” He reached out and squeezed my shoulder. “Lost.” And he turned away and made for the bathroom, locking himself in before I could answer.

“Right,” I said to the empty hall. “Okay.”

I made tea, then hung round the kitchen for ages, nursing my brew and waiting for Sherlock to emerge from the bathroom. Sherlock’s mug stood untouched til it was beyond stewed and lukewarm, and still the shower ran. Finally I took the hint and took myself upstairs to bed. I didn’t think I’d sleep, but eventually I did, the shower still running downstairs.

I woke in the night, hours or minutes later, to the sound of Sherlock’s violin. Low and hesitant, and horribly sad.
Wake on the sofa, crick in my neck, fearful headache, wool blanket from John’s chair draped over me. Smell of coffee. John’s voice coming quiet and careful from the kitchen. Talking to Mrs Hudson? Push up on my elbow and listen.

“...still asleep...difficult to say, really. Last night he seemed mostly pissed off, then he hid from me until I went to sleep, so who knows what that’s about...er. Lunch? I’m not sure; I’ll have to...very funny...Christ, Sarah, how many...Well it isn’t...Why does it have to be more than...What do you want me to say?...fine. Yeah. Call you tomorrow. Bye.” Near inaudible tap of John’s finger on the screen of his phone to disconnect. Little sigh. Ceramic scraping of his mug lifting off the worktop, then footsteps. Hastily slump back onto the sofa and arrange the blanket, then shut my eyes.

Listen to John cross the sitting room and take his chair. Little hum of satisfaction after he sips his coffee again. Friction sound of fabric (crossing his legs?)(sounds like jeans rubbing). For a long moment, there’s silence.

“You’ve got a tell, you know. “There is a warm note of amusement in John’s voice when he speaks again, “You get a line between your eyebrows when you’re shamming sleep.”

Well then! Kick off the blanket and sit up, “Good morning.”

John nods, “Morning. Coffee in the kitchen. We’re out of sugar.”

Nod, “Thanks. I’ll go to the shop later.”

John smiles, “I think I’ll come along and make sure.”

Grin reluctantly, “Though I’m sure I’d be glad of your company, if it is on offer, Boswell, all the flirtatious criminal masterminds we know are in prison actually, so you need not worry about me running off again.”

John’s smile fades a bit and drops his eyes to his cup, “The one that got away.”

I’ve got it wrong somehow (always!), “No, he went where I meant him to go.” Get up and go into the kitchen before John can answer. When I return with my mug (ergh no sugar), John has disappeared behind the morning paper. Disappointing. “I’m famished. Breakfast? We could go to that place that does the fry up with those imitation sausages you like.”

John peers around the edge of the paper, “The one we went to after you fainted?”

“I did not-”

John smirks, “Then you crumpled into my arms for other reasons? I never knew you cared. Give a fellow a bit of warning next time, will you? Nearly knocked me off my feet. You’re heavier than you look, which is good, I suppose.”

“That wasn’t a crumple! I tripped, and you knocked into me!”

“Yeah, yeah, I’ve heard this song before. That’s gratitude. Go and get some clothes on, and we’ll go.”

…
“The mushroom and swiss omelet with the wheat toast and coffee, black, two sugars for him, and I’ll have the same, but coffee white without, ta.” John hands over our menus to the waiter with his company manners smile on. Our waiter nods and hurries away.

“Thanks,” Nothing to do with my hands. Start to reach for my phone, then decide John’ll be annoyed if I do (brain is already clenching around a void)(need a case; I’m so annoying without) (perhaps he won’t want to do cases with me anymore, as he’s been kidnapped three times since he met me)(terrifying, humiliating)(some detective I am)(then he’d leave)(panic rising shutupshutupnotnow).

“You’re welcome,” his smile is real now (underneath the table, my left knee is pressed to his right) (it’s terrifically loud, touching John). “Man’s got to eat.”

Roll my eyes, “I eat.”

“Mmm, not really. Not enough.”

“I’m alive, aren’t I? Doesn’t that prove I eat enough?”

John laughs, “No, it really doesn’t.”

Shrug, “Fine, I don’t eat enough. You win. Where will you display your trophy?”

John’s mind is elsewhere, it seems, “You’re autistic, aren’t you?”

Raise an eyebrow, “Is that deduction the work of the moment?”

John’s eyes flick guiltily to the side, “No. I suppose I’ve been wondering. You don’t have to answer, if you don’t-”

“I know I don’t. Yes, doctor, I am. You may cease from wondering.”

John nods, “So why d’y’tell people you’re a sociopath?”

Shrug again, “If they’re going to hate me anyway, they may as well be afraid of me. Better than. Pity. Pity, contempt, and condescension make for a very tiresome cocktail. You know; you’ve seen Mycroft.”

John frowns, “Do you really think that’s all he. I mean, he’s your brother. He must. Love you.”

Frown, “Does it matter? That’s all he shows.”

John’s mouth sags glumly, “I suppose you’ve got a point there.”

“I usually do. Must we really talk about my horrible brother? It puts me off my breakfast.”

“Sorry,” John pauses to receive the coffee our waiter has brought us, and we sip quietly for a few moments. “You’re wrong about everyone hating you,” he continues after he’s wet his whistle.

“Oh?”

“I like you,” John bumps his knee against mine under the table.

Crack a smile, “I know.” Expression of reciprocity is customary in these circumstances, I believe. “I like you, too.”
John licks his lips thoughtfully, “Do you really?”

Rather taken aback at that (seems to pour out of me in everything I do, and he doesn’t see it)(flash of annoyance)(impossibly stupid!), “Of course I do. Why should you doubt it?”

“I was wondering, last night. If that’s why he took me. And if.” John shrugs, looks away (something heartbreaking in that; can’t think what, exactly), “I dnno. He used me against you. I had a lot of time to think on that. It was. I was wondering if everyone else has got the wrong end of the stick or if I have.”

Wet my lips, “The wrong end of the stick. Which end is that?”

John still isn’t looking at me, “People seem to think. Erm. People. See something between us. People think I’m so important to you. It’s hard not to. Er. Wonder. Where they erm. Get that.”

My stomach constricts (he won’t look at me!), “And you think. There’s nothing between us.”

John does look then, “Not nothing. Of course not.” He tries to smile, “Don’t mind me; I’m talking shite. Just. I wouldn’t have kidnapped me. That’s all.”

…”Sherlock Holmes, if you’ve been sneaking my reefer again!”

Startle and nearly drop the carton of ice cream I’m up to my wrist in, “No, I’m not stoned; I’m just hungry!”

“Well you needn’t stand there with the freezer door open! You’re letting out the cold!” Mrs Hudson smacks her handbag onto the kitchen table and marches up to me, tutting, “Mind you already owe me a fortune for the wall, young man.”

Recollect the original purpose for my presence in Mrs Hudson’s flat, nod, and reach into my dressing gown pocket for a folded cheque, “The builder said it’d be about that much. Let me know if it’s more.” Shut the freezer door and shuffle past her to the kitchen table, still holding the last mouthful aloft on my spoon.

Mrs Hudson peeps at the amount and nods, then tucks the cheque into her sleeve and joins me at the table, “Well now, what’s the matter with you?”

Sigh and lean over to rest my head on her shoulder, “Nothing.”

She pats my back and chuckles fondly (knowingly)(annoying)(fair), “If you say so, dearie.”

My eyes prickle (infuriating!). Shut them, try not to sigh. “Do you think he’s going to leave?”

She pats my back again (sudden distinct impression I’m being winded)(impulse to laugh, though my eyes are prickling more than ever), “I hope he stays.” I do sigh then, and she sighs as well, “It isn’t like you to be so helpless, Sherlock.”

Sit up, “I’m not!”

She kisses the top of my head and hands me a napkin, “Then do something. And mind you don’t drip ice cream all over my kitchen floor.”
Where are you? I’ve been shouting for you.
-SH

I’m at work. I said bye this morning, didn’t you hear me?
No. Sorry, most people are on mute until after 9 AM.
-SH

Lovely.

Who isn’t on mute until after 9 AM?

Whoever’s minding the counter at Speedy’s.
-SH

Of course.

Man’s got to eat.
-SH

True.

Did you need something?

How’s your caseload looking this week?
-SH

Got a couple days while one of Sarah’s GPs is at a conference.

May literally die of boredom.

Why?

I was sort of hoping you’d say that.
-SH

Have you got something for us?

When do you get off? I’ll come and collect you.
-SH

Quarter to five. I’ll see you then.

…

“Monkey glands?”

Sherlock smirked and swiped the keycard into our hotel room, then stepped back to let me in first, “Yep.”

“But that’s bollocks,” I walked in and flopped onto my bed.

“Isn’t it, just,” Sherlock began to dig in the suitcase and tossed pyjama bottoms and a t shirt onto his bed.
“You’re getting into pyjamas already?”

Sherlock paused with his hand on his belt, “Problem?”

I sat up, “Well it’s only half seven, and we haven’t even had dinner yet.”

“Oh that,” Sherlock sat on the end of the bed and took off his shoes.

“Yeah, that. Man’s got to eat. Keep that genius brain going. Anyway, the case is over now. Isn’t the spell broken?”

“Can’t we have them send something up? I didn’t see anything in the way of restaurants that sparked my interest on journey in.”

I laughed, “No, you were busy thinking about how much you wanted to pat Roy.”

Sherlock tossed his head, “He’s a very big dog, John. Didn’t you want to pat him?”

“Yeah, all right,” I agreed. “I’ll call down, shall I?” I turned away to make the call, and when I’d finished, Sherlock was stretching out on his bed, clad in his pyjamas.

“Thank you, John.”

“Don’t mention it.” I took off my shoes and laid on my bed, “I hope they’re not ages with the food. I want to get into my jims as well.”

Sherlock shrugged, “Go on, then. I’m sure they’ve seen worse.”

“I can’t answer the door in my pyjamas. It feels like an orgy.” Sherlock snorted but did not reply. “Shall I put the telly on?”

“Whatever you like,” Sherlock said, absently, feeling down the side of his bed for his phone charger.

I switched on the television and turned through the channels. I watched the last few minutes of a rugby match, and Sherlock noodled on his phone. The food arrived as the match was ending, and by the time I’d wrangled the trays into the room, Sherlock had turned over the channel to a documentary about penguins. He shimmered over to my bed and sat on the end of my bed with his tray, leaned back against the wall, and tucked in.

I began to get into my pyjamas, “You can sit there if you like, but if you get crumbs in the sheets, I’m sleeping over there,” I indicated his bed with my chin.

Sherlock raised an eyebrow, “Noted.” I got my own tray and sat on my bed toward the head. The food was very nice. I rather wished I had a pint to go with it.

It occurred to me after a few minutes of silent chewing that Sherlock had stopped eating and was watching me, “What?”

Sherlock seemed to consider, “John, how was I today?”

I grinned, “Have I not praised you enough? What’s a new one? Magnificent.”


“Did I what?”
Sherlock twisted his napkin, “Kidnappable?”

I cottoned on then, “Oh. Are you still thinking about that?”

Sherlock tied his napkin in a knot, “It very much disorders me when you. Your absence is a very effective way to.” He sighed and untied the knot, “I need you. I don’t want you to leave.”

I frowned, “Who said anything about leaving?”

Sherlock knotted his napkin again, his eyes on his hands, “I mean I never want you to leave.”

“I’ve got to be part of the ritual, I suppose. Like the nicotine patches and the violin.”

Sherlock frowned deeply, “You’re John!”

“Er, yeah.” I cocked my head, “With you so far.”

“Never mind,” Sherlock glared into his soup and half turned away from me.

“Sherlock, come on. I’m listening! What are you trying to say?” I prodded his hip with my socked foot, and he stifled my toes between his hip and his palm.

“Stop that. I’m trying to eat.”

“Come on, I’m listening. I’m not going to leave. Is that really what this is? Where would I even go?”

Sherlock’s scowl deepened, “You might go and live with Sarah some time. Or someone.”

“I really don’t think so. Anyway, that’s on its way out.”

Sherlock looked up, surprised, “Really? I thought you liked her.”

I shrugged, “Not as much as I need to, I think.”

“Oh. I’m sorry.”

I shook my head, “It’s all right. I’ll probably get sacked, though, and you’ll forget all about friendship and chuck me out for someone who can make rent.”

“I’m really not a sociopath, you know,” Sherlock snapped. “And I don’t understand why you’re making fun of me, when I’m trying to talk to you.”

“I’m sorry! I was just being stupid; I didn’t mean anything by it. I don’t understand what’s bothering you.”

“I’m trying to tell you, and you’re laughing at me! I can’t!” Sherlock waved a hand inarticulately, “Talk!”

I set my food aside and leaned forward, “God, I’m sorry!”

Sherlock pushed his tray away as well, then to my surprise, took hold of my foot and squeezed it, “You keep casually telling me that I don’t care about you. As if. I’m a dog or something, and I can’t even understand you.”

“I’m sorry, I was only joking!”
“No you weren’t! And it isn’t funny! I.” He shut his eyes and squeezed my foot hard, “What do you want me to do? I. Don’t know how to be more clear.”

“You’re clear, all right. We’re friends. I’m sorry. I know we’re friends. I shouldn’t have said those things. We’re friends.” I shuffled on my bum down to his end of the bed and patted his shoulder. “We’re friends.”

Sherlock opened his eyes, “I am not making do with you, John. I like you. I’ve never liked anyone like I like you.”


He rolled his eyes, “Yes, apparently I’m mad, arrogant, imperious, pompous, not safe, and spectacularly ignorant.”

I frowned, “That. Well, that’s a bit not good, isn’t it? It sounded complimentary in my head. I’d never strung it all together like that.” Sherlock shrugged. “I’m sorry. I’m an arsehole. I. I have no excuse. I’m sorry.”

“You sound fed up. On your blog.”

“I’m just trying not to gush! I keep taking out a load of stuff that makes me sound so. Enchanted.”

Sherlock smiled, “That’s a new one. You must let me see one of your first drafts some time. I may be able to do something about your ghastly grammar.” I threw a chip at him, and he smiled when it bounced off his nose.

We finished our food in fairly companionable quiet, and when Sherlock had pushed away his empty tray, he pulled my feet into his lap again. He fell asleep on the end of my bed an hour later, slumped back against the wall, his fingers wrapped around my left ankle.

…

Wake up in the pitch black with a hot, damp weight pressed to my back. Takes me a moment to place it, but it’s John. I’m caught between John and the wall, and I’m sweating through my t shirt. My mouth is dry and sour, so I push up on my elbow and lean over John for the bedside water glass. Drain it in one draught and consider wriggling past John to go and sleep in my own bed (where it’s probably less sweaty). He sighs in his sleep, though, and sags toward me on the dip in the mattress. Pull the damp shirt off and toss it over John onto the floor, then settle back into my crevice. John rolls over and nestles up to me.

“Keep still, can’t you?” he murmurs against the back of my neck. “M’sleeping.” Freeze (he thinks I’m Sarah)(should probably move if so)(shouldn’t I?). John blows a little amused sigh on the back of my neck, “Right you can breathe, though, Sherlock.” Burst into nervous giggles and try and stifle them in my arm, but after a moment, John giggles along with me (can feel his stomach trembling and his chest rise with his breath). “Well,” John remarks after we’ve giggled ourselves into silence, “That was fun. N’night. If you bounce me about again, you’re going to end up on the floor.”

“I’ll try not to breathe too. Bouncy.” John snorts and pats my hip fondly, and my answering smile feels so loud that I muffle it against John’s pillow until I fall asleep.
The Redacted Redacted

Well I can’t really say much about that last case, except that Sherlock was an absolute screaming genius as usual. You wouldn’t believe me if I told you. To make it up to you, I will tell you that he looked at puppy adoption websites on his phone the whole way home on the train. I peeped over his shoulder and watched. It was, dare I say? Adorable.

Comments(7)

Sherlock Holmes:
Snoop!

John Watson:
Hark who's talking. We’re still out of sugar. You said you’d go to Tesco.

Sherlock Holmes:
You said you’d come with me.

John Watson:
Fine, fine, I will. Have you seen my brown boot? The left one. I didn’t leave it in the hotel, did I?”

Sherlock Holmes:
Check under the wardrobe.

John Watson:
Thanks :)

Sarah Sawyer:
Ah, so that’s where you got to. Could you please phone me, John? I’ve left messages…

Sherlock was tuning his violin when I got in that night, and he lowered it and turned to look at me when I threw myself onto the sofa, “You look discontented.”

I shrugged, “I’ve just been chucked.”

Sherlock set his violin down and came to perch on the arm of the sofa, “That’s too bad. I’m sorry.” He patted my shoulder.

I sat up, “I sort of knew it was coming. Had been for a while, I suppose. Were you going to play something?”

Sherlock clasped his hands on his knee, “Oh. I was, actually. I won’t if it’ll annoy you.”

“No, it won’t annoy me. I like the violin.”

Sherlock gave my shoulder another pat, then returned to his music stand and played through the scale. I got up and went into the kitchen to put the kettle on. While I was in the kitchen, Sherlock began to play something low and sweet and halting. I crept back to the doorway to watch him sway and cradle his violin to him, as if rocking it to sleep. I tried to be silent, but he must have heard me, because he turned and looked at me and played the rest of the piece through with his eyes on my
I applauded when he finished, “Marvellous!”

Sherlock smiled and made me a little bow, “Thank you, John.”

“What was that?”

“Hasn’t got a title,” said Sherlock briefly, going into something that sounded like Bach.

I thought about that for a moment, “Did you write that?”

Sherlock paused in his playing, “I did.”

“It’s beautiful.”

He nodded to me, “Thank you, John.”

“Give it a name,” I said. “So I know how to ask for it.”

Sherlock smiled, “Thank you, John. I will.”

…

I’ve been doing research.
-SH

What? Where are you?

In my bedroom.
-SH

Where are you?
-SH

In mine.

Why are you asking silly questions?
-SH

Never mind. Go on. What do you mean by research?

Into friendship.
-SH

Have you really? What have you discovered?

Your friend is your needs answered. He is your field which you sow with love and reap with thanksgiving.
-SH

Sorry?

Khalil Gibran.
-SH

Is that poetry?
Yes. Don’t you recognise it?
-SH

You’re the romantic.
-SH

Doesn’t mean I know every poem in the world.

Somehow I didn’t expect you to be reading poetry for your research.

I am exploring many avenues.
-SH

What else would you recommend?
-SH

You’re ahead of the game, actually.

It was a sincerely meant question, John.
-SH

I know. I’m just trying to pull my head out of my backside, all right?

I can’t imagine objecting to that.
-SH

Sherlock, you don’t have to woo me like this. You’re already the best friend I’ve ever had.

You’re kidnappable.

Thank you, John. I am moved.
-SH

I feel the same.
-SH

:

(:
-SH

You can come up for a chat, if you fancy a chat.

I wasn’t sure you’d still be awake.
-SH

I’m awake.

Come up.

…

Sherlock’s bare feet sounded eager on the stairs up to my bedroom. The door stood ajar, and he burst through it and vaulted from the threshold to my bed.

“Jesus!” I couldn’t help laughing. “That was dramatic.”
“The floor was freezing,” Sherlock demonstrated by finding my calves under the sheets with his icy toes.

“Gah! Sherlock! Behave!”

“All right, all right. I’m behaving; there’s no need to shout,” Sherlock withdrew his feet and curled up, tucking the blankets about him.

“Figures you’d steal the covers.”

“The floor is cold, John! I’ve got to warm up,” Sherlock shuffled his feet about under the sheets, trying to warm them.

“You should have worn socks.”

“Oh!” Sherlock popped out of bed and went digging in my dresser, “Your sock index is in shambles, John.”

I sat up on my elbow and grinned, “I haven’t got a sock index.”

“You had. I installed it for you. But this is not the sock index I created; this is the dog’s breakfast. You’ve no eye for organisation whatever. And you have a really startling variety of socks, also. How do you find anything? Or is that why it takes you so long to get ready to go out?” Sherlock found an acceptable pair of socks in a thick woollen navy blue and returned to the bed to put them on.

“Oh you’re one to talk Mr I-Can’t-Unless-My-Hair-Is-Perfect.”

“You don’t have curly hair, John; you couldn’t possibly understand,” Sherlock prodded me in the ribs under the blanket, and I knocked his hand away.

“It is nice hair,” I conceded.

Sherlock patted his hair smugly, “It’s perfect, or I wouldn’t be here.”

I laughed and pulled the blankets up to my chin, then plumped my pillow and stretched out on my back, “I didn’t know people wrote poetry about friendship. I thought it was all love and Beowulf.”

“Neither did I. I wasn’t looking for it; I just found it.” Sherlock yawned and shut his eyes, “It didn’t surprise me, though.”

“Did you just come up here for a kip?”

Sherlock opened one eye, “I was freezing down there, and I knew your bedroom would be warmer than mine. You may keep talking if you like, but I can’t promise I’ll hear you.”

I laughed, “You’re ridiculous.”

“You are.”

“Good night, Sherlock.”

“Good night, John.”

It rather seemed like I ought to kiss him good night. But he fell asleep while I was wondering, and he looked so sweet on my pillow that it was hard work to be disappointed.
“You think I’m an alien, don’t you?” Sherlock demanded as soon as I opened my eyes. He did look sort of alien, backlit by the light streaming in through my tiny circular window, his silvery eyes opaque and his hair a wild, ruddy halo around his head.

I rubbed my eyes, “Er. Not literally.”

“Some sort of sexless innocent who has no idea of the implications of climbing into bed with his flatmate in the middle of the night,” Sherlock persisted.

I laughed, “If you want me thinking about the sex implications of you climbing into my bed, maybe don’t immediately go to sleep. No, I don’t think you’re particularly innocent. I think you ignore the implications that are inconvenient to you.” Sherlock harrumphed at that. “You did say you were married to your work the last time,” I reminded him.

“I knew you were trying to pull!” Sherlock crowed, bouncing in place with retroactive triumph.

“Married to your work, though. Too bad. Maybe I’ll go back to sleep,” I rolled over, grinning and buried my face in my pillow.

Behind me, there was a considering sort of silence, “Married in haste, repenting at leisure.”

I raised my head, “Eh? What’s that?”

“John! Don’t make me beg.”

I rolled back to Sherlock and faced him, “Beg for what, exactly?”

“John!” Sherlock pouted rather gorgeously.

I held strong though, “We ought to define our terms, don’t you think?”

Sherlock leaned in til his nose brushed mine and lowered his voice, “Can I kiss you, John? Please let me kiss you.”

His voice ignited a hot spark in my gut. I wet my lips and nodded, “Yeah.”

He kissed me. Softer than I was expecting. Tender, exploratory. It made me think of the music he’d played for me the night before.

“Mmm,” Sherlock drew back, his eyes bright, his lip shining. “I knew you’d like the begging. I must try it again some time.”

“Presumptuous.”

Sherlock bounced an eyebrow and leaned in to speak against my ear, raspy and sweet, “Please John. Kiss me again?”

I kissed him and felt him smirk under my lips, “How’re you already so good at this?”

Sherlock squirmed with the pleasure of success, “I have been observing you for eight months, John. I’ve cultivated some theories.”
“You’ve been pondering my sexual response for eight months?” I grinned, “Well, that’s flattering.”

“I doubt that I have been pondering alone,” Sherlock answered primly.

I laughed, “All right, I’ve got some theories, too.”

Sherlock’s eyes sparkled, “Show me.”

“Mmm,” I danced my fingers up the back of his lovely neck to sink them into his hair and rub his scalp. Sherlock shut his eyes and hummed low with pleasure, then shivered when I tugged his hair.

“Oooh, John.”

I kissed his neck, “Like that, do you? I thought you might. Posh boy.” Sherlock’s answering giggles were drowned in a moan when I sucked lightly at his throat.

“That’s enough banter,” said Sherlock imperiously but with an extremely gratifying wobble in his voice. “I require your full attention on other matters now.”

“Mmm,” I nipped where I’d kissed and savoured the thrill of Sherlock’s body trembling under mine, “I was really hoping you’d say that.”

…

It isn’t like giving up, admitting it. It isn’t something strained til snapped. It isn’t a burst dam, and though I am not a snowcapped mountain, neither am I a spurting volcano (well, I have my moments) (mmmm!) (clever John, talented John). Letting myself find John (find us) is letting myself find the world with my own proper niche in it. It’s like footing, like context. It’s like solving. A reference. A fixed point. It’s home.

…

“What’re you so happy about?” Look up from slicing the top off my egg to find John smiling over the top of his newspaper and folding it away.

“Me? Nothing.” No! Don’t need to do that anymore. Bite my lip, mainly to feel the broadening grin I scarcely knew I was wearing, “I love you.”

John’s face shines like a sunrise, so golden, so bright that it hurts to look at, but I gaze back because it’s mine(!). I have grown greedier than I ever knew I could be for that look, and I mean to drink down every precious drop of it.

John reaches across our breakfast table and catches my hand (little crackle of delight in me when I realise he’s never done that before) (he will again, I’m sure of it!) (such a thing to know!!). “I know,” John says. “I love you, too.”

End Notes

The poem Sherlock refers to in this work is called Friendship IXX by Khalil Gibran.
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